Hermeneutics and Communications

Susan Flores-Edwards

Omega Graduate School

Date (September 20, 2021)

Professor

Dr. Ken Schmidt, Ph.D.

**Assignment #3 – Essay on a case study**

1. Write a 5-page paper on a specific event or phenomenon (e.g., a historical event, a

cultural practice, a legal decision), and interpret it from a hermeneutic perspective.

This would involve understanding the event within its context and recognizing the role

of your prejudices in shaping your interpretation.

The student should direct developmental readings from Assignment #2 on the

hermeneutic issue for this assignment.

2. **Paper Outline**

a. Begin with an introductory paragraph that has a succinct thesis statement.

b. Address the topic of the paper with critical thought.

COM-803 Hermeneutics and Communications 7

© 2022 Omega Graduate School. All rights reserved. Revised May 2023

c. End with a conclusion that reaffirms your thesis.

d. Use a minimum of eleven scholarly research sources (two books and the

remaining scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles).

**Does the Trinidad and Tobago Carnival maintain its core principles of indigenous musical expressions, creative costuming, and a vibrant preservation of cultural legacy? Or did it transit into an audacious sensual street festival?**

Trinbagonians and expats regard the annual Trinidad Carnival as extravagantly expressing the country's cultural history (Bahadoor, 2023). Others perceive the two days as hedonistic pursuits. The researcher uses visual and audible interpretations and personal experiences to identify the essence of the festival. With these two perspectives in mind, the author questions whether carnival costumes and music retained their distinctive allure or descended into an abyss of excessive sensuality. Furthermore, if the latter, the author presents potential solutions.

The Trinidad and Tobago Carnival (T&T C) occurred during the early 19th century. A significant transition occurred from a costumed and dance satire targeting the French ruling social class, which eventually expanded to the ridicule of the European ruling class by the enslaved peoples. (Bahadoor, 2023). The celebration originated from a Christian Catholic pre-Lenten festivity to indulge in the *Carne Val,*meaning farewell to the flesh before fasting and abstinence from pleasure-seeking activities during Lent (Henry & Plaza, 2019).

Throughout the years, the mesmerizing phenomenon captivated creativity and drew tourists from around the globe. The carnival demonstrates its status and popularity as a worldwide phenomenon observed at different seasons in approximately fifty nations (Bissoondath, 2022). In the early 19th century, enslaved Africans illustrated Trinidad royalty by adorning themselves with kings, queens, princes, and princess costumes to the earliest period of mimicking the British drunken sailors' white uniforms combined with a street sailor dance (Weatherby, 2019). Moreover, from the 1970s to the late 1980s, the bandleader meticulously infused artistry and creativity into every intricate detail of costume design. The designers, known as *masmen*, skillfully portrayed historical events, showcasing their profound knowledge of history through their faithful replication of costumes. The designers lend authenticity to Viking and Roman ensembles when they expertly incorporate goatskin, chest plates, metal shields, and guards (Weatherby, 2019). The designer masmen exhibited the annual carnival through stunning costume designs, depicting world history and the vibrance within the culture of Trinidad.

Before the 21st century, Trinbagonians ushered the carnival bacchanal philosophy; streets echoed with the lively sounds of steel drums and later brass musicians to accompany the masqueraders. *Masqueraders* define the revelers dressed in costumes while *playing mas* describes their action in costumes (Weatherby, 2019). The melodious symphony of pan instruments and the harmonious chorus of saxophones captivated both revelers and onlookers. The infectious rhythms beckoned everyone to join the vibrant, chipping dance movement.

The Trinidad and Tobago Carnival transformed from elegance to exhilarating chaos. Weatherby (2019) emphasized, "good mas is all kinds of airy-fairy artistry, Meaningless abstract, ideas-mas; silky, flimsy, see-through, breezy, substance-less portrayals reflecting the superficial shallowness and falseness of bourgeois creators and promoted in the press as 'good mas" (p.166).

Moreover, the costume designers draw inspiration from the opulence of Las Vegas, adorning bikini-clad women covered only through flamboyant feathers while dancing to the rhythmic beats of Calypso Soca music (Henry & Plaza, 2019).

Furthermore, it is essential to acknowledge illicit behavior, as excessive alcohol consumption and uninhibited freedom sometimes overshadow moral and logical reasoning. The streets come alive with exuberance as the parade showcases half-naked women joyously gyrating, followed by festive men (Henry & Plaza, 2019).Kearney &Treanor (2020) describe carnal hermeneutics as a philosophy that highlights the importance of touch as a form of communication. This type of dancing has become the dominant cultural norm. Participants and onlookers engage in a lively and uninhibited form of dance, confidently swaying their hips and gyrating to the rhythmic tunes of steelpan, Soca music, and Hindi melodies. (Bissoondath, 2022)

As the crowd jumps and prances to the Soca rhythms, they chant lyrics that demean women, encourage infidelity, and jump wave a flag in a frenzy a stark distance from honoring Steelband men. Renowned calypsonian Lord Kitchener paid tribute to Winston "Spree" Simon, a pioneering figure in Steelband culture. In Kitchener's calypso "Rainorama", he shares with his listeners the story of the unfortunate cancellation of the 1972 carnival due to heavy rainfall(Sullivan, 2020). Calypsonian, David Rudde*r* paid tribute to esteemed former Calypsonians Lion, Executor, Invader, Lord Kitchener, Beginner, and Terror with his heartfelt rendition.

*"*I can still hear Lion roar

Through Greenwich village

While Executor kills them dead at the Ribbon Blue

Lord Invader conquers Berlin but their hearts this time

And Lord Kitchener make it, Ole London feel so new

Beginner and Terror Too

Fitzroy Coleman fingers dancing on the fret" (Genius,1987, ver.3).

Henry& Plaza (2019) asserted that De African lyrics represent the struggle for independence and the profound impact on the cultural fabric of Trinidad. However, the lyrics accentuate the singer's charm towards women and his talent for energetic dance moves, acknowledging misbehavior and misconduct associated with his African heritage.

Calypso and the Calypsonians dominate their subjects due to their exclusive verbal expression. These artists express discord, reveal their truth, and hide it from uninformed listeners by using double entendre in their lyrics (Watson, 2022). Most of the calypso relate double entendre lyrics or songs about the current affairs in the country and worldwide or social commentary and political picong. Picong defines making a mockery of a person. (Rampaul, 2023).

While some embrace it as a mental release and artistic expression, others view the revelry as immoral. My experience represents both views. The carnival experience filled me with wonder and excitement when I was five. I vividly remember being taken to the event by my mom, relishing in the outdoors, and the special moments we shared away from my six siblings. The vibrant colors and beauty captivated me, even as a small child looking at the towering masqueraders. The vibrant steel bandsmen and their clash of violence throwing broken bottles at each other frightened me as a child.

Nevertheless, I also experienced joyful memories. I discovered long-lost relatives who resided in the city where the masqueraders paraded. It was fascinating to lean over the window and watch the procession pass by; the convenience of it all felt magical. I never associated the parade with illicit behavior, only seeing adults reveling and having a good time. A couple of revelers scared me with giant, intimidating costumes with their bodies covered in paint.

  As an adult, I heard about the legendary pan-men- Rudolph Charles, Ellie Mannette, and Winston "Spree" Simon, famously portrayed in Calypso lyrics—the same steel bands that created a raucous on the streets.

I recall memories of joining my neighbors and their children, sitting at the savannah to enjoy a picnic while watching the parade. I cherished the delicious food, the company of friends, and the independence from my parents. In those moments, I felt the true significance of carnival, experiencing the excitement and freedom in one of the largest parks in Port of Spain.

I registered to play mas in the school carnival celebration in middle school. While walking down a street near my home, tired after the celebration, a neighbor's child exclaimed, "Look, there's a masquerader!" By then, I felt like a celebrity. I had become part of the live spectacle, no longer merely a spectator in the city.

As I entered my twenties, carnival became an opportunity to gain recognition by participating in the tradition of playing mas. I attended the pan-festival competitions during the carnival season and became a fan of the sound of the steel drums. Years later, I noticed a difference in the festival on my return to Trinidad. The vibrant colors still dazzled, and the revelers and spectators radiated the same excitement and joy. However, the attention soon shifted to the bronzed figures of women adorned in bikinis, feathers, and beads, diverting focus from the actual costume design.

These carnival women viewed their attire as a form of freedom within the *carnivalesque.* Bissoondath (2022) interpretscarnivalesqueas the culture, identity, and human connections explored in a carnival setting infused with erotic, chaotic, and creative behavior. Women use their bodies to express themselves (Bahadoor, 2023). "Within Trinbagonian Carnival, eroticism as sexual and non-sexual serves as an energizing fuel for sensual expression and transformative empowerment" Bissoondath, 2021, p. 113). Designers kept the idea of creativity, but their costumes remained the same every year except in different colors.

The carnival celebrations witnessed a cultural shift. Consequently, the actual substance of the festivity changed when society lost its appetite for history. The Trinbagonian culture encouraged alternative expression that sparked the interest in displaying the human body compromising clothes. Thus, in time, the historical significance of visual artistic costume design combined with choreography of masquerade dances and thought-provoking social and political commentaries sung in calypsos gradually faded.

As a result, extensive research permitted a fusion of my horizon with those who perceive carnival as a cultural artform. Zimmerman (2015) articulated that hermeneutics is the understanding of piecing facts together to make a coherent whole. Thus, I recognize the art form as a business, an exposition of talent and beautiful colors. Further, the carnival industry is a continuous source of employment opportunities and a platform that presents musical talent globally. The junior calypso competition, known as the kiddie's Carnival, adds to the merriment with children representing schools and organizations in carnival costumes (Watson, 2022). Young participants of the carnival support creativity and patriotism derived from carnival celebrations.

Many organizations and small businesses gain authenticity from the business of carnival. The tourism industry benefits from the cultural extravaganza, which nurtures the growth of the steel drum and calypsonian talents and garners worldwide recognition.

Further, the steel drum transformed from pan players of gangs with violent bottle throwers to Panist playing in Carnegie Hall. (Allen, 2022). The genre of the music exploded from exclusively calypso and Soca to include Jazz and classical music. In the United States, 600 high school and university Steelband ensembles exemplify the recognition of the music thus far. (Haskett, 2018)

 Trinbagonians affirm that the festivities include diversity and self-expression, which induces ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic togetherness (Bissoondath, 2022). Expats interpret carnival as a profound love for their culture into a sense of self-identity and national pride extending beyond the island's boundaries (Watson, 2022). Carnival represents patriotism.

Organizations such as the Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra (TASPO), the National Carnival Committee of Trinidad and Tobago (CCTT), and the Trinidad Government contributed to the steel drum's uniqueness as a versatile instrument that transcends musical genres. (Haskett, 2018). While many calypsos still offer political commentary, enlightening the world about current events in the Caribbean and beyond. (Henry & Plaza, 2019). Carnival signifies culture.

It is challenging to pass judgment on Carnival celebrations. I participated as a reveler and spectator, which allowed me to experience the many aspects of the talent symbolized as the essence of the culture. Nevertheless, discerning Christians must differentiate between right and wrong by aligning themselves with God's standards of righteousness rather than cultural influences. Utilizing the cultural artifacts of scripture offers an impartial perspective on moralism, immoralism, and sensuality. In (God's Word Translation, 1995/2010 Phil 1:10), disciples Paul and Timothy encourage believers in Christ to stand for principles that embody Christ, "you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ." Moreover, in (1 Pet. 4:4), Peter warns his disciples not to relent to fleshly desires rooted in sins of self-indulgence and the world in actions of drunkenness and hedonistic pleasure. Thus, the verse message counsels all believers in Christ.

Trinidad and Tobago boast immense potential to attract tourists without compromising morals. Conceivably, the New Age philosophy influenced the interpretation of design, creativity, and how Trinbagonians should characterize the history and Caribbean cultural heritage. Groothuis (2016) expressed the New Age as an assemblage of like-minded people committed to changing social and spiritual ideologies.

Trinbagonians can curate music and portray creative costumes to reflect a more refined approach. The National Carnival Committee of Trinidad and Tobago (NCCTT) should reassess its judging criteria. NCCT should judge carnival bands on originality rather than images of Las Vegas or Brazilian carnival entertainers. These organizations should allow their masqueraders to choreograph synchronized steps and dance that define the uniqueness of their vision and creative display instead of gyrating and thrusting their bodies on each other.

Bandleaders should embrace the glitz and color but avoid provocative attire. Soca artists are vital in sharing social commentaries and educating young people during the street parade. It is a lost art of this century to sing calypsos that delve into topics such as education, politics, carnival history, and world history. Trinbagonians can revive this lost art by encouraging Soca artists to perform calypsos that educate and inspire the masses.

Grondin (2003) chronicle an aspect of hermeneutics as *normalism.*Herein, the name carnival encompasses different forms with unique characteristics that define the event's essence. While there is no singular, all-encompassing carnival, the term unifies diverse celebrations of common elements. Trinbagonians are free to embrace decency and personalize their expression of carnival culture.

**WORK CITED**

Allen, J. (2022). *Group Flow in the Secondary School Steelband.* [Doctoral dissertation, Trevecca Nazarene University]. <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/group-flow-secondary-school-steelband/docview/2769599084/se-2>

Bahadoor, B. (2023). Everybody Jumping on the Savannah Grass: How Carnival Became a Symbol of Trinidad and Tobago’s National Culture. *Caribbean Quilt*, *7*(1), 12-18. <https://doi.org/10.33137/cq.v7i1.38626>

Bissoondath, S. (2022). *Carnivalizing the Nation: Reassessing the Trinidad and Tobago Carnival as an Inclusive Platform for Local and Diaspora Cultural Identity* [Doctoral dissertation, Claremont Graduate University]. <https://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgu_etd>

God’s Word Translation, (1995/2010): *The Holy Bible.* Baker Books.

Grondin, J. Faith in the nominalistic age? (2003). The possible theological contribution of Hermeneutics.” *Religions* 14, No. 2: 220. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14020220>

Groothuis, D. (2016*). Confronting the new age: How to resist a growing religious movement*. InterVarsity Press.

<https://www.amazon.com/Confronting-New-Age-Religious-Movement-ebook/dp/B01N3Q2181/ref=sr_1_1?hvadid=580629195276&hvdev=c&hvlocphy=9008603&hvnetw=s>

Genius.com. (1987). Calypso music. David Rudder

<https://genius.com/David-rudder-calypso-music-lyrics>

Haskett, Brandon L. (2018). *The Emergence of the U.S. School Steel Band Movement: The Saga of Steel*. Lexington Books. <https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Emergence_of_the_U_S_School_Steel_Ba/9oiADwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=Haskett,+Brandon+L.+The+Emergence+of+the+U.S.+School+Steel+Band>

Henry. F, Plaza. D (2019*). Carnival is woman: Caribbean studies series.* University Press of Mississippi. <https://www.amazon.com/Carnival-Woman-Feminism-Performance-Caribbean-ebook/dp/B082FP45X3/ref=sr>

National Carnival Committee of Trinidad and Tobago.

https://ncctt.org/new/index.php/2017-02-06-17-49-13/band-launches-other-happenings-for-2019/category/104-senior-kings-and-queens-prelims-2019.feed

Kearney, R., & Treanor, B. (Eds.). (2020). *Carnal hermeneutics*. Fordham University Press. <https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C47&q=What+Is+Carnal+Hermeneutics%3F&btnG=>

Rampaul, G. (2023). Shakespeare, empire, and the Trinidad calypso. Vol. 9 No. 2 (2015)

<https://borrowers-ojs-azsu.tdl.org/borrowers/article/view/296>

Watson, K. A. (2022). *Sounds of Rebellion - Voices and Rhythms of a Nation. Examining Calypso and Steelpan as forms of protest in Trinidad and Tobago.* [Master's thesis, Bowling Green State University].

Sullivan, N. (2020) Cultural pluralism in the steelband movement of Trinidad and Tobago; East Indian involvement in steelband. *The late: Russell Henderson (UK) Christopher Innes (Canada) Ashton Sylvester Moore- ‘Mighty Tiger’(UK)*, 43. <https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/67390109/0df248_daa20a5f6d4843c2917874d308e42766-libre.pdf?1621596343=&response-con>

Weatherby. A. C. (2019) The Trinidad carnival: Not just carnival in Trinidad.

<https://www.amazon.com/Trinidad-Carnival-Not-Just-ebook/dp/B07PB8D66X/ref=sr_1_1?crid=3S5MEY0LNJYE9&keywords=The+Trinidad+Ca>

Woods, J. (2023). Steel bands in US secondary classrooms: Process and pedagogy.

[Master’s thesis, Western Washington University] <https://cedar.wwu.edu/wwuet/1178>

Zimmermann, J. (2015). Hermeneutics: *A very short introduction*. OUP Oxford. [Seminal] <https://www.amazon.com/s?k=a+short+introduction+to+hermeneutics&hvadid=580629582867&hvdev=c&hvlocphy=90>