



# International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science

e-ISSN: 2544-9435

Scholarly Publisher  
RS Global Sp. z O.O.  
ISNI: 0000 0004 8495 2390

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## ARTICLE TITLE

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THE SENSE OF IDENTITY AND RESISTANCE

## ARTICLE INFO

Djamila Mehdaoui, Yassmine Boukhalkhal, Fewzia Benyelles Bedjaoui. (2025)  
Calypso Music: A Popular Culture for Establishing The Sense of Identity and  
Resistance. *International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science*.  
2(46). doi: 10.31435/ijitss.2(46).2025.3535

## DOI

[https://doi.org/10.31435/ijitss.2\(46\).2025.3535](https://doi.org/10.31435/ijitss.2(46).2025.3535)

## RECEIVED

25 January 2025

## ACCEPTED

10 March 2025

## PUBLISHED

30 April 2025

## LICENSE



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# CALYPSO MUSIC: A POPULAR CULTURE FOR ESTABLISHING THE SENSE OF IDENTITY AND RESISTANCE

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## ABSTRACT

Calypso music emerges as a significant cultural feature and sign revealing the socio–historical continuum between Africa and the New World, since this musical genre is mutually and inextrably interconnected with the plantation fields and the many enslaved Africans. And because the African diaspora in the New World has been rigid and more enduring, suffering gives birth to myriads of artistic expressions and oral forms burgeoning from the inherently brutal treatment of planters, such as religious songs, folktales, and ritual practices. Therefore, Calypso appears as a unique mingling of dance and music expressing the African sensibility in terms of orality. Calypsonians, thus, continue in their imaginatively inventive tools and ways of artistic resistance to the diverse images of oppression and exploitation. On the other side, because of the privileged position it occupies in the Caribbean society, Calypso acts as a distinctive expression of collective identity. Therefore, this paper examines the relationship between the traumatic history and Calypso as a folkloric culture, and explores how this popular culture emerges as a site of negotiating identity and power relations. It concludes that Calypso and carnivals, as positive responses to the colonial hostilities, have continued to play major roles in establishing collective behaviors, maintaining the sense of identity, and emphasizing resistance through performance styles to preserve the bonds of their cultural heritage.

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## KEYWORDS

Calypso Music, Popular Culture, Identity, Resistance, Carnival

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## CITATION

Djamila Mehdaoui, Yassmine Boukhalkhal, Fewzia Benyelles Bedjaoui. (2025) Calypso Music: A Popular Culture for Establishing The Sense of Identity and Resistance. *International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science*. 2(46). doi: 10.31435/ijitss.2(46).2025.3535

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**Introduction.**

Calypso acts as a literal and figurative venue through which a specific mode of resistance has permitted many Caribbeans and Trinidadians to voice heavy messages of empowerment and strength to wo/men all over Trinidad. This type of music stands as a popular culture possessing precious and intriguing cultural meanings and values within the native spots in which it was born, fuelled and sharpened. Throughout the long years of the planters' criminality and inhumanity against slaves in the plantation fields, Calypso bridges the gap between the orator and citizenry, especially by standing in front of the dominant promoters of political injustices, social suppression, and many driven agendas of exclusion and neglect.

Therefore, the aim of this article, then, is to review the questions related to the approaches of popular culture and offer an explanation of how this music represents a real surface of identification from the largely experienced cultural products. Another aim is to exhibit the historical development of Calypso in parallel with its origins. It is also useful to reveal how Calypso's lyrics take the initiative as a politics of resistance against the enslaving, oppressive systems of distancing and isolating the natives. This paper examines the diverse ways through which Calypso emerges as a site of agency, negotiating individual and collective identity, shedding light on many hidden issues affecting people and society. Through inserting popular culture theories, this paper confirms the unique role of calypso in alleviating the accumulated historical and social traumas, reinforcing struggle and resistance against the dominant groups, and establishing a sense of identity.

**1- Colonialism and Slavery**

Colonialism has left deep drawbacks and unpredictable realities and futures in the Caribbean's Islands, especially in Trinidad, Tobago, and Jamaica. Its scattered ravages become largely susceptible to imagination, memory, time, and even distance. The weight of suffering, pain, and fragmentation it brought for both men and women still appear in people's languages, personalities, and psyches. Its ineffable splintered recollections emerge in the recesses of people's bodies, minds, and spirits. Colonialism maintains many dilemmas and controversies alive for the coming generations, and its misdeeds contribute to altering geographical places from a captivating and intriguing cultural and political scene into a painful and historyless site.

The brutality of the colonizers emerges under unnamed behaviours of mindlessness and cowardice and has gone beyond the universal need for living in its deeper significance and beyond one's cultural search for purpose. Throughout history, colonialism has been deemed as the knife that is used to distinguish racial groups and separate the one united body. The system of slavery cannot be defined in terms of its intensity, investment in human beings, and criminality. Likewise, its political and economic game and repressive machinery blossom terribly through negative and hostile platforms circulating throughout the whole island. Under these systems, the Caribbean wo/men find themselves obliged to nurture metropolitan conduct, values, modes of thinking, and many undesirable norms. Under these explosive tensions and terrible milieu, conflicts function as an operative systematic denigration where economic abuse goes in parallel and hand in hand with cultural discrimination. All these colonial institutionalized environments contribute to the rebirth of all sorts of psyche ruin. Suppression acts as a barrier that dismantles one's self and identity into numerous parts. This passivity is purposefully reflected in the realm of art and literature of the region.

**1.2 Caribbean Islands and the System of Slavery**

Throughout history, the Caribbean's islands have emerged as a geography of a historical phenomenon. This history is still engraving the desperately narrated stories of slaves and slavery as a project for self-construction and differentiation. Most Africans were coerced to enter the Trinidadian territories under the Spanish rule that invited many settlers to set foot in the historically neglected colony. Trinidad became under Spanish colonialism, and the wealth of the region depended on the cultivation of the soil but 'Spain was unable to offer the financial, military, commercial, nor population resources necessary to develop Trinidad' (Koyo, Ope.1992, pp. 1-2). Later, the British widened their settlement and increased their economic greed by bringing other enslaved people from West Africa. After establishing the abolition between 1813 and 1821, Trinidad received 3,800 enslaved (Ottley, Carlton Robert. 1974., pp. 37- 38).

The journey of bringing slaves from Africa coupled and coincided with the horrifying circumstances of torture, hunger, and death, in addition to selling and buying slaves at cheaper prices. The destination towards the new world meant simply "a trip towards death" and contradicted man's dignity and what a human being needs.

Though the negativity of the exploitative created milieu, the European eagerness for economic greed, and the great desire for instituting a powerful economy surpassed all the probabilities. This brutality and cruelty were accompanied by the ineffable silence of many organizations of human rights. These scenes continued to

shape the social and political events for many centuries of investing in human beings. Passivity and the absence of hope combined with all types of violence under misunderstood atrocities. These accumulated events pushed the Caribbean individuals to sink into a flooded collective, dramatic and traumatic history. The shared wound revealed the extent to which this nation became under all figures of political distancing, cultural isolation, psychological fatigue, and the deep-seated sense of unbelonging. The West Indies reflected numerous ambiguities and stories emerging from the many questions of the who, how, and why. This system of slavery as an act opposed to nature that could not be willingly suppressed led to renewing a humane structure in the islands through created tragedies and vulnerabilities. The notion of coherence became complicated with the multiple pluralities of people brought there under these big question marks. Though the fierce and vehement rejection by many groups and the loud protesting voices, Caribbean people could not but claim their citizenship and Caribbean-ness in an environment where they could be raped, murdered, and suppressed without any type of redress and under a complete engendered process of depersonification.

The arrival of numerous people from the intricate tapestry of geographies and histories, such as India, Africa, Europe, and China, resulted in the island's social reconstruction. Africans were heavily brought in huge numbers, and contributed strongly to building and enriching the socio-economic and cultural features of the region. Africa, with its constant flux of spiritual people, stands as a homeland and a physical mother, endowed with aesthetic miracles and intricately woven oral stories for its diasporic members. The treacherous trips replying to each other responded to many contradictions and harsh hostilities existing beyond man's inhumanity to his peers. The newly reconstructed circumstances gave birth to a new ethos, identity and conveyed diverse sites of power and defacement. People from multiple angles coalesced under a tangible mirror of enslavement and invisibility. Their traditions, myths, roots, languages, and religions cohere to transmit genuinely the West Indian wo/man image.

## **2- Popular Culture as a Theoretical framework**

There is no singular definition of popular culture, and the perspective of defining a popular culture seems to shift between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. According to O'Brien and Szeman, popular culture refers to "the communicative practices of everyday life" (O'Brien, S. & S zeman, 2004, 09). These communicative acts include activities related to the production of meaning, such as writing, talking, dancing, singing, visual culture, music, sports, and fashion. These activities are practiced by many individuals in a specific society. This also includes members who aren't powerful economically, socially, or politically. Theories of popular culture started to develop between the 1920s and 1930s since this period coincided with the development of technology, such as radio, cinema, mass consumption, and mass production. Therefore, the familiar use of the term popular culture becomes interconnected with the entertainment made by commercial media such as music, television, film, and industry. This type of media has the ability to reach a wide range of diverse demographics and geographically dispersed audiences because of economic and technological capacity. In this case, consumption and production are two parameters of measuring popularity. Popular culture falls under what "the people" do, or make, for themselves and their satisfaction.

John Storey (2008, p1) suggested three main approaches for defining popular culture: folk culture, mass culture, and pop culture. However, the focus in this article is built on the solid relation between popular culture as folk expressions inserted to negotiate the sense of identity. The first approach views folk culture as the main source of popular culture.

Folk culture refers to all types of cultural products and practices exercised in a particular community by identifiable social groups. These practices pass from generation to generation among a group of people who are known to each other. Folk culture reveals the direct expressions experienced and shared in life. It originates "from below"; 'inferior kinds of work' (Williams, Raymond, 1983, p237). This means from peasants, non-elite and working class. Both the audience and creators are considered unconscious groups. Therefore, popular culture is classified under folk culture, which is "a culture of the people for the people" (John Storey, 2008, P09). It is collective, natural, genuine, and characterized by authenticity. There is a shared belief that culture whose internal source is from "the people" is "authentic" (Ibid, 09). The second approach focuses on the idea of mass culture as being the main source of popular culture. Mass culture refers to popular culture as commercialized, produced, and received by an unknown and disparate audience. While the folk culture is transmitted orally or face-to-face through simple or no technology, mass culture is addressed through electronic media to send messages, such as radio, film companies, and television to a wide audience to achieve maximum profit and ultimate goals. It is produced "from above," i.e., by self-conscious producers for passive and easily manipulated consumers (John Storey, 2008, P8). The meaning can be resisted and negotiated in the cultural

product. The third approach is linked to “pop culture” which is rooted in a postmodern and post-industrial blurring of the difference between “high” and “low” culture (Ibid, 12). Both producers and audiences are conscious elites who question the categorization of some cultural products.

However, during the 1960s, the notion of popular culture became a site of negotiating identity formation and power relations. As was pointed out by Storey in his book *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* “Whenever the dominant culture imposes itself upon the new culture, it is culture itself, and not culture as a symptom or sign of something else, that becomes for the first time the actual focus of concern” (Storey, 2009, p. 17). Cultural theorist Stuart Hall (2009) connects popular culture with the collective sense of people’s identity, it is a site where “collective social understandings are created,” a terrain or a ground on which “the politics of signification” are played out in attempts to win people to particular ways of seeing the world” (John Storey, 2009, p. 4). As such, popular culture is a contested lieu for political constructions of “the people” and their relation to the “power bloc” (Storey, 2009, p. 11). In addition, Hall argues that popular culture represents a large surface that depicts who are “the people” and how they are constituted. Popular culture is a locus and a site for political constructions of ‘the people’ and their relation to ‘power’ (Storey, 2009, p. 11). It reveals people’s identities, how they are constructed, organized, and how they are articulated in struggle. It also refers to a political notion and concept: “Popular culture is a site where the construction of everyday life may be examined. The point of doing this is not only academic— that is, as an attempt to understand a process or practice— it is also political, to examine the power relations that constitute this form of everyday life” (Turner Graeme, 2003, p. 06).

Popular culture is also a suitable terrain for resistance and struggle against the dominant groups. To Hall, Gramsci (1979) considers popular culture to be a space of hegemonic struggle between the “resistance” of subordinate groups and the forces of “incorporation” operating in the interests of dominant groups. Gramsci calls this “equilibrium of compromise” (Storey, 2009, p. 10). On the other hand, popular culture is regarded as an ideological weapon and artistic machine through which hegemonic discourses are steered through reproducing the dominant structures of power. Richard Maltby transmits his view and a strong argument about how creative and valuable popular culture is; he posits its deep seated- sense of art and aesthetics that, “if it is the crime of popular culture that it has taken our dreams and packaged them and sold them back to us, it is also the achievement of popular culture that it has brought us more and more varied dreams” (1989, p. 14). Therefore, popular culture has contributed invaluablely to the dominant culture through its geniuses, authenticity, essence, resistance, struggle, and the process of defining and negotiating people’s identities.

## 2.1 Calypso as Popular Culture and Music

There is no exaggeration to claim that most studies of contemporary Caribbean popular culture are linked to the music that the island is internationally popular for. For Carole B. Davies, “Calypso is said to be both a traditional popular song and a creative act in which the artist both expresses and shapes popular opinion” (1985, p. 77). The Trinidadian arts are inextricably connected to the storytelling traditions that flourish through African slaves’ religious folk tales and the Indian indentured labourers. Oral tradition absorbs its strength from the slaves’ homeland, which is considered a place of collective retention and counter-memory. The slaves’ culture grew from various elements of folktales, songs, proverbs, and poetry, and contributed as a catalyst to spark social change through inspiring the Trinidadians to take action on important, serious questions.

The artistic production and aesthetics in the West Indies combine creativity, genuineness, illusion, mindfulness, and the original discourses. The Trinidadian people assure their sense of being and secure their identities through confronting wounds within their own limits. The slave’s simple oratory acts as a loud voice rising from the silenced and liminal spaces to empower the shattered and traumatized psyche. Oral traditions invent a real locus that can be regarded as a flight from all bad certainties emerging from durable systems of sustained perpetration. It is through the craft of oral tradition, the sincerity of folkloric expressions, and the talented performance that a slave’s identity has been expressed and manifested.

Calypsoes represent the most genuine expression of *popular culture in the West Indies*, “born of the folk and intrinsically tied to the folk” (Warner Keith, 2004, p. 151). Slavery and the slave system have unleashed numerous cultural energies and gifted powers to reduce the traumatic memories of their nations. Many songs skillfully couple with people’s dance, lead to vivid behaviours, and stand eloquently and powerfully as the nation’s heritage and repertoire. Calypso elevates the diasporan’s consciousness and Africa as a sovereign purity that is able to oppose the colonial ideology of exclusion or demonization. Caribbean’s slave singers assume the load responsibility as distinct interlocutors of resistance to suppress the wide range of meanings that carry the sense of negativity. Various fundamental social codes, political figures and national issues respond



to the stormy histories and the atrocities of this muted community. In Hall's words, popular culture is an 'arena of consent and resistance' (Hall, 1981, p.228), a 'constant battlefield where there are always strategic positions to be won and lost' (Ibid, p.239). Calypso functions as a "resistant discourse and language" whose main potent feature is orality. It acts powerfully as an expressive tool and a moral lesson on how Caribbean people should face their hurts and future. The Calypso song, on the other hand, emerges as a self-conscious tool to articulate the self to others in a deliberate and purposeful way. According to Hall, popular culture is among the primary sites where power can be negotiated, where hegemony is built and constructed, and political struggles take place (Ibid). Calypso can be regarded as an open dialogue between artists and audience, a tune suffused with optimism and hope that sought to exhibit all types of injustices perpetrated by a malign foreign European and exploitative elites against labourers in many industries. Calypso appears as a necessary conversation, striving for mutual unity and putting the many differences that characterize the Caribbean people aside. Since Caribbean people were not allowed to communicate with each other under one roof, calypso manifests itself as a resort of creative construction, altering all cultural practices and symbols to articulate social, cultural identity and the varied degrees of oppression. For myriads of slaves, Calypso helps to reveal an autonomous process linked to the historic past where political parameters, historical realities, landscape, life philosophies, communal experiences and social thought are elaborated and illustrated visibly through sounds. Therefore, songs summarize numerous details about the lived circumstances of the African slaves, especially their histories and stories related to the ways of being sold, tortured, and being separated from their motherlands, fellows, family, and peers.

Christianity takes a great part in the words inserted in these songs that include coded messages and meanings to bring hope and sometimes escape from hostilities. Calypso music is meaningful because it offers many ways by which people acknowledge identities, places, and borders that distinguish them. Calypso as art and a musical performance gathering melody, lyrics, the verbal and visual persona of the singer, and combining dramatic presentation, and the audience involvement in a symbolic cultural context, has been considered as an important defining method and knowledge of the culture and identity of Trinidadians for long years (Patton, 1994, p55).

## 2.2 The Origins of Calypso and Its Emergence as a Politics of Resistance

The history of Calypso can not be separated from the history of Trinidad and its sociopolitical development. It emerged among enslaved Africans brought to Trinidad during the 18th century. Slaves find Calypso as a refuge to release their hurts since they were not autonomous but oppressed and subjugated people. J. D. Elder refers to the strong relation emerging between Trinidad's slaves and the progress of the traditional calypso: "The history of the Trinidad Negroes' struggle for personal freedom from slavery and of their progress to political and national independence can not be extricated from the history of the traditional calypso" (1966, p.83). Naipaul widens the connection between Trinidad and Calypso by claiming that: "The Land of the Calypso is not a copywriter's phrase. It is one side of the truth, and it was this gaiety, so inexplicable to the tourist who sees the shacks of Shanty Town and corbeaux patrolling the modern highway" (1969, p.58).

Historically speaking, Calypso emerges from the word Kaiso, whose origins burgeon from West Africa. This derived word was brought to the Caribbean and spread by the myriads of enslaved Africans. Kaisos are originally recited in French Creole and are then translated into English. Kaisos are also considered narratives imbued with nature and having social and political commentary and purposes. Calypso appears among African slave songs in the sugar plantation of Trinidad. These kinds of slaves suffer the total absence of humane conditions, which refer to what a human being can be defined as. As a result, through digging songs with new components of their own production, they create Calypso songs. And in this way, they share feelings and bonds of friendship without the white master's awareness. For them, this popular song is a vehicle for political struggle and solid commentary to address the hostility of the colonial machine in terms of violence, the acts of dispossessions, and the traumatic cruelty that the planters hold during their whole presence. It provokes slaves to express their spirituality which was through the performance of Calypso, reggae music, and body language.

Calypso represents a folkloric form of popular culture that fills every Caribbean's space as a method of rebellion to resist diverse forms of brutality, and its insinuation surpasses the Trinidadian traditions to include all the Black diaspora: "It is related to all Black diaspora music, regardless of language, and shares with them traditional African functions of affirmation" (Gordon, 1990, p.05). The African tradition of folk songs sharpens its importance through the use of English Christian religion. It preserves an inner revolt shining in the whole Caribbean. On the other side, the connection between songs and narratives is best summarized in the Trinidadian Calypso as a new form of art correlated with the strength of Afro-Caribbean Creole. It addresses significant messages and valuable historical lessons.

Yards are places where many performers, musicians, stickmen, and calypsonians gather to prepare for upcoming carnivals: "The stick fighting bands which had represented and controlled entire districts were replaced by smaller and more manageable 'social unions' whose venues were the 'yards' of Port of Spain, San Fernando, and other towns" (Ibid, p.40). Instruments such as the violin, piano, guitar, and flute are not associated with the culture of yards (Errol, 1972, p. 45-46). Calypsonians replace the voice of many subjugated people and allow storytellers to explore courageously topics that myriads of people dare not raise. They boldly address hidden topics and make light of serious questions and closed issues in society. Indeed, Calypsonians hold the strength needed to take account of their actions.

Undoubtedly, calypso is absorbed from the many-faceted plantation and field of Caribbean orature, where Calypsos can be regarded as African-made, born, derived from folklore and mutually linked to folklore, revealing a potent catalyst for African sensibility, triggering many questions about the long years of silencing.

There is an inspiring connectivity between Africa and the New World through the African themes sung in African Creole. The strong presence of the Canboulay, the traditions of masking and drumming, in addition to Carnival in French Creole, transmits the eternal use of music to reflect the African identity. The aim of Calypso transcends the fact of being a song to introducing serious problems and vagaries in society through inserting narratives in lyrics, the sense of comedy, and bringing joy to many. Many calypsonians do not only make people dance, but they also make them laugh. Calypsos acts as a sensory epitome that is invented, composed, sung, and performed, standing as a powerful resisting *nation language*, where the slave is raising his spoken English loudly through an alternative musical structure. Giuseppe Sofo (2013) states that "music in Trinidad has in fact represented not only the expression for the thoughts of a nation, but something to fight for, a fundamental weapon for the fight against colonialism and for a new national identity" (p. 24).

Calypsonians are very skillful at concentrating on serious facts and making light of them. They admonish in a humorous way. So famous and transmissible has calypso become that it transcends the many borders and confines of Trinidad and Tobago. Calypso also appears in diverse angles in the islands, such as Grenada, Barbados, Grenada, Bermuda, and St Kitts. Numerous islands consider Calypso as a national monarch's marker, coded memory, and ideological weapon to declare resistance and relief against slavery and colonialism. Calypsonians host this genre as it becomes more and more recognizable and popular.

In different areas, Carnival and Steelpan define not only the Trini spirit throughout many Caribbean islands but also express the whole island's soul. Slaves find the plantations as a well from which they draw inspiration and derive their songs and dance. It is through their enthusiasm that they maintain their African traditions. Despite the planters' cruel laws, which prohibit them from assembling and playing their musical instruments for music-making, this cultural tongue compels the despotic and tyrannical planters to consider the slaves' plight and their daily problems. In his song (the slave), the Mighty Sparrow (Slinger Francisco) (1963), who is an outstanding calypsonian figure, reveals power and spontaneity as the main components of Calypso:

We had to chant and sing to express our feelings  
To that wicked and cruel man.  
That was the only medicine to get them to listen  
And it's so calypso began.

The high rhythmic narratives correlate with harmonious sound and the strength of the voiced message to shape the storytelling discourses and define the Trinidadian folk culture. Calypso lifts the collective tragedies and picks out the savagely tragic miseries and the ravages of history out of their corners. Along carnivals, it is often seen as the symbol of socialization and the Caribbean spirit.

The Calypsonian storytellers transmit their poetic craft, obsessed with dance and humour. And under this magical beauty, the Trinidadians are always judged and masked by skepticism and the uncertainty of the socio-cultural issues in which they are covered during long years of oppression.

Streets during carnival time and the local calypso tents become a new repertoire for Calypso development. The steel pan, or the steel drum, a new musical instrument spreading during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is what popularized calypso through playing a great role in the composition of the local music. Calypso sprang up from Trinidad and Tobago to other communities throughout the country.

In fact, the popularity of calypso also stems from the growth of the West Indian diaspora towards the United Kingdom and America. Calypso gains more audience at important concert halls in metropolitan New York and England. Calypso became the country's national music after Trinidad and Tobago gained their independence in 1962. This "national emblem" remains among the songs of rebellion and emancipatory ideology. It largely carries the political question in society. For this Calypsonian, lyrics is a tool for nation-building and a peaceful call to social

change and collective awareness of the society's members. This excerpt from "Come Let Us Build a Nation Tokedda" by Merchant (1982) reveals the collective responsibility of its members.

You talk 'bout a place  
Where the people are carefree living  
It is such a place  
Of fun loving, spreeing and feting  
Tis the land where people  
Don't care if Ash Wednesday fall on Good  
Friday  
Man they love to struggle  
In this happy, go-lucky way  
It's blockorama, feteorama  
And just now is masorama  
So the foreigner come for Carnival  
And he telling heself after he had a ball  
Trinidad is nice, Trinidad is a paradise  
Mr. Foreigner in La Trinity  
The people have a Carnival mentality  
Trinidad is nice, Trinidad is a paradise  
They are not serious, very few conscious  
So I cannot agree with my own chorus  
Trinidad is nice, Trinidad is a paradise  
But I'll hear some people talking about  
Revolution Day  
Changes on the way

Women, on the other hand, express their strong and heavy anti-imperial, anti-elitist, and anti-colonial views. They advocate for social integration and compose songs against domestic violence and rape, demanding women's autonomy and raising worthy images of Trinidadian women as housewives, mothers, and brave human beings. These newly emerging Trinidadian women transcend the venue of discrimination against women, transmit mass dissemination of empowering messages, and construct alternative formulations of women's identity that allow women to voice and address messages of courage, empowerment, and resistance to women all over Trinidad.

### 2.3 Calypso for Negotiating Individual and Collective Identity

Many social dilemmas and diverse social and political issues are the burning, transmitted questions by Calypsonians in their songs that combine their lyrical wisdom, creativity, witty jokes, and satire. Boundaries, whether cultural, geographical, political, or linguistic, are profoundly significant, partially or entirely, as they coincide with many and diverse oral and folk traditions. Therefore, the African body, which is localized in a distant spot from the New World, has inscribed itself with the Caribbean diaspora, texts and archives, fleeting shadow, and glimpses to construct unbiased documents. Liverpool states that calypso "was a song encompassing all the African cultural traits relating to music: percussive rhythmic beats, the call and response pattern, extemporaneous singing, and satire" (2001, p.185). Calypso reveals many aspects and enigmas of this historical and cultural continuum existing between the New World and the Black world. Through Calypso's narrative expressions, both the slave and the independent one find their sense of identity. The calypso (Slave) by the Mighty Sparrow (1963) is the best example of exhibiting the duality of the slave identity and his desire to be free as a reflection in the song, especially in the following excerpt,

I'm a slave from a land so far  
I was caught and I was brought here from  
Africa  
Oh Lord. Lord, I want to be free

Calypsonians are positively aware of the African origin circulating in their art, antiquity, and traditions. It is through combining the sense of historicity, the profound artistic trait, and the spiritual rituals that power is claimed through extemporaneous songs. Montserratian calypsonians make famous songs that have been translated into a myriad of languages, including Spanish, Hindi, and Turkish. Calypso, as a subtle social commentary, challenges the eternal controversy concerning the fact that Africa and the Caribbean are the forgotten memory. Calypso, as "a



cultural ocean without limits,” allows Caribbean culture and “caribbeanness” to be recognized and to be made visible in a world in which they are overlooked as a result of racial and socioeconomic status. This popular culture permits the Caribbean wo/man to situate herself in comparison to other people in the world. Through Calypso, they come to understand themselves who they are and where they come from. DeNora writes that: “the sense of ‘self’ is locatable in music... Musical materials provide terms and templates for elaborating self-identity”(DeNora Tia, 2000 , p. 68). Self articulation and impression become a metaphor to reveal “how people present themselves and how they guide the impression others form of them” (Ibid, p.62).

Calypso, as a big part of the Trinidadian /Caribbean culture, is interconnected to the discovery of one’s individual identity. Martin and Nakayama claim that “identity serves as a bridge between culture and communication”(2010, p.162). As a popular music genre, Calypso allows others to discover the one ethos that unites the diverse ethnic groups under meaningful emblems and codes, popular music, thus, is central to people’s daily life and their social identities (Roy, 1998, p8).

The African restored heritage acts as psychotherapy and healing from the trauma of enslavement and its subsequent wounds and hostilities. Collective identity results from the way individuals join the dominant group, sharing the same experiences of pain and happiness, in addition to the collective historical events of heroism, resistance, and neglect. Therefore, creating popular songs is a powerful artifact that acts as representatives of popular culture that serves an important social function (Judith, Thomas, and Nakayama, 2010, p350), Calypso music is seen as a strong medium and symbol related to identity and intervenes in the influence of social groups, attracting peers and empowering bonds between individuals. Calypso contributes in allowing many people to perform diverse roles, partake in valuable images from their culture, modify images about themselves, and therefore shape their identities.

Popular music reinforces new associations and values between the Caribbean and establishes beautiful practices inspired by the concept of popular culture through widening the communication activity. It is through this kind of communication, in addition to the process of the ‘giving and taking’, that meaning and understanding are negotiated. Calypso music, thus, functions as a cultural symbol connecting the individual and his society. People start or redirect their power and energies towards redefining their identity to exclude all sorts of oppression, suppression and inequities (Ibid, 179). These painful experiences are the symbol of the aesthetic and artistic basis of belonging, affiliation, brotherhood, and communication that unite different groups. Therefore, this “intensely social feature” helps to articulate the shared and immediate experiences of collective identity (Hesmondhalgh, 2007, p.7). Calypso appears on the stage as a tangible, terrible weapon to resist many forms of oppressive strictures and mock the plantation owners. Enslaved Africans were not allowed to communicate with each other. Thus, Calypso acts as an intricate code of communication between the enslaved Africans.

Though the harsh colonial milieu and the planter’s punishment, torture, censorship, and the criminality that have suppressed diverse sorts of songs, dance, and profound cultural traditions, the fight to maintain calypso alive has been sustained forcefully. As Elder Jacob notes, "the blowing of the conch shell, playing of the doun-doun, and the deep Congo drums never really ceased" (1966, p.86).

The “Big Drum,” which takes great part in African rituals, including dance and song, is the symbol of popular culture and the cultural extension in the Trinidadian Calypso. Many barracks yards fuel the fire as a cultural seedbed and intervene in shaping and reshaping the big drum tradition. Diverse and rich motivational lyrics were composed and sung to stick-fighters to accompany male drumming. “The big drum” emerges as a permanent continuity of African art and aesthetics and an open dialogue destined to the local and diasporic borders. It suggests a profound revelation on how the formation of home, identities, and realities might be challenged and reinforced. During the dire colonial project that fuels the flame for identity crisis and upheaval, calypso culture manifests itself as an unwavering wall to resist cultural suppression, involving all social classes, men and women. Festivals and Carnival scaffolds as a nuanced tapestry woven for the Trinidadian’s representation, definition, and renaming. It is considered a spot to reveal the colonial contribution and construction of cultural production (Springer, 2008, p97).

#### **2.4 Carnivals as a Reference of Identity**

Carnivals participate in the process of defining the Trinidadian identity and spirit, and act as a popular culture, an artistic institution, solid rituals, and a rebellious agenda in front of many undesirable colonial practices. It is a syncretic act that includes aspects through which music, song, dance, costumes, religion, and poetry allow the artist to exhibit his philosophies and perspectives. What characterizes Caribbean /Trinidadian carnival is its ritual power of resistance interconnected to the logic of emancipation that is not a copy of any

European carnival. African Masquerade, which means types of masks used by musicians and audience, in addition to the Canboulay (cannesbrûlées), which means a ritual related to the reenactment of emancipation and opposition, are the main features of this carnival. Afro-Caribbean and African dances, such as the bamboula, the belair, the kalinda, and the ghouba, in addition to wearing costumes by planters make this carnival distinct and attractive. The African Masquerade is widely related to the sense of the newly born Trinidadian/Caribbean identity. Metaphorically speaking, it is inserted to unmask myriads of untold issues: "Carnival tells the world who we are, what we think about ourselves and where we are going. [...] At Carnival time, we wear masks in order to unmask issues, selves and others" (Foote, Russell, 2005, p. 73).

Carnivals emerge as a culture of resistance since they start directly with the end of enslavement (between 1830/1834). The aim is to celebrate this victory through sustained resistance and fight against the colonizing regime and the system of slavery under different names. Giuseppe Sofo expands the concept when he associates it with culture, rituals, decolonization, oppression, and even the true sense of identity. He said: "The Carnival of Trinidad is a performative ritual of cultural resistance and awakening, claiming a space and celebrating freedom from any kind of oppression. The history of this ritual is strictly connected to the process of cultural decolonisation and political independence of the Caribbean country from the mother land" (2014, p.17).

After the abolition of the slave trade, the carnival became impeccably a source of celebrating the former slaves' freedom. The festival witnesses important events, such as canboulay, which means re-enacting the act of putting out fires in the sugar cane fields during the period of slavery, and the stick fights, or kalindas, which means a type of dance and song accompanying stick fighting. The 1860s are known as the era of the 'Jamette Carnival'. The notion jamette refers to people who were underclass and under respectability, including "the singers, drummers, dancers, stickmen, prostitutes, pimps and 'bad johns' in general" (BreretonBridget, 2004, p.54).

In carnivals, calypso permits many Caribbeans to release the negative energy, including a sudden loss, a traumatic upheaval, or any distressing event. Many planters' attempts aim to prohibit diverse activities exercised by slaves, such as dancing and singing, especially at the carnival. Liverpool stated that the ban "was effectively a ban on the earliest forms of calypso since these instruments would be used in playing the Kalenda, the stick fight dance and song" (2001, p.164). These practices reveal the extent to which carnival and calypso music are mutually interwoven and linked to the identity development of the Afro-Trinidadians. The Trinidadian identity is well satirized through folk songs and best deployed by carnivals. These festivals reveal how massive this culture is since it yields many courses of artistic expression. They also refer to the mutability of identities that are usually remade under diverse diasporic circumstances. Carnivals explore how chant, dance, and music can govern the construction of one's identity, in addition to exhibiting the many ways to present the self to others through the sense of sociability. Carnivals allow groups to be involved to participate with each other through connection and shaping their collective identities. Music conveys an aesthetic experience, transmitting the way of being and becoming in the world, a way to derive a sense of it (Hesmondhalgh, 2007, p514 ). Thus, when the society becomes homogenous musically, this helps easily to form popular culture, solid collective identity, and to maintain the sense of preference and exclusivity in the group (Chamorro-Premuzic& Furnham, 2007, p176).

## Conclusions

This article has presented the first in-depth look at the Caribbean people who have held many burdens of their history. They have attempted to recover from their painful colonial past and legacies through postcolonial realities that are full of self-expressions and artistic forms. Their primary aim and responsibility remain the search for an authentic identity and reaching the deep-seated sense of self-discovery. The Caribbeans highlight the power of Calypso music as the voice of the people to rewrite the vagaries and hostilities of their history, which represent a transparent and empty scene upon which all Europeans' malign practices and ideologies were recognized. The study has revealed how the Trinidadians' realities, their everyday and continuous cultural, political, and social circumstances, can be read clearly and profoundly through carnival musical genres as an ideal sort of popular culture. It suggests that calypso and carnivals as affirmative responses have continued to occupy central roles in establishing many socialized behaviors, maintaining identity, and reinforcing the sense of explicit resistance through the associated performance styles and discovering narratives in lyrics to retain the bonds of their cultural heritage. Being Trinidad's version of sorrows and blues, Calypso and carnivals act as a cure and healing in front of the hostile milieus and the many tragedies growing from the heart of the two systems of colonialism and slavery, and turn Trinidad and many Caribbean islands into a spot of creativity and poetic experiences.

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