Frances Henry & Dwaine Plaza (eds.), *Carnival is Woman: Feminism and Performance in Caribbean Mas*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2020. vi + 201 pp. (Paper US\$30.00)

Historians believe that Carnival was introduced to Trinidad by French Catholics in the eighteenth century, with the participation of Africans who brought Canboulay after Emancipation in 1833, adding a new cultural dynamic to its events. Its emergence as a major festival in Trinidad and Tobago, later generating offshoots in Canada, New York, and London where West Indians have migrated, exemplifies its capacity for shape shifting. Constant transformation has been evident in this festival since its origins. These have been traced to medieval Latin *carnevelevarium*, Roman Catholic pre-lenten merrymaking, and celebration of the rebirth of nature in the ancient Roman pagan Saturnalian, and they have resemblances to the annual Hindu spring festival of Holika.

The heightened participation of women in this festival from the late twentieth century has encouraged feminist perspectives which vacillate between discourses of victimhood and female agency. This collection of essays essentially debates women's collusion or noncollusion in pretty mas. It is a singularly novel contribution to research and commentary that was made previously by historians, sociologists, ethnomusicologists, and journalists, among others. The chapter by Philip Scher on the rise of the Jamette in carnival, and the one by Frances and Jeff Henry on Dame Lorraine and Baby Doll both recover women's central and transgressive roles in carnival history from the late nineteenth century, fully engaging the Bakhtinian elements of resistance, satire, laughter, creative masquerade, and meaning making of identity by which Caribbean carnival has become known. Darrell Baksh's introduction of Indo-Caribbean women through chutney-soca creates more visibility of this ethnic group in the festival. This must not be misread as the primary entry of Indo-Caribbean women in Carnival as my own memory of female Indian participation since the 1960s refutes this.

It is, however, the tension between the roots of resistance, mimicry, historically grounded costumery, and a reclaiming of African identity against the rise of "bikinis, beads and feathers" mas that underpins the current reading of women's participation. The introduction by editors Frances Henry and Dwaine Plaza and Chapter 1, "Women and the De-Africanization of Trinidad Carnival: From Jamette to Bikini, Beads and Feathers," by Plaza and Jan DeCosmo largely present the evolutionary path of carnival as a diminishment of resistance, identity confrontations, and satire. Samantha Noel's critique of the Jaycees Carnival Queen Competition as a staging of the dominant Western ideal of female beauty as lighter skinned that persisted into the mid-twentieth century in the

region suggests that this insertion was a manipulation of the State to control Black mass culture. The themes of women as victims of a consumer capitalism, the “constant over-representation of the female carnival body, often excessively sexualized” (Asha St. Bernard, p. 128), and commentary on participation by lighter skinned middle-class women in the festival recur as if the space has become the rightful possession of another class and color and been appropriated by male band leaders for their personal economic gain.

In setting out the parameters for a gender perspective of women and performance in carnival, Henry and Plaza explore theoretical interpretations from structural functionalism and Marxist class struggle to Mikhail Bakhtin's view of the carnivalesque as embodying the grotesque and intersectional cultural studies frameworks that combine class, race and gender. They conclude that the differences between the various approaches, rather than being contradictory, “suggest the ambivalent nature of Carnival in that it may both subvert and reinforce existing boundaries, hierarchies and moralities while also contributing to social unity” (p. 8). The ambivalence and contradiction is echoed in Plaza's presentation of the evolution of women's participation in the Toronto Caribana Festival of 1967, where women were viewed both as passive spectators and free labor for mas camps, along with the realization of their transnational identities.

While the tensions of Whiteness over Blackness, folk culture over upper-class values, and mass produced over handmade objects will no doubt continue to frame the debates about Trinidad carnival, one feels disturbed by a sense of nostalgia for a presumed glorious past, and a negative determinism that pervades the reading of women's mass entry into Trinidad carnival. Perhaps the advent of women in beads, bikinis, and feathers is another historic achievement for female liberation of the body at this point in the feminist movement; and it may also be very consistent with this transgressive festival which, as with all living and breathing culture, will continue to mutate as the centuries unfold.

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