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THROUGH THE DIAMETER OF RESPECTABILITY: THE POLITICS OF HISTORICAL REPRESENTATION IN POSTEMANCIPATION COLONIAL TRINIDAD

Introduction

There was a masquerade popular in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, in the Carnival of the late nineteenth century – the "Dame Lorine."[1] It depicted the transmogrification of a house-slave on the plantation, the butler, into a refined gentleman of the postemancipation period: a schoolmaster, ornate with a long frock coat and colossal attendance book. In parallel fashion, the masters of the plantation were transformed into the butler's pupils in the schoolhouse. The masquerade was divided into two acts. The first, set at the balls of the planter elite in the time of slavery, is given account by David Crowley:

> a very elegant grand march of people dressed in the costumes of the French aristocracy of the 18th century. A haughty butler announced the mouth-filling names of each couple as they entered the stage. A stately dance was then performed, and a slave was seen peeping in the window, looking on in amazement. (quoted in Alonso 1990:106)

The second act transported the actors to the postemancipation period, to the Creole society of the late colonial period, a temporality coeval with the Carnival masquerade. Here, the transformed butler qua refined schoolmaster calls the roll in a mock classroom and bullies his pupils with a whip to dance in respectable fashion, instructing, "Dance, my children dance. Leg to leg but no vulgarity. Let's get on, let's get on. Listen! Do like brother and sister but not like man and women" (Hill, quoted in Alonso 1990:106). Errol Hill gives the following description of the schoolmaster's students:

1. Alonso's work (1990:106) called my attention to this masquerade, which is variously called "Dame Lorraine." It is in her work that a composite is presented of Crowley's and Hill's accounts of the skit.

> dressed in old garments, [they] were a burlesque imitation of the aristocracy. They were all masked, and inversion of the sexes was a common practice. Each pupil had a prominent physical protuberance which accounted for his name, ... M'sieur Gros Coco, M'sieur Gros Boudin, Mme. Gros Tete, Mlle. Jolle Fouge. (Hill, quoted in Alonso 1990:106)

This masquerade foregrounds the two broad levels I relate in this paper: on the one hand, the history of Trinidad in the period immediately following emancipation, 1834 to roughly the end of the nineteenth century; on the other hand, the *multiple* and *perspectival representations* of this history in the same period. We will see how these two levels were related through the creation and transformation of social values, identities, and cultural concepts. The two cultural concepts I focus on, which should no doubt be familiar to the Caribbeanist, are "respectability" and "reputation." Building from the substantial literature on these concepts, I examine respectability and reputation in their capacity as highly productive representations of historical process – to borrow a set of terms from Richard J. Parmentier (1985) – as "signs of history" and "signs in history." The matter to hand pertains to their emergent functions in the colonial politics of postemancipation Trinidad, a politics coalescing around local imaginings of the transhistoric consequences of slavery for the project of transforming a collapsed plantation complex into a class-based Creole society. I will call this the "diameter of respectability" so as to distinguish the emergent functions that respectability and reputation came to play in Trinidad in this period from the greater description and provenance of these concepts discussed in Caribbeanist literature.

There are two sections to this paper, each addressing (roughly) a moment of "historical imagination" (Comaroff & Comaroff 1992) in Trinidad, describable in terms of a different play of *represented* diachronic process from the same identified baseline – the time of slavery, the act of emancipation. The emergent functions that the two cultural categories identified above obtained in postemancipation Trinidad will be analyzed in and through these historical imaginings. My thesis is that to understand the social use of these concepts, one needs to understand the dynamic by which each presupposed and entailed a different representation and valuation of local historical process. First, the emergence of class structure and social distinction in Trinidad after emancipation, centered on and around the concept of respectability, is figured as a refinement or self-advancement over time of certain upwardly mobile social identities and their respective emblematics. I show how the diameter of respectability needs to be related to the emergence of an educated colored and black *petite bourgeoisie* on the island and the way this class represented its own history, as diachronic progress from humble origins. We will see how this trope worked more specifically by analyzing the social life of one man, J.J. Thomas. The house-slave qua schoolmaster in the Dame Lorine masquerade traces this development.

Second, there is the burgeoning of a large urban black underclass on the island, and the subsequent revival of the island's Carnival by the underclass toward the end of the nineteenth century. Filling out the barrack yards of Port-of-Spain and San Fernando, these characters became known as the *jamettes* because they were, to Trinidad's more "refined" sensibilities, below the diameter of respectability – *jamette* being a creolization of the French word *diamètre*, or diameter (Pearse 1956:188). Carnival, for the *jamettes*, was a yearly descent into the "underworld," where a set of values diametrically opposed to the norms of respectability were conjured – what were called "reputations." This development is captured by Dame Lorine not so much in the world depicted by the masquerade, but in the contemporaneous world in which the masquerade, and its representations of diachronic process on the island, is situated.

Before turning to this, however, I review the literature on respectability and reputation in the Caribbean and make some remarks regarding the theoretical tow of the paper, how we might begin to view these concepts as ethnohistorical imaginings of diachronic process. I should note that while this paper does address the second moment of historical imagination, reputations, my primary concern is however with first moment, considering reputations only insofar as it engaged the diameter of respectability. Thus discussion of reputations here will only be schematic.

RESPECTABILITY AND REPUTATION

Respectability and reputation were first suggested by Peter Wilson (1969) as a framework for linking domestic organization to broader social organization, in which an analytic distinction between male-centered values of reputation and female-centered values of respectability articulates the expanding social world through a sexualized duality. This duality has since become commonplace in the ethnography of the contemporary Caribbean, approximating a "master-trope" for Caribbean anthropology (Trouillot 1992). As a complex of dichotomous norms, values, and morals, the duality has been elaborated in subsequent literature in a variety of interesting ways, across a range of topics, including: personality (Abrahams 1979); sociolinguistics (Abrahams 1983); the cultural construction of time (Miller 1994); style (Leiber 1976; Eriksen 1990); independence and nation-state formation (Van Koningsbruggen 1997); mass consumption, modernity, and the development of capitalism in the Caribbean (Miller 1994).

To summarize the literature (though by no means doing it justice), respectability pertains to the values of an external system, of formal institutions such as "legal society." Reputation, on the other hand, approximates the values of an internal system of informal interactions and relations that better fall

within the subcommunity (Wilson 1969). Respectability represents "proper behavior, status-seeking good behavior that demonstrates order, propriety, and various other virtues ... [it] is the overt value system of the community, subscribed by all when they give testimony to what is good and proper" (Abrahams 1979:448). Value is put on "respectable talk" which emphasizes "continuity, decorum, and social place, and ... outward manifestations ... [that] have a high-toned British cast to them" (Abrahams 1979:448). Respectability involves "acting sensible" and "talking sweet" (Abrahams 1979:450). It is behavior befitting the household, the workplace, the courthouse; behavior that is disciplined, routinized, rationalized, prudent, prudish, precious, painstaking, serious, and obedient. Respectability belongs to the female domain and is imposed upon the wife and, in corollary, the marriage contract (Wilson 1969). In contemporary Trinidad and St. Vincent, respectability has been identified with the sobriety of Christmas, with its emphasis on family (and the consumption of family-oriented items), tradition, and communalism – this in contrast to the festivities of Carnival, where individualism, freedom, and bacchanal (generally, the values of reputation) motivate revelers (Miller 1994).

Reputation, broadly, is "associated with male, friendship-oriented values, in which life at the rum shop and other public places is pursued and valued ... a deployment of resources with friends rather than family ... with masculine 'flash,' big- and loud-talk, and sometimes drunken unruliness" (Abrahams 1979:448). Reputation is symbolized by the street and crossroads, by licentious behavior, rudeness, talking broad, talking nonsense, boasting, and rhetoric (Abrahams 1979). It is behavior that is irresponsible, unpredictable, though highly stylized. Reputation is what is at issue in "liming" – spontaneous drunken excursions marked by the "art of doing nothing" (Eriksen 1990), "checking out the scene," and "hanging around with eyes and ears keenly tuned to the flow of action and recognition of advantage" (Leiber 1976:327). Reputation is marked off by a man's "virility," as indicated by the fathering of children and giving them one's own name (Wilson 1969). Reputation approximates ideals such as absolute freedom and transcendence, and stands for, in such events as Carnival, the dominance of a rampant individualism over the constraints of proper society (Miller 1994). If respectability is the embodiment of order and obedience before the law and in the domestic sphere, then reputation embodies chaos and transgression. Some schemas have associated respectability with the imposition of foreign values – patently British – during the colonial period, while on the other hand identifying reputation with native values, which are seen as more creole, and in some cases, more African in origin (see Wilson 1969; Van Koningsbruggen 1997) – a point I would contest (see also Olwig 1993).

Wilson's initial exposition of the dichotomy stemmed from ethnographic work in Providencia. Subsequent claims have been made by Wilson and others for the extension of the respectability/reputation framework to the pan-

Caribbean, identifying throughout a "functional equivalence of the moral values ... and their role in social organization" (Wilson 1969:70). The effect, however, has often meant the black-boxing of the local provenance of the concepts – this despite the fact that an important stream of scholarship has shown how the concepts are not exclusive to the study of the contemporary period, nor the exclusive analytic domain of the scholar. Respectability is, for instance, central to Raymond T. Smith's (1967) work on change and integration in colonial British Guiana. Reputation has been central to historical accounts of *machismo* in the Hispanic-Caribbean (Wilson 1969). Roger Abrahams (1983) has demonstrated how the concepts were historically operative at missionary tea-meetings in colonial St. Vincent, forming a central tension through which participants vied and competed. Working on the island of Nevis, Karen Fog Olwig (1993) traces respectability to middle-class European folk models brought to the Caribbean by Methodist missionaries in the time of slavery; similarly, reputation is traced back to seventeenth-century concepts of "sociability" brought by small farmers from Britain. Olwig demonstrates how these concepts (via their respective social institutions) were successfully appropriated by Nevisians as vehicles for public expression of Afro-Caribbean culture. In the case of colonial Trinidad, much too has been made of the local importance of respectability and reputation (see Powrie 1956; Brereton 1979).

These latter historical studies especially point to a central idea I want to draw on in this paper: the need to view respectability and reputation as native concepts to be examined in their social and historical contexts, as folk models used by social actors to understand, unravel, and regiment their worlds, *their* histories. Abrahams (1979) explicitly alluded to this point in his critique of Wilson's initial argument, along the lines that, while Wilson "picked up on a real systematic contrast (and often contest of values) ... [to] translate this into social structural terms does violence to the native concepts" (Abrahams 1979:449). Abrahams reprimanded Wilson's suggestion of extending folk concepts to greater institutional realms, the folk model uncritically becoming the ethnographer's tool. The challenge posed here, then, is to situate respectability and reputation at the intersection of local history, its representation, and its politic – the politics of historical representation. In what milieu of contested perspectives on the value and meaningfulness of local historical process did the diameter of respectability emerge, operate, and transform in postemancipation Trinidad?

One of the intriguing things about Trinidad in this period is the degree to which the act of emancipation afforded an ideological rupture salient enough to stimulate a lasting dialogue on the nature of social change and historical process, indeed "progress." Some sectors of the population were imputed to have advanced since slavery; others were seen to have degenerated – in either case, emancipation from the time of slavery was identified as a baseline for

measuring progress. I would argue that we need to examine the respective Trinidadian-valorizations of respectability and reputation in this light, as a set of social metrics operative in this politics of diachrony, configured through situated representations of the transformation of social relations on the island in the wake of emancipation – *situated* along the perspectival, ideological fissures of Creole society's emergent structurings of class and social distinction.

In an important study of race ideology among Jamaica's middle class, Jack Alexander (1977) demonstrated how race functions in Kingston as a sign-complex expressing a particular mythical time which, like an historical charter, "establishes the historical rootedness of the society and its members' place in it:"

> It does so in a way that locates this historical rootedness directly in the experience of persons' bodies and thus to a certain extent fuses the continuity of the person with the continuity of the society. Every time a person experiences inconsistency among race, physical appearance, status, and class, he is referring the present to a past in which there were two original groups – one English, white, civilized, master, and solidary, the other African, black, uncivilized, slave, and solidary – that mixed without amalgamating. Every time a person perceives himself or someone else in terms of race, he commits himself to a view that sees the present as the result of a long process of mixture in which the two elements are always kept track of because they have never really joined together. (Alexander 1977:432-33)

While my argument regarding race in postemancipation Trinidad departs from Alexander's in significant ways, I would argue that respectability and reputation in Trinidad can be treated more generally along these lines, as historicizing sign-complexes, or ethnohistorical categorizations, involving a play of signs encoding historical or diachronic process.

Parmentier (1985) has suggested that we pay attention to the way signs not only achieve meaningfulness through synchronic systematicity, but also temporally and diachronically, thus arguing that cultural categories, need also to be understood operatively, in their capacities as (ethno)historical functions. He theorizes a dialectic between two classes of historicizing signs – signs in history and signs of history – which function in different ways:

> Here the phrase "signs in history" refers to those value-laden objects, expressions, and patterns of actions involved in social life that are loci of historical intentionality. And "signs of history" refers to those mnemonic signs which ... codify events *as* history, that selective discourse about the diachrony of a society. (Parmentier 1985:134)

Signs of history, as objectified arrays of diachronic process (a topography of specified events and their imputed consequences), can refer to and predicate about signs in history, foregrounding their potentials as appropriate and effective sign-vehicles for social action, mediation, and transformation, around

which social actors *ought* to mobilize, that is, for the *making* of history (Parmentier 1985:149).

Thus, following Parmentier and Alexander, we want to see how, in their capacity as schematizations of diachronic process (signs of history), cultural categories like respectability and reputation are generative of social values, identities, and their emblematics, by referring to, foregrounding, and fixing certain objects, expressions, patterns of action, and even persons as sign-vehicles (signs in history) ripe for social action and distinction. As we shall see, such an approach will help us to re-conceptualize the way we understand and relate the respectibility/reputation duality to the specific local contexts of its emergence and social use.

THE DIAMETER OF RESPECTABILITY: THE PROBLEM OF EMANCIPATION AND THE BRITISH SOLUTION, EDUCATION

Colonial Trinidad, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, promised to be a "great experiment" for the British, with tremendous potentials if successfully exploited: the colony was vast, land was abundant and fertile for plantation work, and the island was strategically located at the base of the lesser Antilles, ideal for monitoring and regulating trade with South America. British magistrates sought financial and political rewards by converting the island into an exemplar of effective governance. This was no simple matter, and, as British administrators came to realize, it necessitated a comprehensive social and political integration, transcending the fragmented plantation complex – where each plantation composed a singular, closed socioeconomic-political unit – by bringing together disparate legal, economic, religious, and cultural elements. For this task, a cohort of British administrators and professionals were dispatched to the island under the guise of crafting, through legislative artifice, an internally coherent Creole society with a sustainable margin of profit (Wood 1968).

Slavery in Trinidad and the rest of the British West Indies was formally abolished on August 1, 1834. However, a compulsory apprenticeship of six years for field slaves and four years for others was required before full manumission. In this period, the administrative invasion of the West Indies redoubled, with British officers and professionals assigned more permanent positions in the islands. As Smith (1967:234) writes, "[a] new body of Europeans appeared in the colonies ... missionaries, stipendiary magistrates, doctors and Colonial Office officials ... whose task it was to 'civilise' the ex-slaves." In these times of radical transition, the Colonial Office well apprehended the benefits of an ordered and integrated colonial society, both to minimize the hazards of emancipation and allay the fears of the local plantocracy. Indeed, fears

of a degenerate class of freed slaves were widespread throughout the Caribbean before and after emancipation, with the example of Haiti and its slave revolt serving as constant reminder of the depths of "barbarism" into which an unchecked ex-slave population might sink. Once emancipated, it was widely held that slaves would succumb to the most base desires, regressing to the heathens they were before the "disciplinary-effects" of slavery. Indolence, laziness, lust, licentiousness, vice, and vagrancy would inundate the island as liberated slaves fled the plantation, taking to the bush or heading to the city to join the ranks of the growing urban underclass (cf. MacQueen 1824; Burnley 1842).

To convey to the British Crown the gravity of the (impending) matter, the *Sterling Report* of May 11, 1835 was dispatched by the Colonial Office within a year of emancipation. The "issues at stake," reported Sterling (quoted in Gordon 1963:21), were manifold, at once the moral fabric of the Empire and the *raison d'être* of the colonies – a profitable, now free, labor:

> For although the negroes are now under a system of limited control, which secures to a certain extent their orderly and industrious conduct, in the short space of five years from the first of next August, their performance of the functions of a labouring class in a civilised community will depend entirely on the power over their minds of the same prudential and moral motives which govern more or less the mass of the people here. If they are not so disposed as to fulfill these functions, property will perish in the colonies for lack of human impulsion; the whites will no longer reside there; and the liberated negroes themselves will probably cease to be progressive.

If the *Sterling Report* made palpable the fears of emancipation, it also presented a solution in its injunction to step up the "civilizing mission" in the West Indies. Emancipation, according to the report, was to come in two parts and two times, each via proactive legislation: the emancipation of the physical body from slave labor; the emancipation of the mind from its primitive African origin and the degenerative effects of slavery – a moral and mental "improvement." The latter had only been alluded to in the Emancipation Bill of 1833, in the act's stipulation of mandatory apprenticeship. The *Sterling Report*, with all its dispatch, intended to make occurrent this second meaning of emancipation, refashioning it as the secondary step to civilization, linking this to the imperatives of universal education: "The law having already determined and enforced their civic rights, the task of bettering their condition can be further advanced only by *education*" (*Sterling Report*, quoted in Gordon 1963:21).

The 1847 *Ideas for Curriculum*, for example, illustrated what a proper education might, or ought to entail, essentially in and through industrial and normal schools, both of sectarian and secular design. Circulated by the Colonial Office throughout the British West Indies, the document outlined

four basic tenets, the importance of which would be realized as the century unfolded: religious education; knowledge of the English language; knowledge of economy and "calculation;" and education in the "rational basis" of colonialism (quoted in Gordon 1963:58). As was generally deemed prudent at the time, the dispatch was careful to distinguish a morally-uplifting and practically-minded curriculum befitting ex-slaves – and the "station in life to which they belong" (for Trinidad, see Burnley 1842) – from the academic or society-oriented finishing schools predominant in the metropole (Wood 1969).[2] The trick was to educate to a certain standard of civilization, but no further. Bridget Brereton (1979:78) explains that in Trinidad, "[a] sound elementary education was one which inculcated the virtues of honest labour. An unsound one was a system which made children despise agricultural labour." The point was not to educate the children of ex-slaves to be Ladies and Gentlemen, but as Governor Robinson remarked, "honest, industrious, self-respectful, and God-fearing gardeners, carpenters, servants, cooks, or housekeepers" (quoted in Wood 1968:78).

How were these prescriptions from the Colonial Office received in Trinidad? Education in the nineteenth-century postemancipation period was regarded as necessary to and the best means by which to impart civilization, but also as a dangerous and necessary evil about which each successive colonial administration worried. But, as Trinidad was a Crown Colony and thus had little legislative autonomy, the influence of the Colonial Office and its prescriptions loomed large, overriding island opinions (and wisdoms). Here, the 1847 *Ideas for Curriculum* somewhat misapprehended the complexities of the colonies, Trinidad in particular, with its emphasis on Christianity and the English language. With is multifaceted colonial legacy, Trinidad's landed elite were historically divided along two lines, linguistic and denominational, the French creole elite preferring a Catholic education in the French language, English creoles preferring a Protestant and English-language-based education (Wood 1969). This division would continually plague efforts in Trinidad to universalize education and make good on the *Sterling Report* (and others of its kind) throughout the later half of the nineteenth century.

2. A report to the Colonial Office in 1838, for example, made the following recommendation for educating ex-slaves in the colonies: "it must be a sober education; one rather calculated to discipline the mind, and to bring its opening powers into wholesome subjection, than to excite it; one suited to the necessities and probable prospects of the class to whom it is presented; and above all, an education not merely based on worldly morality, but built on the Holy Scriptures." (Latrope, quoted in Wood 1968:213) So while ideologies of "achievement" and "egalitarianism" were taking shape in the British West Indies, in which the growing demand for public education played a part, the reality and *practicalities* of ascripted social roles, identities, and classes were still palpable. Everyone had their "proper station," as allotted by God.

In 1850, a system of normal and ward schools – free, public, and paid for by taxes levied on local landowners – was instituted in Trinidad. This ordinance thought to resolve the denominational divisions by rendering the public schools secular; the matter of language, however, was less flexible, and English, as the "most important agent of Civilisation" according to the *Ideas for Curriculum*, was duly implemented (quoted in Gordon 1969:58; Wood 1968). Two years later, a review of this system by the administration of Sir Arthur Gordon (1867-70) found the ward schools lagging in quality and attendance. As the most significant reform of education of that century, Gordon's 1870 Education Ordinance sought to expand and better the public system by first channeling state aid to the better-equipped (and private) Church schools on condition they admit students on a faith-blind basis. Second, to assuage the impasse between the two contending elite factions, Gordon's Ordinance installed a clergymen, selected according to the denomination registering the majority in that ward, as overseer in each ward school (Brereton 1979:65). Though a practical and industrially minded primary education remained the norm in Trinidad for the large population of ex-slaves and their descendants, efforts were made throughout the remainder of this century to expand and enroll these students in secondary schools established on the island, mainly in the form of normal schools. (Trinidad's elite, on the other hand, sent their children abroad, to secondary schools in France and England.) In this milieu, the normal schools – as secondary schools for teachers-to-be – became quite important in Trinidad, being, along with marriage, the most accessible and rapid means for society's lower caste to attain social status and respect.

Early attempts in Trinidad in this period to establish free, universal education and to impose the English language are important here because it was through these discourses and their resultant policies that the diameter of respectability was given contour. First, as we shall see below, education and the English language – through a circular logic – became the primary means of upward mobility and self-definition for the emergent colored and black *petite bourgeoisie* toward the end of the nineteenth century. Second, both reflected the broader "liberal," "egalitarian," and "individualistic" ideologies of the cohort of British emissaries newly resident in the colonies (Smith 1982). Invigorated by the rejuvenated spirit of the Enlightenment and the "civilising-mission," these men seized upon these ideologies as a "common value-set" for grafting a "Creole society" atop the fragments of the plantation complex. Smith (1967:234) argues that "[t]he only image of 'civilization' possessed by these men was that of their own culture, so that the West Indies appeared to be an extension of English society." In the form of tastes, preferences, manners, dispositions, ways of consuming, ways of governing, and especially the canons of learning, an entire lifestyle – a virtual microcosm of English society – was transposed to the island from the British metropole. Unwitting or not, this common value-set or lifestyle was instrumentalized as

an integrative framework to reconcile extant racialized-social partitionings to an emergent achievement-based modality of status reckoning, one that "stressed the importance of Christianity, of education, respect of the law, 'good' as opposed to 'rough' or 'bad' behavior, the need for moral upliftment, and the importance of using proper language" (Smith 1967:235).

By these measures Trinidad was to be rendered first respectable, with a progressive Creole society (as opposed to degenerate one), and second, profitable as a colony – fulfilling the so-called double mandate of civility and economy. We need to understand this respectability in its early and very British modality, not confusing it with the concept of respectability later operative in Trinidad. Here, respectability was a transposed British concept, circulated to the island by the transient class of English emissaries, those often described as "birds of passage." As an "essence" of one's person, this form of respectability was foremost bestowed by birth and worth. In certain cases, like those of the colonies, it might be achieved through one's adoption or approximation to British dispositions, manners, and habits, understood as a "refinement" to the standards of the British metropole as instantiated by the representative birds of passage. But how did this very British concept of respectability fit more particularly into the local agenda of an emergent *petit bourgeoisie* in Trinidad, one composed of ex-slaves and their descendants? We want to turn now to the profound transformation in meaningfulness and value that respectability underwent in the later half of the nineteenth century, examining the more specific historicizing/historicized potentials that the cultural category obtained in Trinidad's Creole society. How did this very British notion of respectability, with its complex of values and emblematics, take on (operative) significance locally as both a sign of history and sign in history around which social actors mobilized?

THE REFINEMENT OF THE EMERGENT COLORED AND BLACK "PETITE BOURGEOISIE"

> Who could, without seeming to insult the intelligence of men, have predicted on the day of Emancipation that the Negroes then released from the blight and withering influence of ten generations of cruel bondage, so weakened and half-destroyed – so denationalized and demoralized – so despoiled and naked, would be in the position they are now? ... Here in the West Indies ... are to be found Surgeons of the Negro Race, Solicitors, Barristers, Mayors, Councilors, Principals and Founders of High Schools and Colleges, Editors and Proprietors of Newspapers, Archdeacons, Bishops, Judges, and Authors – men who not only teach those immediately around them, but also teach the world ... *The European world is looking with wonder and admiration at the progress made by the Negro Race – a progress unparalleled in the annals of the history of any race* [emphasis mine]. (Rev. Doughlin of Trinidad, quoted in J.J. Thomas 1889)

Within a generation or so following emancipation and the implementation of public education, a substantial black and colored *petite bourgeoisie* resided on the island. As teachers, doctors, pharmacists, journalists, printers, solicitors, barristers, clerks, and especially civil servants, this professional class came to dominate city life in Port-of-Spain and San Fernando (Brereton 1979). Attesting to the efficiency of the British colonial project, the island had never appeared so English. For one, the English language was becoming standard for public affairs; French, Spanish, and the incorrigible French patois were rapidly being displaced. Other than the large population of indentured East Indians (who with their customs and language were conceptually marginalized to the periphery of society and in some sense outside of society [Brereton 1979]), Trinidad was becoming the exemplar British colony in terms of social integration. A bona fide Creole society can be said to have existed.

Members of the emergent middle class came to dominate the island's literary and educational circles, essentially composing the island's public sphere, forming the ritual center of Creole society. School boards, debating societies, prominent literary clubs, Trinidad's journals and newspapers (e.g., the *San Fernando Gazette*, *Trinidad Press*, *Trinidad Colonist*, and the *Telegraph*) – all were owned and operated at the time by members of the colored and black *petite bourgeoisie*. Thomas, an acclaimed scholar, schoolmaster, and founding member of this class – whose case we will look into below – was widely regarded as the most learned and respectable person in the Trinidad of that period.

Indeed "Culture" – in the nineteenth century sense of the civilized, refined, and respectable – had been wrestled from both the planter elite and British emissaries in Trinidad, becoming the supreme property for this emergent class. Through the culture of respectability, its consumption and display, the colored and black middle class distinguished itself from the rest of the island (Powrie 1956). Brereton (1979:94) writes that,

> the members of this group attached great weight to cultural and intellectual life. They boasted of their command of British culture, their ability to speak and write "good" English, their interests in things of the mind. It was literacy, familiarity with books, the possession of "culture" which mattered, as well as an occupation which involved no manual labour. These things were more essential criteria for membership of the middle class than wealth or lightness of skin. Most of the people in this sector were not wealthy, or even moderately well-off; many were teachers existing on very small salaries. In one sense they formed an intelligentsia, in that they took pride in being the cultured sector of the community, although they were not part of the ruling class.

The situation was similar to that in British Guiana, as described by Smith (1967:237):

> The very forces that were used to integrate creole society – religion, education, the law, medicine, journalism, the civil services – resulted in the creation of a creole elite which, by the end of the nineteenth century, was referring to itself as "the intelligentsia." This group owed its position within society to achievement in the sense that it filled valued occupational roles and commanded and manipulated "English" culture, but it is evident that its members came to believe themselves to be qualitatively different from the other non-Europeans by virtue of their "refinement."

Smith's quote describes somewhat the more *literal* dimensions of refinement and respectability of the *petite bourgeoisie* in the colonies, where a quantitative difference from other members of society was, as Smith points out, essentialized as a quality: from refinement to respectability. Respectability, in this regard, was understood more literally as a substance inhering in English culture, and thus in the individual who achieved this mental culture through education, as displayed and attested to by the consumption, possession, and performance of the appropriately prescribed emblems and signs. In postemancipation Trinidad, the two most important signs were the performance of religious faith and morals through Christian marriage and the mastery over and production of works in the English language, both written and spoken (Powrie 1956). The latter especially – the English language – became a highly valued emblem, understood to be *literally* good-in-itself, its grammar exercising (and thus displaying) a self-disciplining or morally fortifying effect on its speaker (recall the *Sterling Report*). Caught up in an incipient process of linguistic standardization wrought by education, the legal apparatus, and Creole society's emergent class distinctions, and involving simultaneously the stigmatization and elimination (or belief of the elimination) of competing linguistic codes in official/formal contexts (most notably, French, Spanish, and the French-based patois, but also Portuguese, Chinese, Hindi, and an English creole or "bad English") and the development of an allegiance to, though ambivalence and anxiety before, one highly-valued code (here, the "refined" English of the British metropole) (Alleyne 1985; Silverstein 1993), this emblematic valorization of English language and culture is not at all surprising.

One argument might relate this valorization of English language and culture to hypercorrection among the lower middle classes in New York City, discerned by W. Labov (1972). Labov argued that members of the second-highest status group in a speech community, eager to acquire social status, exhibit the most exaggerated patterns of style shifting toward prestige forms of talk as they become aware of the efficacy of these forms as valued social markers, although transgressing the norms of appropriateness-of-use of these

speech forms in their very eagerness to imitate to these forms. As R. Brown and A. Gilman (1972:272) write on the phenomenon:

> Persons aping the manners of the class above them usually do not get the imitation exactly right. They are likely to notice some point of difference between their own class and the next higher and then extend the difference too widely.

In class-based societies this hypercorrection can lead to the commoditization of prestige forms, where as emblems of identity, social status, or lifestyle, these speech forms literally obtain economic values (Silverstein 1996:289).

In the robust class structure of the early postemancipation period in Trinidad, both a hypercorrection to imputed English-based prestige forms and concomitant commoditization of these forms as emblems can be detected among the emergent colored and black *petite bourgeoisie*. For instance, while the demand for a free and universal education had been recurrent among the "liberal" British colonial administration in the postemancipation period, a substantial movement among the middle class had formed on the island, calling for the imposition of fees on schools, realized partially in an ordinance in 1875 – a strange move considering that many of the supporters for the fees had themselves benefited from free education. The argument was put forward by a report from the Inspector of Schools and later substantiated in the *Port-of-Spain Gazette* that parents, particularly of the middle class and working class, did not appreciate free public education, as its being free tended to depreciate its value in the public eye. In fact, many parents preferred to send their children to schools with fees, and a school without fees was a school with fewer students. As Brereton (1979:84) remarks, "[i]n Trinidad the value of education was judged by the amount paid for it."

It would be folly, however, to understand these phenomena in Trinidad as simple matters of hypercorrection, aping, or mimicry (and subsequent commoditization) on the part of the black and colored *petite bourgeoisie* to the prestige-forms and signs of respectability embodied by the resident British emissaries and professionals. This has widely been assumed in the literature on the black and colored middle classes in Trinidad – e.g., V.S. Naipaul's "mimic men," or C.L.R James's criticisms – and has largely motivated the pejorative treatment of the concept by scholars: these are imitations/imitators of "foreign" values. Rather, we need to grasp the historical dimensions, that is, how respectability in Trinidad became not just a measure of one's approximation to (or overshooting of) British standards, manners, and dispositions, but also (and more importantly) a measure of one's removal or distantiation in the long run of history from the (transhistoric) legacy of slavery and the plantation (a sign of one's history). Crucially, the diameter of respectability in Trinidad, needs to be delimited as, on the one hand, an instance of (synchronic) approximation or hypercorrection, and on the other hand, diachronic

remove from one's own imputed historic roots. Christian marriage and English manners and language, in this sense, become emblems of a historically-articulated identity, implicit representations of a diachronic distantiation from the regimentation of slavery and the plantation. Refinement becomes a trope with a more literal historical connotation, as an achievement from humble origins and against great odds since emancipation.

The related notions of "progress" and "self-advancement" become instrumental in understanding the operative historical significance of respectability in postemancipation Trinidad. Members of the *petite bourgeoisie* often described themselves as "self-made men" (Brereton 1979), and on these grounds sought to distinguish themselves from other social groups with their associated histories and represented diachronic distantiation – or lack thereof. On the one hand were members of the black working class and urban underclass who, as uneducated and illiterate manual laborers still speaking the "redundant patois," represented the "vulgar" vestiges of slavery: its degenerating effects. The same could be said of the decadent plantation elite, who with their unrefinement and crass materialism represented the other side of the effects of slave society (Brereton 1979). Neither ex-master nor ex-slave could boast the level of self-engendered progress or self-advancement achieved by the colored and black middle classes. Indeed, it was often the case that this emergent group believed itself to be more refined and respectable than the British emissaries circulated to the island, from whom the concept originated. After all, to what amount of "progress" or "self-advancement" could they lay claim (see Thomas 1889)? Thus, while respectability was the very ritual center of Creole society in Trinidad, this was always in terms of the historical transformation *of* but *away from* what came *before* – and herein lies the difference between this local Trinidadian valorization of respectability and the very British concept of respectability discussed earlier.

To discuss respectability in Trinidad any further requires a more systematic discussion of this "before" to which Creole society represents an "after." I will do this on two levels: presently, with regard to the semiotics of slavery, by describing the plantation and its practice of "seasoning;" then by discussing the (re)articulation of this in the postemancipation period, in the representation of slavery's effects. In the next section of this paper I will relate these two levels more systematically in the example of J.J. Thomas.

While evidence suggests that slavery in Trinidad may have been more "mild" than throughout the rest of the West Indies, plantation life in Trinidad was nevertheless what Smith (1967), after Goffman, calls a "total institution," each plantation a closed social system or unit with a coherent internal structure, hierarchical and racialized. What could be called a caste system existed, in which status and social value were calibrated to an index of racial valuation via an ascriptive model of blood, descent, and degree of mixing: those with the "whitest blood" were the most highly valued; those with the "blackest

blood" (indicated by skin color, eye color, hair texture, and facial features) were the most devalued. Coupled to the related distinctions of origin of birth (foreign-born versus creole) and place and type of work (house-slave versus field-slave), this index of ascriptive racial valuation over-determined one's position on the plantation, somewhere between master and slave.

As a total institution, the plantation reproduced itself through the internalization of these prescribed identities via the compulsory and semiotically baptismal practices of seasoning, to which a newly imported slave had to submit – in essence, a series of "[m]echanisms ... designed to effect a clean break with the past and a destruction of the [slave's] old self so that a new set of attitudes – a new 'identity' – can be imposed" (Smith 1967:230). Beginning with the horrific Middle Passage, and through the rigors of seasoning (e.g., systematic docketing, numbering, and standardized dress, but also calculated physical as well as psychological violence in the form of beatings, acts of renaming, and separation from loved ones), the African was ritually incorporated as a slave on the plantation, inscribed in body and mind with an entire regime of meanings and values, "in effect reborn into a new social system" (Smith 1967:231). It was this practice of seasoning, its precision and repleteness, that motivated – and haunted – representations of slavery in the post-emancipation period.

Here we move to the second point, where plantation seasoning and its representation constituted a discursive axle around which the historical imagination of slavery churned. On the one hand, belief in the "degenerative effects" engendered by seasoning served as fodder for debates regarding the educability of ex-slaves, reinforcing the view that, while physically liberated from the plantation, blacks might never escape the more entrenched internalized consequences (Wood 1969). Later beliefs regarding the degeneracy of the elite plantocracy and its incapacity to fully enter Creole society after abolition – beliefs held by both the "progressive" British colonial administration and the island's middle class – similarly suggest the power these imagined consequences of slavery and seasoning exercised in Creole society (Brereton 1979; see Hodgson 1838:76; Thomas 1889).

Ideologies about the French patois spoken on the plantation, and later by ex-slaves and their descendants in the postemancipation period, illustrate the persuasiveness of this imagination. Discourse, in this gesture, articulated the "degenerative effects" of slavery quasi-linguistically: the patois was the trans-historic contagion through which slavery continued to exercise its intellectually degrading, morally debasing forces. That the English-based Creole – or "bad English" – was increasingly noticed in Trinidad as English, more and more, occupied public policy, only exacerbated these perceptions. While it had been the contention of planters during slavery that the French-based patois found on the plantation was the outcome of the admixture of African and Western elements – distortions caused by a barbaric and childlike mind trying

to grasp a superior language (the so-called "baby-talk theory": see Alleyne 1985:160; Decamp 1971) – different interpretations of the extant patois emerged in the postemancipation period. According to one conspiracy theory, the patois was intentionally fabricated by slave owners for slaves as a means to "degrad[e] their own intellect," thus "retain[ing] them in the most deplorable mental darkness ... to prevent their emancipating themselves" (Hodgson 1838:121-22). Other theories – e.g., the so-called "deficit theory" (Alleyne, 1985; Morgon, 1994) – argued that the hardships of slavery had stripped and warped the minds of blacks and even their (freed) children: the persistence of the French-based patois in the postemancipation period, along with the emergence of an English-based creole, was seen as overwhelming evidence for this theory (Buscher 1969).

First found among abolitionists – from whom the words above are taken – these representations of the patois' *(trans)historical* dimensions quickly diffused among colonial policy-makers: the patois became a sign of history (a time of degeneracy), but insofar as policy-makers mobilized around it, taking stances toward it, it became, as well, a sign in history – a privileged site for historical action. For example, representations like these gained currency with the Inspector of Schools in Trinidad. In an 1859 report, after briefing the reader on the impediment of the patois for the intellectual improvement of the Negro mind (and thus the required grammatical remedy found in the English language, coupled with the prudence of time), the Inspector writes that,

> [t]he minds of these little creatures are not apt at learning, for although not deficient in natural intelligence ... The chances are ... that its better tendencies and dispositions of self-reliance have been cowed and kept down by harsh treatment and repeated flogging. There are still existing among our present traits too many examples of *the ancient degraded character engendered by slavery*, but this will always be found accompanied by the absence of Education, and it will be many years probably before the influence which slavery had upon the African labourer will be entirely eradicated from the dispositions and habits become altered for the better [emphasis mine]. (*Report of the Inspector of Schools in Trinidad*, quoted in Gordon 1963:65-66)

Here, the patois was valorized as a naturalized audible mark of the "ancient degraded character engendered by slavery," and the very impediment to the "civilizing mission" of the British. It was a "rabble," the scouring of Babel which through a transhistoric and intentional artifice hampered the educability of its speakers: slavery, not Africa, was blamed for the shortcomings of the colonial administration.

Ridding the island of the patois, thwarting its effects, became the express aim of education and public policy. "Teachers in patois-speaking districts were urged to 'tackle resolutely' the difficulties caused by its use" (Brereton 1979:164). Laws were promulgated outlawing the speaking of patois in pub-

lic – for it was the tongue of sedition and rioting – and barring it from the courts of law – for it was the idiom of rumor, perjury, and obscurity of mind. Patois, and through it the mechanics of slavery, were condemned as "virile" elements admitting irrationality in the labor market: when it came to labor contracts, the creole word simply could not be taken at face value – it had no honor, no respectability.

To recall the contrary movement by which the English language was simultaneously highly valued, standardized and commoditized, we can then see how, through legal and educational policy and artifice, a situation in Trinidad approximating a prestige-laden linguistic continuum was instituted in the later half of the nineteenth century, becoming integral to the emergence of a society ordered by class distinctions, but with historical roots in the plantation. To be sure, the linguistic situation in Trinidad at this time might best be described as "multilingual" following Mervyn Alleyne (1985), in which multiple standard and non-standard linguistic varieties (and norms) coincide. On the other hand, the pervasiveness of social valuations and linguistic ideologies attached to linguistic codes created a situation in Trinidad in which language forms were literally graded on a scale of prestige, from least prestigious (the French-based patois) to most prestigious (British English). The distance from one end of the continuum to other was such that a high degree of speaker awareness obtained regarding the two polar codes – *especially when we consider them in light of their ethnohistorical significances.*

It is important, then, to examine the ethnohistorical dimensions of this prestige-laden linguistic continuum, in which each pole of the continuum was not just about prestige but tacked down as a sign of the times. That is, we must grasp the larger cultural milieu in which linguistic use of each polar linguistic code was regimented by a local conception of respectability, doubling operatively as a schema of diachrony. Speaking standard English (particularly, British-sounding or literary English) in Trinidad obtained high valuations exactly because it tropically embodied a maximal, self-achieved distantiation from the days and ways of slavery, a maximal respectability. As we shall see in the next section, this was especially *and prototypically* the case when the speaker of English simultaneously embodied the more marked signs of the plantation, namely skin color. Indeed, the figure of a black person eloquently speaking English in Creole society was exactly the prototype of maximal distantiation, maximal refinement, hence maximal "progess" – recall the butler qua schoolmaster in the Dame Lorine masquerade. On the other hand, patois was the lowest prestige form in creole society exactly because it schematically represented diachronic stagnancy, a lack of "progress" or "self-advancement," the pernicious consequences of seasoning. Located in the emergent class distinctions of the postemancipation period, as it were, Creole society's prestige-laden linguistic continuum had one foot planted in the ideologies of achievement and egalitarianism, and one foot planted in the racial-

ist, blood- and body-based continuum operative in the time of slavery, to which it had to be reconciled.

Yet, if the plantation fixed one permanently and ascriptively to this blood-based continuum, it was the perceived flexibility of Creole society's linguistic continuum in relation to this racialized continuum that enabled a discourse of "achievement," "progress," and "self-advancement" in the postemancipation period. Indeed, cultivation and civilization in Trinidad were understood quite literally – though tropically – as the supercession of the patois by English over time since the event of emancipation. The rise of English on the island became the primary measure by which the overall remove of society from the vagaries (and dangers) of slavery could be gauged. Thus, for example, it was with satisfaction that, in 1880, the Inspector of Schools remarked in his annual report on,

> the use of the corrupt local jargon called "Creole" among the Trinidad born portion of the population. 10 or 12 years ago no child belonging to the lower classes born in the island spoke English except in school, and it was a rare thing to hear English spoken in the streets. Now the use of English is the rule, and though the Creole patois is still too often heard, its days are evidently drawing to a close. (quoted in Brereton 1979:165)

As valorized forms, English and the patois became simultaneously (ethno)historical functions, or as Parmentier (1985) writes, "signs of the times:" the patois of the ebbing and fading-from-view times of slavery; English of the present and future-to-come – an entering into the diameter of respectability. The black and colored middle classes, in this capacity, became the living embodiment of both times, both places, and a maximal dynamic transformation across them. In Trinidad, they were progress embodied.

AN ANALYSIS OF J.J. THOMAS: A PROTOTYPE OF RESPECTABILITY IN TRINIDAD

> The stern and cruelly logical doctrine, that a Negro had no rights which white men were bound to respect, was in full blast and practical exemplification. Yet amidst it all, and despite of it all, this gifted fugitive conquered his way into the Temple of Knowledge, and became eminent as an orator, a writer, and a lecturer on political and general subjects. Hailed abroad as a prodigy, and received with acclamation into the brotherhood of intelligence, abstract justice and moral congruity demanded that such a man should no longer be subject to the shame and abasement of social, legal, and political proscription. (Thomas 1889:139)

The above epigraph was written by J.J. Thomas (ca. 1840-89) in praise of Frederick Douglass, but may as well served to narrate his own life. In this section I relate the person, writings, and voice of Thomas to the broader milieu of respectability. Here, we see that respectability was a more complicated thing

than previously alleged, having been caught up in the political complexities of history and its representation. In this regard, we can think of J.J. Thomas as a prototype of an ambivalent but respectable, educated black man (and member of the *petite bourgeoisie*) in late-nineteenth-century Trinidad, himself a sign of history – like Douglass, an exemplar of the self-achievement that was possible for a black man – but also a sign in history, in that he became a standard to be emulated by others in Creole society (Brereton 1977).

Teaching in and attaining education through the normal schools was one of the few means for blacks in Trinidad to achieve a respectable occupational status. This was certainly the case for J.J. Thomas, who as the son of ex-slaves of "unmixed" African descent was regarded as fully black by society's standards. Thomas graduated from a local normal school in 1860 and quickly climbed the ranks in Trinidad's educational system. Regarded as the outstanding teacher of that era, Thomas was appointed in 1870 on recommendation of Governor Gordon to the post of secretary to the Board of Education and the College Council, effectively putting him in charge of the two boys' secondary schools on the island. Later, toward the end of his life, Thomas became headmaster of the San Fernando Borough School. J.J. Thomas was more widely known on the island, however, for his social, literary, and scholarly feats: he lectured on education and submitted numerous commentaries on public policy; he co-founded the Trinidad Athenaeum, a literary and debating society; he penned the introduction to *Free Mulatto*, a work by J.B. Philips; he translated Bordes's *Histoire de la Trinidad*; he was editor of the *Trinidad Monthly* as well as the *Review*; as a scholar of language, Thomas studied, spoke, and wrote French, English, Greek, and Latin, in addition to the French creole of his childhood (Brereton 1977, 1979:91-95; Buscher 1969).

J.J. Thomas's acclaim spanned beyond Trinidad. Two of his major scholarly works were well received in London, and circulated throughout the Empire. The first, his *Creole Grammar* (1869), was a codification of the grammar of Trinidad's patois, for which Thomas was elected to the Philological Society of London. His second major work was a reply to a defamatory travel account written by the British essayist, James Anthony Froude. In *The English in the West Indies* (1887), Froude argued that the inferior intellect of Africans and their descendants in the West Indies severely limited the degree of self-government the British Crown might prudently grant the colonies: at most, Froude argued, they should remain Crown Colonies. In his *Froudacity* (1889), Thomas crafted the most comprehensive rebuttal to this text produced in the West Indies, becoming one of the first early black voices from the Caribbean to strike back at the Empire. In fact, both works – *Froudacity* and *Creole Grammar* – were heavily influenced by the early Negritude and back-to-Africa movement, and Thomas's writings can be understood as a presage to the independence and nationalist movements that would arise in the West Indies in the twentieth century (Lewis 1990).

J.J. Thomas's life and writings illustrate the ambivalent nature of being respectable in postemancipation Trinidad, the ambiguities of race and value among members of the colored and black middle classes. On the one hand, Thomas – perhaps even more than the representative British "birds of passage" (it was Thomas in fact who coined this phrase) – believed in the ideologies of the liberal era, of "progress" and the "civilising-mission" brought to the island by the British. After all, it was Christianity and education that had rendered a once "barbarous African Race" into a potential bearer of "Civilisation." According to Thomas (1969:166), the rapid "moral upliftment" of ex-slaves after emancipation "bore glorious testimony to the humanising effects which the religion of charity, clutched at and grasped in fragments, and understood with childlike incompleteness, had produced within these suffering bosoms." In this regard, the "civilized" values and customs of the British were to be emulated, the disciplining and regulatory effect of Christianity and English grammar tools to be deployed – the historical development of the race was likened to and embodied in the individual maturation of the child. On the other hand, particularly toward the end of his life, Thomas became one of the main proponents of racial pride on the island, arguing that one's black blood and historical roots in slavery should not be forgotten but commemorated (perhaps as fondness for one's childhood) (Brereton 1977). As Brereton points out, the fact that Thomas was "of *pure* African descent and *looks* it," as one newspaper, *The Chronicle*, reported (in Thomas 1969:28), was a common topic of public discussion and ever-present theme in Thomas's writings. As a teacher in the schools, Thomas had ample opportunity to observe firsthand a phenomenon he called "flunkeyism," the internalized self-contempt and self-hatred of blacks in the West Indies, a pernicious "pre-occupation of the skin" which he argued hampered attempts to fully advance to civilization (Brereton 1979:105). Thomas's work was in many ways aimed at curbing these feelings, convincing young persons of the "incorrect tinge" of their own merit; racial pride was thus the motivating theme of both *Froudacity* and *Creole Grammar*.

Alexander's (1977) work on racial ideologies among Jamaica's colored middle class reveals a similar ambivalence toward race and value. On the one hand, Alexander discerned the belief that "a man is what he makes himself" and that race ought not to bear significance. But this belief is contravened, on the other hand, by a pervasive ideology that "the rational man who chooses his fate also contains forces over which he has no control" (Alexander 1977:425). Alexander argues that this "ambivalence over the relative importance of achieved and ascribed characteristics" results in a conflicted situation in which the "definition of race" is distinguished from the "hierarchical evaluation of race" – the former understood to be communicated through essentialized "white-" and "black-blood" and degree of "mixing;" the latter, however, understood to be "the result of a historical association of race with social

dominance and style of life: "being white [is] superior to being black because it brings advantages in the society. White is also superior to black because it is associated with a superior style of life; white is civilized, black is uncivilized" (Alexander 1977:428).

Yet, in Trinidad, it was exactly this historical association of the "evaluation of racial hierarchy" with civilization and style of life, with achievement and true "progress," that allowed persons like Thomas to resolve the conflicts of race and value. Respectability, in this light, played an important role, for it was through the peculiar form of respectability operative in Trinidad at the time that the two moments of J.J. Thomas were reconciled. In effect, Thomas's belief in the merits of (English/Christian) civilization and lifestyle and his simultaneous racial pride construct two grounds upon which the trope of diachronic distantiation, or remove, maximally appears (bridging these grounds). On the one hand, one celebrated one's humble and devalued past; on the other hand, one celebrated from advantage of having escaped it. And, this was exactly the point, in that the degree of escape pointed directly to one's own degree of self-discipline, self-motivation, and self-advancement despite the odds, and thus to one's self-worth. This, more than anything, was the defining feature of respectability in any late-Victorian milieu (reconsider the ideologies of individualism, egalitarianism, and liberalism). As Brereton (1977:24) writes of the public understanding of Thomas's achievements: "the wonder was a 'pure black' could write a book and get it accepted by learned Europeans; Thomas proved a point, or disproved a theory." Progress, in Trinidad, was achieved through historical tropes of temporal refinement that celebrate the value of one's blood and historic roots in slavery, but from a safe distance, that is, having already attained another status, respectability, where one's dark history is understood to be formative of this respectability.

For example, while there was much debate in Trinidad among black and colored members of the *petite bourgeoisie* regarding the celebration of the anniversary of emancipation in the West Indies – many arguing that it should not be celebrated, as it might dredge up the miseries of slavery, making manifest dormant prejudices – the broader consensus of the community was that, to the contrary, celebration would instead provide an opportunity to demonstrate the "progress" that freedom had enabled. This reached a zenith in 1888 with the Emancipation Jubilee, commemorating fifty years since abolition. The *San Fernando Gazette*, coming down in favor of the commemoration, may have summed up the respectable black and colored position, the position which J.J. Thomas widely advocated, by printing that:

> [Support for the commemoration] demonstrated that there was yet a spark of manly independence left alive in the downtrodden race, and that with the advance of education ... they may yet reach that crowning point of civilisation which is marked by an absence of that servile shame which acknowledges no race, no country, no ambition. (quoted in Brereton 1979:108)

In other words, neither "flunkeyism" nor complete forgetting, but a prideful remembering of slavery and emancipation, was a valued step toward the future. At another level, that of distance, commemoration was necessary to foreground a full refinement to the "crowning point of civilization."

J.J. Thomas's concern with the patois similarly illustrates this historical imagining. According to his biographer, it was

> largely for utilitarian reasons that Thomas composed his *Grammar* – to give to those who had not learned Creole as their native language a better knowledge of it, and to dispel once and for all the notion that it is "only mispronounced French," a form of speech proper merely to illiterate peasants. (Buscher 1969:vii)

According to Thomas, however, a grammar of the local patois was necessary in connection with its "bearing upon two cardinal agencies in our social system; namely, Law and Religion" (Buscher 1969:iv). Far from idealistic, these reasons tapped into lesser-of-the-two-evils logic: a working knowledge of Creole grammar would on the one hand facilitate more accurate translations of evidence given in court by patois speakers (who had only recently been granted the right to testify in patois); on the other hand, a grammar would be useful for priests and pastors intending to preach the Gospel to largely patois-only congregations. Yet, if Thomas advocated knowledge of the patois in connection to law and religion, this was a matter altogether different for the educational system. Thomas wrote in his introduction that he would save the topic of education for another occasion, at which time he would write more particularly on "the nullifying effects of the patois on English instruction among us" (Buscher 1969:iv). Thus, while Thomas took enormous care to present Trinidad's French Creole as grammatically regulated, consistent, and sophisticated – this "to prove that the Africans are not, after all, the dolts and intellectual sucklings that some would have the world believe them" (Buscher 1969:121) – he remained committed to prescriptions proffered by the likes of the *Sterling Report* and *Ideas for Curriculum*: mental culture or cultivation through education and the civilizing effects of the English language.[3]

3. Thomas's treatment of Creole proverbs is interesting in this respect. Thomas (1869:120) wrote that "[the Creole proverb] has been the instruction and delight of the Negro race in all ages and stages of its existence ... We prize them as beautiful no less than intelligent deductions from the teachings of Nature, that free, infallible, and sublime volume, which Providence has displayed to all men, *but more distinctly to those who have no other revelation and guidance*" (emphasis mine). For Thomas, creole proverbs were a sort of implicit or natural tool for educational instruction. However, while this might present a means of nursing a population beyond the initial stages of civilization (what Thomas calls the "lock-jaw" phase, following an African proverb and his extended metaphor of racial development as child maturation), more artificial and sophisticated means would need to be applied: an educational system.

Though exposed to the French-based Creole since birth, J.J. Thomas chose not to speak it, and instead found inspiration for his own writings and parlance in the "high literature" of New World blacks (like Frederick Douglass, Hyland Garnet, Professor Crummel, Edward Blyden, Dr. Tanner, and Mrs. S. Harper), whose "philosophical subtlety of reasoning on grave questions finds effective expression in a prose of singular precision and vigour" (Thomas 1889:259). Here, Thomas's appreciation of the moral fortitude of "mental culture" meshed with his pride in the "African Race" and its "progress." Thomas argued that the precedence set by people like Blyden, with his Negritude and unity through back-to-Africa convictions, provided a ground for the further "upliftment of the race," as a vanguard or "potential agency to collect and adjust [blacks throughout the world] into the vast engine essential for executing the true purposes of the *civilised African Race*" (Thomas 1889:260). Thomas wholeheartedly believed in the "civilizing-mission," only he foresaw the role that self-educated, self-disciplined, and self-organized black men might play in carrying forth the project that had been started by the British but hastily neglected. In this sense, Thomas can be seen as a precursor to Garveyism (Brereton 1977; Lewis 1990).

Froudacity, J.J. Thomas's dialogic rejoinder to Froude, was in fact written largely for these reasons. The question of constitutional reform and self-government had been broached in the West Indies – it was particularly strong in Trinidad – and as we have said, Froude used his travel account to voice a polemic against this movement, basing it on what he observed to be the inherent intellectual inferiority of blacks in the colonies (Buscher 1969:v). In *Froudacity*, Thomas argued that shortcomings in Trinidad might better be pinned not on the inferior intellect of blacks, nor on the debasing heritage of slavery, but rather on the ineptitude and mismanagement of governors sent to Trinidad by the Colonial Office, the birds of passage who had forsaken their civilizing duties (Buscher:vi). Rather, Thomas argued that if progress was made in Trinidad since emancipation, it was owing to the voluntarism of the island's black and colored population:

> In spite of adverse legislation, and in spite of the scandalous subservience of certain Governors to the Colonial Legislation, the Race can point with thankfulness and pride to the visible records of their success wherever they have permanently sojourned. (Thomas 1969:255)

These visible records, of course, were the respectable blacks found in the West Indies. A degree of voluntaristic self-government, coupled with a pride in one's race and its history, was the logical step to engender further progress of this kind.

The argument made through our cursory analysis of Thomas is that respectability and its emblematics in Trinidad earned their meaningfulness exactly along these imaginings of local historicity, that is, as located

representations of particular diachronic process (signs of history): in this case, as progress and refinement. In this imagining, two historical moments are tropically related, one temporally calibrated to the past or the "before," to the racialized, ascriptive-distinctions of slavery; one temporally calibrated to the present and future, to the possible "after" of Creole society and its distinctions of achievement and mental culture. In this regard, it is not unimportant that Thomas himself was black: when related to the less epidermal emblematics of identity in currency in Creole society (language, manners, marriage, etc.), Thomas became the very icon of respectability in Trinidad (both a sign in and of history).

To assess the efficacy of *this* form of respectability in Trinidad as a sign of and in history – a privileged site for social and historical action – I turn now, by way of conclusion, to look below and beyond the diameter of respectability, to reputations. To what degree can reputation in Trinidad be viewed likewise, as an imagining of the meaningfulness and value of local histories or diachronic process? How do the historical imaginings constitutive of reputations conflict with and contest the imaginings constitutive of respectability?

BELOW THE DIAMETER

Despite efforts to render Trinidad and its ex-slave population respectable through education, the English language, and Christian morals, and in contradistinction to the "progress" of the black and colored middle classes, a largely uneducated and unskilled black working class, or "underclass," persisted on the island toward the end of the nineteenth century, crowding the cities of Port-of-Spain and San Fernando. After emancipation, many slaves had fled to the cities taking on work as domestics, porters, petty traders, dockworkers, janitors, cabdrivers, hucksters, and artisans. When the urban labor market tightened in the 1860s, however, this underclass found itself predominantly unemployed and at the source of a wave of petty crime, gambling, prostitution, and generally, "public indecency" (Alonso 1990).

The *jamettes* scandalized society with rowdy, obscene, and indecent behavior. As one scholar explains, this black underclass took pleasure in violating the more sacred mores of Creole society, in debasing its members' respectability (Pearse 1956). To do so was constitutive of "baadness," a highly valued thing for the *jamettes*, and in many ways the exact opposite of respectability (Alonso 1990:192). Indeed, with their vulgar behavior, the *jamettes* represented such an affront to respectable society

that a series of Vagrancy Laws were drafted in the late 1860s and throughout the 1870s.[4]

My account of reputation is necessarily cursory and draws heavily from an excellent article by A.M. Alonso (1990), who makes a similar, but distinct, argument. My primary concern here is not with reputation *per se*; rather, I am interested in reputation insofar as it became entangled with the diameter of respectability, in a sense, as a "contrary system." In this regard, the historic emergence of the *jamettes* and their contrary system of valuation can be understood, in part, as a reversal of the historical imaginings constitutive of the respectability of the color-marked middle classes. There are three points that need to be made.

First, we need to relate the island's carnival and its transformations in the wake of emancipation to the increasing visibility it provided for the *jamettes* in the public eye (e.g. the eye of the newspapers, its society columns, its opinion and editorial pages). Originally brought to Trinidad by French planters, Carnival increasingly fell under the dominion of the *jamettes*. With the exodus of liberated slaves to the cities following emancipation, the barrack yards behind the houses of respectable persons became spaces for hidden masquerades and wild dances, where *jamettes* parodied conditions on the plantation and celebrated freedom. Over time, these celebrations moved from the barracks to the streets, in full view of society, and became connected to the yearly Carnival celebrated between Christmas and Easter. By the 1870s and 1880s, it was possible to speak nominally of a *jamette* version of the festival (Van Koningsbruggen 1997).

Carnival, for the *jamettes*, became on the one hand a celebration of both freedom from bondage and the underworld of slave life – of identities valorized (often secretly) within slave quarters. With their dramatic qualities and

4. Besides the Vagrancy Laws, a series of laws were promulgated to oppress certain "obscene" customs. An 1868 Ordinance outlawed the worship of "African" obeah, an offense punishable by jailing and flogging (Pearse 1956). African wakes too, especially those of Shango cults and Shouters, with their loud moaning and wailing in the patois, were condemned, considered "lewd," "orgies of the dead," and, according to Carter's *San Fernando Gazette*, "one of the lingering relics of a slavish and barbarous age" (quoted in Brereton 1979:156). In 1883, a Music Bill was introduced to prohibit drumming and the playing of other "primitive" instruments in public spaces. An editorial at the time lambasted the "primitive" dancing that accompanied this drumming as, "the most disgusting obscenity pure and simple, being an imitation more or less vigorous and lustful by the male and female performers of the motions of the respective sexes whilst in the act of coition" (in *Fair Play*, quoted in Brereton 1979:160-61). "Female depravity," the Inspector of Prisons had advised some years before, "is a sure test of general decadence in any state" (quoted in Brereton 1979:122).

infamous "rituals of reversal" (DaMatta 1980; Bakhtin 1984), the masques[5] of Carnival proffered mediums through which an otherwise lumpen underclass was transformed into a highly differentiated class of "stickmen, singers, drummers, dancers, prostitutes (another meaning of *jamette*), *bad johns* (swashbucklers), *matadors* (madames), *dunois* (*jamette* rowdys), *makos* (panders), obeahman (practitioners of magic) and corner boys" (Cowley 1996:72). On the other hand, the masquerades of Carnival provided a medium for the *jamettes* to ridicule the prudish values of respectability and its heady notion of high mental culture, along the lines of what Bakthin (1984) has called a Rabelesian reduction to the "bodily lower stratum" as figured through sexually inverted and perverted bodies, in other words, the grotesque. Brereton, for example, gives the following description of *Canboulay*, the procession commencing Jamette Carnival in Trinidad:

> Bands of prostitutes roamed the streets of Port of Spain making "indecent gestures" and singing "lewd songs." There were traditional masques with explicit sexual themes. The most notorious was the Pissenlit (or Pisani), literally "wet the bed," usually translated as "stinker." It was played by masked men dressed as women in long transparent nightdresses; it involved much sexual horseplay and was accompanied by obscene songs in patois. The jamet bands included both men and women. The women would generally be prostitutes, active or retired, dressed in traditional Martinique costume, always masked. At some times, and in some places, they exposed their breasts. The men were elaborately dressed, and would dance and strut through the streets, making suggestive comments to bystanders and propositioning women. Transvestitism and accompanying horseplay were very common, whether in the Pissenlit, or individually. (Brereton 1979:171)

Through Carnival, *jamettes* risked and won reputations. Wilson (1969:74) describes reputation, like respectability, as "both a cumulation of personal worth and an assemblage of signs of that worth." Unlike respectability, the signs of reputation were measured in increments of virility and "baadness." The grandness (and costliness) of one's masque, the intricacy and absurdity of one's masquerades, became emblems of this inner virility or "baadness." Other non-standard and outlawed practices like stickfighting and wit in kalinda – a verbal art later developed into calypso – became means of winning this status. For example, organized into rival gangs and "warring kingdoms,"

5. Though writing on Carnival in the twentieth century, Crowley (1956:194) distinguishes *masque* from *mask*, an important distinction for the historical component of this argument: The word "masque" indicates that the band wears costumes based upon a theme from history, current events, films, carnival tradition, from the imagination, or from a combination of these. It is thus differentiated from "mask," the covering of the face and/or head sometimes worn by the masques. In Trinidad the expression *playin mas'* referred to the "masque" or masquerade.

kalinda stickfighters roamed the streets of the cities engaging in mock battles consisting of duels with enchanted sticks to the beat of rowdy songs that "boasted of the 'baadness' of the band's stickfighters, who were variously characterized as quintessential 'outsiders,' as 'outlaws' or as 'devils'" (Alonso 1990:101-2). The victor of the battle was he who could wield the more vicious stick, withstand the more deadly assault, and make the more witty turn of phrase. Through these means, the cities were divided into distinct territories for the duration of Carnival, ruled and conquered by celebrated kalinda "warriors" of the underworld: champion stick-fighters, or "batonniers," who commandeered enough reputation to reign king of their district.

Kalinda songs reinforced what distinguished Jamette Carnival from other social events or milieus in Trinidad: they were dominated by the *public* use of patois. As the ubiquitous language of Carnival, the patois attained a highly valued and celebrated status in the late nineteenth century. The passage from the everyday to the carnivalesque was, for instance, figured tropically by a code-switch in acceptable public discourse from English to the patois, marking the commencement of the festival as a descent into the heroic and *historic* "underworld" of patois-speaking black kings, queens, and batonniers. As a publicly-recognized shift in code, from the "high" English of mental culture to the "low" creole of manual/slave labor, this spatial/corporeal trope was (besides being a Bakhtinian reduction to the bodily lower stratum) a trope of public time, conjuring up plantation temporality and its "seasoning."

Second, as a cumulation of signs, reputation in Trinidad constituted an imagination of the meaningfulness and value of diachronic process that conflicted and contested with those of respectability. On the one hand, reputations incorporated its own image of local histories since slavery. On the other hand, this image stood out as a sort of reverse image of respectability (Alonso 1990), as such presenting a parody of its historical presumptions. For respectable Creole society, as we have seen, the shift over time from the patois to English tropically figured a diachronic refinement or self-advancement, a time of progress and a space of the mind and its mental culture. However, with reputations the tropic figuration is an *image* of reversal, and a competing (indeed inverted) valuation is revealed. From this perspective (that of Jamette Carnival), a shift from the English to the patois obtains ethnohistorical significance as tropically enacting a sort of diachrony of the grotesque, a parodic form of time and a corporeal space in which history is constructed as a process of bodily perversion or distortion:

(respectability) patois	→ English	=	diachronic refinement: time of progress/space of mind
(reputations) English	→ patois	=	diachronic reduction to grotesque: parodic time/space of body

It is interesting to which degree the highly valued understanding of the patois by the *jamettes* during Carnival inverts the devalued understanding of the patois found in respectable Creole society. As closely associated to the body, and the distorted body at that, though opposed to English which was associated with the educated mind, the patois was understood by Creole society to be at once a product of Africa, a product of the harsh physical labor of slavery, and a product of the corporeal punishment administered on the plantation. A calculus of the grotesque was applied, in which the body had cowed the mind. One observer in Trinidad, for example, likened the patois spoken by ex-slaves to the shrieks of animals, loathing their "execrable accomplishments" and "stentorian organs of noise," given to incessant "rows" and fits of "yelling and bawling, whistling and singing" (Day 1852:61-64). Even persons like Thomas, who argued against the notion that the patois was a mispronunciation of the French, found occasion to remark that "[a]s Creole is an uncultured speech; whatever of such euphonic refinements it contains is the result of accident and mechanical imitation" (Thomas 1869:13) (where "mechanical imitation" was associated with instinctual or animalistic propensities: a lack of free will; nature rather than culture). The point, however, was that Creole was understood in respectable society as a grotesque version of "proper language" (as is so often the fate of dialects under conditions of linguistic standardization).

Yet, it was exactly this grotesqued/corporeal understanding of the patois that constituted the virility and "baadness" of reputations for *jamettes*, literally conceived as power dwelling in the body. To speak patois was self-evidence of this "baad" internal constitution. Note, for example, the relation between the *jamettes*' "baad" constitution and the "bad" constitution that Creole society posited for the patois speaker, where the topography of the first word is literally an expanded, grotesqued version of the second, but in which the overall judgments of both forms are re-valuated. Here, the ethnohistorical assumptions are structurally reversed: one is not becoming more refined over time, but literally expansive in space – exaggerated speech (via the bending and stretching of grammar rules),[6] is valued over the use of correct, precise speech.

6. One group of batonniers, the only English-speaking group, even though it was "bad English" (i.e., English Creole), called themselves the "Free Grammar of Corbieue Town." Indeed, with the spread of public education and after a substantial amount of relexification of the French patois (creating an English Creole in Trinidad), respectable citizens found themselves increasingly appalled by the distorted use of the English language – that is, for uses not within the range of the prescribed precision-in-denotation. Van Koningsbruggen, for instance, recalls the surprise and horror of a teacher in a Trinidadian secondary school at the turn of the century: "Boys and young men spend hours poring over dictionaries, simply to try to master the meaning of words which for length may be measured by the yard" (Rohler, quoted in Van Koningsbruggen1997:44).

That the patois was associated to the (distorted) body, and historically with the plantation, slavery, and Africa, was in this case a *good* thing: it provided powerful linkages to the darker, more magical forces that existed in the time of slavery, to enchanted words, to obeah, possession, the devil, and the African motherland (Alonso 1990). To be sure, these were words "uncultivated" and "unrefined," but as such, they were words that retained their potency, yet to be discharged of their immanent force. The "mounting" of batonniers and their kalinda sticks by the slave spirits (obeah) provides an interesting example of this immanent force of the patois. Warriors with the greatest reputations were those who had the power to speak enchanted words inciting spirits to mount their sticks and enter their bodies, conferring upon them strength, agility, and aversion to pain: "Whenever they sang, 'Djab sé yô nèg' [the devil is a negro] they were infused with a satanic spirit which actually made them immune to pain; they could walk into battle, and meet sticks, stones, conch shells and even daggers, as it were anaesthetized" (Mitto Simpson, quoted in Alonso 1990:109). This devilish quality was a historically-constituted virility, and it was the means by which one garnered reputations.

The third and last point involves the critical stance toward respectability taken by reputations. For example, when understood in its parodic modality, the Dame Lorine masquerade can be seen as reconfiguring the imputed diachrony of the colored and black middle classes. The historical emergence of "respectables" is converted into something not of celebration, but parody, invoking a negative valuation of respectabilty and its *historic* pretensions. The diachronic transformation of butlers/field slaves into schoolmasters is instead schematized as a process of emasculation: the schoolmaster has forsaken his masculinity over time, the potency and virility immanent on the plantation and transhistorically embodied and conferred in and through "black blood" and the patois. The English language and the Christian faith, as the two most important signs of respectability in Trinidad, then obtained significance as emblems of the feminine, the impotent and sterile, opposed to the virility of the *jamettes*. The respectable stance of celebrating one's historical roots, but from a safe distance – the distance afforded by having escaped it – is re-valuated as, on the one hand, an emasculating distance, and on the other hand, proximity to one's historical roots as virility. The former, of course, was projected upon the respectability of the black and colored *petite bourgeoisie*, the latter reserved for the *jamettes*, as constitutive of their reputations.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have tried to show how the dual framework of respectability and reputation might better be understood as folk concepts that, when exam-

ined in their sociohistorical contexts of use, incorporate both representations of diachronic process and valuations of these represented histories. In this sense, I have argued against understandings that hold respectability and reputation to simply be analytic concepts whose dual nature can be grasped through synchronic analyses. Rather, to understand these concepts fully, I argued, one must examine them in relation to local historical imaginings. Crucially, respectability and reputation in Trinidad need to be understood as operators in a much larger politics of historical representations. In postemancipation Trinidad this meant considering the way each incorporated both a representation and a valuation of diachronic process since the days and ways of slavery: how each related the historic transformation from the time before emancipation to the time after emancipation, the time of slavery to the "present" of Creole society. Respectability, as we saw, represented the diachronic process of certain members of Creole society (the black and colored middle classes) as one of progress and refinement, a self-ascribed positive valuation. Reputation, on the other hand, inverted this representation, re-constituting this progress as one of emasculation, yielding a decidedly negative valuation. Structurally, then, the lack of progress on the part of the *jamette* underclass, then, was re-presented with a positive valuation, as virility and "baadness."

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