

Liming in Trinidad:
The Art of Doing Nothing

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“Yu know why I love my kinda people? Is because nobody could cut no ole style on dem. Dey could rise to any occasion, any time, any place.”

– *Paul Keens-Douglas*

This article sets out to explore the dynamic interrelations of systems of morality in an urban setting in Trinidad.¹ It is shown how ethics of “respectability” and ethics of “reputation”, familiar from the anthropological literature on the Caribbean, interact in different kinds of contexts. Instead of regarding the two moralities as properties of classes or persons, they are seen as two sides of the same coin, as sets of norms and values which may be contradictory and in theory mutually exclusive, but to which every Trinidadian must relate. The focus is on the relationship of the institution of *liming* – the art of idling – to other aspects of Trinidadian society, notably those relating to waged work and the production of national symbols.

Two narrow channels less than ten kilometres wide separate Trinidad from the South American continent. Like its neighbour Venezuela, Trinidad is an oil-rich country, and the material standard of living is far superior to the average of the area. Indeed, Trinidad has been among the most prosperous territories of the West Indies for a century and a half. In the 1850s the island was the beneficiary of a sugar boom, and later in the 19th century the cocoa industry attracted thousands of workers from less fortunate islands in the British West Indies. In the latter half of the 1970s, oil prices were so high, and economic growth so spectacular, that prime minister Eric Williams declared, in 1977, that “Money is no problem.” Towards the end of the somewhat rougher 1980s, Trinidadians reminisced about their recent past, telling

stories about people who went to Barbados to buy onions and others who went on weekend trips to visit relatives in New York. As a matter of fact, even blue-collar workers could occasionally afford a trip abroad, a private car and a TV set during the oil boom. Although the standard of living has declined steadily during the 1980s, The GNP is still comparable to that of industrialized European countries; in other respects, however, Trinidad must be regarded as a part of the Third World.

Despite its physical proximity to the Spanish Main, Trinidad is not a Latin American country. It is true that the island was discovered by Columbus during his third voyage in 1498; it is also beyond doubt that it remained a Spanish colony for three centuries, but Trinidad received little attention and remained an obscure backwater in the Spanish empire.

Cultural, political and economic links with Spain were severed rapidly from the early 1780s to the end of that century, and the Spanish period was to leave little trace except in geographical names. By invitation from the colonial administration, a considerable number of French *planteurs* from neighbouring islands arrived with their slaves during the 1780s, and these immigrants brought and developed a series of cultural practices and institutions which remain core features of Trinidadian public life. The most important were the calypso and the carnival. From 1797 until independence in 1962 Trinidad was a British possession, and despite a remarkable variation in cultural influences,² it must definitely be regarded as a central part of the Caribbean cultural area.

Parameters of Contemporary Trinidad

Trinidad is the senior partner of the parliamentary republic Trinidad and Tobago. About half the population resides in the urban East-West Corridor, a densely built-up belt stretching south of the Northern Range from the western suburbs of the capital, Port of Spain, to the small town of Arima some thirty kilometres to the east. With Port of Spain as a natural hub, the urban corridor dominates public life in Trinidad. Whenever Trinidadians³ talk of their "national culture" or something supposedly "typically Trinidadian," they would never have in mind the Indo-Trinidadian villages scattered among the sugarfields of Caroni, or the remote fishing villages up north, or even the economically important oilfields in the south-west. Crucial institutions in the Trinidadian definition of public self, such as steelbands, calypso and carnival, as well as the most important economic and political institutions can be localized to Port of Spain and the surrounding area. My own field work in Trinidad (April-November, 1989) took place in this part of the island; I was based in St Augustine, twelve kilometres east of Port of Spain. The majority of the population in this area as a whole is of African origin (Negroes), but there are also a considerable number of Trinidadians of In-

dian descent (Indians). My own neighbourhood near the University of the West Indies was, as a matter of fact, a largely Indian one. As regards social rank, the area is varied, and includes respectable workers' estates and prosperous middle-class suburbs as well as squatting areas. Finally, hardly anybody (except some squatters) lives off the land in the East-West Corridor. My acquaintances included, among others, taxi drivers, journalists, clerks and other white-collar workers, university lecturers, municipal workers, shop-keepers, hustlers, industrial workers, a couple of free lance writers, and a gardener.

The extant literature on Trinidad's annual carnival is fairly extensive (Crowley 1956; Hill 1972; Johnson 1986; Stewart 1986). Some of these studies, as well as occasional writings on calypso (e.g. Rohlehr 1975; Warner 1982) and the steelband movement (e.g. Neil 1987; Simon 1975), indicate that the Black, urban working class has been – and still is – crucial in the production of the kind of shared meaning which is projected to a national level in public life in Trinidad. Insights from such studies have contributed to the perspective adopted in this article. However, my focus will be on a less conspicuous, seemingly more trivial type of activity in urban Trinidad, namely, the institution of *liming*, which refers to an extremely widespread Trinidadian activity which has hitherto hardly been dealt with by analysts.⁴

The Practices and Rules of Liming

The etymology of the word liming is obscure. It is a Trinidadian word, probably of recent origin since English has been a popular language in Trinidad for less than a century. It means, roughly, "hanging-around" – but as I shall argue, there is no exact linguistic or cultural equivalent to liming in the cultural contexts with which most of us are familiar.

The concept of liming encompasses any leisure activity entailing the sharing of food and drink, the exchange of tall stories, jokes and anecdotes etc., provided the activity has no explicit purpose beyond itself. As such, it may seem as though liming occurs in most societies. But whereas idling and inactivity are frequently seen unequivocally as shameful and slightly immoral kinds of social situations, liming is acknowledged in Trinidad as a kind of performing art; it is a kind of activity one wouldn't hesitate to indulge in proudly. In liming contexts, verbal improvisation, ingenuity and straightforward aimlessness are highly regarded, provided one follows the rules, which, however, are nearly all implicit. For my own part, it took me a great deal of time and effort to *learn how to lime*; many of my Trinidadian acquaintances would doubtless be of the opinion that I never really mastered it, despite a large number of determined attempts.

Liming is, alas, an activity not subjected to a formal set of rules. Its value to the participants is entirely contingent on the shared meaning that can be

established spontaneously.⁵ A typical lime begins when two or several acquaintances (neighbours, colleagues, relatives or simply friends) meet more or less by chance – in the street, at the grocer's, outside somebody's home, or in the rumshop. For it is impossible to lime alone: liming is inherently a social activity; it is constituted by the (minimally) dyadic relationship and cannot be reduced to the individual agent. A second necessary condition for a lime is the presence of an ambience of relaxation and leisure. Both (or all) limers should relax physically (recline in chairs, lean against walls etc.) in a manner enabling them to converse at their ease. Thirdly, the situation should assume an air of openness: a lime is in principle open to others who might want to join. Liming is, in other words, a social and public activity.

The term liming is nowadays used locally for almost any kind of unspecified leisure activity; in this analysis, I opt to restrict it conceptually to the kind of contexts outlined. Groups of people meeting in each others' living-rooms are therefore not true limers unless the context allows for the intrusion of gatecrashers.

Limes and Limers

Not just anybody can lime together. The Trinidadian term, a lime, refers not only to the activity, but also to the liming group, which is frequently an informal group of considerable duration. Very often, groups of four or five men lime together on a regular basis. In this way, liming mediates forms of social integration and differentiation not provided by professional and domestic careers. Certainly, the overlap between professional and liming careers is massive; from a structural point of view, it is beyond doubt that the correlation between class and liming milieu is high. In other respects, however, distinctions of liming relating to class are not as clearcut as one might be led to expect, and to this I will turn later.

The unemployment rate in Trinidad is high (in October, 1989, the official estimate was 22%, the real figure higher), and for many men, liming is therefore a major activity. The prototypical limer in the Trinidadian collective consciousness is a man around thirty, unemployed or irregular waged worker, living with a woman or not, resident of the eastern suburbs of Port of Spain. Groups of streetcorner limers can be observed at any time of the day in these (and structurally similar) areas; they exchange gossip and jokes, share beverages, cigarettes or ganja (marijuana) – depending on availability – while continuously on the alert for sources of financial support, be it a job or a friend. The *badjohn*, a rough and somewhat shady character in Trinidadian folklore, is a liming prototype (and a potential troublemaker) sensitively depicted in Earl Lovelace's novel *The Dragon Can't Dance* (1977), but most limers, even of the down-and-out category, are not badjohns. To hustlers, who comprise a large percentage of the urban poor,

liming is a basic activity bordering on a subsistence activity (although its frivolous character is always stressed by the agents), since it is necessary in order to obtain information about possible sources of income.

It should be emphasized that liming is not an activity restricted to members of the "lower classes," although daytime limers are usually wholly or partly unemployed. Starting in the late afternoon and lasting well beyond midnight, thousands of small groups of men gather daily at regular places along the East-West Corridor; in rumshops, at pool halls, at "recreation clubs" and in restaurants; at streetcorners, in parks and around peoples' homes. A great deal is implicitly communicated about the social identity of an individual through his liming habits. People who lime together tend to belong to the same age group, to the same rank category with regards to occupation, and the same ethnic group. Usually, they live in the same neighbourhood, and finally, liming is largely a male activity.⁶ In this way, liming covertly contributes to the reproduction of principles for social differentiation, which have significance in the division of labour, the production and reproduction of ideology, ethnic organization and domestic organization. Seen from a different point of view, to which I will turn, liming contradicts rather than confirms these social institutions.

Good Limes, Bad Limes

As already mentioned, activities resembling liming exist in most societies. A distinguishing trait of liming in urban Trinidad is the consistent application of strong and specific aesthetic criteria in ongoing evaluation of a lime. It is common to distinguish between a *good lime* and a *bad lime*. A lime is good if there is plenty of money for beverages etc., if interesting and/or amusing information flows easily between the participants, and if nobody is seriously offended. Tense and exciting games of poker, pool, dominoes or *all fours* may also add to the success of a lime. A lime can further be elevated to the category of *memorable limes* if an unexpected opportunity for enjoyment emerges in the course of liming; if somebody appears in a car and invites everybody to come and lime on the beach at Maracas or Carenage, or if somebody invites the lime to a party or a film, or if somebody knows about available women nearby, or if news arrives that there is a stickfight or a cockfight⁷ in the area – or, for that matter (in the case of liming hustlers), if a job offer appears. A bad lime, on the other hand, is characterised by boredom and true inactivity, or irritation and sour argument. "Leh we split dis scene man, dis lime doh have no juice," is a perfectly justifiable suggestion after a couple of hours of inertia. A lime with no *juice* is truly dreadful.

Not all collective leisure activities can be classified analytically as liming, although the agents themselves sometimes use the term indiscriminately, and although many non-liming activities may resemble liming both in their struc-

tural and symbolic aspects. I have mentioned that closed, private sessions can hardly be regarded analytically as liming. But there are public spaces, too, which are poorly suited for real liming. For instance, the discotheque forms an inadequate spatial framework of the art of liming; the rules of conduct are too strict, for discos involve imperatives of dancing, and the loud music makes it nearly impossible to engage in the loose, improvised conversations crucial for a good lime. Similarly, it is difficult to lime at the racecourse, unless one spends the day there in order to lime and not in order to bet on the horses (which is not at all uncommon). This is also the case as regards the activity taking place at *de gayelle*, the venue for cockfights. The beach, on the other hand, is a well suited place for liming, but this does not entail that every visit at the beach implies liming. If one goes to the beach with the family on Sunday, then one simply engages in an excursion; only if the trip takes place more or less spontaneously with a group of friends, and only if one does not initially discuss a set time for the return, is it a matter of liming. Liming presupposes, then, that no necessary activity must take place, that one communicates that one is available for whatever might happen. The important point to note here is that the liming protects the individual from the social pressures he experiences in other contexts. In this sense, the context of liming, where a man is among equals, can be regarded as a *backstage* in Goffman's (1981) sense, when compared to those social contexts which relate to domestic and professional careers – despite its being public.

Liming, then, expresses *availability* as a positive value. Being available entails that one is open to suggestions in a very wide sense. The most serious sin that can conceivably be committed by a limer, would therefore be that he tells his co-limers about his immediate commitments at work, at home etc. If a lime is good, it is not legitimate to leave it, no matter what commitments from a different frame of reference one claims to be constrained by. At best, one may make a telephone call during the lime. But one cannot leave the liming community before the social ambience declines in intensity.

Liming, as a leisure activity subjected to the rules and constraints outlined, is very widespread in urban Trinidad. If one were to ask a group of limers why they lime, they would probably reply – if anything – that they do so because they enjoy the informal company of their friends, because there isn't anything else to do, or because they want a few hours' of respite from their family. Liming is acknowledged as an *autotelic* activity (Zapffe 1984) – it allegedly contains its own ends, and it is constantly contrasted with the *heterotelic* activities entailed by domestic and professional life. The rules of liming are undercommunicated or entirely neglected by the limers; the alleged lack of rules regulating liming is itself one of its important virtues, for it is this aspect of it that grants the limers a supreme "aristocratic" feeling of total individual freedom. In this, I believe fundamental, sense, liming is

associated with a state of mind transcending temporal commitments. It should, however, be pointed out that the tendency to overcommunicate the autotelic ("expressive") aspects of liming does not necessarily imply that liming cannot function heterotelically ("instrumentally" – this is evident in the case of liming hustlers); the point is that it is invariably the aimless, irresponsible features of liming which are emphasized by the agents themselves.

Activities resembling liming are familiar from a number of West Indian societies where family life and professional careering are given low priority in the normative systems of male communities, and it is frequently seen as "proletarian." However, it is also true that respectable middle-class family fathers and taxpayers relish the art of liming, and this fact provides a key to an understanding of a central contradiction in Trinidadian culture.

Limers from Respectable Backgrounds

When a group of hustlers, occasional waged workers or unemployed men lime, it is easy to understand why, and this has already been accounted for. When a group of middle-aged white-collar state employees lime, on the other hand, there is something puzzling about the entire scene. On one of my first days in Trinidad, I was taken aback at the sight of four gentlemen in three-piece suits, sharing several bottles of rum and laughing loudly in a cafe in central Port of Spain early in the afternoon. For a while, as I gradually grew more familiar with Trinidadian society, this kind of behaviour remained inexplicable. For roughly the same cultural distinctions are applied to distinguish between working-class and middle-class culture in Trinidad as elsewhere in the West Indies: the "lower classes" of manual and occasional workers are believed to lead disorganized and promiscuous lives where no considerations pertaining to family life and professional career are allowed to interfere with their natural inclination to be led by coincidental and spontaneous notions. The middle class represents a complementary moral code in this system of representations: these people are believed to live in stable marriages and to be highly competitively minded and career-oriented; many would even allege that middle-class people choose their spouses and friends with their professional career in mind. These perceptions were confirmed many times by people I spoke with in Trinidad. A municipal worker from Arouca, for instance, told me that he wouldn't dream of envying the middle class for their lifestyle. "I've got everything I need", he explained, "food in my belly, clothing to cover my body, a house, and a bit left over. I would never want to live down in Valsayn.⁸ It must be a bore to just sit there with your remote control, eh, your wife all dressed up next to you and the kids silent as eggs (...) – and at your job you've got to lick the bottom of your boss all day; you wouldn't have any *freedom*, man."

Another acquaintance, with a different background, had a job in an organization lending money to small businessmen. Most of the loans were never paid back. "The problem of those working-class people," he said, "is not that they're lazy or dishonest, but that they're so extremely *irresponsible*. What do they care if they go bust?" A common assumption, not least common in the urban working class itself, is that Black working-class Trinidadians don't commit themselves to "respectable activities" such as waged work and family life. Life is too sweet.

As a matter of fact, liming is much less widespread among "respectable citizens" than among members of "the lower classes." The Mas Camp Pub, a respectable liming venue on the west end of Port of Spain, is typically crammed with liming groups in the weekends, while it is nearly empty on weekdays. It is common for respectable citizens to spend their evenings at home with their families, and they frequently entertain guests in their homes (which cannot be regarded as liming). But the yearning for the "free life" of the worker is an explicit theme among men in the middle class of Port of Spain. When they lime together, remarks to the effect that "if it hadn't been for the wife and the money, I'd gladly have left the rat race" are common. An implicit condition of their liming is that it is limited by structural constraints they would rather have been without. Therefore, middle-class limers indulge in liming with perhaps greater enthusiasm than their working-class counterparts: to the sales manager and the architect, liming is a scarce resource which thus represents a set of cultural values deserving to be overcommunicated; to the regular streetcorner and rumshop limers, it is rather seen as a normal condition.

A shared value in male, urban Trinidadian culture is the notion that *too much pressure* is an evil to be avoided; in other words, that it is virtuous and pleasant for an individual to be in charge of his own life to the extent that nobody takes decisions on his behalf. People in "respectable" jobs and stable marriages are more likely to be deprived of this feeling than others, since they know that they cannot take a day (or a week, or a year) off any time – their liming is circumscribed by real constraints, and their communicated availability can appear as a kind of masquerade, *playin' mas*. Their private life is, in addition, closely monitored by colleagues and competitors, and it is considered imperative to keep a respectable face. The rank of the middle class in Trinidadian society depends to a great extent upon the ability of its members to display *responsibility* and *respectability* – which are values also acknowledged by agents representing themselves as non-respectable. This gives their liming a streak of indecency and illegitimacy, and they might often stress, when talking to outsiders such as myself, that this is something they seldom do; that their job and their family places great demands on them, etc. It is acknowledged by the men of the urban middle class that their position in

society denies them the right to indulge in excessive liming; simultaneously, there are strong cultural incentives encouraging them to do just that.

One may well ask what could be the "benefit" of liming among middle class men. It is doubtless true that liming serves to confirm friendship, but it is equally true that sociability more or less directly related to professional interests preferably takes place in closed contexts, frequently with accompanying wives. Like members of the working class, middle-class men tend to lime with old friends with whom they share no immediate business interests. It is indeed hard to see that there could be a directly utilitarian aspect related to their liming. On the contrary, liming serves to weaken the respectable image of the middle-class, and it can also create immediate practical difficulties (arguments with the wife, hangovers at work, bad reputation...). It is therefore necessary to examine the kind of cultural system encouraging liming in some detail, before discussing the peculiar place of liming and its associated values in Trinidadian society.

Liming and West Indian Systems of Morality

Many anthropologists who have carried out research in the West Indies have been struck by the "flexibility" in social organization on the levels of the household and the local community; the lack of wide, formalized systems of rules for interaction have been noted, and equally, the many opportunities culturally available for the breaking of whatever rules might be there.⁹ In particular, the family institution has been depicted as extremely loose and non-formalized, and the generalized West Indian male, in particular, is frequently described as a character fighting against his own values when attempting to live a regular and predictable family life. The generalized West Indian man, as he emerges in e.g. Wilson (1973) and Eidheim (1981), seeks support and conformation not with his family or employer, but in the *peer group*: the men he drinks and plays with, and at the same time the men he competes with for women. The morality of *respectability* represented by the domestic sphere is directly contradicted by the morality of *reputation* encouraged in the context of the peer group. Whereas any man's friends would want him to spend the entire night buying drinks, and to play cards, and tell jokes (while he himself perhaps thinks about his mistress, who clearly belongs to the reputation sphere), his wife would wish him to work in a disciplined fashion, to support his family steadily and to stay at home in the evening.

The notion of these two systems of morality which have now been sketched briefly, has usually been applied to societies where the larger part of the male population does not participate in regular, bureaucratic waged work (Wilson and Eidheim have been mentioned as examples; I have myself (Eriksen 1986) described a similar pattern in a fishing village in Mauritius). The contradiction between "moralities of respectability" and "moralities of reputa-

tion” is often assumed to correspond to the conflicting interests of the genders; it is also often invoked in comparisons between social strata. A crucial part of the definition of the middle class in West Indian societies – stressed by its members and by others – is thus that this category of persons, in addition to earning higher wages and working more regularly than the working class, represents a morality of work and domestic life related to the wish to be, and to be perceived as, respectable. These notions about the respectability of the middle class are socially very significant throughout the West Indies. Wilson thus notes that the family ideology and to some extent, the practices of the few middle-class families on Providencia are different from, and much more “European”, than that of the majority (Wilson 1973:98ff; cf. also Smith 1988:33). It is generally assumed, by West Indians as well as by anthropologists, that the West Indian middle classes live in a more predictable fashion in matters regarding education, sex, work and so on, and that their institutionalization of the family is stronger and stricter, than the working classes.

As regards Trinidad, this moral duality has been documented extensively in fiction and is consistent with my own research; two splendid examples are Edgar Mittelholzer’s study of class and ethnicity in a Trinidadian office, *A Morning At The Office* (1979 [1951]), and Vidia Naipaul’s *The Mystic Masseur* (1984 [1957]), which tells the story of the creolized Hindu entrepreneur and his wife, who enthusiastically upgrade their moral codes as they climb socially.

In our discussion about liming in modern Trinidad, it has been suggested that these classic West Indian dilemmas are not restricted to relatively autonomous village communities and further, that they do not denote a clear-cut cultural distinction between classes or even between individuals: the cultural contradictions described by e.g. Wilson can be identified in the midst of the contemporary Trinidadian middle class. This is significant insofar as Trinidad was never a mature slave society, and it is also interesting to note that those who “suffer” from the contradictions can be highly respected, prosperous and disciplined citizens in a modern nation-state. The apparently contagious character of proletarian lifestyle and attitudes evident in the uneasy endorsement of liming among middle-class Trinidadians, indicates that the urban working class may have been the central exponent, and the ultimate source, of shared Trinidadian culture since Trinidadian nationalism was invented in the 1950s.

The “proletarian values” expressed through liming stand in a contradictory relationship to the self-image, lifestyle and professional aims of the middle class, yet the power exerted by liming as an exemplary activity is considerable regardless of class. It is therefore tempting to suggest, provisionally, that the urban working class is *culturally hegemonic* in Gramsci’s sense, or even that

the working class represents *good taste* in Trinidadian culture (cf. Bourdieu 1979). This will, however, not do by way of conclusion. Below, I explain why.

Up to now, the aim of the discussion has been to describe in what ways informal and apparently chaotic patterns of interaction in an urban environment are subjected to rules and norms which form part of a wider socio-cultural system. I have shown that these rules are frequently implicit, and that they should be classified as *strategic* rather than *constituting* rules; that is, they are articulated exclusively through ongoing interaction. Since individual freedom and lack of commitment are highly appreciated values among male, urban Trinidadians, the normative, regulated and heterotelic dimensions of activities such as liming are systematically undercommunicated.

The next step in the analysis must be to relate the values and practices associated with liming to the wider socio-cultural system of Trinidadian society. We will, then, explore the relationship of this “institution of inactivity” to its wider context; in particular, the attempt to develop a shared, Trinidadian identity. It will now become evident that the cultural contradictions indicated in the institution of liming are pervasive in a more fundamental sense than implied by the dichotomy of respectability and reputation – indeed, that the contradiction is an irreducible aspect of a great number of social situations and is constitutive of the social person regardless of class.

Liming and Key Symbols in Trinidadian Culture

The carnival, the calypso and the steelband are key symbols in the official national culture of Trinidad.¹⁰ These are all institutions symbolically linked with the urban working class of Port of Spain. An acquaintance of mine, a journalist who was of impeccable middle class origin himself, thus once remarked that “the Trinidadian middle class has not been able to create anything of lasting value, and it therefore has to be parasitic on the culture of the working class.” Whatever the case may be, it is doubtless correct that all of these institutions are associated with slightly mythological conceptions about the loose and free life of the proletarian and not least his sexual prowess, contrasting this image with the phlegmatism and asexual Protestant virtues of the European-influenced middle-class lifestyle. In this respect, *aesthetics*, *humour* and *frivolity* (my terms, not necessarily those of the agents) are ambivalent, but nevertheless expressions of “typically Trinidadian” culture. Let us consider them briefly as cultural values.

Aesthetic judgements are ubiquitous in Trinidadian society. The aesthetic sense of Trinidadians naturally reaches a peak during the annual carnival in February, but aesthetic judgements are also omnipresent during the remaining 363 days of the year. For one thing, Trinidadians are concerned to look

their best, and to a great extent, they judge others according to their appearance. Beauty contests of every shade (from Miss Republic Bank to Miss Swimsuit) are common and widely attended by men who sometimes bring their families. The ugly and the corpulent are frequently the victims of satire and assorted rudeness; and it is important for men, too, to look good. A slightly different aspect of this aesthetic attitude to the social world is the Trinidadian emphasis on personal *style*, traditionally an aristocratic criterion for judgement of others. In a Trinidadian context, much can be forgiven in terms of rude and careless behaviour with or without malicious intent, provided the act is carried out *in style*. Verbal statements are frequently evaluated according to the criterion of style; that is, the content is less important than the form (cf. Abrahams 1983, for similar observations from St. Vincent, and Miller 1989, for an analysis of style in consumption in Trinidad). Indians are frequently chided for lacking style. Edgar Mittelholzer, who belonged to the "olive-skinned middle class" himself, notes that the Indian accountant Jagabir invariably eats lunch at his desk in order to save money. His coloured, stylish colleague Lopez, passing Jagabir's desk on his way to a restaurant, considers the appearance of the Indian at his desk. "He saw the bulge in Mr. Jagabir's coat pocket – and the grease stain. The grease from the *roti* had seeped through ..." (Mittelholzer 1979:235) Jagabir had no style and was therefore ultimately chanceless in the milieu of Port of Spain – in 1990, he might be described as *moksi*, a local concept defined by Miller (1989:11) as, "the unsophisticated backwoods look which has yet even to acknowledge its own demise or indicates the inability of the person to enter into competitive display." Another typical example of the deprecation of alleged Indian taste is that a presumed favourite colour among Indo-Trinidadian householders is jokingly known as *coolie pink*: it is an extremely bright pink.¹¹

Humour pervades the central literary tradition of Trinidad (and the Caribbean); namely, the calypso. It may take the form of political satire, dirty jokes or witty puns; a good calypso nearly always contains a humorous element. During liming, too, the ability to make people laugh is highly esteemed (cf. Keens-Douglas 1987, for examples). And in regional jokes, where Guyanese are usually depicted as inherently dishonest, *Bajans* (Barbadians) as stupid and Jamaicans as violent, there will normally appear a Trinidadian taking every conceivable opportunity to *fete* and enjoy himself.¹²

Urban Trinidadians regard the ability to enjoy oneself, and the tendency not to worry about tomorrow, as characteristic of themselves. The most spectacular example is, of course, the carnival, which is an immensely erotic, rhythmic and colourful party with hundreds of thousands of slightly dressed and equally slightly intoxicated participants. The *sexual element* is very dominant during carnival, and not only then: sexual themes are omnipresent in Trinidadian discourse throughout the year. Sexual infidelity is evaluated as

partly legitimate, but there is always a minor scandal whenever a "respectable" man or woman is "caught at it," and such news sometimes reaches the weekly press. An indicator of the extent of extramarital sex is the rapid spread of Aids among heterosexuals in the East-West Corridor; and incidentally, the expression "deputy" is used casually about women with whom one has sex while married to another. The existence of female sexuality is acknowledged.¹³

The current prime minister of Trinidad & Tobago, Mr. A. N. R. Robinson, has been the subject of much malicious satire since he was elected in 1986; hardly because he is perceived as being stupid or incompetent, but because he seems to lack an understanding for these basic elements in Trinidadian culture – the sense of beauty and style, a good and subtle sense of humour, and a measure of irresponsibility. Unlike his predecessor Eric Williams, Robinson seems to be a snob unable to mix with his inferiors. A popular explanation for this is that Robinson, the son of a preacher, is a Tobagonian and therefore fails to understand the "Trinidadian character."

The values, or cultural themes, discussed above – aesthetics, humour and frivolity – are all characteristic of liming, which can therefore be regarded as metonymic of the Trinidadian nation, seen from the perspective of the urban population. Apart from being defined culturally as a characteristically autotelic kind of activity, liming could, therefore, express a form of national self-consciousness or identity. However, it should be remembered that liming could only be metonymic of the one half of such an identity – and the other half, the respectable side of the coin, is no less important in the constitution of Trinidadian identity and society, although it remains in the background of this essay.

• *Values of Trinidadian Nationhood*

In Black urban Trinidadian society, it is common to contrast values of respectability with values of reputation; discipline and obedience are contrasted with individual idiosyncrasy; the careerism in the labour market is contrasted with the egalitarian practices of the rumshop; frugality is contrasted with hedonistic joy, and so on. To most Trinidadians, their shared culture (whether they endorse it or not) appears as a set of happy-go-lucky attitudes, for better or for worse. Simultaneously, Trinidad is a highly competitive capitalist society where individual prosperity and social climbing are highly valued. The contradiction between the two value systems creates practical dilemmas for the many individuals who lead their lives between the poles, but the dilemmas – which seem unresolvable intellectually – are not necessarily seen as inherently destructive; people rather tend to shrug and identify them as natural. Like most of the people studied by anthropologists, most Trinidadians are not moral philosophers and do not necessarily require inter-

nal consistency between their diverse "models for action." For instance, in Trinidad, there is rarely a practical contradiction between religious piety and a multitude of sexual partners.

Contrary to national symbols associated with the state, like the flag, the national anthem and the national mottos, liming and related institutions have firm roots in the daily practices of people, and can therefore more easily contribute to the production of shared meanings. Independence Day is perceived by most Trinidadians as "jes' anodder holiday," while *j'ouvert*, the opening ceremony of the carnival, is an event hundreds of thousands of people anticipate with great expectations every year.

I mentioned earlier that the middle class is represented as confirming values of respectability, while the working class is believed to confirm values of reputation. The simplification, culturally almost a common-sensical one, is empirically crude, and in fact, most individuals relate situationally to both systems of evaluation – although their relative emphases vary. (For instance, profession and education are important variables whenever a liming group is founded, but during the liming itself they are undercommunicated.) Still, it is probably correct to assume that the anarchic flexibility represented by liming is structurally relatively unproblematic if related to the daily practices of those in a personal situation entailing few formal commitments, and that problems of reconciling liming with other activities grow with the growth of formal commitments. People who are committed to values of respectability through their choice of professional careers, domestic situations and formal contracts such as bank loans, act, as it were, against better knowledge when liming, for liming is a denial of the social structure they relate to. Yet even middle class men lime.

The interaction between "Apollonian" and "Dionysic" values is a *Leitmotiv* in urban Trinidadian culture, sometimes codified as class conflict, sometimes not. An illustration of the tension can be provided by looking at the patterns of expenditure in relation to the carnival. It is expensive to take part in the bands; one has to pay the choreographer and buy one's costume; still, there are poor Trinidadians who spend several months' wages on this brief, annual event. During the months leading up to the carnival they save in impeccable "Apollonian" or respectable manner, only to spend everything at once in an intense "Dionysic" orgy, with no overt worry about paying the rent of next month. Now, members of the middle class also spend much money on the carnival, but this rarely leads to their losing control of their personal economy. This is possibly due to the fact that the middle class is better off, but it is widely *interpreted* as an indication that in relation to the working class the middle class are superior planners, but inferior enjoyers.

The contradiction between the value systems, and particularly the fact that it is easier to "sell" reputation than respectability values, emerges as a pro-

blem in every context related to nationbuilding and national planning. Two events involving Eric Williams, the first prime minister of Trinidad & Tobago, illustrate that this contradiction is very much alive in individuals of middle class as well as working-class membership.

When Dr. Williams, already then an internationally known historian,¹⁴ began his political career in the mid-fifties, he did so by giving a series of lectures at Woodford Square, the "Speaker's Corner" of Port of Spain, a small park in front of the Parliament, which has been an important venue for public discourse and private discussions for over a century. The topics of Williams' lectures could be the political philosophy of Locke or Plato, or for that matter, the writings of Carlyle. The purpose was to contribute to the political education and self-understanding of the ordinary citizen; most of the lectures were spun around themes of imperialism, slavery and exploitation. These lectures were immensely popular, and Williams – a small, chain-smoking man in a grey suit, with a low voice, hearing aid and a pedantic style (or lack of it?) – was cheered as though he were a great calypsonian, by people overwhelmingly belonging to the urban proletariat of Port of Spain. In his lectures, Williams directed his attention specifically to the desire of Trinidadians to be respectable, to be on a par with the rest of the world culturally and intellectually. In this way, Williams also attacked the morality of reputation: he promoted serious political organization and intellectual ambition. The morality of reputation contains a strong element of *ressentiment*: it defines itself in contrast to, and through a rejection of, the colonial morality of duty. Through his lectures at the "University of Woodford Square," Williams encouraged his listeners to make a productive and positive force of their *ressentiment* by making respectability its servant, convert it to an "authentically Trinidadian" system of values, and exploit it for their own ends.

As long as he remained in Trinidad, Williams (who died in 1981) would frequently criticize his electorate (that is, the generalized Black Trinidadian) for lacking seriousness and discipline. When he attended conferences in Europe, however, he sometimes invited his European colleagues to come to Trinidad "to learn how to enjoy the good life." In other words, Dr. Williams was himself caught in the contradiction between the two systems of morality. Much of his immense popularity in the lower strata of Black Trinidadian society derived from his ability to succeed in serious projects and yet understand – not ignoring or neglecting, like his successor Robinson – why his electorate would sometimes favour a cultural logic of liming.

The flamboyant, elegant, unworried man-of-words or man-of-style is a dear prototypical character to Trinidadians of all classes. Its roots can partly be localized to strategies of resistance during slavery (Serbin 1987:114ff; Lewis 1983:180-82). On the one hand it expresses a rejection of hierarchy

and formal organization, overtly through the *ressentiment* directed against the English and later against all kinds of *bosses*. On the other hand, it also expresses an affirmative national identity.¹⁵ But like every modern nation-state, the Trinidadian state demands obedience to values of respectability. A recent, authorized national motto is, thus, "Discipline, Production and Tolerance," and complaints are common to the effect that "it is difficult to get anything done around here, because nobody cares to make long-term plans." On the other hand, norms related to respectability can be encountered right at the centre of the domains of liming – literally and metaphorically: Virtually every rumshop in Trinidad features easily visible wall placards admonishing the customers not to swear while patronizing the establishment ("No obscene language!"); further, homosexuality is nearly universally regarded as an abominable perversion, and the weekly press of the island, the calypso of the printed word, explicitly condemns strip shows and pornography (the same papers are filled to the margins with photos of girls in bikinis). The steelbands, who represented the rough reputation ethic of the badjohns in the urban slums, played classical tunes from the very beginning, and thereby indicated that they earnestly wanted to be taken seriously by the colonial establishment.

In Trinidadian society it is extremely important to be able to bet on both horses simultaneously, as it were, regardless of one's cultural class membership. When the highly respected Trinidadian historian, marxist and Pan-Africanist C. L. R. James died in London in 1989, the legendary calypsonian The Mighty Sparrow could therefore remark (on the phone from Bonn): "Me and James, together we cover the whole spectrum of Trinidadian culture."¹⁶

Finally, it should be added that 1956 was for two reasons an important year in the history of the Trinidadian nation: The respectable Dr. Williams won the election on a nationalist platform, and the reputable calypsonian The Mighty Sparrow won the Calypso crown for the first time. In a word, the two main elements of Trinidadian national symbolism were consolidated through these events.¹⁷

The moralities of reputation and respectability are aspects of a shared, dynamic system of values, and some of the tensions as experienced by Trinidadians are illustrated in Table 1 below. If we were to adopt a Parsonian "theory-of-social-action" perspective (Parson 1968) in this analysis, we might perhaps claim that all Trinidadians in any given situation have to choose between the two moralities. It ought to be stressed again, therefore, that these "situations of choice" always take place in practical, not discursive contexts; in other words, the contradictions may not be as important to the actors as it seems, although they may create profound problems for social planners. Notwithstanding this, the dichotomies of Table 1 *do* express con-

traditions which are recognized by urban Trinidadians – and they could, perhaps, be labelled *cultural premises for the evaluation of situations*. The sets of values are contradictory at a logical or discursive level, but in practice they are *de facto* complementary because nobody lives within but one of them. Respectability and reputation cannot be regarded strictly as poles on an analog scale either, since the rules are of an either-or type. However, it would theoretically be possible to locate total, individual patterns of action over a period, on such a scale. Individual and class-specific variations are considerable, but everybody has to relate situationally to both sets of values. It is in this sense that it is possible to claim that all urban Trinidadians "belong to the same culture," culture being an ambiguous property of a series of social processes and relationships, not a static property of society.

RESPECTABILITY	REPUTATION
Scarcity of time	Time not subjected to scarcity
Discipline	Chaos
Obedience	Freedom
Hierarchy	Equality
Contract	Trust
Large-scale society	Personal networks
Articulated purposes	No explicit purpose
Regularity	Unpredictability
Responsibility	Irresponsibility
Cumulation	Immediacy
Delayed returns	Immediate returns
Plan	Spontaneity
Seriousness	Humour
Writing	Speech
Planning carnival	Carnival
Job, family	Liming
(etc.)	

Table 1. Some variables in the codification of Trinidadian morality.

Concluding Remarks

A metonym for an important segment of a Trinidadian definition of self, liming is a social institution (and a cultural state of mind) reproducing the contradiction-ridden symbolic relationship between discipline and freedom. As a formidable *anti-structure* (Turner 1974:44ff), liming is the symbolic counterpart of official national symbols and values; it is explicitly spontaneous and unorganized, it contains its own ends and is evaluated on purely aesthetic grounds. Cultural values which can be codified as irresponsibility and spontaneous joy, initially countercultural values of *ressentiment*, have become indexical for *der Volksgeist* in the public spaces of modern Trinidad. This entails that some of the key symbols of the "lower classes," and their related values, create a normative pressure vis-à-vis members of the "higher

classes," where the contradictions between the moral systems are most evident. As I have shown, the normative pressure between the moral systems is mutual, but proletarian values (which can clearly be traced back to slavery) remain remarkably strong in daily practice and discourse in the Trinidadian class society. The morality of reputation, which is linked to the working class and the lumpenproletariat in Trinidadian culture, relates not only to the performing art of doing nothing; it also relates to the calypso, the carnival and the steelband, which are key symbols – not only in the self-image of the working class, but also in official Trinidad. This paradoxical situation, where "low culture" takes the former place of "high culture" in the ongoing production of national symbolism, is clearly a legacy of colonialism. It should nevertheless serve as a reminder that facile assumptions about "cultural hegemony" and the presumed dominance of bourgeois values in capitalist society deserve closer scrutiny.

My second concluding point deals with the generality – or lack of generality – of phenomena resembling liming. For in contrast to the African village societies inspiring Turner's work on structure and anti-structure, liming and structurally similar situations are prevalent in modern Trinidad; they are visible and culturally recognized, and they are regarded – by members of both the working class and the middle class – as being more authentically Trinidadian than those values and forms of organization with which they are contrasted. Liming is unthinkable in a cultural context not encompassing modern, bureaucratic virtues in addition to those represented by the liming itself, since liming is dependent on its own negation. This duality endows liming with its inherently contradictory character. It remains true, nevertheless, that one cannot be recognized as a *true true Trini* unless one understands the art of liming, even if one happens to be prime minister. Although the concept of liming is not itself a comparative concept of universal value, its "anti-structural," anti-authoritarian aspects can probably be generalized to most, if not all societies.

NOTES

1. Research in Trinidad was funded by the Norwegian Research Council for the Sciences and the Humanities (NAVF). An earlier version of the article was read by Daniel Miller and Kim Johnson, both of whom contributed valuable comments and suggestions – although I am far too much of a man-of-words to have taken account of all of their criticisms.
2. The cultural and social diversity of Trinidad is not the topic of this article. Allow me, however, to mention that Trinidad has been the recipient of substantial cultural influence from Africa, India, Britain, France, North America and China. About half the population of slightly over a million is mainly of African descent, whereas about 40% are of Indian ("East Indian") descent; seven to eight per cent constitute an ethnically distinctive category of "Reds" (mulattoes), and there are smaller ethnic categories of Chinese, Europeans and

- Syrians/Lebanese. The Indians and Chinese came as indentured labourers from 1845 to 1917; the Syrians have arrived as merchants during this century.
3. The expression "Trinidadians" is here used primarily about urban persons of African or mixed descent, as well as "Creolized" Indians. Village culture and social organization is so distinctive that it must be excluded from this general discussion.
 4. The one exception known to me is Lieber's (1981) sensitive study of working-class men in Port of Spain, where the liming institution is recognized as crucial for an understanding of urban life in Trinidad. For instance, Lieber notes (p. 61) that the "zones where liming is concentrated are pivotal points in the 'action topography' of the city."
 5. Liming can thus be subsumed, provisionally, under a respectable analytic class of interaction, namely what Weber (1951) labelled the *value-rational type of action*, which he contrasted with the *goal-rational type of action*. This concept is related to Tönnies' (1912) concept of *Wesenswille*, which he links ideal-typically to the societal type of *Gemeinschaft*. Many theorists, among them Schütz (1981) and Parsons (e.g. 1968), have later worked out classifications of action where "non-rational" action, i.e. action which is not directly goal-oriented, is accorded an important place. Further elaborations on such distinctions are provided by, among others, Turner (1974), who distinguishes between (goal-rational, instrumental) *societas* and (value-rational, expressive) *communitas* as complementary modes of social integration; and by Österberg (1988), who identifies, as a third form of action, the *amphibious* class of actions, "where the intentions are oblique." Personally, I prefer Zapffe's (1984) concepts of *autotelic* and *heterotelic* action (respectively, action which is its own end and action incorporating ends outside of itself). We should finally note that such analytic distinctions ought to be regarded as ideal types, usually merging with each other in ongoing intercourse; or as poles in an imagined continuum. And, as I shall argue later, liming acts are ambiguous and can therefore be interpreted as goal-rational.
 6. Two additional points must be made here. First, it is no longer rare to see women liming – in particular, young and professional women lime, although never on streetcorners unless they are prostitutes. Secondly, ethnically mixed liming groups are not uncommon in urban Trinidad. A lime I joined one late evening at an Arima rumshop, for instance, consisted of a Chinese, an Indian, a Red and a Black. They were, however, all in their thirties, and all of them belonged to the respectable segment of the working-class (i.e. skilled or blue-collar workers).
 7. Stickfights and cockfights alike are semi-legal or illegal leisure activities traditionally associated with the working-class. As I shall argue, one leaves the domain of liming when entering that of the stickfight or cockfight.
 8. A middle-class suburb about ten kilometres east of Port of Spain along the Churchill-Roosevelt highway. Most of the residents are *nouveaux riches* who climbed socially during the oil boom in the latter half of the 1970s.
 9. Two standard works on West Indian morality and family organization are Smith (1956) and Wilson (1973); three studies focusing related discussions on Trinidadian contexts are Herskovits (1947), Braithwaite (1975), and Lieber (1981).
 10. Limbo dancing, which was allegedly invented in Trinidad, is still featured in tourist brochures – but hardly elsewhere. Occasionally, however, the Hilton hotel hosts limbo shows for its guests.
 11. These ethnic stereotypes may not conform very well to "observable facts"; in other words, the "poor taste" of Indians may be a cultural construction. The important thing to note here is that such stereotypes exist as forms of social classification and standards for aesthetic judgements.
 12. An anonymous columnist in Jamaica's *Daily Gleaner* remarks that if two or several Trinidadians are together somewhere, they arrange a party; but if two or several Jamaicans are together, one gets killed (*Daily Gleaner*, 12 October, 1989).
 13. Cf. e.g. David Rudder's calypso "Bacchanal Lady" (Rudder 1988): "She will infect you with her ramajay/Melt you like a noonday sun/She'll take your status symbol high away/She'll mix your milk with puncheon rum."
 14. His most famous book is probably *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944).

15. Eric Williams was a master at exploiting both ends of the continuum. In the early sixties, his great slogan for independence was "Massa Day Done," where he drew on anti-British resentment and simultaneously gave cause for national pride. Twenty years later, well established as a respectable "boss," Williams ordered his electorate to go back to work ("Go back to work, the party's over!") as the oil prices fell.
16. An attempt to explain the origins of this specific situation falls outside of the scope of this article; allow me mention, nevertheless, that the interaction between class-specific symbolic universes is very different in e.g. Barbados and Jamaica, and that the lack of bounded symbolic universes in Trinidad is to a great extent caused by the peculiarly fluid, flexible class structure present in the island for two hundred years.
17. Kim Johnson called my attention to this.

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