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Wanderers in Time and Space
Nation, Diaspora, and Temporality in Trinidad and Tobago

Ryan Cecil Jobson

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Senior Honors Thesis in Africana Studies and Anthropology
Advisor: Dr. Deborah Thomas
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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a Caribbean American, my household upbringing has long influenced my scholarly research and aspirations. Born to a Jamaican father and a mother one generation removed from Barbados, I have often considered how my ostensibly diasporic voice figures in the scope of the contemporary Caribbean, a voice marked definitively as American due to my birthplace yet nonetheless colored by my familial ties to the "other America" in the nearby islands of the West Indies.

I can think of no better means of describing my own positionality with respect to this research than an anecdote from the days following my return home from fieldwork in Trinidad. Upon arriving at the Woodstock, NY home in which I spent the majority of my childhood, I was captivated by a copy of *Inward Hunger: The Education of a Prime Minister*—the autobiography of the inaugural Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Eric Williams—resting on a bookshelf I had passed on countless occasions throughout my adolescence. Though it was not particularly shocking to encounter a Caribbean text in my academically-minded household, I was moved nevertheless as I opened the fragile front cover, revealing a seal commemorating my father's achievement of "First Place in Form" at his secondary school in St. Elizabeth, Jamaica. Below, the seal bears the date, "23rd February, 1974."

Born more than 16 years later, I, like the physical text, am both geographically removed from its place of origin, as a result of my father's migration to the United States, and temporally distant, belonging to a subsequent generation further uprooted from the Caribbean. While the text itself bears this legacy in its obvious wear, deteriorating dust jacket, and yellowing pages, I similarly display this break in my affective performance of "Caribbeanness," informed by my father's immediate influence, occasional visits to relatives in Jamaica, and resources (or

commodities?) such as my father's reggae 45's, cassettes, and CD's, iconic films like the Jamaican cult classic *The Harder They Come*, and texts such as that of Manley, Lamming, Naipaul, and Williams, as I recount here.

Akin to the anecdote offered above, this thesis seeks to address the ways in which the Caribbean is constructed by such concurrent movements, migrations, commodity circuits, texts, soundings, and affective experiences. In this fashion am I indebted to the influences of my parents, G.W. Mark Jobson and Lisa Jobson, their parents before them, and in this respect, all of my forebears, both blood and otherwise, known and unknown. Furthermore, I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge my undergraduate mentors, especially Deborah Thomas, who introduced me to anthropology and similarly offered her own brand of Caribbeanness to my evolving repertoire, and John Jackson, who likewise has pushed my scholarly work to heights I never imagined possible. Here, I also would like to thank Salamishah Tillet, Peggy Sanday, Tukufu Zuberi, Val Cade-Swain McCoullum, Herman Beavers, Tanji Gilliam, Pat Ravenell, Brian Peterson, Chaz Howard, Daina Richie, Karlene Burrell-McRae, Tracee Thomas, and all the "elders"—not in body, but in mind—who have shared their experience and guidance with me.

Also, big up to my Mellon Mays family of budding Caribbeanists, Wilfredo Gomez, Petal Samuel, Enmanuel Martinez, and of course my most reliable interlocutor and partner Kaneesha Cherelle Parsard. And lastly, to my best friend and brother, Ethan, ten years my junior but seemingly already my intellectual equal, I can only imagine what you will go on to achieve.

INTRODUCTION

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, THE NATION-STATE, AND THE DIASPORIC IMAGNATION

"I am a victim of disillusion
A soul without a resting place
A lonely pilgrim without a vision
A wanderer in time and space
Going from country to country
Over the wide world I roam
Searching for my identity
It's time for me to come home"
~Machel Montano and Xtatik, "Take Me Back"

Now revered as an international sensation, in 1991 a 16-year-old Machel Montano garnered attention not for his tantalizing live performances or soca monarch accolades. Instead, the soulful calypso, "Take Me Back," an ode to the African continent recorded for the debut album of Montano and his accompanying band Xtatik, was subjected to popular scrutiny. One opinionated voice on the topic appeared in a letter published by the *Trinidad Express*, bearing the headline "Calypso 'Take me back. Africa' a national insult," and signed only with the moniker "Disgusted Tourist" ("Calypso":10).

The author, who describes an encounter with the song in question during a visit to Trinidad, subsequently criticizes Montano for "expressing his love for Africa and longing to be with her, instead of the country that gives him milk and honey," and charges that the young soca artiste "has no respect for this country and doesn't even want to play a hand in its development" (Ibid). Citing the lyrics "I want to share your sorrow and pain" and "I want to be strong like Mandela" as the basis for his critique, the alleged "disgusted tourist" illustrates the inherent challenges of Caribbean nationalism in the postcolonial era. In forging nation-states from the "creole" societies of the Anglophone Caribbean, infant nations such as Trinidad and Tobago are forced to effectively construct national unity in the wake of colonial systems of oppression,

systems which bred pervasive disunity among its differently racialized laboring populations of formerly enslaved Africans and indentured East Indians.

Despite the apparent foreign origins of the letter's author, the sustained tension between the incongruous imaginaries of nation and diaspora in Trinidad and Tobago figure centrally the history of the dual island nation. Often remarked upon for its racial diversity, boasting near equal populations of African and Indian descent, the prevailing rhetoric of nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago has often enacted a discursive break from the country's dual diasporic "homelands" of Africa and India, echoed in the recurring creole nationalist mantra "all o' we is one."

Nowhere is this more evident than in historian and statesman Eric Williams' iconic passage from his *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago*, which reads: "There can be no Mother India for those whose ancestors came from India…There can be no Mother Africa for those of African origin…A nation, like an individual, can have only one Mother. The only mother we recognise is Mother Trinidad and Tobago" (Williams 279). However, despite Williams' concerted efforts to the contrary, assertions of diasporic solidarity with the nation's dual motherlands of Africa and India recur throughout post-independence Trinbagonian society. Characterized by a populace rooted in involuntary and semi-voluntary systems of enslavement and indenture, the corresponding ruptures from the proverbial "homelands" of Africa and India enacted by the Middle Passage and *kala pani* have produced a distinctly diasporic consciousness in the Trinbagonian national imaginary.

Accordingly, much of the early scholarly literature on Trinidad and Tobago—particularly in the discipline of anthropology—has engaged the islands' populations solely in relation to said homelands, charting the retention of cultural traits by diasporic communities in the West Indies. Ethnographic studies such as Morton Klass' 1961 monograph *East Indians in Trinidad: A Study*

of Cultural Persistence and Melville Herskovits' 1947 text, *Trinidad Village*—which I will return to in chapter one—exemplify this school of thought, perpetuating conceptualizations of diaspora as a unidirectional proliferation of a singular, originary culture. Alternatively, a more recent body of scholarship has foregrounded the postcolonial political struggle between Afro- and Indo-Trinbagonians, calling for a national rhetoric of creolization, or more specifically, one of "douglarization" (Puri 2004), drawing from *dougla*, the colloquial term for mixed-race Trinidadians of African and Indian descent.

Viranjini Munasinghe's aptly titled ethnography *Callaloo or Tossed Salad?: East Indians and the Cultural Politics of Identity in Trinidad* (2001), reflects this popular narrative of ethnic conflict, disputing commonplace characterizations of Trinidad and Tobago as an ethnically pluralistic "callaloo nation" (Khan 2004). However, in her unrelenting critique of a purportedly "Afro-Creole" dominated political sphere, Munasinghe's analysis remains unfortunately committed to notions of Indo-Trinidadians as mere "bearers" of a diasporic East Indian culture, who she argues, are consequently excluded from discourses of Trinidadian creolization and full political participation in the Trinbagonian national imaginary (see also Munasinghe 1997). As Jamaican anthropologist Don Robotham notes in a review of *Callaloo or Tossed Salad?*, Munasinghe's approach to creolization fails to account for the similar exclusion of "Africanness" from creole nationalist rhetoric, perpetuating existing hierarchies of class and color, adding, "If one fails to grasp that this was and is the substance of the Creole society thesis, then the revolt against it and the revival of Blackness and Africa "from below"—first in Jamaica in 1968, then in Trinidad in 1970…become incomprehensible" (2003:69). Accordingly, this more recent body of scholarship, in its preoccupation with notions of national political representation and discourses of creolization, have not entirely displaced prior conceptualizations of diaspora as a

unidirectional process, failing to accommodate the diverse, multifaceted manifestations of diasporic politics and practice in the contemporary moment.

As Robotham reminds us, the Black Power Revolt of 1970 in Trinidad presents a prime example of diasporic politics and their sustained tension vis-à-vis the contemporary Caribbean state, evidenced by the adoption of a distinctly diasporic consciousness by an Afro-Trinidadian underclass in "remind[ing] the nation of its failure to alleviate, as promised, the deplorable socioeconomic conditions of most Trinidadians" (Bennett 1989). And though the Black Power Movement in Trinidad and Tobago did not wholly succeed in its challenge to the postcolonial state and its corresponding social hierarchies, it bears emphasizing that questions of diaspora remain central to the sociopolitical futures of the Caribbean. Here, despite the apparent binary opposition of nation and diaspora as competing sites of identity formation and political organization, the case of Trinidad and Tobago demands we place such seemingly incompatible structures in productive conversation, illuminating the role of the diasporic imagination in the sustained development of Caribbean nations, and conversely, the respective roles of said nation-states in the advancement of its diasporic interlocutors. In other words, in contrast to the abovementioned assertion that Montano does not intend to play a part in the development of his country of origin due to his explicitly (African) diasporic sensibility, I put forth an alternative approach, which does not eschew the nation-state as a site of engagement, but rather engages the ways in which diasporic processes are fundamentally shaped by national borders and political infrastructures.

A telling example from my field research in Port of Spain further complicates the binary opposition of the nation-state and associated diasporic formations in scholarly literature. Throughout six weeks of ethnographic fieldwork, conducted primarily as a volunteer member of

the Emancipation Support Committee, a nonpartisan political organization charged with planning the annual Emancipation Day festival in Port of Spain, the ostensibly oppositional structures of national and diaspora remained in productive conversation. In dialogues surrounding the August 1 commemoration of abolition in the British West Indies, it was commonly understood that the sustained pursuit of national and diasporic development were inextricably linked. In contrast to the often oppositional nature of national and diasporic belongingness among minority communities of African-descent in Europe and the United States, Caribbean nations such as Trinidad and Tobago alternatively display the ways in which parallel strivings toward postcolonial and diasporic sovereignty operate concomitantly.

An anecdote from the Emancipation Festival demonstrates this phenomenon. After weeks of anticipation, I arrived at the Hasley Crawford National Stadium for the annual "Blessing of the Ground," marking the formal opening of the Emancipation Festival on July 25. Welcomed by the "drum call," a rhythmic barrage of continental African percussion performed by the National Drummers Association of Trinidad and Tobago, I, brandishing a recently purchased dashiki, joined a crowd composed largely of *orisha* practitioners similarly adorned in ceremonial attire. Notably, however, the other young adults in attendance, aside from members of the Emancipation Support Committee, chose to remain in everyday casual attire, displaying a striking generational fissure between the vanguard of the 1970 Black Power Revolution and its successors.

As an intimate, opening event foregrounding the broader festival, the Blessing of the Ground primarily served to recognize those in attendance from abroad—governmental ambassadors from various diasporic locales, including Nigeria, Suriname, and Costa Rica, artists from Cuba, and entrepreneurs from Ghana seeking to market their wares to Trinidadian

participants in the Emancipation Day festivities. Flanked by the *djembes* of the drum call and the Africanist clothing and iconography of the orisha community, the investment in a distinctly "African" aesthetic was clear. Following the initial performance, the event's master of ceremonies, a middle-aged Trinidadian woman, shared this sentiment, praising the National Drummers Association as "the only group playing authentic West African rhythms" and "as good as anything coming out of West Africa."

Framed in accordance with a growing sentiment of Trinidad and Tobago Emancipation Day as the "Premier Pan-African Festival," the comments offered by the master of ceremonies further established the diasporic and distinctly political proportions of the commemoration. Illustrating a material link between the African continent and Trinidad and Tobago, engendered both by historical ties in the Atlantic slave trade and the "authentic" performance of African percussion by a Trinidadian collective, this subtext of authenticity offered a narrative of cultural affinity, lending legitimacy to the larger project of Pan-African unity. Nonetheless, after brief opening comments, the tempo of the program suddenly shifted, as we were asked to stand for the national anthem of Trinidad and Tobago. Those in attendance proudly joined the chorus: "*this is our native land, we pledge our lives to thee*."

Despite the apparent contradiction of asserting a distinctly African aesthetic alongside the racially pluralistic rhetoric of Trinbagonian nationalism, I alternatively approach diaspora as a structuring framework for contemporary south-south relations across nation-states of Africa and the Caribbean. Moreover, the vignette recounted above speaks to the ways in which both diaspora and nation are framed in accordance with particular *narratives* of origins and belonging, structuring quotidian societal relations and state politics in the Caribbean postcolony. Challenging essentialist conceptualizations of nation and diaspora as ontological, territorialized

structures of belonging, Emancipation Day in Trinidad and Tobago elucidates their fragile, even fleeting temperament. In contrast to conceptions of diaspora that reify enslavement and the formative experience of the Middle Passage as its conceptual foundation (see Gilroy 1993), I seek to affirm postcolonial subjects as sculptors of the proverbial "diasporic imaginary," which in Brian Axel's expert formulation, calls attention to the means by which "the diaspora produces the homeland" (426) through its attendant histories and corporealities. How, then, might we better understand diaspora through the multifarious narratives through which it is deployed, rather than the pursuit of a singular narrative of origin or dispersal?

Invoking the words of a young Montano, *Wanderers in Time and Space* duly explores the function of discourses of diaspora in the postcolonial milieu of the Caribbean. Engaging Trinidad and Tobago as an exemplar of such developments, this study underscores the sustained diasporic engagement between continental African and Caribbean nation-states, exploding the persistent binary of homeland-diaspora, which continues to marginalize the African continent as a site of contemporary diasporic processes. In the aforementioned diasporic rhetoric of the Black Power Movement in Trinidad, the revival and subsequent "internationalisation" of the Emancipation Day holiday, and recent efforts to forge political ties with continental African nation-states in the petroleum sector, we observe renewed efforts to forge bilateral relations between Africa and the Caribbean, expressing an explicitly politicized rendering of diasporic connectivity.

Here, despite its visibly multiracial populace, Trinidad and Tobago continues to draw on discourses of diaspora in the contemporary political sphere, evidenced by former Prime Minister Patrick Manning remarks in a 2007 address to the African Union, "the time has come to revisit, reaffirm and strengthen…the relationship between Africa and its diasporic nations" (2007). What is the significance, then, of a "callaloo nation" such as Trinidad and Tobago employing an

African diasporic sensibility? How might we similarly imagine diasporic formations outside of the seemingly foundational structure of enslavement, and in resistance of a preoccupation with essentialist notions of racial belonging and shared ancestry founded in bounded geographical landscapes?

While recent studies attend to the fraught transatlantic routes of diasporic exchange between African Americans and the African continent (Hartman 2008; Holsey 2008), few have engaged the parallel circuits between Africa and the Caribbean. Predominant scholarly discourses of diaspora, accordingly, remain consistently Americentric in scope, failing to engage the unique manifestations of diasporic politics in the postcolonial context of the global south. Here, while prominent theorists such as Paul Gilroy situate diasporic formations in opposition to the modern nation-state, "allowing for a more ambivalent relationship toward national encampments" (2000:128), the historical trajectory of Trinidad and Tobago begs otherwise, as diasporic ties are articulated in conjunction with the very national structures Gilroy decries.

While recent scholarship grows abound with assertions of "postnationality" (Appadurai 1993), the relative infancy of "subaltern nations" (Hardt and Negri 2000:105)—particularly in Africa and the Caribbean—have prevented a comprehensive engagement with the progressive potential of such national formations outside of the proverbial "West." In her study of the South Asian Diaspora in Trinidad, Tejaswini Niranjana similarly asks, "If the disciplines have so far been caught up in these paradigms of domination, what kind of representations of the Third World might be produced when this agenda is disrupted?" (2006:13). In positing the sustained diasporic dialogue between India and Trinidad as an instance of south-south political relations that implicitly resists narratives of neocolonial and imperial dominance, Niranjana suggests an alternative to the contemporary predilection with nationalism as an inherently reactionary

phenomenon. With this critique in mind, how might we differently engage questions of diaspora through the lens of the postcolonial Caribbean nation-state?

Likewise, my engagement with Trinidad is motivated by a commitment to revise the existing concern with diasporic movements from the south to American and European metropoles, instead positing diaspora as a technology uniquely fashioned in accordance with bilateral relationships across nations of the global south. Furthermore, in the context of contemporary African and Caribbean nation-states, such diasporic processes eschew prevailing tropes of "memory" and "continuity," deploying diaspora as a political assemblage and expression of postcolonial solidarity.

In this respect, while paradigmatic studies such as Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* proffer theorizations of the African Diaspora that exclude the contemporary African continent from its scope of analysis (see Zeleza 2005), I instead seek to further attend to the multilateral, transcontinental "dialogues" (Matory 2006) constitutive of diaspora. Here, I echo the interventions of recent ethnographic approaches, which as Kamari Maxine Clarke and Deborah Thomas note in their introduction to the edited volume *Globalization and Race*, "ma[ke] significant contributions to understanding how new developments at local, regional, national, and transterritorial levels have generated shifts in ideas about and experiences of citizenship, belonging, and racial difference" (3). In resisting attempts to construct totalizing theoretical models for diaspora as an object of analysis, Clarke, Thomas, and the contributors to their pathbreaking collection instead call attention to the political economy of diasporic movements and discourses, exploding the geographic and discursive limits engendered by a proscribing analytic such as the "black Atlantic" (see also Brown 2005; Campt 2005; Clarke 2004; Holsey 2008; Ralph 2007; Thomas 2004).

The scholarly interventions discussed here lend a variety of approaches and analytical metaphors to the study of the African Diaspora, while contemporary political projects and individual actors likewise deploy divergent conceptions of diaspora in accordance with particular demands and aspirations. Central here is the question of *narrative*, as diaspora is constructed alongside the particular aims of scholars and laymen alike. In this respect, avoiding totalizing theoretical models for and definitions of diaspora, scholarship in diaspora studies alternatively may better attend to the ways in which narratives of diasporic belongingness—and rupture, for that matter—are conceived, performed, and realized.

Likewise, combining ethnographic, archival, and textual analysis, this thesis takes up Trinidad and Tobago, and by extension, the Caribbean, as a site of knowledge production in diaspora studies. Drawing from prominent conversations in the fields of anthropology, literary criticism, and cultural studies, *Wanderers and Time and Space* serves to further delineate a conceptual space for the Caribbean under the conceptual umbrella of African Diaspora Studies. Often neglected in an American and British dominated interdisciplinary field of analysis, the Caribbean remains marginalized both within the canonical texts of diaspora studies and the institutional structure of ethnic studies and related fields in the academe.

Here, it bears noting that in the historical trajectory of anthropological thought, the Caribbean emerges only recently as a site of inquiry, paralleling a disciplinary shift from a preoccupation with isolated, singular "cultures" to questions of political economy. A region, in the words of C.L.R. James, "in but not of the West" (cited in Hall 1996b:246), the Caribbean figures as a space dislocated from the "modernity" of its colonial metropoles, yet ostensibly "too modern" for the concerns of classical, functionalist anthropology. Today, however, amidst assertions that "we are all Caribbeans now in our urban archipelagos" (Clifford 1988:173)

characterized by accelerating processes of globalization, migration, and racial pluralism, the Caribbean remains an anthropological metonym for such developments elsewhere, rather than a distinct site of investigation. Constructed in accordance with prevailing disciplinary concerns, the Caribbean often figures centrally as an area of scholarly and political contestation in the field of sociocultural anthropology.

In the emergent interdisciplinary field of African Diaspora Studies, the Caribbean is similarly marginalized. Caught betwixt the concerns of continental African Studies and a lamentably U.S.-centric African American Studies, the Caribbean exists primarily as an intermediary space, engaged merely tangentially to its accompanying binary of Africa and the United States. Similarly, the fraught relationship across the intersecting fields of Caribbean Studies and Latin American Studies has further isolated the Caribbean archipelago from its regional interlocutors, often fracturing discussions along lines of language, and supporting the discursive excision of the Hispanophone Caribbean from its English, French, and Dutch counterparts. In this fashion, while the Caribbean is often adopted as an exemplar of increasingly globalized societies by scholars elsewhere, anthropology in particular has failed to forge an academic space for the unique concerns of the Caribbean in the contemporary moment.

Heeding prominent critiques from scholars of the Caribbean, I seek to posit an alternative approach to diaspora studies distanced from the prevailing Americentric paradigm. Despite the apparent depoliticization of African Diaspora Studies in recent years, in contrast to its distinctly politicized origins in the Post-Bandung Third Worldist and Pan-Africanist movements of the 1960's and 1970's, I posit that popular deployments and academic theorizations of diaspora nonetheless serve distinctly political interests and aspirations. Resisting conceptualizations of diaspora as rooted in geographic "homelands," central here is the question of temporality, as the

relational structure of diaspora is framed explicitly by notions of *time* (Axel 2002; Hanchard 1999).

Heeding the words of a young Montano recounted in the epigraph above, I aptly characterize the diasporic experience as a nomadic journey, an amalgam of disparate "wanderers in time and space" as Montano's lyrical ode observes. Furthermore, this implies that diasporic subjects occupy fluid positionalities of *time and space*, shifting across concurrent sites national, ethnic, and diasporic belonging, and oppositional timescapes of rootedness and cosmopolitanism, tradition and modernity. Recent interventions in the transdisciplinary field of diaspora studies have similarly posited temporality, rather than geography, as the connective tissue of contemporary diasporic formations (Axel 2002; Edwards 2001, 2003; Puar 2005).

Literary historian Brent Hayes Edwards' recent work on Harlem Renaissance-era black internationalism fittingly deploys the French idiom *décalage* as a metaphor for diaspora as an articulation of "difference within unity" (Edwards 2003; see also Hall 1990, 1996a; Mercer 2003), noting the ways in which discourses of diaspora operate outside of claims to a shared homeland or raciality. *Décalage*, translated loosely "jet lag," nonetheless aptly "resists translation into English" (Edwards 2003:13), and accordingly casts diaspora as a product of particular spatial and temporal arrangements. Derived from the verb *caler*, meaning "to prop up or wedge" (Ibid), Edwards marshalling of *décalage* reminds us that diaspora "alludes to the taking away of something that was added in the first place, something artificial…served to fill some gap or to rectify some imbalance" (2003:14). Here, while his attention to temporality is especially poignant, it bears noting that such spatial and temporal structures are *constructed* in accordance with particular political movements and aspirations conscripted under the umbrella of the African Diaspora. Returning to the case study of Trinidad and Tobago, how might

Caribbean claims to "modernity" necessitate a break from prevailing notions of African primitivism and exclusion from the discursive cartography deemed the "West?" And alternatively, how might efforts to foster south-south cooperation between the African continent and Trinidad and Tobago incite a parallel effort to conflate such temporal fissures in asserting a renewed sentiment of postcolonial solidarity?

The analytical frame I term diasporic temporalities seeks similarly to probe the construction of temporal relations in the context of African diasporic formations. Here I am indebted to critiques in queer studies that similarly challenge the sustained preoccupation with diasporic origins and "homelands," disputing the heteronormative and essentialist privileging of blood ancestry as the formative substance of diasporas (Gopinath 2005; Puar 2005). Drawing from the Brian Keith Axel's conceptual apparatus, "the diasporic imaginary" (Axel 2002), Jasbir Puar acutely observes:

> diaspora…is not represented only as a demographic, a geographic place, or primarily through history, memory, or even trauma. It is cohered through sensation, vibrations, echoes, speed, feedback loops, and recursive folds and feelings, coalescing through corporealities, affectivities, and, I would add, multiple and contingent temporalities: not through an identity but an assemblage (135)

Axel's "diasporic imaginary," usefully offers a terminology that challenges classical definitions of diaspora as an outgrowth of territorial claims and exile, instead calling attention to its inherently affective, seemingly intangible properties. Mirroring Puar's incisive critique, I actively resist deploying "diasporic identity" and similar language that unfortunately reifies racially essentialist formulations of diaspora on the basis of ancestry and phenotype. Rather, in remaining attentive to the *processes* and "small acts" (Gilroy 1993b) that constitute diaspora, I arrive at a productive definition that acknowledges the fluid, and at times fleeting, nature of diasporic politics. How, for example, might we differently characterize the diasporic imagination

of Pan-Africanism (Robinson 2000[1983]) from that of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States (Singh 2004) and perhaps even the narrative proffered by a Kenyan American President? Moreover, returning to the question of temporality, how do such deployments and conceptualizations shift and develop over time, within the trajectories of such seemingly distinct epochs, as evidenced in the corpus of thought left by C.L.R. James, Martin Luther King, Jr., Barack Obama and their interlocutors?

Critical here, as evidenced in the ethnographic vignette recounted above, is the various schisms and contradictions inherent in narratives of diasporic community and solidarity. For instance, how might the apparent generational fissure between the diasporic political aspirations of the Black Power movement in Trinidad and the aspirations to international cosmopolitanism expressed by the nation's youth provide an implicit theorization of diaspora as a multifarious set of concurrent dialogues, rather than a singular, essentialist structure? And similarly, how do the alternating concerns over national development and diasporic solidarity necessitate respective narratives of diasporic continuity and disjuncture, proximity and distance, forged in support of such political projects and ambitions?

In this vein, *Wanderers in Time and Space* engages these questions from the vantage of the postcolonial Caribbean nation of Trinidad and Tobago. In accordance with my preoccupation with the construction of diaspora in scholarly, political, and popular discourse, and my own disciplinary background in anthropology, I first seek to locate Trinidad as a site of anthropological knowledge, returning to the canonical texts of Melville Herskovits. In chapter one, I juxtapose his research in the Caribbean against the parallel scholarly works of Trinidadian historian and statesman Eric Williams. Employing the brief exchange between Williams and Herskovits as a foil for broader questions of African diasporic epistemologies, I engage the

various ideological and rhetorical deployments of diaspora as a primary object of investigation, probing the distinctly political stakes imbued within their respective research.

Chapter two draws from six weeks of ethnographic fieldwork surrounding the 2010 commemoration of Emancipation Day in Port of Spain, Trinidad—in conjunction with textual and archival analysis—engaging the history of the holiday since its revival in 1985 as a site of diasporic engagement between Africa and the Caribbean. Again, I note the ways in which this development demands concerted attention to the role of *temporality* in African diasporic processes, framed by the sustained tension between discourses of nation and diaspora in Trinidad and Tobago.

In all, the uses of Caribbean as a site of analysis in diaspora studies have yet to be fully engaged. This thesis accordingly seeks to both lend a fresh perspective on the political development of Trinidad and Tobago, and the Caribbean more broadly, and to outline new directions in the fields of anthropology, literary, and cultural studies, and the interdisciplinary subfields of diaspora studies, Africana Studies, and Caribbean Studies. I intend here to explode the arbitrary boundaries often placed upon these intersecting, though often independent, schools of thought in hopes of constructing new approaches to scholarly analysis and the articulation of new politics of African diasporic belonging.

CHAPTER ONE

THE MYTH OF THE CARIBBEAN PAST:

TEMPORALITY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF DIASPORIC FUTURES

> "Obviously this story about continuities is not confined within the disciplinary parameters of anthropology. It is a story that has in a variety of ways structured our own 'imagined community,' our own narratives of identity and tradition. For this reason it would be possible…to speak here of at least two historically interconnected yet distinct and analytically separable registers. One is anthropological, strictly speaking, inasmuch as it has to do with the properly disciplinary construction of a distinctive theoretical object, namely, 'the New World Negro'…The other is, we might say, extra-anthropological, being transdisciplinary, something positively antidisciplinary, and having rather to do with the varying cultural-political discourses of identity and tradition produced by peoples of African descent in the New World, in the course of our own practices and struggles."
>
> ~David Scott, "That Event, This Memory"

Melville Herskovits, the renowned forefather of African-American anthropology, first ventured to Trinidad in 1939, conducting three months of ethnographic fieldwork in the rural village of Toco (Gershenhorn 2004:84). Now fully committed to the concept of African "survivals" that would later appear in his renowned 1941 text, *The Myth of the Negro Past,* Herskovits set out to place Trinidad along his growing scale of "Africanisms," measuring the relative presence of African cultural traits in the diasporic populations of the Americas (Herskovits 1930). Both *The Myth of the Negro Past* and his later *Trinidad Village*—published in 1947—follow the same conceptual trajectory, engaging Trinidad solely in relation to a veritable African *past*, one that Herskovits personally constructed through secondary sources and prior field research in the French-West African colony of Dahomey beginning in 1931 (Blier 1989; Gershenhorn 2004).

Accordingly, Herskovits' initial research in Toco—conducted in collaboration with his wife and primary interlocutor, Frances—was not without personal bias or political motivation. In fact, prior to initiating his fieldwork, Herskovits' prevailing assumptions regarding the relative

"modernity" of the Caribbean vis-à-vis its presumed African past, colored his preliminary conclusions. As he and Frances reveal in the preface to *Trinidad Village*:

> Because Shango worship was so near the capital, we thought it evident that this cult, and the African ways of life we assumed to be associated with it, would be met in greatest purity in the districts remote from this center of European contact. The choice of a community removed from Port-of-Spain was thus the first requisite (Herskovits and Herskovits 1976[1947]:v).

Having distanced himself from his prior belief in the "complete acculturation" of African-descended peoples (Herskovits 1997[1925]:360), Herskovits alternatively sought to tackle the embattled racial milieu in the United States via a comparative analysis of "the Negro in the New World," charting the presence of African cultural retentions on a spectrum ranging from "the Bush Negroes of Suriname who exhibit a civilization which is the most African…[to] a group…who only differ from their white neighbors in the fact that they have more pigmentation in their skins" (Herskovits 1930:150). Despite the necessarily internationalist scope of Herskovits' research, distinguishing his publications from contemporaneous studies of race relations—perhaps most notably Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (1944)—his analysis nonetheless remains confined to Americentric notions of raciality and race relations, evidenced in his politically-charged opening to *Myth*, where he asserts, "The myth of the Negro past is one of the principal supports of race prejudice in this country" (Herskovits 1990[1941]:1), locating the question of cultural survivals squarely within the context of the United States. Presuming an American audience and adopting domestic racial politics as his primary object of critique, Herskovits implicitly eschews the parallel anti-colonial political ambitions of his research "subjects" in Africa and the Caribbean, who conversely remain ossified as relics of an African American cultural past.

Accordingly, Herskovits' preoccupation with the cultural *past* of "the Negro" and its retention by contemporary African-descended peoples in the Americas incites a temporal politics

that has been scarcely interrogated by scholarly critics in diaspora studies. Here, Herskovits' initial, now fabled fieldwork in West Africa operates primarily as an attempt to recover the cultural origins, or *past*, of the African Americans with whom his research was preoccupied. His proverbial scale of Africanisms, then, signifies a particular temporal politics, inciting notions of temporal progress from a scientifically verifiable African past to an African American present. Though Herskovits was undoubtedly progressive in his challenge to pervasive assumptions of African cultural inferiority, he nonetheless casts African diasporic populations as culturally stagnant, occupying disparate temporal rungs on the proverbial ladder of modernity, measured in accordance with the relative presence or absence of an ostensibly "African" culture.

Within this frame of analysis, the Caribbean operates solely as an intermediary site between an originary African continent and the contemporary United States. A telling passage in *Myth*, outlines this relationship accordingly:

> study in West Africa [serves] to establish the cultural base line from which the differing traditions of the dominant New World Negro peoples might be assessed, and concomitant study of the life of Negroes in the West Indies and South America, where acculturation to European patterns has proceeded less rapidly than in the United States (Herskovits 1990[1941]:15).

Establishing the African continent as a "base line" against which its diasporic populations, and particularly African Americans, will be measured, Herskovits engages the Caribbean solely for its heuristic value, providing supporting data for his broader conclusions regarding the nature of acculturation in African diasporic populations of the Americas. Accordingly, Herskovits' field research in the Caribbean serves a preordained analytical end, revealing a distinctly political agenda that undergirds his scholarly claims. In positing a continuity of African cultures among descendents of enslaved Africans in the Americas, Herskovits upholds the Boasian ideal of cultural relativism in an attempt to challenge the prevailing "racial and cultural chauvinism" in American society, employing the Caribbean merely as additional support for his existing thesis.

As an inherently politicized site of inquiry, scholarly approaches to diaspora are necessarily political, and therefore, demand greater attention to the political stakes of efforts to map the physical and conceptual cartography of the African Diaspora. Accordingly, I am preoccupied with the sociopolitical implications of invocations of diasporic continuity and disjuncture, or as Kamari Clarke poignantly suggests in a recent essay, to "mak[e] sense of contemporary diasporic identity by asking the question of what people do rather than who they are" (2010:52). In this regard, scholarly approaches to diaspora may further engage diaspora in its various rhetorical and political deployments, rather than the ways it is ostensibly constructed through the proliferation of a primordial, "African" culture.

The conceptual apparatus I term diasporic temporalities figures centrally in this negotiation of diaspora, which as Clarke observes, remains a necessarily political maneuver. Moreover, as select diaspora theorists observe, not only are diasporas intrinsically defined by points of spatial disjuncture, across regional specificities, nation-states, and transcontinental landscapes (Appadurai 1990; Hall 1990), but also by temporal fissures (Edwards 2001, 2003) as such diasporic spatial locales are assigned distinct, and often disparate, temporal positionalities. The analytic of diasporic temporalities seeks to address the ways that diaspora is deployed in accordance with particular temporal arrangements, such as the Herskovitsian concept of a "Negro past" located in the contemporary African continent. In turn, as critics contend, the concept of "modernity" invokes not only time, but also *location*, illustrated prominently by the "exclusion of the Caribbean from the imagined time-space of Western modernity" (Sheller 2003:1). At its essence, then, temporality functions primarily as a discourse, enacting a racialized and spatialized continuum of relative primitivism and modernity.

Herskovits' anthropological rendering of African diasporic continuity exemplifies such

deployments of temporality. Seeking to affirm the rightful place of African-descended peoples as full participants in American democracy, Herskovits proffers a chronology of African diasporic progress, positing African Americans as the population furthest removed from an iconic African past. Though Herskovits sought to uphold all African diasporic cultures as equally viable—following the Boasian tenet of cultural relativism—he nonetheless inadvertently enacts a troubling notion of cultural evolutionism, stemming from a singular origin in Africa and emerging through distinct epochs represented by populations of Latin America and the West Indies.

Michael Hanchard's theory of "racial time" and corresponding notion of "Afro-modernity" presents an especially fruitful lens to interrogate the temporal politics of African diasporic formations. Complicating the often theorized relationship between peoples of African-descent and Western "modernity" (Gilroy 1993a), Hanchard notes that "African and African-derived peoples…could either 'catch up' with the West by assuming certain practices and behaviors, or forever look across a civilizational chasm" (252), occupying a racially subordinate, and temporally distant position vis-à-vis an omniscient West. Applying Hanchard's concept of racial time to Herskovits' body of research, one must further interrogate how this temporal location of African-descended peoples is constructed as a "savage slot" (Trouillot 1991) placed in dialectical opposition to Western Civilization.

The infamous scale of Africanisms proposed by Herskovits, then, has not been sufficiently interrogated for its temporal politics, remaining wholly disengaged from the transition toward independence and "modernity" in colonial territories of Africa, Latin America, and the West Indies. This frame of analysis is by no means incidental, though, as Frances and Melville Herskovits observe in their description of their Trinidadian fieldsite, "Nor is Toco

touched by the industrialization of southern Trinidad, where the oil-fields and refineries are located, or by the commercial preoccupations of Port-of-Spain, the capital" (3). Therefore, though the Herskovitses were aware of the distinctly "modern" strivings of Trinidad at the time of their research, noting its industrial development in the petroleum sector, they nonetheless elect to frame Trinidad—and the Caribbean more broadly—as a mere site of comparison to his primary concerns in the United States. In failing to engage the Caribbean as an independent site of analysis, instead merely appropriating the region for its heuristic value to his broader claims, Herskovits establishes the Caribbean as solely an intermediary locus in the progression from a continental African "Negro past" to present-day African Americans in the United States. Herskovits' fixation upon race relations in the United States, therefore, severely limited much of his research in the Caribbean, which in its exclusively acculturative approach fails to engage the mounting appeals for self-government throughout the region. Furthermore, in the diverse racial milieu of Trinidad, Herskovits paid scarce attention to the relations between the island's peoples of African- and Indian-descent, strategically selecting a predominantly African-descended community "far removed…from the southern and western portions of Trinidad, where most of the British Indians live" (Herskovits 1947:3). Herskovits, in turn, sustains a precariously Americentric frame of analysis, offering an ethnographic depiction of Trinidad divorced from local incidences of interracial intimacy and conflict, instead engaging the island's African-descended population in isolation, lending additional support for his previous conclusions regarding African cultural survivals. Herskovits deliberate isolation of Afro-Trinidadians from their South Asian counterparts in the then island colony further exemplifies his sustained commitment to an Americentric frame of reference. Echoing the conclusions of *The Myth of the Negro Past*, *Trinidad Village* remains grounded in a black-white racial binary, once again

reflecting his preoccupation with the familiar racial politics of the United States. Eschewing the possibility for parallel syncretic traditions between Trinidad's African and Indian-descended populations, Herskovits effectively constructs the Caribbean as a site of ethnographic inquiry in an effort to uphold his underlying political aims.

The inextricability of Herskovits' findings from contemporaneous American racial politics reflects a centuries-long relationship between anthropological knowledge production and social policy in the United States (Baker 1998). Here, however, I am primarily concerned with Herskovits temporal placement of Africa in relation to the ideal of American national identity. Seeking to affirm the role of "the Negro" in a still nascent American nationalism, Herskovits constructs an argument concerning the potential assimilability and Americanization of people of African-descent, citing a distinctive cultural past of African Americans. In enacting a temporal politics of diaspora, I argue that Herskovits' corpus of anthropological research indicates the overtly political nature of diaspora as an "imagined community" (Anderson 1990[1983]) and object of academic study.

Therefore, while numerous attempts to historicize Herskovits' research foreground his prominent debate with African American sociologist E. Franklin Frazier (Cole 1985; Yelvington 2001)—pitting Herskovits paradigm of African "survivals" against Frazier's assertion of an African American *tabula rasa* engendered by the trauma of the Middle Passage—few have engaged critiques of Herskovits from the vantage of the Caribbean. Eric Williams, the renowned Trinidadian historian who would later serve as the nation's first Prime Minister, was a notable critic of Herskovits in this regard. In a review of *Trinidad Village* entitled "In the Land of Rum and Coca-Cola," referencing a popular calypso of the day, Williams—then a professor at Howard University—chastises Herskovits for discounting the hegemonic role of British

colonialism in the cultural trajectory of Trinidad and Tobago. Concerning education, Williams observes:

> the authors—curiously enough, for Americans—express no concern over what is a burning question all over the British West Indies…Implicit…is an acceptance of the status quo in British West Indian education, with its emphasis on literary training for white-collar work, and on the standards and ideals of the metropolitan country which have been imposed on the distant colony (Williams 1947:549).

For Williams, the burgeoning desire for political sovereignty in the West Indies usurps the Herskovitsian preoccupation with African cultural retentions in Trinidad, a struggle he would personally adopt after leaving his post at Howard and returning to the Caribbean. Nonetheless, akin to Herskovits, the diasporic figurehead of "Africa" remains a central point of contention in Williams' scholarship and subsequent political rhetoric, which he similarly deploys in accordance with his concomitant political strivings.

In direct contrast to Herskovits' avowed commitment to scientific rigor, Williams' *The Negro in the Caribbean*—published one year removed from Herskovits' *Myth*—tackles similar thematic concepts, but conversely engages their implications for the political futures of the Caribbean. Characterized by biographer Colin Palmer as "an overt assault on colonial rule in the Caribbean as a whole," *The Negro in the Caribbean* functions equally as a political manifesto and scholarly text, generating significant contention among his academic detractors (Palmer 2006:20). The emergent anti-colonial strivings of Africa and the Caribbean, as a result, proliferate throughout the text, which in foregrounding the conclusions of his subsequent *Capitalism and Slavery*, recounts the arrival, enslavement, and colonization of African-descended peoples in the Caribbean.

In this respect, upon the release of *The Negro in the Caribbean*, Williams' critique of colonization was overtly racialized in the singular archetype of "the Negro." Akin to Herskovits,

then, Williams adopts "the Negro" as a site of scholarly inquiry. However, while Herskovits concerns himself with the question of race relations in the United States, Williams turns his attention to the imminent decolonization of the Caribbean. Accordingly, Williams' invocations of diasporic continuity invoke a distinctly politicized impulse, deviating from Herskovits' acculturative, anthropological model. He writes, "With the transportation of the Negro from Africa to the Caribbean the germ of political revolt was transplanted to the New World…The moment he was placed on the small tubs which made the Middle Passage, that moment he became a revolutionary, actual or potential" (Williams 1994[1942]:83). Following a distinctly Pan-African sentiment that characterized many of his writings during his tenure at Howard (Palmer 2006:238), Williams' implicit theorization of diaspora, aimed at the wider decolonization of the Caribbean, invokes diaspora as a political, rather than cultural, body.

Following his return to Trinidad, however, Williams effectively revised his Pan-Africanist politics, adopting the growing nationalist struggle in Trinidad and Tobago as his own. Seeking to affirm the multiracial, pluralistic character of the proposed dual island nation, Williams, in contrast to his earlier works, deemphasized the historical ties of Trinidad and the African continent. An oft-cited passage from Williams' *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago*—a text drafted explicitly for the occasion of Trinbagonian independence from British colonialism—characterizes the infant nation's relationship to its diasporic "motherlands" thusly:

> only together can [the peoples of Trinidad and Tobago] build a society, can they build a nation, can they build a homeland. There can be no Mother India for those whose ancestors came from India…There can be no Mother Africa for those of African origin…A nation, like an individual, can have only one Mother. The only mother we recognise is Mother Trinidad and Tobago, and Mother cannot discriminate between her children (Williams 1993[1962]:279).

Williams' effort to distance the newly independent Trinidad and Tobago from its diasporic interlocutors acts as an explicitly political maneuver, not unlike that of Herskovits more than two

decades earlier. Here, the shifting nature of their respective approaches to diasporic community, from "complete acculturation" to "African survivals," and from political affinity to historical and temporal disjuncture, reminds us that "diaspora" is necessarily political, operating as a discourse serving particular ideological projects, namely American racial democracy and Trinbagonian creole nationalism.

Again, for Williams, the temporal placement of the African continent remains tantamount to his periodic political strivings. As his later diplomatic tour of the African continent following his inauguration as Prime Minister bears out, the cultural continuity from Africa to the Caribbean mattered little to Williams in his personal conception of diasporic community. A speech delivered at Haile Selassie University in Ethiopia provides a telling example, as Williams describes African unity as "'a powerful political movement toward decolonization" (Palmer 2006:245), highlighting parallels in history in politics rather than a shared cultural lineage with the East African nation. Here, as a statesman, Williams revived fragments of his Pan-African rhetoric in attempt to foster political ties with African nations engaged in a common struggle against the specter of colonial rule. Returning to a notion of temporal proximity with the African continent, he recalls in his autobiography, "The African tour gave me an insight into the political realities in Africa" (Williams 1969:291), upholding the synchronous strivings of his counterparts on the African continent.

In light of the parallel renderings of diaspora proffered by Herskovits and Williams, and divergent temporal arrangements of Africa and the Caribbean in their scholarly and political works, recent approaches in the subfield of diaspora studies have not fully accommodated *temporality* as a source of critique. As evidenced here, attempts to define the geographical and cultural parameters of the African Diaspora such as that of Herskovits, despite claims to "a

foundation on scientific fact" (Herskovits 1990:32), remain fundamentally political, entangled in contemporaneous societal discourses of race and national belongingness.

Brent Edwards' interventions are of note here, as he offers the metaphor of *décalage*—a French word he borrows from Senegalese statesman Leopold Senghor—which, loosely translating to "jet lag," also "can be translated as 'gap,' 'discrepancy,' 'time lag,' or 'interval'" (2001:65). Here, Edwards reminds us that invocations of diaspora necessarily reflect particular constructions spatial and temporal relation, rejecting the Herskovitsian preoccupation with diasporic origins. Rather, he notes instead that "the question is why it becomes necessary at a certain historical conjuncture to employ the term *diaspora* in black intellectual work" (Edwards 2001:53). Though Edwards sufficiently interrogates the "uses" of diaspora in scholarly discourse (2001), and by prominent writers and intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance (2003), I extend his argument further, noting the ways in which temporality is invoked deliberately in accordance with historical and political movements, as evidenced by both Herskovits and Williams.

Citing *Black Power*, a travel narrative by African American writer and activist Richard Wright, recounting his visit to the recently independent republic of Ghana, Michael Hanchard provides a telling example of the approach I delineate here. Applying his notion of "racial time" to the intradiasporic schism between African Americans and their counterparts in continental Africa, Hanchard recalls a passage in which a British bank clerk contends to Wright "You American chaps are three hundred years ahead of these Africans" (Wright 1954 cited in Hanchard 1999:262), framing diasporic difference as a fissure of temporality. Akin to Williams, Wright rejects a notion of diaspora rooted in a common cultural lineage, instead framing his relationship to Kwame Nkrumah's recently independent Ghana as one of shared political struggle.

In this respect, as scholars refashion theoretical approaches to diaspora in the contemporary moment, the classical, anthropological "science of culture" approach remains lacking. While scholars relentlessly return to the Herskovits-Frazier debate as the prevailing outline for debates in diaspora studies, the parallel debate of Herskovits and Eric Williams demands that we avoid this zero sum binary of diasporic continuity or wholesale disjuncture, turning instead to questions of political economy, engaging discourses of diaspora in tandem with the historical and political contexts in which they arise. As J. Lorand Matory writes in reference to the oft-noted Herskovits-Frazier debate, "The debate over this matter…is significant less for the *scholarly* correctness of one or the other argument than for how it framed a debate that would continue in the general African American population…and continue to articulate diverse programs for the uplift of African Americans" (2006:162).

Similarly, writing from the critical vantage of the Caribbean requires that one remain critical of Herskovits' ethnographic appropriation of Afro-Caribbean peoples for his own ideological strivings, noting the ways in which his analysis prohibited an anthropological approach to the political economy of the region. Accordingly, it is in this context that Williams' critique and subsequent studies may be understood as a critical intervention, reframing prevailing anthropological discourses of the African Diaspora from the perspective of the anticolonial, nationalist struggle in Trinidad.

Here, while scholars posit "Africa" as an invention of the West, a product of orientalist Christianizing missions, travel narratives, and anthropological accounts of the continent (Mudimbe 1988), it bears noting, additionally, that it is continuously (re)constructed by diasporic figures such as Williams, and his counterparts in the contemporary moment. Recentering Africa and "Africanness" as a site of analysis in diaspora studies, I seek to interrogate the various

"uses" of Africa in political rhetoric and scholarly discourse. Here, the critical lens of temporality demands we reclaim people of African-descent as agential, rather than passive, participants in the "practice" of diaspora (Edwards 2003). In contrast to Herskovits' purportedly scientific approach to an anthropology of the African diaspora, which maintains the primacy of a white male ethnographer in delineating the parameters of diasporic belongingness, I alternatively posit diaspora as a discourse, one which scholars must further interrogate for the various breaks, silences, and hegemonies (Thomas and Campt 2006, 2007) encompassed by its temporal politics.

Here, I recenter temporality as an analytical lens for contemporary approaches in diaspora studies, which remain unfortunately preoccupied with establishing the geographical and conceptual limits of the African Diaspora, rather than its deployment in support of particular scholarly and political strivings. As I illustrate here, echoing the recent intervention of Kamari Maxine Clarke, adopting an anti-essentialist approach to diaspora demands that scholars shift their attention from questions of what diaspora *is*, toward questions of what diaspora *does*, as a cultural and political signifier. What this requires, moreover, is a critical analysis of foundational research in diaspora studies, such as that of Herskovits, which despite assertions to the contrary, carries distinctly political implications vis-à-vis its primary research "subjects."

Though Frazier's critique of Herskovits prevailed in the immediate aftermath of their iconic debate, the Herskovitsian model of acculturation and continuity would reappear alongside the cultural nationalist movements of the late 1960's and 1970's, prompting a resurgence of scholarship in African American anthropology (Mintz and Price 1992[1976]; Whitten and Szwed 1970). The groundbreaking studies of Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, for example, despite offering poignant critiques of Herskovits, maintain a preoccupation with an African past and New World present, subscribing to an essentialist, anthropological rendering of diasporic cultural

continuity (Mintz and Price 1992[1976]). Here, diaspora theorists sustain an unfortunate preoccupation with defining the geographical and cultural parameters of diasporic belonging (Clifford 1994; Tölölyan 1996), stemming from a distant, originary African continent, and centered in the dispersal of the Middle Passage and subsequent experience of enslavement.

The works of Paul Gilroy are paradigmatic of this school of thought, positing enslavement as the defining experience of the diasporic community he terms the "black Atlantic" (Gilroy 1993a). Though it bears noting that Gilroy does not put forth his concept of the black Atlantic as a metonym for diaspora, his work has nonetheless come to define research in diaspora studies over nearly two decades since its release. In their commitment to the black Atlantic as a frame of analysis, scholars of the African Diaspora have placed arbitrary geographical limits on their respective conceptions of diaspora, upholding a Herskovitsian air of continuity rooted in the formative experience of the Middle Passage. Here, numerous foundational works in African Diaspora Studies present dangerously positivist frames of analysis, privileging "scientific" anthropological approaches to African diasporic culture (Herskovits 1930, 1990[1941]; Herskovits and Herskovits 1976[1947]; Mintz and Price 1992[1976]; Price 2002[1983]) and conceptions of diaspora founded in racial ontology and phenotype (Drake 1982, 1987; Harris 1982), failing to accommodate the diverse, and at times contradictory, invocations of blackness and diasporic solidarity (Gordon and Anderson 1999).

Though the legacy of enslavement remains a constitutive element of the African Diaspora, the role of such historical processes in relation to present incarnations of diasporic community remains a point of contention. As Richard and Sally Price write in their pamphlet on the field diaries of Melville Herskovits, *The Root of Roots, Or, How Afro-American Anthropology Got Its Start*, "Some younger, 'postcolonial' scholars are now questioning the

object that became known as Afro-American Anthropology, seeing it as based on the meretricious assumption that peoples of African-descent in the New World require a 'science of culture' to provide them with the foundational guarantee of an authentic past" (78). Rehashing the abovementioned conflict between Herskovits' scientific approach and the overtly politicized scholarship of Williams, Price and Price's cursory engagement of such "postcolonial" critiques illustrates a commitment to a neo-Herskovitsian frame, sustaining debates between "Africa-centrists," who maintain the lasting influence of select African cultural forms in the Americas, and "creation theorists" such as Mintz and Price, who alternatively focus on the historical underpinnings of creolization and syncretism (Price and Price 2003:79). Implicit in both models, however, is a conception of diaspora as ontology, presuming an "authentic" cultural continuity to be mapped by scientifically-verifiable ethnographic data.

Alternatively, the postcolonial scholars cited above have alternatively proffered renderings of diaspora as *discourse*, constructed by diasporic peoples in memory, myth, and political discourse. David Scott, one such "postcolonial" scholar, levies a timely critique of Richard Price's *First-Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People*, challenging scholars of the African Diaspora to relinquish the anthropological propensity for "corroborating pasts" (267) in accordance with purportedly "authentic" narratives. In cases such as that of African cultural origins for Herskovits, Scott instead calls for an interrogation of the "ideological conditions that motivate" (269) particular conceptions of diasporic belonging.

Recent developments further underscore the need to distance diaspora studies from its prior preoccupation with cultural origins and verifiable "pasts," as "new claims to diasporic linkages that have little reverence for or focus on earlier transatlantic movements" emerge in the contemporary moment (Clarke 2010:50). However, as the review of Herskovits and Williams

displays, prior invocations of diaspora only engaged such earlier transatlantic movements, most notably, the Middle Passage, in conjunction with their political strivings. The contemporary salience of diaspora, then, lies in the *politics* it signifies. In other words, to what ideological and ends is diaspora fashioned? How are notions of diasporic solidarity alternately invoked or silenced in accordance with such political aspirations? Drawing from the examples provided by Herskovits and Williams, I additionally maintain the significance of temporalities to such contemporary invocations of diaspora. If, as Hanchard suggests, diasporic politics require "an altering of the extant historical path toward a new time" (263) devoid of temporal discrepancies and corresponding hegemonies, then such uneven temporal arrangements must remain a primary object of critique.

Furthermore, my critique of Herskovits' works seeks to uphold the Caribbean as an central site of analysis in the ever-expanding field of African Diaspora Studies. Despite a prevailing Americentrism in the field—as evidenced in the sustained prevalence of African American Studies programs that exist to the exclusion of the African continent, and to a lesser extent, the Caribbean—studies rendered from the perspective of the Caribbean permit an engagement with distinct diasporic processes previously obscured by a preoccupation with diasporic formations in the United States and former colonial metropoles. Instead, efforts to further attend to diaspora as a sociopolitical discourse, rather than a scientifically-verifiable object of analysis, demand greater attention to the societal contexts in which such discourses arise, and are forged by scholars, political actors, and their interlocutors.

CHAPTER TWO

DAAGA, DASHIKIS, AND DIASPORA: DIASPORIC TEMPORALITY AND EMANCIPATION DAY

> "When Sonnyboy Apparicio hear the government had declared a state of emergency and was arresting leaders of the Black Power demonstrations that our most illustrious historian had christened the February Revolution, his first instinct was to run. He exchanged his dashiki for a long-sleeved white shirt, patted down his halo of hair to fit under a bebop cap, left Rouff Street where he stayed by his brother Alvin when he was in Port of Spain and dodged his way to the village sleeping on top Hololo mountain to hide out by Daniel, an Indian pardner, where he felt sure the police wouldn't look for him, there to wait for word of the resistance that the Black Power leader warned would follow."
>
> ~Earl Lovelace, *Is Just A Movie*

In a public address to an April 19, 2010 campaign rally, incumbent Trinidad and Tobago Prime Minister Patrick Manning put forth a now infamous attempt to undermine upstart opposition candidate Kamla Persad-Bissessar. Indicting her People's Partnership coalition as a conspiring group of "dangerous men," Manning questioned the political viability of his Indo-Trinidadian challenger, suggesting she would succumb to the influences of her newfound political allies (Maharaj 2010). Of her supporters, Makandal Daaga (neé Geddes Granger), famed leader of the 1970 Black Power Revolt in Trinidad and Chief Servant of its political offshoot, the National Joint Action Committee (NJAC), received the brunt of Manning's criticism. Denouncing Daaga's affinity for the cultural aesthetics of the Black Power era, he charged, "From what I see nothing has changed with the gentleman, he even still wearing a Dashiki…and I can't remember the last time I see a Dashiki in this country" (Ibid). In portraying Daaga as a political anachronism, Manning conjures two prevailing stereotypes of African cultural iconography in Trinidad and Tobago; first, indicting the dashiki as a relic of the 1960's and 1970's Black Power movement, and secondly, as a traditional form of African dress divorced from the ostensibly "modern" trajectory of Trinbagonian society.

The debate Manning raises is one familiar to Trinidad and Tobago and fellow postcolonial nation-states of the Caribbean. Characterized by the pluralistic ideals of creole nationalists and the (black) internationalist sentiments of Rastafari, Black Power, Caribbean Marxism, and Pan-Africanism, aspirations to Trinbagonian nationhood and an African diasporic imaginary remain in a perpetual state of tension. As Manning illustrates in his comments toward Daaga, the perceived fissure between a purportedly modern West Indies and a geographically and temporally distant African continent remains influential in contemporary regional politics.

Therefore, while early anthropological studies of African-descended peoples in Trinidad and Tobago are predominated by Melville Herskovits' concept of African cultural "retentions" (Herskovits 1941, 1947; Simpson 1965), the twilight and aftermath of British colonialism, alternatively, yield renewed efforts to forge political connections between the African continent and Trinidad and Tobago, including the Black Power uprising of 1970, the deployment of a Trinidadian delegation to the Sixth Pan-African Congress—which convened in Dar es Salaam in 1974—and the revival of Emancipation Day as a national holiday in 1985. Although the position Africa occupies is malleable rather than fixed, the specter of Africa and its diasporic influence remains a fixture of political debate in the twin island nation.

Echoing the 1991 calypso "Take Me Back," Trinidadian soca legend Machel Montano's lyrical ode to the African continent cited in the introductory essay, this chapter accordingly interrogates the temporal and spatial politics associated with political and rhetorical deployments of diaspora in Trinidad and Tobago. Eschewing prevailing theories of diaspora that marginalize the contemporary African continent as a site of analysis (Gilroy 1993a), I alternatively uphold Africa as an enduring concern in the diasporic politics of the Americas, both as a figurehead of the "diasporic imaginary" (Axel 2002) and contemporary political interlocutor. Here, I argue that

the question of *time*, or the temporal location of Trinidad and Tobago vis-à-vis its diasporic interlocutors, frames the concurrent friction between nationalist and diasporic politics in Trinidad and Tobago.

In grappling with Brian Axel's proposition that it is "the diaspora [that] produces the homeland" (426), we accordingly must further attend to the ways in which the homeland imaginaries of Africa—and India for that matter—appear in popular and state discourse. Mirroring Manning's campaign debacle, the historical trajectory of the Trinbagonian state has often grappled with similar questions regarding its relationship to its diasporic counterparts, conceived simultaneously as vestiges of a culturally primordial past, and as contemporary postcolonial partners.

This temporal fissure is notable insofar as it troubles notions of the Caribbean as a region ostensibly "in but not of the West" (James cited in Hall 1996b:246). Engaging both "the West" (Trouillot 1991) and "modernity" (Appadurai 1996; Sheller 2003) as signifiers of temporal progress, the African diasporic imaginary in the Caribbean is similarly fashioned in accordance with prevailing notions of Western modernity and subaltern primitivism. Drawing from textual and historical analyses, and a six-week period of ethnographic fieldwork conducted amidst the commemoration of Emancipation Day in the summer of 2010, I cast diaspora not simply an expression of cultural continuity, but also as a site of political influence and contestation in present-day Trinidad and Tobago.

FROM INDEPENDENCE TO EMANCIPATION

Prior to the attainment of independence from British colonial rule in 1962, Trinidad occupies a central role in the historical trajectory of Pan-Africanism. Henry Sylvester Williams,

a forefather of the movement and organizer of the First Pan-African Conference in 1900 was of Trinidadian origin, as were C.L.R. James, George Padmore, and Claudia Jones, all of whom rank among the foremost thinkers in the 20th Century black radical tradition (Davies 2007; Baptiste and Lewis 2008; Mathurin 1976; Robinson 2003). In their respective anticolonial strivings, such activist-scholars and their interlocutors frequently looked to their compatriots in Africa as a source of inspiration in the burgeoning struggle for self-determination. Echoing the "philosophy and opinions" of Jamaican-born activist Marcus Garvey, it was argued that the liberation of the African continent was a necessary prerequisite for the subsequent liberation of African diasporic peoples in the Americas. *The Black Jacobins*, James' historical account of the Haitian Revolution first published in 1938, accordingly locates the African continent as its primary audience. As he notes in the preface to its 1962 edition, the initial publication was "intended to stimulate the coming emancipation of Africa" (James xii), through the narrative of Haiti—the sole successful slave revolution and the first modern black republic.

Upon its reissue, however, as the reality of independence for colonial territories of the West Indies grew closer, James included an additional appendix, "From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro," seeking to accomplish "for the future of the West Indies, all of them, what was done for Africa in 1938" (Ibid). At this juncture, the promise of national sovereignty for the Caribbean temporarily took prescience above the diasporic aspirations of Pan-Africanism, privileging a pluralistic narrative of national unity. *The Black Jacobins*, then, understood primarily as a manifesto rather than traditional historiography, illustrates how the emergent scholarly histories of the Caribbean in this period were intimately tied to the political ambitions of the moment.

Conscripts of Modernity, David Scott's brilliant retrospective of James' landmark monograph, rightfully characterizes history as an inquiry into "futures past," "offer[ing] a way of remapping the problematic in which the relation between colonial pasts and the postcolonial present is conceived" (9). Similarly, my proposed analytic of diasporic temporalities seeks to trouble the wholesale distinction between historical pasts and the ethnographic present, emphasizing the inherently discursive nature of historical narrative. Rejecting a preoccupation with authorship, and the original intent behind works such as James' *Black Jacobins*, I otherwise seek to attend to the ways that such narratives are restructured and deployed by postcolonial actors, engaging the critical response and appropriation of such texts as equally constitutive sites of investigation.

Likewise, the renowned historian Eric Williams, who would later serve as the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, channeled the rising project of Caribbean nationalism throughout his definitive *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago*. Written in anticipation of the dual island nation's formal independence from British colonialism on August 31, 1962, his monograph recounts the history of the islands' various ethnic polities—particularly the descendants of enslaved Africans and South Asian indentured laborers—in hopes of inspiring a common commitment to national unity. Writing in stark contrast to his Pan-Africanist predecessors, Williams rejects the diasporic imaginary engendered by Henry Sylvester Williams, James, and Padmore as antithetical to the ideals of the Caribbean nation-state:

> only together can [the peoples of Trinidad and Tobago] build a society, can they build a nation, can they build a homeland. There can be no Mother India for those whose ancestors came from India…There can be no Mother Africa for those of African origin…A nation, like an individual, can have only one Mother. The only mother we recognise is Mother Trinidad and Tobago, and Mother cannot discriminate between her children (Williams 279).

Here, Williams' ideological commitment to the Trinbagonian state founds itself upon a premise of ethnic pluralism, enacting a formal severance from the diasporic communities to which the nation's populace is tied. It would soon become apparent, however, that a mere rhetorical denunciation of ethnic difference could not guarantee its wholesale dissolution. While this pluralistic rhetoric characterized Williams' incumbent party, the People's National Movement, the opposition Democratic Labor Party nonetheless charged Williams, who was himself of African-descent, with promoting a racially exclusionary sentiment. As Williams recalls in his autobiography:

> PNM decimation in areas with an overwhelming preponderance of Indian votes reflects…the DLP appeal that Indians should vote for the DLP so as to ensure an Indian Governor and Indian Prime Minister…Our opponents even went to the length of distributing by the thousands a letter…addressed 'my dear Indian brother' and signed 'Yours truly, Indian' (Williams 275)

Despite Williams' sustained commitment to a platform of interethnic solidarity, he nonetheless alienated an East Indian community that remained underrepresented in the national political sphere, and a black underclass yet to reap the social benefits of decolonization and independence. The latter would manifest itself in the Black Power Revolution of 1970, as prominent activists at the nearby University of the West Indies—St. Augustine campus erupted in virulent protest (Sutton 1983). Influenced by the burgeoning Black Power movement abroad, the leaders of the demonstrations once again drew from the Pan-African ideology of their forebears, seeking to enact a diasporic political agenda reaching across national, regional, and continental borders (Lux 1972). Though Indo-Trinidadians participated in the Black Power uprising, and the extent to which the movement was racially exclusionary remains contested (Gosine 1986), the "state of emergency" declared by Prime Minister Williams demonstrates how the warring imaginaries of nation and diaspora endure. For the disenfranchised black underclass, both in Trinidad and elsewhere, a "state of emergency" long preceded the demonstrations in 1970. What Williams'

declaration reflects, rather, is the fragility of the postcolonial nation-state amidst the perpetually conflicting ideologies of nationhood and diasporic belongingness.

The revival of Emancipation Day as a national holiday in 1985 figures centrally here, as the annual August 1 commemoration of abolition in the British West Indies entails a host of distinctly diasporic ambitions. Upon its reinstatement by Parliament, Emancipation Day replaced the prior celebration of Discovery Day, commemorating Christopher Columbus' first voyage to Trinidad and Tobago. While proponents of Discovery Day sought to acknowledge the apparent "discovery" of the islands as the event foregrounding the influx of their African, European, East- and South Asian populations that constitute the Trinbagonian national community, those backing Emancipation Day felt it necessary to recognize the struggles of African-descended peoples against the strictures of enslavement. In this respect, the debate between Discovery Day and Emancipation Day fundamentally recapitulates the abovementioned tension between nation and diaspora in the era of Caribbean decolonization and independence.

As support for Emancipation Day progressed, critics clamored that its revival would only inhibit the tenuous unity of the nation's ethnically diverse populace. An August 1984 letter published in the *Trinidad Guardian* bearing the headline, "Dr. Williams would not have agreed to Emancipation Day," exemplifies this sentiment, placing the iconic figurehead of Trinbagonian nationalism in conflict with the proposed holiday. Citing Williams' *History*, the letter's author posits that the islands' relatively recent introduction of enslaved Africans—in comparison to its regional neighbors—and small slaveholding community deems Emancipation Day less relevant to Trinidad and Tobago than its counterparts, writing: "All of this may explain why during his more than two decades of being Prime Minister of this country Dr. Williams never thought fit to recognize the institution of slavery with a public holiday…We have lost Discovery Day, a

commemoration to which we could all relate and have had Emancipation Day, a commemoration which means little to the majority." Accordingly, following the reestablishment of Emancipation Day as a public holiday, the commemoration continues to serve as the ideological battleground for the parallel national and diasporic projects of the Afro-Trinbagonian community. In its contemporary incarnation, though Emancipation Day is upheld as a day of national pride in the struggle against enslavement, its political ramifications as a site of diasporic exchange and political solidarity pose an overt challenge to the notion of national particularism, and the utopic ideal of racial pluralism.

EMANCIPATION DAY: DIASPORIC AFRICANNESS AND MODERN BLACKNESS

Just days after my arrival in Trinidad, I ventured to the Emancipation Support Committee (ESC) headquarters in the nearby hamlet of Maraval. Having previously corresponded with members of the ESC leadership prior to initiating fieldwork, I was offered a ride from my apartment in central Port of Spain and eagerly accepted. Upon entering the converted building on Bergerac Road, I was welcomed by the remaining Executive Members of the ESC, and provided with a tour of the premises. The foyer, which doubled as a workspace for summer interns, was flanked with posters commemorating previous Emancipation Festivals and laminated photos and newspaper clippings from the 1970 Black Power "February Revolution."

As I was directed through the remainder of the building, consisting largely of additional offices and storage space, my guide, a young woman recently appointed to the ESC secretariat, spoke emphatically regarding the importance of Emancipation Day to the livelihood of African descended peoples in Trinidad and Tobago, adding, "Africans need a day when they can celebrate their culture and history…In Trinidad you can find any race that exists in the rest of the

world. But that's what's special about Trinidad. Living here you can learn about any race." Indeed, Trinidad is often perceived as an overtly creolized space, in some ways distinct from the burgeoning discourse of "modern blackness" espoused by its regional counterpart, Jamaica, as anthropologist Deborah Thomas theorizes in her monograph of the same title. How, then, have such seemingly divergent narratives of diasporic continuity and creole nationalism come to coexist in Trinidad and Tobago? And why then, does a holiday such as Emancipation Day resonate within its explicitly multiethnic society?

Throughout my fieldwork in Port of Spain, conducted alongside the Emancipation Support Committee, the organization charged with planning the national Emancipation Festival, the concurrent ideals of nation and diaspora were frequently juxtaposed. Within the confines of the Emancipation Support Committee, the rhetoric of diaspora did not entirely displace depictions of Trinidad and Tobago as a "callaloo nation," an amalgam of disparate racial groups characterized by a societal trope of "mixing," which, as anthropologist Aisha Khan reminds us, "holds central importance in forming interpretations of identity and self-worth, of place in the world, and therefore interpreting the quality of relations among individuals, communities, nation-states, and regions" (3). Echoing her insightful analysis, I similarly seek to attend to the ways in which conceptions of "Africa" and "Africanness" are deployed by particular individual and institutional actors in contemporary Trinidad and Tobago. In other words, how does "a day [for Africans to] celebrate their culture and history," reflect newfound conceptualizations of nationalism and diaspora in a moment characterized by neoliberalism and diminishing sovereignty in the global south?

Only months removed from the devastation of the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti, a sentiment of regional and diasporic solidarity was frequently invoked by the Emancipation

Support Committee and its affiliates throughout the Emancipation Festival. Fittingly, however, the Black Power Revolution in Trinidad—in which a number of ESC members, including chairman Khafra Kambon (nee David Darbeau), figured prominently—received near equal attention, commemorating its 40th anniversary. The theme of the 2010 commemoration, "Reawakening the Spirit of Liberty," accordingly, sought to evoke a nationalist imaginary through the events of 1970, and a discourse of diasporic unity through the historical narrative of Haiti as the first independent black republic in the Caribbean. Kambon, in his remarks at the opening of the Lidj Yasu Omowale Emancipation Village at the National Stadium in downtown Port-of Spain, echoed this vision for the holiday:

> They were able to rise up from slavery and begin their revolution without guns, take away the guns of the French, British and the Spaniards and beat them all into submission. That is why this year, we are looking at Haiti and the Haitian Revolution and we are talking about reawakening the spirit of liberty, that spirit that was so strong in our brothers and sisters in Haiti between 1791 and 1804 when they finally declared Haiti to be independent. That is the spirit we want to reawaken in our people and in our society…Those who have always been vultures preying on nations, they think they have an opportunity to take away the liberty that our people fought for over 200 years ago. So we here want to show them our solidarity. We want to let our Haitian brothers and sisters know we are with you. We have gained our freedom because of your spirit of liberty a spirit you showed again in 1970, we are going to show you that spirit again. We are going to show you that solidarity that we feel for you. (Maraj 2010)

Here, while Kambon's words offer a critical narrative of the sustained threat to postcolonial sovereignty in Haiti and the wider Caribbean, I am particularly interested in the ways in which particular narratives, such as that of the Haitian Revolution and the Black Power Revolution in Trinidad, are deployed as a critique of the contemporary political milieu, marked by the specter of American imperialism and a general dissolution of state sovereignty in the postcolonial Caribbean. As C.L.R. James, and later David Scott, remind us, such narratives of history remain operative in the present as a site of political contestation and the ideological fodder for grassroots mobilization.

Once again, here a particular temporal politics is at play, as the diasporic ties between Haiti and Trinidad and Tobago, not unlike the parallel relationship with the African continent, is framed in accordance with historical narratives of emancipation and resistance. In this fashion, characterizations of diaspora as a form of "relation" (Glissant 1997; see also Brown 2005), while attuned to the ways in which diasporic processes function across spatial fissures, must similarly attest to the ways in which relation is contingent upon temporality, and the lasting relationship between history and the present. To what ends do such narratives and their attendant temporalities serve?

As I will return to later, my own participation in the planning of Emancipation Day alongside the Emancipation Support Committee foregrounds the ways in which such narratives are actively forged in accordance with the political aims and aspirations of their progenitors. However, despite the ESC's sustained efforts to levy such historical narratives toward a renewed Pan-African project and reclamation of postcolonial sovereignty, one must likewise question the divergent ways in which such narratives are fashioned by a grassroots political collective, and for instance, the Trinbagonian state. Emancipation Day, in its storied history, attests to the malleability of such narratives, often resulting in dissonance and conflict between differently racialized and classed sectors of Caribbean society.

Therefore, despite the controversy surrounding the establishment of Emancipation Day as a national holiday in 1985, the history of the commemoration in Trinidad emerges long before the struggle for nationhood engendered by 20th Century creole nationalists. In historian B.W. Higman's article-length study of Emancipation Day in the Anglophone Caribbean, he locates the origins of the holiday in the immediate wake of abolition, nevertheless noting that "the ex-slaves of Trinidad showed little enthusiasm for the celebration of 1 August, and were criticized in the

1850s for failing to exhibit 'joy or thankfulness' for 'the boon of freedom'" (91). Following this initial period of resistance and disenchantment, however, Emancipation Day quickly emerged as a site of political contestation in colonial society, serving as the medium "for competing interpretations of slavery and attitudes to the past" (Ibid). Here, serving as a memorial commemoration of enslavement and abolition in the British West Indies, Emancipation Day figures centrally as a source of political narrative, construed alongside the aspirations of its participants.

In this respect, Higman recounts the suppression of Emancipation Day by a growing "coloured" middle class that sought to erase the legacy of slavery from the public imagination, attempts to revive the holiday in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a source of commerce and site of political dialogue, and its later decline in the creole nationalist period, as proponents of decolonization alternatively proposed commemorations aimed at regional unity, such as "West India Day" (94), later abandoning the holiday altogether in favor of the commemoration of independence. This tumultuous history of Emancipation Day reminds us that the holiday functions as an architect of narrative, which in various historical epochs has been marshaled or subdued in support of ideological and political strivings.

Likewise, J.R. Kerr-Ritchie's recent study, *Rites of August First: Emancipation Day in the Black Atlantic World*, attends to the politicized underpinnings of the holiday, foregrounding the role of Emancipation Day in fostering circum-Atlantic dialogue across communities of African descent in years following abolition in the British Caribbean, serving especially as fodder for African American resistance to enslavement. In detailing the institution of August First as a platform for abolitionist struggles in the United States, he posits the holiday as a site of diasporic engagement, which "politicized people of African descent around slavery and in

support of emancipation" (Kerr Ritchie 2007:238). Kerr-Ritchie's insightful historical analysis offers a necessary pretext to my own research on the contemporary commemoration in Trinidad and Tobago. As he acutely observes, Emancipation Day never provided a mere memorial of the experience of enslavement or moment of abolition, but rather was engaged in a transnational articulations of diasporic solidarity in resistance to the sustained institution of enslavement.

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Soon after my introduction to the Emancipation Support Committee, I was actively engaged in the practical preparation for the holiday, charged with producing an exhibition on the history of Haiti to be featured at the Emancipation Village. Fueled by my enthusiasm to contribute to the commemoration, I happily accepted and began researching, supplementing my existing knowledge of the subject and constructing a preliminary list of topics to be included. From then on, arriving at the ESC headquarters with my personal copy of *The Black Jacobins* in hand, I began to construct the narrative of Haitian history that would later be featured at Emancipation Day and frame the backdrop of Haitian recovery and redevelopment in accordance with the year's theme, "Reawakening the Spirit of Liberty."

Initially, I was reluctant to trust my own sensibility in preparing the materials for the exhibition, frequently deferring to the ESC leadership, and soliciting their input and advice. However, despite my reluctance as a recent addition to the planning commission, I was assured by a senior staff member that the exhibition was my project to coordinate, who added, "it'll be your name on it" when it is showcased at the Emancipation Village. Though I elected to keep my name off of the finished product, I continued in my efforts to produce a comprehensive portrait of Haiti to both celebrate its historical significance to people of African-descent—and the Caribbean in particular—and call attention to its contemporary circumstances as a result of

sustained foreign exploitation and, subsequently, the physical ruin exacerbated by the earthquake. Ultimately, I settled on a list of essential topics to be included, which included the following: "Precolonial History," "Colonial Saint Domingue," "Mackandal," "Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen," "Oge's Revolt," "Boukman," "Toussaint L'Ouverture," "Jean-Jacques Dessalines," "International Debt," "United States Occupation," "François Duvalier," "*The Black Jacobins*," "Jean-Bertrand Aristide," and "January 2010 Earthquake" (see Appendix).

Before completing the exhibition display, the contents of each section were painstakingly crafted in close collaboration with the ESC leadership. Special efforts were made to employ language that affirms the agency of people of African descent as historical actors, and a sentiment of regional, and more broadly diasporic solidarity, was featured throughout. The section covering James' *The Black Jacobins* was included deliberately for this purpose, as the only contribution to explicitly reference Trinidad and its historical relationship with Haiti. As the placard reads:

> Concluding that "West Indians first became aware of themselves as a people in the Haitian Revolution," James credits the uprising and achievement of independence in Haiti with stimulating the subsequent struggles for independence throughout the Caribbean. As an early advocate of West Indian self-governance, James' work illustrates the impact of the Haitian Revolution on the wider Caribbean, particularly Trinidad and Tobago. In this respect, *The Black Jacobins* is arguably the defining text of Caribbean history, charting the earliest development of a distinctly West Indian identity.

Likewise, the exhibition sought to place the historical trajectory and recent events in Haiti in a broader context informed by a common struggle against enslavement, colonialism, and subsequent foreign intervention. This narrative of submarine unity across the Caribbean was further necessitated by the efforts of the Emancipation Support Committee Haiti Re-development Fund, a campaign launched following the earthquake earlier in the calendar year. Accompanying the topical contributions discussed above, an informational announcement providing contact

information and soliciting donations was also included. A telling passage from an announcement marking the launch of the fund foregrounds this emphasis on diasporic cooperation, contrasting the efforts of the ESC from American and European NGO's and humanitarian aid organizations. Demanding self-determination for Haiti in its progression toward redevelopment, the announcement observes:

> We have to make our best effort to raise funds that will be needed to help the efforts of grassroots organizations in Haiti to rebuild and embark on long term sustainable development projects, to help wider regional efforts at governmental and nongovernmental levels that can support larger Caribbean interventions in partnership with Haitians. We have to strengthen the recognition that Caribbean people have a special role to play in ensuring the independence and development of our neighbour. That involves changing the international political climate within which Haiti operates, spearheading the mobilization of the wider African Diaspora community, securing the cooperation of African countries, and identifying partners throughout the international community who have the decency to stand against exploitative designs on a prostrate country. ("Launch of Fund for the Reconstruction and Development of Haiti")

In casting the ESC Re-development Fund as distinct from similar efforts of foreign aid organizations, assertions of diasporic connectivity figure prominently as a means of advancing the Pan-African aims of the organization at large. Calling explicitly for renewed efforts to strengthen ties between African nations and their Caribbean counterparts, the ESC articulates an explicitly contemporary vision of diasporic cooperation.

On the opening night of the Emancipation Village, the exhibition was raised and displayed prominently in the ESC tent. Located at the center of the festival grounds at the national stadium, the exhibition was framed against a backdrop of speakers, steelpan performers, food vendors, and entrepreneurs from West Africa peddling continental African art and clothing. It is within the context of this diasporic convergence, of disparate nationalities, traditions, and histories that the exhibition is best understood. Despite the shared space of the Emancipation Festival, each of the groups listed above arrive at Emancipation Day with particular ends in mind Whether this end is the proliferation of Pan-Africanist philosophy, selling food to attendees, or

the sale of "authentic" African art and clothing, each is able to employ Emancipation Day as a medium for their individual ambitions.

In this respect, Emancipation Day in Trinidad does not signify a singular, unified narrative of diaspora as one might expect. Instead, activists, government officials, musicians, and entrepreneurs alike draw on the holiday to construct multifarious, and often disparate, conceptions of the African Diaspora and its ancillary structures of Africa and Africanness. Drawing from my ethnographic and archival research, I am preoccupied here with the uses of Emancipation Day in the contemporary political strivings of Caribbean nation-states such as Trinidad and Tobago. In the decades following independence, the Trinbagonian political and societal milieu are often framed as a clash between the country's African and East Indian peoples, creating what political scientist Selwyn Ryan theorizes as a state of "deadlock" (2003). The annual government-sponsored cultural festivals, Emancipation Day and Indian Arrival Day, effectively serving as the commemorations of Trinidad and Tobago's black and Indian communities, respectively, are no exception. Inciting concerns over the unequal allocation of government funds to the two festivals (Moore and Dassrath 2009), it is clear that the ostensibly disparate realms of "politics" and "culture" remain tightly interwoven.

Commemorating the abolition of slavery in the Anglophone West Indies in 1838, the contemporary Emancipation Festival represents the most prominent expression of "Africanness" in Trinidadian public life. However, not unlike Carnival, Emancipation Day is often cited for its *performance* of resistance, eschewing its significance to the contemporary political sphere (Puri 2003). On the contrary, however, since its revival as a national holiday in 1985, Emancipation Day has frequently served as a platform for international "dialogues" between Trinidad and the African continent (Matory 2006).

However, in contrast to the prior moment of south-south solidarity, engendered by the "Afro-Asian" Bandung Conference and a thriving Pan-African movement, the current moment of neoliberal development in the global south demands an alternate articulation of diasporic solidarity, which may deviate from an earlier sentiment of anticolonial struggle and political independence. How then, in the context of Emancipation Day in Trinidad and Tobago, are conceptions of diaspora structured in accordance with shared aspirations to neoliberal development? In what ways is diaspora similarly complicated by national particularism and a preoccupation with capitalist accumulation?

In recent years, the diasporic subtext imbued by the annual commemoration has grown less ambiguous, as parallel commemorations of Emancipation Day launch in various nations of Africa and the Caribbean. A pamphlet published by the National Joint Action Committee (NJAC), "A Vision Unfolding: The Internationalisation of Emancipation Day," attests to the deliberate nature of this development, fashioned in an effort to foster political ties across national and continental borders. As the pamphlet recounts, Emancipation Day was first commemorated as a national holiday by fellow Caribbean nation Jamaica in 1997, and reached the African continent the following year, introduced to Ghana by then-President Jerry Rawlings after a diplomatic visit to Trinidad for the Emancipation Festival in Port of Spain. While the iconographical significance of this proliferation is noteworthy in itself, the accompanying political linkages engendered by the exportation of Emancipation Day bear particular significance as a contemporary rearticualtion of latent diasporic ties between Trinidad and Tobago and its sister nations of the West Indies and African continent.

Since President Rawling's visit to Trinidad in 1997, the commemoration of Emancipation Day in Trinidad has shifted from a cultural festival of national significance to a political agent of

international, diasporic, proportions. Seeking to fortify political ties between Trinidad and Tobago and continental African nation-states, the Presidents of Nigeria, Uganda, and South Africa were extended invitations by Prime Minister Manning to the 2005 Emancipation Festival. For Trinidad and Tobago, the African diasporic aesthetic of Emancipation Day, rife with continental African music, clothing, and general iconography, provides an ideal medium for the enrichment of political ties with African nations.

What does the Caribbean nation-state stand to gain, then, from such renewed assertions of diasporic connectivity? Pitted in direct contrast Williams' stark notion of national particularism, which rejects notions of diasporic connectivity, the contemporary strivings of Trinidad and Tobago in the global political sphere once again demand a rearticulation of such diasporic "linkups," (Neptune 2007:6) predicated upon a notion of cultural and temporal proximity fostered by the annual Emancipation Festival. As former Prime Minister Manning observes in a *Guardian* article written in anticipation of the 2005 commemoration, "Not only [is Trinidad and Tobago] becoming famous for [its] oil and gas resources…but more and more, T&T is exerting influence and playing its role in major fora internationally" ("Manning invites African presidents").

Ironically, in direct conflict with Manning's diatribe against the dashiki discussed above, during his tenure as Prime Minister, Manning frequently donned a dashiki on Emancipation Day, and most notably, when in the presence of dignitaries and heads of state from the African continent. The apparent contradiction of Manning's simultaneous denunciation of the dashiki in his prime ministerial campaign and affirmation in the context of Emancipation Day further illustrates the malleability of diaspora as a discourse shaped by individuals and political actors such as Manning himself. Amidst his denunciation of the dashiki as a relic of the Trinidadian

national past, Manning alternately privileges a contrasting narrative of temporal proximity, seeking opportunities to foster south-south relations with contemporary nation-states of the African continent.

Accordingly, since Rawlings' fateful visit, Emancipation Day operated as the site of numerous political agreements between Trinidad and Tobago and nations of continental Africa, such as the establishment of direct airline service from Trinidad to Nigeria at the 2005 celebration (Lord 2005), supporting a growing community of West African immigrant workers, and recent partnerships in the energy sector, in which representatives of the oil-rich Trinidad and Tobago will advise several African nations seeking to expand their petroleum industries. Throughout, these agreements have featured an explicit diasporic pretext. As Manning observes in a 2007 address to the African Union, "the time has come to revisit, reaffirm and strengthen…the relationship between Africa and its diasporic nations" (2007), both as historical brethren and political allies. Emancipation Day, in this respect, proffers a prime example of the interplay between cultural practice and political development in contemporary African and West Indian nation-states. Despite efforts to the contrary, the diasporic politics of black internationalism continue to bear particular significance for the futures of otherwise bounded nation-states in the global south, proffering new avenues for south-south political relations within the conceptual apparatus of the diasporic imaginary.

How, in this fashion, does Manning's ironic narrative inform new theoretical approaches to the African Diaspora? Here, Manning reminds us that the ties between apparent "homeland" nations such as Ghana and Nigeria and "diasporic nations" such as Trinidad and Tobago remain dependent on constructed narratives of historical continuity, or as Jasbir Puar expertly terms, an "assemblage" of converging peoples and political bodies (2005:135). Thus, in accordance with

increasing prevalent discourses of virtuality, philosophers such as Jean Baudrillard remind us to resist notions of origins and authenticity, attesting to the *simulated* nature of contemporary society. He writes, "When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity" (Baudrillard 1983:12). However, despite Baudrillard's acute characterization of the late 20th Century moment of "postmodernity," it bears noting as well that structures such as diaspora were never indicative of a clearly identifiable, tangible reality, but rather are effectively simulated from their conceptual beginnings, rooted in particular attempts to articulate solidarities across imagined time-spaces of diasporic belonging.

As Brent Edwards observes in his influential essay "The Uses of Diaspora," such diasporic projects are a manifestation of specific spatial locations and temporal junctures, adding, "there is a possibility here in the phrase 'in time and space' of a…subtly innovative model to read the structure of such unevenness in the African Diaspora" (65). However, despite Edwards attention to the necessarily "unevenness" of sites of diasporic exchange, what he does not fully accommodate in his framework of *décalage* are the ways in which diaspora is differently, even strategically deployed by individuals such as Manning, simultaneously occupying multiple commitments to ostensibly competing structures of nation, ethnicity, region, and diaspora.

What then does it mean to embrace temporality as a structuring framework for the African Diaspora? Rather than embracing essentialist conceptions of diaspora as a singular dispersal from an originary homeland, in which individuals are conscripted as diasporic subjects based on markers such as enslavement, common descent, and phenotype, I, conversely, affirm the agency of said subjects in the construction and dissemination of "diaspora" in public and scholarly discourse. Eschewing questions of who and what constitute the African Diaspora, I

instead am preoccupied with how and why particular rendering of diaspora are invoked, and the particular spatial and temporal contexts in which they arise.

The 2010 Emancipation Day commemoration is notable in this regard, as Kamla Persad-Bissessar became the first Indo-Trinidadian woman to preside as Prime Minister over the holiday. However, not unlike Manning, her rhetoric in the context of both the electoral victory and Emancipation Festival were clearly calculated in accordance with her new role as head of state. Following her triumph in the May election, Persad-Bissessar channeled the iconic words of her predecessors and her counterpart in the United States, Barack Obama, observing in her swearing-in speech that "change has indeed come" (Cudjoe 2010:109) and "we must recommit ourselves to our nation" (Ibid) calling for "No more prefixes of Afro and Indo not North and South nor East West corridors" (Ibid). Moreover, her subsequent Indian Arrival Day address invoked the specter of Eric Williams more explicitly in her demand that "[r]eaching out in the name and for the sake of Mother Trinidad and Tobago is the only way forward" (Cudjoe 2010:116).

In her Emancipation Day address, Persad-Bissessar found yet another opportunity to promote her platform of multiculturalism and national unity, calling upon "citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, to continue to embrace the hard-won freedom bequeathed to us by our forefathers…to look beyond our differences and build a common destiny as one united nation" (Prime Minister's Emancipation Day 2010 Address). Still, however, this nationalistic rhetoric was offered alongside continued efforts to build upon Manning's attempts to forge diasporic ties with nations of the African-continent.

Donning "bright yellow African garb and a green head tie" (De Souza 2010) throughout the Emancipation festivities, Persad-Bissessar facilitated renewed efforts to broaden the scope of

existing agreements between Trinidad and Tobago and its continental African counterparts. Particularly, the 2010 commemoration further stimulated a budding partnership with Ghana in the petroleum sector, as a government delegation, led by Ghanaian Energy Minister Dr. Joe Oteng-Adjei arrived in Trinidad to observe Emancipation Day alongside the newly minted Prime Minister (Ghana strengthens relations with Trinidad and Tobago).

Despite a prevailing tendency to reduce the political climate in Trinidad and Tobago to one of ethnic conflict, Persad-Bissessar's active participation in the Emancipation Day festivities and parallel political dialogues demands we interrogate such limiting characterizations. Moreover, how in this context does the first Indo-Trinidadian woman Prime Minister effectively serve as an arbiter of African diasporic dialogues and processes? Serving as the political figurehead of Trinidad and Tobago as what the African Union articulates as a "diasporic nation," the sustained deployment of diaspora by Persad-Bissessar as an organizing framework for political exchanges with the African continent bears noteworthy significance. Resisting essentialist renderings of diaspora as a product of ancestry and phenotype, her unique positionality offers the potential for new directions and possibilities for *diaspora* in the contemporary neoliberal milieu of postcolonial Africa and the Caribbean.

The personal narratives of individual Trinidadians, however, complicated the concurrent diasporic dialogues of both the Emancipation Support Committee and the Trinbagonian state. In the days following the Emancipation Festival, I struck up a conversation with a taxi driver in Port of Spain, explaining that I was a university student and conducting research on Emancipation Day for a thesis project. Chuckling to himself, he shared, "you know I have never been to Emancipation, and I play mas only once in my life." After actively participating in the planning and execution of the Emancipation Festival, it came as little surprise that all

Trinidadians did not embrace the holiday wholeheartedly. By now I was convinced, however, that Emancipation Day provides a critical public medium for both everyday peoples and governmental institutions to parse out the significance of "diaspora" to Trinbagonian society.

Despite his general ambivalence toward the holiday, the efforts of both the Emancipation Support Committee and the national government of Trinidad and Tobago speak to the ways in which the holiday represents not a singular historical trajectory or political agenda, but rather, like the narrative of diaspora that undergirds the annual commemoration, cannot be extracted from those who organize, participate in, and strategically appropriate the festival and its iconography. What must be furthered delineated, then, is the discord between the explicitly Pan-Africanist notion of diaspora as proffered by the Emancipation Support Committee—fashioned in support of self-determination and political independence for the masses of African peoples—and the diasporic exchanges between the governing bodies of African and Caribbean nation-states, which articulate an agenda of industrial development in accordance with a neoliberal economic model fueled by industries such as tourism and petroleum extraction. In this context, does diaspora provide a liberatory alternative to the limiting features of national identification, or in fact, do particular formulations of diaspora in fact operate in support of nationalistic neoliberal development?

Nonetheless, I offer an ethnographic portrait of Emancipation Day, and my own participation in the holiday, to highlight the role of individual actors in the shaping of such discourses of diaspora, and the possibilities it entails. Again, seeking to transcend monolithic renderings of diaspora and diasporic belonging, I embrace a notion of diasporic temporalities in an effort to highlight the ways in which diaspora is constructed both historically and in the

present day, and cannot be reduced to the primary dispersal of peoples it signifies. Diaspora, it seems, remains an elusive yet powerful idea.

CODA: ON DIASPORIC AFFECTS

As a Caribbean American, my field research often grew intensely personal in my efforts to situate myself as simultaneously insider and other in the context of the Emancipation Support Committee and Trinidad and Tobago at large. Accordingly, in my quotidian interactions with other members of the staff, my own personal background was often interrogated along similar lines, existing as both a Caribbean compatriot and the "young man with the funny accent" from abroad. Despite being the child of two parents of African-descent, my distinctly "mixed" appearance was often referenced as a means of inclusion in the national narrative of "Trinidadianness." In one particular conversation, I expressed how comfortable I felt in Trinidad—as I was often mistaken for a Trinidadian until my spoken accent confirmed I was from elsewhere—strongly deviating from my experiences as a racialized minority in the United States, as well as in my father's country, Jamaica, where my light complexion places me at odds with what Deborah Thomas terms a rising national discourse of "modern blackness." Aptly, one of the young women I worked alongside replied, "yes, Trinidad, we are blessed," by its multiracial and "mixed" national character.

Still, my background was nonetheless embraced within the scope of the Emancipation Day holiday, as I similarly embraced the cultural iconography of the celebration. Understanding the ubiquity of the dashiki as a representative of one's African heritage in the annual Emancipation Festival, I stopped in a nearby shop, which advertised an "Emancipation Sale" on its usual selection of African clothing and art, in order to select a dashiki for myself. Upon

entering the shop, I was offered the opportunity to tour the premises and its vast collection of materials personally imported by the owner on his frequent visits to the African continent.

I happily accepted, and was soon led through the large storerooms on the property. Seeking to learn more about the extensive collection, particularly the tremendous selection of kente fabrics labeled by their country of origin (i.e. Ghana, Mali, etc.), I asked the guide, a young woman employee, if all of the fabrics were in fact handwoven, rather than the factory-produced kente often marketed in the United States (Stoller 2002).

"Yes, these are the kente from Ghana," she replied, "the *authentic* kente." Both here, and throughout the remainder of the tour, I was frequently reminded that all of the objects were imported directly from the African continent, to which the owner "makes a trip every year to 13 or 14 African countries" in order to maintain the store's inventory. However, despite the preoccupation with narratives of authenticity (see Jackson 2005), my brief exchanges with the store employees nonetheless remind us of the ways in which said narratives are constructed by individuals in accordance with distinct interests and objectives. Seeking to affirm the veritable authenticity of the store's offerings, thereby separating itself from competing entrepreneurs, one observes a quotidian discourse of authenticity being produced, by the signs attesting to the national origins of each product, and the assurance of the store's employees.

Similarly, each year, numerous entrepreneurs from the African continent descend upon the Emancipation Festival, peddling their own products as the veritably "authentic" forms of continental African clothing and artwork. What I mean to emphasize here is the ways that such discourses of African authenticity serve as a strategic site of commodity fetishism, manufacturing narratives, which place their products above those of the competition. Accordingly, in the context of Emancipation Day, both political actors like Manning, and

independent entrepreneurs, from both Trinidad and the African continent, display the diverse and tactical function of discourses of diaspora in the present.

The above historical analysis of Emancipation Day in Trinidad and Tobago and examples drawn from my fieldwork display fundamentally that while discourses of diasporic belonging and political solidarity do pose a challenge to contemporary national structures in the Caribbean, the significance of national sovereignty, particularly in the global south, remains especially salient. Conversely, however, prevailing scholarly theories of diaspora—drawing largely from the critical intervention of Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*—frequently eschew an engagement of the contemporary nation-state in favor of what Arjun Appadurai terms "postnational" (Appadurai 1993) discourses of globalization, neoliberalism, and transnationality. In my experience, however, the alleged demise of the nation-state is at very least premature, originating from a Euro- and Americentric vantage divorced from the everyday struggles of "Third World" nations to maintain a stable position in the global economy. However, as the recent partnerships between Trinidad and Tobago and select counterparts in continental Africa illustrate, the rhetoric of diaspora continues to augment this project, serving as a pretense for the growth of such bilateral relations between developing nations in the African diasporic world.

Here, while many theorists have often concerned themselves with outlining the geographical and discursive limits of the African diaspora, proffering frameworks such as Gilroy's "black Atlantic" that define the particular spatial and racial parameters of diasporic community, what Emancipation Day in Trinidad and Tobago otherwise demands is further attention to the ways that diaspora is deployed, by individuals, grassroots collectives, and nation-states, as a means to particular economic and political ends. As Kamari Maxine Clarke observes in a recent essay, "this approach makes sense of contemporary diasporic identity by asking the

question of what people do rather than who they are" (52). Furthermore, Clarke calls for scholars to accommodate analyses of "the language of diaspora" (49) in their respective theoretical approaches, engaging the specific political objectives imbued by its various incarnations in public discourse. Likewise, the diasporic politics of Emancipation Day display a conceptual rupture from classical notions of cultural continuity, in which diasporic populations reflect varying "retentions" of a culturally singular "homeland." Instead, as Patrick Manning's simultaneous denunciation of the African dashiki in a *national* context, and affirmation in political negotiations with continental African heads of state indicates that diaspora, conversely, exists as a decentered, deterritorialized structure, which may be upheld or dismissed in accordance with a particular personal or political project. Here, a shift from discussions of what diaspora *is* toward questions of what diaspora *does* in the contemporary global sphere, figure centrally to subsequent attempts to reckon with its conceptual futures.

APPENDIX

The following pages comprise a textual reproduction of the exhibition for Haiti displayed by the Emancipation Support Committee at the 2010 Emancipation Festival in Port of Spain.

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