Special Issue

Dance in Steelband Performance and its Connection to Decoloniality

Charissa Granger

Discarded 55-gallon oil barrels were used for music making in 1930s colonial Trinidad and Tobago; a period deeply shaped by discrimination of its performers. Large ensembles consist of over 500 drums played by 120 musicians, who all move as one. Analysing large ensemble performances, this chapter examines dance as a decolonial aesthetic and epistemology, discussing how dance enables performers to regenerate the communal and thereby transgress the colonial matrix of power. It explores the potential of the performing body for broader understandings of decoloniality. This chapter seeks to understand the moving body in musical performance as a historical and current practice of transgressing and (re-)existing beyond coloniality. It asks: how does music enable people to (re-)exist beyond the colonial matrix of power and its working in the epistemic realm, which is crucial to understanding subjectivity, the control of knowledge, and personal and political consciousness. The performing body is socio-political because it generates space for the receipt and exchange of emotions and experiences, bringing about feelings of joy, love, and communion, thereby enabling a way of being that transgresses coloniality.

> What I learned from the slave is that I can control my body. Music movement – this was outside the reach of the oppressor … this we could control.
>
> (Rex Nettleford, cited in Philip 2017: 256)

Movement is Tethered to Confinement

> He check out meh bosom, oy!, he say too much rhythm
> He check out meh big toe, he say too much tempo
> Doctor, what to do?
> Dance it out, dance it out, dance it out.
>
> ("Doctor Say" by Winston "Shadow" Bailey)[1]

Lord Kitchener, Shadow, Sparrow, and Calypso Rose – I had my favourite calypsonians. This listening was mostly influenced by my father and music teacher. The songs these calypsonians sang directed me rhythmically, and instructed me lyrically, to roll and wine, to jump up and gyrate. Before I played steelpan, I danced. This music defined the way I moved my body in every way. As a pre-teen I would gyrate and wine down to the ground unprompted, whether there was music or not. I was agile and this was my pastime activity. I was good at it, causing worry among the women folk of my family. "Stop that," my grandmother would urge. "Tell her to stop," she would admonish my mother. Considered suggestive, my smooth hip and abdomen rolls were not appreciated – I was disrupting respectability politics. My mother recognised my abilities and forbade me from participating in the annual carnival processions and parades, fearing I would take what was mostly a private show out onto the streets of San Nicolas, Aruba. She could not have that. I

1 Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JgJtVpkv_Sk (accessed 8 June 2020).

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knew all the calypso lyrics, only to learn their overtly-sexual-in-nature, double-entendre meanings much later. I recited them frequently at the top of my voice. My peers listened to soca: Alison Hinds & Krosfyah, Onyan, Burning Flames, T.C., and Super Blue. Mixed in with this calypso-soca way of organising my world was Bob Marley. This was the influence of my grandmother, who gave me a Marley cassette mixtape – I rewound it with a pencil until it was destroyed. "Buffalo Soldier," "I Shot the Sheriff," "Old pirates, they rob I, sold I to the merchant ships" – this was my first encounter with the slave ship and its hold.

The ship and its hold have been carefully theorised: specifically, the violent and catastrophic events involving slave ships such as the *Zong* and the *Recovery* (Dabydeen 1994; D'Aguiar [1997] 2015; Hartman 2008a; Philip 2008; Saunders 2008). Christina Sharpe (2016) theorises the ship and the hold as "ongoing locations of Black being … The *hold* is the slave ship hold; is the hold of the so-called migrant ship; is the prison; is the womb that produces blackness … We inhabit and are inhabited by the hold" (ibid.: 16, 27). George Lamming outlines the hold of the slave ship where those enslaved were packed on top each other.

> Each was given only four or five feet in length and two or three feet in height so that they could neither lie at full length nor sit upright … they lived this way for the voyage, coming up once a day for exercise and to allow the sailors "to clean the pails" … when the weather was bad, then they stayed below for weeks at a time. The close proximity of so many naked human beings, their bruised and festering flesh, the foetid air, the prevailing dysentery, the accumulation of filth, turned these holds into a hell … in a closed and loathsome darkness they were hurled from one side to another by the heaving vessel, held in position by the chains on their bleeding flesh. (cited in Philip 2017: 210–11)

According to NourbeSe Philip, what links enslaved people to those who parade during carnival is movement – the (in)ability of moving their bodies. Coming off the ship, their bodies continued to be controlled by the plantation system (Philip 2017: 211).[2] Thus, Philip understands the sounding out of the steelband as "beating its way up and out of the holds of slave ships" (ibid.), drawing a line from "slaving into the freedom of sound wrested from oil drums" (ibid.). This line is marked by movement: "They are moving and moving and in the moving they are defying the holding in the ships … rebelling against their [and their ancestor's] not moving" (ibid. 212–13).

> When the African came to the New World, she came only with the body
> … she didn't come with the material and physical trappings of "home."
> The body would be the repository of everything
> she could or would need to survive –
> physically, spiritually and psychically. (ibid.: 268)

This discussion of the hold is a point of departure, a recognition of scholars who have offered generous considerations of the hold, the movement out of the hold, and movement in dance – particularly during carnival – and its connection to the hold. Building from this discussion, my offering is not to say that movement is in resistance to bondage and the hold, that movement is tethered to practices of resistance, or that it should be considered resistance. Instead, in what follows, I seek to elaborate on movement, especially the uses of the erotic and pleasure in this

2 Philip details: "they living on plantations where massa watching and trying to control all their moving, the moving of their thinking, their speaking and their singing, the moving of their hands on the drum skin giving praise to their gods, even the moving of their feelings, so that mothers finding their loving toward their children coming to nothing when massa taking them away and selling them … the moving of their loving going nowhere when massa selling them one from the other, even their moving toward their gods – their drumming, their dancing, and the moving of their tongue – all these massa trying and controlling. The only moving massa wanting is … working for him in the field, and when they not moving as he wanting he using the whip" (Philip 2017: 211).

movement, to offer another perspective on how dance and the aesthetic of movement can enable bursts of liberation.

Though I focus on the steelband, I draw from my experiences of Afro-Caribbean inspired carnivals as a whole to attend to physical movement in dance, in relationship to erotic embodied knowledge, pleasure, and senses of freedom.[3] Attending to physical movement in the steelband during the Panorama annual music contest in Trinidad and Tobago and in carnival more generally, I aim to highlight the importance of self-determination in processes of emancipation and in the face of unfulfilled promises of freedom. I attempt to detail how self-determination is enabled in movement and how participants (re)fashion themselves therein, evoking and proposing a sense of freedom. How is our movement within Panorama and broader practices of carnival connected to emancipation and freedom? And how can this movement be considered as a decolonial practice and aesthetic? Exploring these questions, I concentrate on how performers physically move together to evoke freedom. According to Fanon (1963), "[a] national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify, and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence" (ibid.: 233). For this reason, I draw not only on steelband but on the entirety of the performances within which the instrument is situated during Panorama.

This offering will be placed in conversation with the decolonial critical perspectives with which I think and feel. I quote at length those who have informed my accounts of movement and dance during carnival, and my experience as a performer and researcher. What follows seeks to illustrate that a community generates not only the movement in dance but also my thoughts and feelings about the steelband and carnival practices I focus on. Rolando Vázquez (2020) asks whether we can "*owe* our thinking and not *own* our thinking" (italics mine). This is to move from an I-voice that is individualistic, suggesting ownership, towards a plural voice (ibid.). Thinking and writing in the "we" and giving up that ownership is a decolonial act, pluralising the place from which we think and feel. In this regard, I want the cited work to speak in the very voice of the scholars I am in conversation with.[4] This writing is a relational act and direct quotes are a way for me to speak in that we-voice, to give a sense of thinking *with*. Here I also draw on Sara Ahmed (2017): "citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured because we deviated from the paths we were told to follow" (ibid.: 15–16).

3 The West Indian carnival is a celebration of music, dances, and expressions that have circulated throughout the Caribbean and the diaspora, in places such as Toronto, Brooklyn, London, Rotterdam, and Miami.

4 I am thankful for the time spent in conversation with Rolando Vázquez, Walter Mignolo, María Lugones, and Gloria Wekker at the 2019 edition of the decolonial summer school. The offering in this essay is owing to those conversations.

Sounding Out: Unleashing Sound into the World

> The music insists that you dance.
>
> (Lovelace [1979] 1998a: 14)

Iron and steel. Metal sounds embrace us during carnival.[5] For Panorama in Trinidad and Tobago, the largest steelband competition internationally, steelbands perform eight-minute arrangements, learned by rote, consisting of an introduction, verse, chorus, variations on the theme, a jam section, and an ending. Taking place during carnival, over 500 drums played by 120 musicians come together in style and precision to perform. Orchestras are judged on the standard and style of their performance, on their creativity in using modulation, reharmonisation, percussion breaks, different rhythmic grooves, and melodic and harmonic development. When there were sanctions and restrictions on music making (particularly drumming) and on gathering in general (Stuempfle 1995; Dudley 2002, 2008; de Jong 2012), musicians used bamboo and eventually scraps of metal objects including spoons struck against glass bottles, and discarded objects such as old sweet oil cans, biscuit tins, trash cans, paint tins, cow bells, vehicle brake drums, and eventually 55-gallon oil barrels to make music. Some of these instruments are still found in the contemporary orchestra – in the "engine room." The iron, a vehicle brake drum and a non-pitched instrument, is one such hold over. As the heart of the orchestra, the engine room consists of congas, cowbells, bongos, timbales, drums, maracas, scratchers, and the iron. Steelband scholar and historian Kim Johnson (1998) describes the iron as "the heart of the engine room" (ibid.: 66).

Usually about five or six irons are played simultaneously; they are combined to produce different sounds that complement each other. The iron contributes to timekeeping – not allowing the orchestra to drop a beat, slow down, or speed up, it keeps us together. With a different tonal quality and playing different rhythmic patterns simultaneously and repeatedly, one iron, called the cutter, often emphasises the offbeats, improvising against the sustained pattern of the other irons – this contributes to tonal variation. Polyrhythms emerge from the interlocking of these repeated rhythmic patterns. The groove created is what insists that you dance. The cutter offers ornamental interjections between the double strokes of the other irons. There is an interplay between the regular downbeat of the group and the cutter stressing the offbeat.[6] The downbeat is reinforced by the bass drum, and I realise that it matches the movement of my feet; the offbeat of the iron moves my waist and hips to create a polymovement.

Though the steelpan and iron are metal, they have different timbres, which adds to the melodic texture and the already thick rhythmic pattern of the orchestra. The iron is brash, sharp, and piercing. Layering the instruments intensifies the brashness. This piercing and aggressive sound counters and complements the steel orchestra, which is also brash but has a dulcet aspect to its timbre. The syncopated and interlocking rhythms encourage participants to move. However, the timbre, in addition to the rhythm, has a visceral impact. It is almost an excess of sound when the engine room and the steel orchestra play together. Shadow sings: "The heavy vibration, controls my emotion."[7] It organises 120 moving players as one.

5 This embrace is felt the whole year through, but it is intensified during carnival.
6 For a history of the iron, see Johnson (2006). For structural analysis, see Dudley (2002, 2008).
7 "Doh Try Dat" by Shadow. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-nlhXKbAITI (accessed 25 June 2020).

Steelband music-making practices, among those of other Afro-Caribbean music, are often interpreted through a perspective of resistance. However, Johnson argues against seeing too close a proximity between creative practice and resistance:

> If Afro-American music is not the product of white hegemony, neither is it the result of black (or Creole) "resistance." True, it grows and is shaped by its environment, including the psychic environment of oppression, which it transcends, but by which it is also limited … "Resistance" is reactive, a response to something; the elaboration of an art form can never be resistance alone … Rather than reacting to their highly circumscribed lives, the young inventors of pan … were driven by their need to improvise an instrument, an ensemble and a music. (Johnson 2006: 12–13)

Dudley (2008) questions whether the steelband is "still a force for resistance to elitist values and control" (ibid.: 16). Focusing on musical transformation, the articulation of tradition, colonial authority, and national politics, Dudley's research attends to the musicians who overcame poverty and prejudice and their position of disadvantage, as well as to the cultural resistance that shaped the steelband movement. Dudley acknowledges that because of its situatedness in carnival and practices such as playing bomb tunes,[8] steelband can be interpreted "as a form of resistance to colonial authority, an act of transgression, and defilement of dominant cultural icons" (ibid.: 123). Dudley interprets steelband music, specifically the practice of performing Western art music on the instruments, as both an accommodation of colonial hegemony – thereby illustrating sophistication – and as resistance – for its practice of resignifying. Additionally, he argues for understanding and critically exploring aesthetic pleasure as an interpretive stance applicable to steelband music (ibid.: 119–29). Dudley (2002) suggests that individually, these interpretive stances cannot represent the total meaning of steelband music making (ibid.: 137). He argues further that "given the panmen's struggle to 'prove themselves' musically … it is clear that steelband music has developed through a dynamic tension between accommodation and resistance to colonial hegemony (ibid.: 143–4)." Finally, Dudley makes it clear that "the ability to immunize oneself against the oppressive authority of colonial culture may in itself be an act of resistance, but it also sets the stage for a much more psychologically diverse range of experiences and emotion" (ibid.: 154). Attending to dance and movement can further elaborate on narratives of resistance.

"Ah Feelin' to Rock my Body" (Shadow)

> Dance! There is dancing in the calypso. Dance! If the words mourn the death of a neighbor, the music insists that you dance; if it tells the troubles of a brother, the music says dance. Dance to the hurt! Dance! If you catching hell, dance, and the government don't care, dance! Your woman take your money and run away with another man, dance. Dance! Dance! Dance! It is in dancing that you ward off evil. Dance! Dance! Dance! Carnival brings this dancing to every crevice.
>
> (Lovelace [1979] 1998a: 13–14)

Steelband is part of carnival and Panorama occurs during carnival. In steelband, dance moves by the pannists emerge organically during nightly rehearsals. They are minimally choreographed. Direction is given only when it impacts musical dynamics; the arranger might ask those who can to physically drop at a crescendo and to come up as the volume increases, or to freeze at a rhythmic break in the music for dramatic effect. Besides this, musicians have free reign to move. This movement weaves between dancing together, moving off into individual moves and back. Often musicians switch instruments during repetitive passages framed by a measure pause, or they climb on the instrument racks while playing. Movement aids memory retention of the musical

8 A bomb tune is a calypso arrangement of any international popular piece, ranging from chart hits to music for the screen and Western classical pieces. See Dudley (2002).

arrangement and keeps the band in time. Importantly, it adds flare and excitement to the performance too. It also enables a "freeing up" – it allows us to become something else, suspending our everyday self so that we may become anything we desire to be. Saidiya Hartman (1997) offers a critical analysis of how chattel slavery is moored to freedom, contesting the idea of a discontinuity between the two. There is a line that connects the lived experience of Black people during slavery to the contemporary lived experiences of Black people. Arguing that the "attempts to assert absolutist distinctions between slavery and freedom are untenable (ibid.: 13)," Hartman asks: "How does one tell the story of an elusive emancipation and a travestied freedom? … The effort to examine the event of emancipation is no less riddled by inescapable ironies, the foremost of these being the discontinuity between substantial freedom and legal emancipation" (ibid.: 10). She elaborates: "The question persists as to whether it is possible to unleash freedom from the history of property that secured it" (ibid.: 119).

In a pan orchestra, whole bodies are in movement – not necessarily always dancing, but jumping, spinning, and jostling. Polymovement is characteristic of most dancing. Here different parts of the body move independently in different ways while maintaining a whole. Some players have more foot action; others have more hip, abdomen, and waist rolls. As individual as our movements are, the orchestra moves as one. The rhythm rack (the float that carries the engine room, the percussion), individual instrument racks (the structures on which the instruments are hung), and the fringe around the tops of the racks all shake as the band plays. Everything around the band is vibrating and the whole band is moving together – music is visible and audible. Despite the individual freedom to control personal movement, there remains a strong collective movement. Each orchestra has its own movement aesthetic.[9] In this way, as a performer you can tune in and out to other performers through movement. Movement also involves acrobatics – this is why I speak both of dance *and* movement. Performers, for instance, sometimes scale the instrument racks, and bass players climb and hover above instruments, twirling and clicking sticks. The arranger is usually also the conductor, directing the orchestra with elaborate gestures. For the final performance, the arranger is joined at the front of the stage by a flag woman, who embodies the orchestra's arrangement and expresses it in dance. Claiming the space of the entire stage, the flag women move to add to the frenzy, winin', stepping back and forth and waving a flag displaying information about the orchestra.[10] The physicality of players is important to the music's aesthetics. Through physical movement, players convey energy, vigour and strength and display joy and happiness. Some of us manage to break a sweat during the performance of an eight-minute piece. When a particular player breaks away from the collective movement, we explore ourselves, illustrating our own style. This dance and movement aesthetic is also part of non-steelband movement:

> I was supposed to meet with Julia, carnival reveller and masquerader, on Carnival Monday. At this point in the festivities, I am coming out of night-long steelband rehearsals in preparation for Panorama, as well as performing at the final night of the competition on Saturday. I attended jouvay from Sunday night into late Monday morning. I was running on only a few hours' sleep and had missed Julia throughout the day. Julia also attended jouvay and was part of the Monday parade. We meet at 10pm on Monday on Tragarete Road. As I approach, I see Julia, arms outstretched, jumping and winin' to the residual music of a long-gone big truck. Alone, in the middle of the street, she spins and turns, a grand smile on her face.

9 For instance, Trinidad All Stars moves collectively as an orchestra in a different way to Phase II Pan Groove.

10 This information includes the orchestra's name and sponsor, the orchestra tuner and arranger, its tune of choice and band captain. I thank an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this important figure of movement within the steelband. The importance of the flag woman to the orchestra is emphasised in Lord Kitchener's ode to the "Flag Woman." Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uCRwG48a8BQ (accessed 14 June 2021).

> "Are you not tired at this point? Do your feet not hurt? How will you parade tomorrow?" I questioned.
>
> "The music got me going, if yuh keep moving, yuh doh feel tired or pain," Julia replied.

Before taking to the streets, revellers assert that they are "ready to get on bad," or "ah ready to mash up the place." Some claim that they are going "to break away,"[11] "leggo" [to let go], and "cause bacchanal in the streets." Though I focus on steelband, I also want to locate it within the broader event of carnival to which Panorama and its preparation is tethered. Multiple steel orchestras, with reduced numbers of players, take to the road for *jouvay*,[12] carnival Monday and Tuesday. The physical performance and ways of moving in steelband are connected to *jouvay* and carnival. Physical movement forms an integral part of nightly rehearsals at different panyards and official performances. There are countless fêtes that culminate in taking to the streets on carnival Monday and Tuesday. The goal of participants is to have unbridled pleasure and enjoyment; this is reinforced by the music and lyrics, which as Black Stalin sings them, instructs us to "shake dung, roll dung, jam dung, and wine dung,"[13] and we answer that "we just want to roll back, roll back all night long."[14] When I am rollin' back and gyrating my hips and backside in the panyard or in the streets, I feel spiritually connected to my ancestors and elders. Those ancestors who were confined in the hold, on the plantation, those who made way for me to "dance it out" in the street.[15] I am tethered to the inventors of an instrument that allows me self-knowledge and to continuously refashion myself in its beauty. Often those knowledgeable of the histories of Caribbean carnival feel a particular connectedness to the past, imagined and real. Others such as Julia made it clear to me that there are no such feelings of connection to ancestors when she is moving through the streets. She parades in the street because it feels good and she enjoys doing that for what it is. Where I and others reflect on spirituality in movement, Julia reflects on "feeling pretty – it's about the glitz and the glamour." Julia explains further that she enjoys "dressing up and getting your make-up done and feeling beautiful and united as a troupe. The sun is hot and the alcohol is cold … I can be free and do what I want."[16] Dancing, whether in a steelband or parading in the street, whether enabling a connection to ancestors or to yourself, is erotic power. Audre Lorde (2007) approaches the erotic as an episteme, a critical way of sourcing self-knowledge. Embodiment is a mode through which we can consider freedom even while encircled by unfreedom. Physical movement is political and a source of power because in this movement there

> is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire … having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves. The erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing. (ibid.: 54)

There is knowledge in this erotic power that emerges and is felt in gyrating, rolling abdomens, and swinging hips. This movement then enables self-determination and -knowledge. This is an internal, sensuous and embodied knowledge – one that is useful. We take these feelings with us

11 The Break Away is also a section in an Aruban Carnival genre, roadmarch. Gregory Richardson (2020) analyses the performance that occurs in this section of the music in terms of *jouissance*.

12 *Jouvay* is the opening of carnival, starting around 3 or 4am on Monday morning before Ash Wednesday and running until Monday afternoon, when the parade starts. See Lovelace (1998b).

13 "Dung" is a pronunciation of "down." "Monday Night Mas" by Black Stalin. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A5WFbP24w5s (accessed 25 June 2020).

14 "Come With It" by Black Stalin. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7J5KG3CfE6U (accessed 25 June 2020).

15 "Doctor Say" by Shadow. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JgJtVpkv_Sk (accessed 14 June 2021).

16 Interview with Julia, a seasoned carnival reveller. Aruba, March 2019.

long after Panorama and carnival are over. Lorde argues that "[o]nce we begin to feel … we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of. Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence" (ibid.: 57). Within it is a capacity to wholly sense and feel oneself. This way of knowing ourselves goes against the grain of imposed colonial socialisation and aesthetic values. We are not (always) talking back to systems of oppression, coloniality or the state. Self-determination and -ownership in processes of emancipation can be analysed for the possibilities, however brief or small, of attaining "freedom under subjugation" (Lockward 2017: 104), or of how music making, dance, parading, and performance can potentially "unleash freedom from the history of property that secured it" (Hartman 1997: 119). The spiritual and the political are sutured together by erotic knowledge (Lorde 2007: 56).[17] As such, can the pleasure felt in sensuous practices such as playing and winin', hip rolls, and swinging waists assume the weight of a politics of liberation? Such questioning seeks to unearth the creative and imaginative force that fashions new futurities, ways of being, and worlds. From dance, movement, and sounding out emerges an evocative and erotic self-determination and political vitality that critically challenges dispossession and erasure. For this reason, I consider dance and movement part of steelband's decolonial aesthetic.

Toward a Decolonial Aesthetic

> Oh, he danced. He danced pretty. He danced to say "you are beautiful,"
> Calvary Hill, and John John and Laventille and Shanty Town.
> Listen to your steel bands how they playing!
> Look at your children how they dancing!
> You is people, people. People is you, people!
>
> (Lovelace 1998a: 125)

Lovelace connects dance to humanness. Our humanness was contested in the hold of the slave ship and on transatlantic plantations. As #BlackLivesMatter makes clear: "we affirm our humanity,"[18] the understanding being that our humanness continues to be questioned, that we are in the "ongoing time of emancipation" (Walcott 2018: 157) – that struggles for liberation are current. According to Walcott, "we are not free but we are not free in different ways" (ibid.). This unfreedom is innate to coloniality, which brings with it poverty, low- to-no-employment, sexual abuse, the destruction of natural resources, and mostly unacknowledged generational trauma stemming from colonial violence and the vestiges of slavery. Coloniality is the baneful side of the Janus-faced modernity (modernity/coloniality). According to Quijano (2007) and Mignolo (2007), modernity and coloniality are inextricably interwoven. This entwinement is due to modernity meaning enslavement of indigenous peoples in the Americas and Africa. Coloniality is the bedrock of colonial power relations that are retained and enforced even after formal independence from European imperial rule. Fanon (1963) describes this process as "the transfer into native hands of those unfair advantages which are a legacy of the colonial period" (ibid.: 152).

Decolonial thinkers argue that dismantling the political project of colonialism through independence struggles only means a political change of hands (see Mignolo, cited in Cervantes and Saldaña 2015: 87). However, the same operating system, structural logic of domination, knowledge production, aesthetic values, and cultural mode of operation remain unyielding. Drawing on Pablo González Casanova's arguments, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) speaks of "internal colo-

17 Calypsos such as Black Stalin's "Wait Dorothy Wait" enact the entanglement between the spiritual and political. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrN_EbqMeck (accessed 25 June 2020).
18 From the "About Black Lives Matter" website: https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/ (accessed 25 June 2020).

nialism" to underscore the relation between coloniality and modernity (ibid.: 101). Fanon (1963), critical of the intact colonial structures held by the postcolonial middle class, was apprehensive of the national bourgeoisie that was "part of the racket" (ibid.: 150), suggesting that they "totally assimilated colonialist thought in its most corrupt form" (ibid.: 161). Vázquez (2016) argues that "coloniality names the dehumanization, exploitation, dispossession, disdain that is co-constitutive of modernity and that governs its relation to alterity. Coloniality relegates to oblivion the life and the suffering of all those who have been dehumanized" (ibid.: 14). Decoloniality "seeks to dismantle modern colonial relations of power and create alternatives to the colonial matrix that has systematically denied the existence, knowledge, and way of life of colonized peoples" (Cervantes and Saldaña 2015: 87–8). Ureña (2017) defines decoloniality as "a project that takes seriously the task of healing the psychological, affective, and epistemic wounds occasioned by the division of the world into colonizers and colonized, a split implicit in the concept of modernity/coloniality" (ibid.: 88).

After dancing on sore feet until 2:30am, after having spent over twelve hours in and around the panyard, my feet are sore and my lower back is feeling the weight of the day. At 12am, following a short break, it rains. We wait for the rain to let up and recommence. I dance through the pain; a majority of the band is present and, having learnt the complete arrangement, I can finally settle into it without anxiety about missing pitches or passages. Settling in means I can jam it. I can tune into the other instruments, in particular the rhythm rack close to which I stand. The iron is instructing my body, my hips and waist take over, feeling the vibration of 120 players moving under one groove.

Fanon (1963) argues that "because it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: 'In reality, who am I?'" (ibid.: 250). In dance, whether while playing with a big band for Panorama or on the streets for *jouvay* or carnival parading, self-determination and -knowledge are evoked. Self-ownership is tethered to Fanon's arguments regarding decolonisation. I understand this from personal childhood negotiations of Dutch colonial spaces. Educated in a Dutch colonial school system, for me, growing up as a minority on an island that makes up part of the Dutch kingdom, the steelpan was a source of personal empowerment. For Fanon, decolonisation is a theory of self-determination. To this I add self-knowledge, -respect, -possession, -ownership. Fanon is concerned with what it means to be completely human and how this is achieved in the process of decolonisation. He says: "Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men" (ibid.: 36). In sharing stories with revellers, this creation occurs in different ways.

Dancing, moving, and sounding out as previously outlined, playing, parading, gathering, and taking to the streets all generate embodied responses through which we can (re)imagine, in various ways, emancipation, freedom, and liberation in the sensuous character of these practices. Rinaldo Walcott (2018) argues that emancipation, freedom, and liberation are not interchangeable and that they require further critical inquiry (ibid.: 155). Music and dance might offer what Walcott suggests is needed: "a searing and engaged critique of their signifying intentions" (ibid.). Music, gyration, wukkin' up,[19] grinding and winin' evoke a "freedom that is still beyond us" (ibid.: 157), and this erotic embodied way of being is crucial to us while we are "in the ongoing time of emancipation" (ibid.), since music and dance enable important steps that need to be taken during this period. Self-knowledge, self-possession, and self-determination are vital steps that are pre-

19 Wukkin' up is a different articulation of winin', illustrating the different expressions of winin' physically and linguistically throughout the region.

conditions and remain germinal, so that, as Walcott argues, "emancipation might be read as a pathway for and towards freedom, but *it is not* freedom" (ibid.: 156; italics mine). Pathways and inroads are made towards freedom in our soundings out and physical movement. Parading, and moving through the streets with a steelband or a big truck packed with high-voltage speakers and amplifiers continues to add to a decolonial transatlantic aesthetic and embodied archive, "authorizing [and authoring] a potential freedom to come" (ibid.: 158). From this emerges a theory and epistemology of jamming under one groove,[20] which enables a (re)imagined transatlantic freedom evoked through dance and sounding out. I do not dismiss the rebelliousness or a character of resistance; however, with this analysis, I offer another perspective that is little attended to – involving pleasure and eroticism. Both are cogs in the wheel that moves emancipation forward. They are needed in the ongoing struggles towards freedom.

Calypso teaches us to live in pleasure, joy and struggle – as Black Stalin says, "Black man got to keep on jamming for black man to get a little something."[21] Moving together in dance while sounding out in this way enables a collective management and way to re-organise our internal world, thereby creating communality. This communal life allows me to understand steelband performance, dancing, and moving as a decolonial doing and practice. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) clarifies that "there can be no discourse of decolonization, no theory of decolonization, without a decolonizing practice" (ibid.: 100). Mignolo and Vázquez (2013), along with other decolonial scholars, have asked what the place of aesthetics is in the colonial matrix. According to Rolando Vásquez in conversation with Alanna Lockward:

> Decolonial Aesthetics/Aesthesis seeks to bring to the fore those other forms of sensing and inhabiting the world that have been subsumed under the long history of this Western-centered world, of the modern/colonial order … decolonial artists are not seeking innovation and abstraction for the sake of it, they are not seeking the recognition of the contemporary art world; rather, they are bringing to light through their practices, through their bodies and communities the histories that have been denied, the forms of sensing and inhabiting the world that have been disdained or erased. (Lockward 2017: 105–6)

How then is movement and dance in steelband connected to decoloniality? Dancing and moving offer the possibility to explore and assert our own ways of evoking freedom, when surrounded by unfreedom. Music offers a way of (re)existing outside of imposed socio-political and economic catastrophe. In the face of violence, frighteningly high crime rates, baffling unemployment, and unequal wealth distribution, dancing and sounding out is a way to re-exist outside the state and governance. This is made explicit in conversations and interviews with steelpan players. As the music summons us to jump and wave, and to trample the stage,[22] there is a general aesthetic disposition to move and groove.[23] It is a practice that includes love, joy, pleasure, and imagination, producing moments of radical freedom and ways to imagine and evoke freedom in the face of unfreedom. It is a way of re-imagining and re-existing and re-membering. In dance pasts and presents,[24] history and memory meet, clash and are grappled with. The legacy of colonialism and slavery do not only bring with them resistance. They bring anger and outrage at the catastrophe and an embodiment of terror and trauma left in their wake; they bring resistance, but they also

20 "The Ganges and The Nile" by David Rudder, from the album *International Chantuelle*, 1999. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9r6mM_QgxtI (accessed 8 June 2020).

21 "Nothing Come Easy" by Black Stalin. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I43fLfUxsog (accessed 8 June 2020).

22 "Advantage" by Machel Montano. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WG3H_0GzeF8 (accessed 1 February 2021).

23 This disposition is detailed in "More Music" by Shadow. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Le8Mm_x_I1I (accessed 25 June 2020).

24 Sharpe (2016) talks about the present and past: the past does not exist but within the present – the past is constructed.

bring healing in the wake (ibid.: 10–11). Love, pleasure, joy, imagining, and wonder accompany the healing. In music scholarship especially, resistance and protest are highlighted. Steelband, calypso, bachata, tambú, reggae, and a host of others are approached through an understanding of resistance music or protest songs, and the scholarship often rests there, stagnant. According to Lorde (2007): "The only way we can [fight old power] is by creating another whole structure that touches every aspect of our existence, at the same time as we are resisting" (ibid.: 103). Another aspect that touches our existence is pleasure and sensuous knowing and being in the world through movement. Pleasure and joy, jammin' and breakin' away are the ways in which we organise ourselves and are self-empowered. According to Toni Morrison, "it is not possible to constantly hone on the crisis; you have to have the love and you have to have the magic. That is also life, and I regard it. Even though it may sound as though I am dealing in fantasy … that is where truth lies, in our myths, in our songs, that is where the seeds are."[25] Dance it out, prance it out, jam it, roll back roll back, back back, are ways in which we physically enact freedom. I argue that this way of moving, whether in calypso, soca, steelband, jab jab,[26] or bouyon,[27] is a transatlantic decolonial aesthetic, (re)shaping our self-consciousness, the way we know ourselves.

According to Hartman (2008b), knowledge hinges on occularcentrism in Western philosophy. "To know is to see and to see is the inception of thought … Sight is the sense elevated above all others in apprehending the world" (ibid.: 74–5). Mbembe (2015) critiques the dismissal of other epistemic traditions and speaks of the dangers of the occularcentric way of approaching knowledge production, where epistemic traditions remove the known from the knower.

> They are traditions in which the knowing subject is enclosed in itself and peeks out at a world of objects and produces supposedly objective knowledge of those objects. The knowing subject is thus able, we are told, to know the world without being part of that world and he or she is by all accounts able to produce knowledge that is supposed to be universal and independent of context. (ibid.)

This tradition, argues Mbembe, is hegemonic for the way "knowledge production has generated discursive scientific practices and has set up interpretive frames that make it difficult to think outside of these frames … actively repress[ing] anything that actually is articulated, thought and envisioned from outside of these frames" (ibid.).

With this critique, I move to considering knowledge generated sensuously, evocatively, and erotically, at the border; knowledge that emerges at the margin – the epistemology of the exteriority. Mignolo and Tlostanova (2006) argue that "critical border thinking is grounded in the experiences of the colonies … consequently, it provides the epistemology that was denied by imperial expansion" (ibid.: 206).

Border thinking considers the experience of those historically excluded from the production of knowledge. What makes this music making and dancing a border practice is not only that it occurs literally at the border of the city or that it is practised by marginalised people, but also *how* it occurs (in secret/surreptitiously), and because of the sonic quality that emerges (shrill, loud, clamorous sounding out). An embodied knowledge arises with the affective experience, revealing that a consideration of border practices offers a way of moving beyond ideas of "resistance."

25 "Young Toni Morrison Interview (1977)," video. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_vgEhN4fypw (accessed 25 June 2020).

26 *Jab jab* is a particular performance practice where the character of the devil is embodied. Playing the devil involves spitting fire, chasing after onlookers, and asking for money. The devil may be covered in motor oil or paint. This performance is often part of *jouvay*.

27 *Bouyon* is a style of music practised in the Windward Caribbean. See, for example, "Bouyon" by WCK. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fLYSO67jBvQ (accessed 14 June 2021).

Understanding steelband music solely in terms of resistance goes against decolonial understandings, for it places colonial hegemony at the centre, a position which decolonial studies seeks to disrupt. Self-determination exists outside of coloniality, it is transgressive and transcendent. This is the wake work (Sharpe 2016) that movement and performance take on in steelband. Such a comprehension takes us beyond discourses of identity and resistance, and into discussions of personhood and humanity – it humanises our ancestors who were in bondage and us who face more covert forms of dehumanisation/coloniality. We delink from the confines of ongoing colonial socialisation, imperial globalisation, and imposed colonial aesthetic values (Mignolo 2007). Dancing in the street allows us to contest the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade and coloniality. In addition to how sounding out is achieved, movement in performance enables us to (re)-exist and (re)imagine; for this reason, I argue that it is a part of the steelband's decolonial aesthetics (Lockward et al. 2011). Decolonial aesthetics aims to liberate the senses and sensibility trapped by modernity/coloniality and works towards making epistemic shifts in disciplines and art, furthering the process of decolonisation. Maria Diaz Nerio notes that "decolonial aesthetics is a communal endeavor that requires delinking and healing. To connect with the urge for making visible what has been and continues to be neglected, denied, and untold. Connect current and past performance in the frame of decoloniality to assess the legacy and consider how we approach this legacy in our work" (Lockward 2019: 424).

Completely surrounded by the resonance of the instrument, I am empowered, boosted by my movement to the sound and the feelings of liberation this supports in me. As I lay in bed at 3am after the rehearsal, I can still feel the pulse and the groove.

Conclusion

> So move, move you blocking up the place
> So move, move I want to shake my waist
> The people want to jam I say move
>
> ("Move" by Black Stalin)[28]

Combining theory with personal narrative, I have attempted to understand dance and physical movement as manifestation of a decolonial aesthetic, as an embodied way of enacting and evoking a sense of freedom. I wanted to bring our experiences of parading and practices of performing during Panorama and as part of carnival into a discussion of decolonial aesthetics. I did so to illuminate how pleasure is emancipatory, as it enables self-determination and self-ownership. I drew on the carnival reveller's erotic knowledge and my own embodied experience of gyrating, winin', and hip rolling in steelband, bringing them into conversation with decolonial thought. I have thus been critical of discourses that centre resistance while sidelining the role of pleasure. Not arguing *against* resistance, I offer that our practices of movement in parading and performance can *also* be considered in different ways.

Can I live? – "Each new deprivation raises doubts about when freedom is going to come, if the question pounding inside her head – Can I live? – is one to which she could ever give a certain answer, or only repeat in anticipation of something better than this, bear the pain of it and the hope of it, the beauty and the promise" (Hartman 2019: 10). Sitting with Hartman's question, can *I* live? Just live, without having my living immediately interpreted as resisting. I have posed this question often in relation to my hair, my physical movement, and my instrument. What is the implication of having our living tethered to resistance? Hartman elaborates: "How to live a

28 Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v75hQWLg-QE (accessed 19 June 2020).

free life, how one can live, is the pressing question for black folks in the wake of slavery's formal end" (Chambers 2020). Hartman notes that a fundamental requirement of a radical imagination "is believing that the world you want to come into existence can happen. I think that that is how black folks have engaged with and invested in and articulated freedom, as an ideal and as an everyday practice" (ibid.). We *can* live in parading and physically moving in steelband performance, (re)imagining ourselves as we enact and evoke freedom. The sense of freedom I am examining is fleeting, temporally confined to a particular time of year, and spatially limited. As soon as the parading is over, as Ash Wednesday ushers in the season of Lent, Julia, other revellers, and pan players start various countdowns: "Carnival countdown: 102 days, 18 hours and 33 minutes 'til carnival." In conversation with Julia four months after carnival, she told me: "I would do anything right now just to put a lil' feather on my back." This same person follows the Afro-Caribbean carnival circuit. Playing mas[29] in Aruba in January, in Trinidad in February, in St. Maarten in April, in Miami in October, and in St. Kitts in December.

Attempts to understand Afro-Caribbean music often start from a conception of music and performance as operating solely in response to hegemony, marginalisation, and colonial oppression. But such discourses rarely take into account that practitioners were/are not always occupied with their oppressors. I suggest that music making is not just about resistance, but that it is a way of being that transgresses coloniality – this is made clear by dancing persons and their collective movement. Embracing a decolonial practice, I question the narrative of resistance while exploring the emancipatory act of sounding out and performance style. The story of victimhood persists through narratives of resistance and accounts of struggling through brokenness. The history might begin elsewhere. Visionary arrangers, composers, performers and the performances they produce made and continue to make history, evocatively and with style. And it is not a history that begins with brokenness, but with the recognition that the work of dancing, moving together, and sounding out is a revolutionary starting point. Dancing, music making, and the development of instruments were not only offered in resistance or response to, and not merely a legacy of, mistreatment of previously enslaved and colonised peoples. Such a narrow understanding of music and performance neglects the oral historical information of how people gathered to perform – those who were not simply occupied with answering to colonial oppression. It also neglects how music was a way of life. It neglects too the connections to other similar music-making practices throughout the Afrospora (Philip 2017: 35). These ways of making music are historically situated and not simply responses to ordinances. Unfortunately, often Afro-Caribbean music scholarship has dropped the perspective of music as a site of critical thinking and generator of knowledge, considering music and its making only as a series of incidental (accidental, without intention) and uncoordinated (non-strategic, kneejerk) defensive moves against colonial restrictions, bans, and ordinances, all of which places the coloniser at the centre of knowledge production.[30] But this music and movement occurred at the margin of the city and the margin of society, in secret. For this reason, I attempt to think from the border to be decolonial about the discourse of resistance and freedom in the face of coloniality – considering, for instance, the use of metal in the steel orchestra, the informed experimentation involved in instrument development, the innovation in music arrangement and working with sound in magical ways to create a particular sonic and dance aesthetic, performance practice, how the non-playing performers gather, and how all the above come together to build the communal. I thereby seek to understand certain Afrosporic musics within the transatlantic as decolonial practices that enable different

29 "Mas" is short for masquerading.

30 I thank anonymous reviewers of this piece for highlighting the work of Jocelyn Guilbault (2010, 2019), which stands as an exception. Others such as Susan Harewood (2007) and Shalini Puri (2003a, 2003b) also work to move the discussion beyond resistance.

ways of being, feeling, knowing, and sensing the world. I listen and feel at the border, unveiling decolonial options, possibilities, and ways of knowing. Examining the significant work that takes place in winin', rollin' back, grinding, and sounding out in broader terms than resistance will enable the decolonial aesthetic of Afro-Caribbean and diasporic cultural practices to move from intuition and instinct to a conscious, intentional decolonial doing.[31] The routes to make and journeys to take "for a freedom yet to come" (Walcott 2018: 159) are offered in our collective embodied movement and through sounding out in music.

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31 "Respect the Steelband" and "Nobody Cares" by Black Stalin are good examples of intentional doing that critiques disregard from the performing arts. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TjR4-iAR5TQ (accessed 15 June 2021) and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lrj1ztfbZZ8 (accessed 15 June 2021), respectively.

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About the author

Charissa Granger
University of the West Indies, St. Augustine
charissa.granger@sta.uwi.edu

Dr. Charissa Granger analyses Afro-Caribbean music as liberatory practices, examining music epistemologies, aesthetics, love ethics, and erotic knowledge. Granger earned a bachelor’s degree in Visual and Performing Arts from Northern Illinois University and a master’s in Cultural Musicology from The University of Amsterdam. With a cultural musicology doctorate from Georg-August Universität Göttingen, Granger held a Marie Skłodowska-Curie postdoctoral fellowship at Erasmus University Rotterdam and is a lecturer in Cultural Studies at The University of the West Indies. As a postdoctoral researcher in the NWO-funded Island(er)s at the Helm project, Granger collaborates on research for sustainable and inclusive solutions to climate challenges in the (Dutch) Caribbean. Granger is co-editor of *Music Moves: Musical Dynamics of Relation, Knowledge and Transformation* (Georg Olms Verlag 2016) and their published work can be found in the *Langston Hughes Review*, *Contemporary Music Review*, *Conflict and Society*, and *Esferas Journal*. Granger’s teaching includes undergraduate and graduate courses on Caribbean Cultural Studies and Cultural Thought, Theorizing Caribbean Culture, and Methods of Inquiry in Caribbean Research.