

# Calypso, Carnival and Covid 19: Examining Black Musical Joy in Times of a Global Pandemic Through the Lens of Calypso Music

*Calypso, Carnaval y Covid 19: examinando la alegría musical negra en tiempos de una pandemia global a través de la lente de la música Calypso*

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## ABSTRACT

This paper will focus on the demonstration of Black joy as Black music, specifically Calypso and Soca music from Trinidad and Tobago and the Dutch Caribbean. In particular, emphasis will be placed on two case studies from the Dutch islands of Aruba, Curacao and St. Maarten and that of the most southerly isle of the Caribbean, Trinidad, focusing on the ways in which radio and television producers and personalities conjured up joy and nostalgia in their re-enactment of Carnival festivities during the pandemic.

**Keywords:** Carnival; Black Joy; Black Music; Memory studies; Caribbean Music.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo se centrará en la música Calypso y Soca de Trinidad y Tobago y del Caribe holandés. En particular, se hará hincapié en dos estudios de caso de las islas holandesas de Aruba, Curaçao y San Martín y en el de la isla más meridional del Caribe, Trinidad, centrándose en el modo en que los productores y personalidades de la radio y la televisión evocaron la alegría y la nostalgia en su recreación de las festividades de Carnaval durante la pandemia.

**Palabras clave:** Carnaval; Música negra; Estudios de la memoria; Música caribeña.

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## INTRODUCCIÓN

This paper will focus on the demonstration of Black joy as Black music, specifically Calypso and Soca music from Trinidad and Tobago and the Dutch Caribbean. In particular, emphasis will be placed on two case studies from the Dutch islands of Aruba, Curacao and St. Maarten and that of the most southerly isle of the Caribbean, Trinidad, focusing on the ways in which radio and television producers and personalities conjured up joy and nostalgia in their re-enactment of Carnival festivities during the pandemic.

Black Sociology and Black Studies is currently going through a metamorphosis as its main practitioners, Black people from the Americas and the diaspora are grappling with post-COVID trauma-related issues like challenged mental health capacity, economic shortfall with massive job losses, a re-assimilation into the workforce after years of infections, viruses and stimulus checks and conflation of rights and feminine body politics. As public sociologists involved both in activism and scholarship within the academy, the past practice of Black sociology has been mired in being more reactive rather than proactive. Given that reality, how do we re-assert ourselves as Black academics into the sociological discursive space? The answer – enter Black joy. From the Black perspective the move to highlight acts, experiences, and expressions of joy in their lives and the lives of other Black people has been a source of other-worldliness which is generating unprecedented wins in the community.

Through the lens of Black joy, sociology as a transformative agent has the potential to catapult both societal and individual change. In this work, through the lens of music sociology, a path will be laid to delineate how the use of memory studies i.e. personal, cultural and collective memory can be used to create moments of reflection and be the catalyst to initiate Black joy through Calypso and Soca music in response to the trauma associated with the pandemic in Carnival-loving Caribbean societies.

### Popular Music trends

Popular music has had the reputation of constantly re-inventing itself in response to societal trends and innovative and technological changes in the music industry both locally and internationally. I assert here that throughout the history of musical contribution, popular music has been synonymous with Black music. Further, I posit that Black joy can be achieved through Black Music. In this paper, I explore the expressions of the achievement of Black Joy as experienced through the similarities between Calypso and Soca emanating from both the Dutch Caribbean and Trinidad and Tobago, through the lens of Sociology of Music using the praxis of geography and location studies (place and space) —and memory and nostalgia. I argue in this piece that Black joy can be seen as a musicological and essential element that is unique to and shared between Afro-Trinidadians in the main and African descendants/citizens of the Dutch Caribbean. The framing of this argument is posited against the backdrop of the gay abandon and carefree nature of the Carnival festivities in Caribbean societies. In this sense, the concept of Black joy, I am arguing, is one of the phenomenological elements of Caribbean musical identity that our distant communities share alongside our antagonistic existences with our respective colonial powers, protest, and resistance. Further, I use the framing of Black Joy from Black theorist Daphne Brook's iv work entitled *Afro Sonic Feminist Praxis*. Black joy is not only fundamental to the performance of Black music in the African Diaspora, but it is also an analytic tool that is methodologically significant and crucial to understanding these shared global identities.

For purposes of this paper, I do this by reconstructing a very limited overview of the genealogy of the display and demonstration of these two spaces during the COVID pandemic and their contribution to their respective musical communities. I draw parallels between the global African Diasporic communities of the Americas to connect, but not conflate, the histories of Calypso and Soca performance in music and their contributions to location studies discourse.

## **Calypso Music History**

Conventional wisdom from various scholars has asserted that Calypso is a style of Caribbean music that originated in Trinidad and Tobago during the early to the mid-19th century and spread to the rest of the Caribbean Antilles by the mid-20th century. Its rhythms can be traced back to West African Kaiso and the arrival of French planters and their slaves from the French Antilles in the 18th century (Sylvester). Interestingly, several theorists have posited that Calypso music is mother music of the Caribbean as it emanated from the spirit and soul of the enslaved persons as a direct musical response to the atrocities of the slavery experience on the plantations across the Caribbean region. (Sylvester). Given this reading of the development of Calypso, it has been proffered that Calypso as a musical artform does not belong to Trinidad and Tobago nor is it owned by the twin island economy (Sylvester & Masimba). Instead, I opine that it is a musical expression that took root across the region metamorphosing into various sounds, rhythms, beats, timbres and cadences as per the influence and impact of the musical traditions from the varied locales in Africa from which the slaves had been accustomed.

Using multi-faceted pidgins, dialects and languages from the continent brought with much variety and oftentimes, the early Calypso music was characteristically sung characterized by highly rhythmic and harmonic vocals. Historically most often early Calypso music was an amalgamation of broken English, Dutch, Spanish, Danish and French lexicons and was led by a griot or chantuelle (Boyce-Davies 77-94). As Calypso developed, musical accompaniment became a feature and instruments such as the guitar, cuatro, violin and other wood and wind creations were used to add volume and give variety to the sound to lend to the Calypso voices. Most of the history of Calypso music has been written about the English-speaking Caribbean and as such during the passage of time, the telling of the Calypso story traces its movement from a formerly French patois music to English language based musical expression as the dominant language (Sylvester & Masimba).

More often than not, the dominant Calypso story from the Caribbean is one from Trinidad and Tobago and given that the telling focuses on the presence of the naval base in the far West of Trinidad in Chaguaramas where sailors were stationed in the 1940s and it is at that space that Calypso got its foothold as a expression with its widest audience at the time. As a form of entertainment (joy) for the armed men, Calypso bards would perform at staged shows at the base and many Calypsoians used the opportunity to disguise the real meaning of their lyrics by using the technique of “double entendre” which is French for double meaning. The use of this approach later became a signature characteristic of the Calypso which is still in use up to today.

As the joy of the impact of Calypso grew, it attracted more attention from the government of the day and this allowed for a continuation of songs of contestation to develop into the category of political calypsos. On the plantation decades before, slaves had been using the nascent calypsos to speak out against the atrocities on the plantation which were often meted out by the slave master or the overseer. This often delved into themes of the management of the plantations, wars with other European powers and raids from neighbouring plantations. In

the 1940s, the expression of Calypso music allowed for the masses to challenge the doings of the unelected Governor and Legislative Council, and the elected town councils of Port of Spain and San Fernando. These undercurrents from the society were often put into song and Calypso continued to play an important role in political expression. In like manner, the development of the social Calypso or Calypso that featured social commentary, was a hold over from the plantation days as enslaved people often used the early Calypsos to describe the daily lives on the plantation e.g. lynchings, runaways, beatings, pregnancies etc. In today's reality, Calypso addresses matters affecting the social life, focusing on economics, crime, health, finance and the like. The present day category humorous Calypso also deserves significant mention because it is here that the slaves in their day used this musical genre to poke fun at the their colonisers. Derving humour from te frailties of the European colonial masters was one of the ways in which the enslaved derived Black Joy even in the midst of their traumatic realities. So I argue that the timeline of the connection between black joy to the calypso art form can be traced back to the period of Caribbean slavery.

### **Calypso Music as a purveyor of Black Joy**

For Calypso music, the first known recording was documented in 1912 by Lovey's Band (Sylvester, et al). Since then Calypso music has had primacy of place in the African diaspora for over a century. During the period 1910-1920s, recordings of Calypso were made in New York for both the Caribbean and Latin American markets, but by the 1930s there was a renewed focus on recording Calypso for international markets. Calypsonians such as Atilla the Hun, The Roaring Lion, Lord Executor, The Growling Tiger and others began to travel to New York to exploit their careers. Calypsos made within this period were instrumentals by Lovey (George Bailey) and Lionel Belasco. Belasco-lead string bands often included his cousin Cyril Monroe on violin and friend Gerald Clark on guitar or cuatro. This exposure of Trinidadian musicians to the New York music scene gave credence to this local indigenous music as having world-wide appeal. Based on the above above, this researcher is asserting that the continuing creation of the Calypso music as an expression of Black Joy in the twentieth century can be seen directly as the development of Calypso musical careers began en masse.

The international success of Calypso music internationally has been chronicled elsewhere (Sylvester, et al), evidencing the impact of the genre on the world stage that provided opportunities for local performers and musicians to derive joy from sharing their culture with the world. This framing of the Calypso artform as a twentieth century reality gives credence to the fact that its hundred year old existence borne out of the negativity and atrocity of slavery, was still able to derive and create Black joy, even up to today. Understanding the context of Calypso is critical to examining how Black Joy is derived from this resistance music.

### **Calypso and the Carnival tradition**

This paper interrogates the association of Black Joy with the performative artforms of Calypso and Soca. It must be noted that there is a relationship between the singing of Calypso, the Carnival tradition and the existence of Black Joy.

Discussing the historical legacy of Calypso music and establishing the extent to which Ragga Soca music is its descendant is an endeavour steeped in re-living the past and examining the impact of the past on the present and future. The analysis of calypso music as personal, collective and cultural memory has had to contend

with hegemonic perceptual narratives about this Afro-Caribbean musical genre, which has traceable influence, sonic complexity, social and political significance and awareness, but exists outside the margins of contemporary musical currency and impact compared to its more dominant Northern musical counterparts such as Electronic Dance Music and hip-hop. Alongside it, Calypso scholarship has had the fortune to be able to carve out a space in the academy within the Caribbean diaspora as evidenced in the work of these scholars, (Austin; Rohlehr; Davies; Liverpool “Origins of Rituals”; *Rituals of Power*; Regis; Guilbault) and has managed to construct its social meaning and be seen as relevant to its Caribbean spaces.

Ragga Soca music as one of Calypso’s offshoots has had a different history and notions of acceptance. As it began to gain popularity in the decade of the 1990s, this hybrid musical genre which fuses Jamaican sonic elements with Soca beats has had to grapple with failed attempts at sustainability as evidenced by the cancellation of the annual competition in Trinidad and Tobago after just three years (1999, 2000, and 2001). Other public perceptions about the genre were that it conjured up personal, collective and cultural memory of Jamaican Dancehall sonic elements which had been a threat to Trinidad’s most celebrated Calypso music earlier, in the decade of the 1980s. Ragga soca music was then rejected by the Trinidadian business community and the public as anti-establishment music and an embodiment of Jamaican history, culture and morality, channeling negative personal, collective and cultural memories. Amidst this backdrop, this study charts the rise of Ragga Soca and goes on to opine that instead of Ragga Soca music being emblematic of negative memory, it has undergone a transformative process to become a modern-day representation of Calypso music in its content, delivery and impact. Further, its major proponents, Bunji Garlin, Maximus Dan, KMC, General Grant, and its main musical producer Darryl Braxton who were raised on Calypso music used Ragga Soca music through the lyrical content to channel a re-presentation of positive personal, collective and cultural memory through its social and political commentary like its progenitor, Calypso. Having the luxury of historical distance and perspective between the period of the waning of the dominance of Calypso music during Trinidad’s Carnival season (1980s) and the meteoric rise of Soca music in all its forms thereafter, the genre’s writers, lyricists and performers were able to (re)imagine the import and impact of Calypso-styled poignant, cutting and biting lyrics and (re)portray them for a new generation and as a new Carnival music. All this is the conjuring up of Black joy through the gaze of Black music.

Historically contextualising Calypso and its relationship to Carnival, Carole Boyce Davies asserts that Calypso music is created and performed as an integral part of the annual Carnival festivities (Davies 77-94). This perspective of Davies is in line with the viewpoint of Giuseppe Sofo in his 2014 article entitled *Carnival, Memory and Identity* in which he makes the linkages between the culture of Trinidad, the event of Carnival and identity of the people:

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; it is in Carnival and for Carnival that Trinidadians have successfully fought colonialism to gain their freedom. (Sofo 17)

For Sofo like Davies and Liverpool, Carnival and its accompanying Calypso music are inextricably interwoven and are tied to the identity of the Afro-Trinidadian. Specifically, Calypso music can be described by

many to have multiple expressions and satisfy myriad needs namely, it can be a song as well as a lyrical poem containing a number of verses based on the exploration of a theme which can range from a commentary, to politics or to social issues of the day. It is usually sung to melodies in major and minor keys, where the beat is African with a tempo which has two beats to a bar. It is a performing art which grants its presenter the opportunity to demonstrate stagemanship. Cultural sites such as concerts where crowd participation through the call and response tradition is practised with the accompaniment of a local band is often the main exposition space for the artform. It must be noted here that given the diverse demographic structure of Trinidad and Tobago as a twin island republic, the history and the practice of Carnival has not been a totalising representation of national culture. Instead, more often than not since the mid twentieth century, the Afrocentric dominance of the Carnival tradition has headlined the festival.

Earlier mention was made of the intent to analyse the intersections of race and class in the lyrical content of selected Calypsos and Ragga Soca songs as they align to personal, collective and cultural memory. Against this understanding, this work asserts that Calypso music like Ragga Soca has several commonalities worthy of mention.

- (i) The Afrocentric dominance of its major performers (race)
- (ii) The lyrical content of the songs which deliver timely and relevant social and political commentary on the society from the position of the non-dominant (class) against the ruling directorate
- (iii) The themes of several of the songs which narrate issues of economic hardship and inequality (class) and the plight of the Black people in society (race)

These similarities between the mother music Calypso and the offspring Ragga Soca reveal critical intersections which require further examination. Both of these genres produce songs for the Carnival season and as Sofo indicates, the Carnival of Trinidad is a performative ritual of cultural resistance and awakening, claiming a space and celebrating freedom from any kind of oppression. This researcher therefore concurs that the festival music which accompanies this festival tradition is part of the process of affirming cultural resistance and being receptive to an awakening, the claiming of a space of multiple identities and the celebration of freedom from race and class oppression. In sum then, this researcher is positing that both Calypso music and Ragga Soca are undertaking similar functions albeit in different eras and for a successive generation. The unpacking of this perspective will be undertaken in this work.

### **Geography and Location Studies**

It is vital to consider the impact of location as a feature of musical expression for this paper as it presents a juxtaposition of locales within the Caribbean space. In particular, the islands of the Caribbean which were formerly part of the Netherlands Antilles, namely, St. Martin/Saint Maarten, Aruba and Curacao and the English-speaking territories of Trinidad and Tobago are the subject of focus. In North America, there were many examples of the importance of space as a critical junction for musical expression during the pandemic. So too, in the Caribbean, responses to COVID 19 realities, provided an opportunity for the primacy of location to be an important catalyst to the demonstrator of Black joy through the music of Calypso and Soca. Given this, I found

it useful to frame the methodological underpinnings for this paper with the work of ethnomusicologist, Martin Stokes and Donna Buchanan.

Using the work of Martin Stokes (1-27) as the catalyst for this work, I concur that musical performance structures and socio-cultural differences such as ethnicity, nationalism, class, gender, and *race*, can be used as frameworks to ascertain people's recognitions of particular places and understandings of their own identities vis a vis geographic sites. Further music does not simply provide a marker in a pre-structured social space, but the means by which that space can be transformed.

In a 1995 review article penned by Donna Buchannan on Martin Stokes' seminal work, she indicates that the focus on music as an active force highlights how musical practice embodies and enacts political and moral order, sustains communal values and sustains individuals in bounded groups (427-430). Such an approach is valuable because it immediately implicates music within the network of social power relations that generate the constantly negotiated constructs of authenticity and tradition, ethnicity and subculture, nationalism and nation-state.

To date, there is little scholarship that focuses on the Caribbean through anthropological lenses. This work intends to add to the scholarship on the geographies of musical expression where the focus will be placed on the Caribbean looking specifically on Calypso and Soca in the former islands of Netherlands Antilles— Aruba, Curacao and Sint. Maarten and the Anglophone Caribbean twin island state, Trinidad and Tobago.

### **Carnival, Calypso and the COVID 19 reality**

In this section, we will focus on the ways in which Black musical joy emerged as a feature out of the pandemic. Specifically, the state of the two Caribbean spaces as Carnival-centric societies who, for centuries, have enjoyed the "joy" of festival culture, which was eroded during the pandemic due to prohibitive measures instituted by their individual governments in response to the COVID 19 threat. First, an outline of the world's response to the pandemic is provided and then we feature the case studies of the Dutch Caribbean and Trinidad and Tobago respectively.

By way of an overview, it is being noted that the pandemic which began in 2020 possessed many characteristics which were felt worldwide. In particular, the following documents the specificity of the impact in the entertainment industry of the Caribbean in the two named locales being highlighted in this article.

1. The overall effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Caribbean have perhaps been even more severe in some ways than in much of the rest of the world. As in other regions, lockdowns have forced businesses in all sectors to close their doors.
2. In the Caribbean, where some islands depend on tourism for up to 90% of their GDP, the vital hospitality sector has been severely affected, with airports closed for long periods, hotel occupancy plummeting, and many restaurants having to close their doors.
3. Musicians and other cultural workers found themselves not only deprived of the lucrative tourist market, but also deprived of the income that they derive from live performances for local people, because of physical distancing restrictions and the general ban on crowds.

4. The pandemic also exposed the precariousness of employment in the entertainment industry, as most musicians do not have the financial and social security enjoyed by other workers.
5. Carnival festivities were also negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
6. Despite the cancellation of the traditional official Carnival festivities, there has been no lack of the abundant creativity, imagination and resilience that typifies both Calypso and Carnival in the countless efforts made throughout the region to keep Carnival alive during the pandemic.

### **The Trinidad and Tobago Experience**

Trinidad and Tobago is the southernmost island country in the Caribbean.<sup>2</sup> Trinidad and Tobago is well known for its African and Indian cultures, reflected in its large and famous Carnival, Diwali, and Hosay celebrations, as well as being the birthplace of steelpan, the limbo, and music. Against the backdrop of the pandemic, this section explores the critical role of Carnival traditions of competition for a thriving music industry in which musicians are committed to making a living through music.

When the outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic was acknowledged in March 2020, a national lockdown followed suit in Trinidad and Tobago, disrupting the post-carnival season which is an extremely important period for the Carnival “winners” to perform their hits. This is when the radio station WACK station enters the scenario and starts looking for a way to generate funds based on the stay-at-home measures imposed on Trinidad & Tobago (T&T) as part of the government’s response to COVID 19 pandemic. Having been heavily invested in the music culture of T&T, Kenny Phillips, CEO of the joint streaming/radio company KMP Music Group which is inclusive of Wack Radio, Wack TV, KMP Music Lab, an audio company, a video company and a video editing company all backed by a streaming facility adopted the process of attracting a cadre of Calypsonians, Soca artistes, Parang performers, Chutney and Gospel artistes to his studio to perform live, record and be financially viable even in the COVID-related uncertainty.

On March 29, 2020, collaborating with the FundMeTnT.com platform, Kenny Phillips and his co-host Mr Desmond livestreamed “Tune for Tune” (a DJ battle) for the first time. This show was a huge success for a regular Sunday radio programme and the funds amassed was approx. USD\$10,000.00. Following through on this new opportunity to “make money during COVID 19” soon WACK FM launched a series of livestream concerts on the platform. The format is simple—people see the show for free and pay what they can via the website FundmeTnT.com. Viewers could tune in via YouTube, Facebook, or FundMeTnT.com and enjoy shows featuring all local talent. Since most Calypsonians and Carnival 2020 winners had not had opportunities to make money since Dimanche Gras and Carnival Tuesday, WACK FM’s role became crucial as it filled the gap for both performance opportunities and survival options in the post-Carnival season.

The program, which was launched in response to a desperate situation for artists, has since developed into a success story. To date, WACK has hosted over 170 shows on the website, raising over 1.5 million TT

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<sup>2</sup> The island of Trinidad was inhabited for centuries by Indigenous peoples before becoming a colony in the Spanish Empire, following the arrival of Christopher Columbus, in 1498. Spanish governor José María Chacón surrendered the island to a British fleet under the command of Sir Ralph Abercromby in 1797. Trinidad and Tobago were ceded to Britain in 1802 under the Treaty of Amiens as separate states and unified in 1889. Trinidad and Tobago obtained independence in 1962, becoming a republic in 1976. Unlike most Caribbean nations and territories, which rely heavily on tourism, the economy is primarily industrial with an emphasis on petroleum and petrochemicals.<sup>[18]</sup> much of the nation's wealth is derived from its large reserves of oil and natural gas.



(gross), providing a platform for nostalgia as most of the patrons are North Americans residing in the diaspora. In addition, this initiative has expanded the opportunity for nationals of T&T to experience Calypso, Soca, Parang, Chutney Soca and Steelpan culture in cyberspace. Another success factor was to provide the artists with a steady stream of income so that they could keep their careers going to some extent during the pandemic.

### **The Dutch Caribbean Experience (Saint Martin/Sint Maarten, Aruba, Curacao)**

The Dutch Caribbean (historically known as the Dutch West Indies) are the territories, colonies, and countries, former and current, of the Dutch Empire and the Kingdom of the Netherlands in the Caribbean Sea. They are in the north and south-west of the Lesser Antilles archipelago. Currently, it comprises the constituent countries of Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten (CAS islands), and the special municipalities of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba (BES islands).<sup>3</sup> Carnival in the former Netherlands Antilles is celebrated within the same time frame as the major carnival of the region in Trinidad and Tobago. The similarity of celebration is linked in some ways to the pre-Lenten practices of the Roman Catholic religion. Given the synergies in cultural practices and display of masquerades during the street parade, these two geographical spaces are compared to highlight the mutual ways in which members of the music fraternity in separate spaces envisioned ingenious ways to create Black joy during the pandemic. During the Carnival 2021 season, what hitherto would have been Carnival festivities, there were several displays of the creation of personal, cultural and collective memory being used as a tool to conjure up nostalgia for Carnival activities. The examples below highlight the most memorable and dominant excursions into the activities.

A spontaneous initiative was spearheaded by French St Martin Calypsonian Andrew Baker Jr. who created the 'The Baker Jr Calypso Quarantine Challenge.' This Challenge was a virtual calypso competition, established originally with the aim of educating the public on the importance of mask wearing and proper hygiene during the pandemic. The competition focused on extempo calypso, a style of calypso where lyrics are sung extemporaneously in a competitive exchange between performers, tied to a specific beat, melody and refrain.

Demonstrating the capacity of Calypso to cross geographic and linguistic boundaries, the challenge went viral throughout the Caribbean and the diaspora and eventually involved calypsonians of the likes of Brian London, T-Money, Kairo Brat, Young Spitfire, Heather Macintosh and the Calypso Monarch of Trinidad and Tobago, Terri Lions. Many other calypsonians and non-calypsonians all over the region and beyond also contributed. From the Dutch Caribbean, Aruban artist Valentino King participated in this extempo challenge with a Calypso in four languages, utilizing a trans-linguaged approach to calypso that is quite common on Aruba. In the first verse, sung in Aruban English lexifier Creole, Valentino King relates the pandemic to biblical prophecy and gives the audience advice about wearing masks and gloves, as well as instructions on how we might solve this problem through prayer.

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<sup>3</sup> The islands in the Dutch Caribbean were, from 1815, part of the colonies Curaçao and Dependencies and governed from Paramaribo until 1845, when all islands again became part of Curaçao and Dependencies. In 1954, the islands became the Netherlands Antilles, which initially consisted of four island territories: Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao and the Windward Islands. The island of Aruba seceded from the Netherlands Antilles in 1986 to become a separate constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. This situation remained until the complete dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles as a unified political entity in 2010. In that year Curaçao and Sint Maarten, like Aruba, became autonomous constituent countries within the Kingdom.

During the pandemic, radio DJs in the Dutch Caribbean also played a crucial role in creating entertainment and confronting social isolation. On what would have been the days of the grand parades, Sint Maarten radio DJs commented on a spectacle that never happened. In their programs, the DJs guided listeners through each fantasized spectacle, creating elaborate accounts of how each make-believe parade was progressing, complete with descriptions of costumes, identifications of which carnival groups and music bands were passing in front of them at each moment, and detailed banter concerning which personalities were out and about, impressing the crowds with their performative street theatrics.

As an alternative to festivities that had been cancelled due to the pandemic, Massive 103.5 FM from San Nicolas, Aruba organized several activities related to Carnival. As much as possible, they tried to preserve the traditional carnival schedule and structure, even with the switch from face-to-face to virtual modality. For example, on the day when the Calypso contest is normally held in Aruba, they invited a panel of experts and aficionados to their studios to reflect on the Calypso and Soca music that has been performed throughout the history of Carnival on the island. Massive Radio also organized a virtual *jouvert* morning, complete with DJs in the studio in the early hours of the morning hyping up the virtual crowds who were at home or in their yards in front of their cameras. The audience was dressed in their traditional *jouvert* attire, including nightgowns, head ties, rollers, paint, powder, pots and pans and more.

Several virtual events added to the efforts to celebrate carnival under the condition of a pandemic in the Dutch Caribbean. In Aruba, one of the biggest audio companies on the island organized a series of online concerts, inviting the virtual audience to contribute funds to support struggling music makers and entertainers. Aruban comedian and media influencer, Tyson the Entertainer performed carnival comedy shows, while Tele Aruba, the national TV station, screened historic videos of carnivals gone by. While an attempt to organize a 'drive through' carnival in Curaçao was aborted, a virtual Tumba festival was successfully organized and celebrated. The Tumba festival is normally the biggest musical competition on the island during Carnival. The festival had a commemorative theme, as younger participants sang Tumba classics for an online audience.

### **Black Joy, memory and nostalgia in Calypso**

This article places its main focus on the themes of personal, collective and cultural memory as a source of nostalgia in response to the COVID 19 pandemic to create Black joy. Both the Dutch Caribbean example and that of Trinidad and Tobago championed the use of memory and nostalgia as part of the celebration of Black Joy. Music has been seen to be a means for the transmittance of the personal, collective and cultural memory of one generation to the next where new memories are forged and formed in the process.

According to Sturken, "memory establishes life's continuity; it gives meaning to the present, as each moment is constituted by the past, as the means by which we remember who we are, memory provides the very core of identity" (1). Assmann ("Collective Memory") and Halbwachs opine that memory is more than a biological construct and see it as societal activity. Several sociological scholars have addressed the concepts of personal, collective and cultural memory in popular music as evidenced in the research of Bennett (*Popular Music; Cultures of Popular Music*; Bennett and Hodkinson; Bennett and Taylor), de Zengotita, Hesmondhalgh, and Kotarba, et al. and Olsen references Nikkei people in South America, where music became a learning tool, prompting memories

in ways that contributed to identity formation. Stokes (“Introduction:” also indicates how music can be a tool for evoking and organising intense collective memories, more intense than most other social activities.

For Calypso music, the application and analysis as personal, collective and cultural memory has had to consider and contend with hegemonic narratives of perception about this Afro-Caribbean musical genre which demonstrates traceable influence, sonic complexity and social and political meaning and awareness.

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