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Carnival in Trinidad

The Pierrot and the Pisse-en-lit in the Late Nineteenth Century

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Abstract

This essay focuses on the Pierrot and the Pisse-en-lit Carnival characters during the 1880s and 1890s. Pierrots rambled on about recondite events; spelled out convoluted words in a show of their supposed wisdom; and brawled with other Pierrots to commandeer streets. As to the Pisse-en-lit, these often-transvested revelers displayed bloodied clothes; exposed their underwear to passers-by; simulated sexual intercourse; carried chamber pots on their heads; and/or held sticks protruding from between their legs. The article outlines Trinidad's historical context and features sections on both the Pierrot and the Pisse-en-lit, followed by a brief conclusion. The Pierrot and the Pisse-en-lit were part of an unsettled cultural arena which was adjusting to unbridled migration to the cities, the consolidation of a Black middle class, and the growth of Victorian morality. Both born from and broken by the conditions of the nineteenth century, the figures emerged out of fraught circumstances, meeting their demise as those circumstances decisively shifted.

Keywords

Trinidad – Port of Spain – San Fernando – Pierrot – Pisse-en-lit – migration – Black middle class – Victorian Era – late colonial history

1 Introduction

Conflict, costumes, and contention permeated the streets of Port of Spain during Carnival. Dressed as the princely Pierrot,¹ revelers claimed urban territory as they showcased their might and wisdom to marveling onlookers. Few challenged the boastful madcap, who was always ready to confront rivals in a battle of wits or a physical brawl (Carr 1956:282).² But revelers also dressed as the grisly Pisse-en-lit (bed pisser). Wearing white, transparent nightgowns stained with blood, revelers shocked Victorian-age residents while taking to the streets of Port of Spain.³ Drawn to conquest and spectacle, both figures emerged out of local conditions and also transformed Carnival at large.

The Pierrot and the Pisse-en-lit utilized public display as essential tools in their expressions. Integral to popular Carnival as late as the 1870s, both figures emerged out of the intense migration to major cities and the exponential growth of impoverished living arrangements in these areas. In their disputes over small-scale enclaves, Pierrots perpetuated a tradition of territorial contention linked to the locally rooted heritage of Canboulay and stick fighting. In their performances of the Pisse-en-lit, revelers penetrated the central spaces of Trinidadian cities, provisionally upending the quotidian order as they challenged Victorian mores concerning female sexual health and morality. Either figure also interacted with the burgeoning Black middle class—on the rise in Trinidad since the mid-nineteenth century—a middle class linked with the colony's educational system and, by the tail end of the century, Carnival. Defiant in their own ways, the Pierrot and the Pisse-en-lit challenged reigning values within an unsettled cultural arena which featured rampant migration, a growing Victorian morality, and the rise of a new group.

The article is divided into four sections. The first sketches Trinidadian conditions associated with urban migration, shifts in morality, and developments brought about by the Black middle class. This section also shows important shifts in Carnival and Canboulay—the latter being a midnight procession which was the opening act of Carnival. These changing factors were essential

1 The Pierrot is not to be confused with the Pierrot Grenade; see Carr 1956.

2 *San Fernando Gazette*, March 9, 1889, p. 3; *Port-of-Spain Gazette*, February 10, 1894, p. 3; *Port-of-Spain Gazette*, March 7, 1894, p. 3. From this point on, the *San Fernando Gazette* is cited as *SFG*; the *Port-of-Spain Gazette* is denoted as *POSG* and referred to in the text as simply the *Gazette*. The *Gazette* was associated with the political elites and planter class and held biases in favor of these groups, while the *San Fernando Gazette*, by the second half of the century, was owned by Samuel Carter, a member of the burgeoning Black and creole middle class, and represented this group's interests.

3 Crowley 1956:196; Franco 2001:160; Martin 1998:232.

for shaping reveler performances of the Pierrot and the Pisse-en-lit throughout the 1880s and 1890s. The two following sections focus on the characters themselves. In both cases, I utilize newspaper accounts as the main primary sources for describing the figures, although secondary sources and a few other primary sources are also utilized. These sections, moreover, serve as short narratives following the developments of both the Pierrot and the Pisse-en-lit and, eventually, their extinction by the end of the nineteenth century. Concerning the characters, I claim that they both emerged from changing societal conditions of late nineteenth-century Trinidad—that is, urban migration, growing morality, and the strengthening of the Black middle class—and were crucial to producing further shifts in local Carnival. The final—and shortest—section summarizes my conclusions concerning the figures.

2 Migration, Morality, and the Middle Class: Shifts in Carnival

By the 1880s, it was clear that Trinidad's labor shortage had ended. Emancipation, in 1838, had released the Black work force from plantation enslavement, and under the new conditions the formerly enslaved could choose between moving to the island's burgeoning cities (Campbell 1988:5–6); purchasing or squatting on small plots of land (Brereton 1981:80; Sewell 1861:109); or negotiating better pay to remain on the estates (Sewell 1861:109). But local landowners, driven by profits, sought a cheap workforce, and for this they looked east. In 1845, a ship named *Fatel Rozack* arrived, with “217 Coolies [*sic*, persons from India] on board,” to serve as the “new competitors in the labor market ... opening their [the Black workers'] eyes a little to the necessity of working more steadily.”⁴ Until 1917, the British would continue to fuel the island with indentured servants (Williams 1964:100), long after the labor shortage had ended, benefitting local planters by depressing overall wages (Brereton 1981:86–7) and mitigating the effects of contract expirations (Williams 1964:120). Under these circumstances, throngs of Black Trinidadians made their way to the island's underdeveloped cities, especially Port of Spain (Brereton 1981:131).

The Indians, however, were just one of many arriving cohorts—a cohort which mostly remained in the countryside (Brereton 1981:113–14). Between 1841 and 1867, indentured servants from Africa also made their way to Trinidad, mostly settling in Port of Spain or areas just outside the city (Warner-Lewis 1991:14). The arriving groups varied in their origins, differentiating themselves

4 *POSG*, May 30, 1845, p. 3.

by forming distinct communities such as the Yoruba-based group in Laventille or the Rada settlement on Duncan Street in Port of Spain itself (Warner-Lewis 1991:36–39). Migrant laborers from all around the Caribbean also made their way to the Trinidadian cities. In contrast to native Trinidadians, however, most immigrants spoke English, further dividing the island’s already-varied population. By the 1880s, it was clear that Trinidad was split by multiple ethnicities, with about 46 percent of its total population of 153,000 born outside Trinidad itself (De Verteuil 1984:13). During Carnival, ethnic divisions became particularly exposed when groups marched through the streets of Port of Spain, unified by their territorial associations—commonly divided on religious, linguistic, and ethnic grounds (Cowley 1996:60). Splits among diverse groups supported conflict in the cities, a condition which was highlighted during the Carnival season.

Rampant migration put great pressure on the city’s housing infrastructure (Brereton 1981:131–32), and upon arrival most newcomers had little choice but to settle in areas known as barrack ranges. The barracks were sheds built against the back walls of centrally located stores or houses, with each range facing a similar strip of shacks as small as eight-to-ten square feet. Six or seven people crowded each shack, shut inside for seven or eight hours every night (Brereton 1979:116–17). The lodgings were hazardous to the point that, for the *Port of Spain Gazette*, “not the faintest breath of air [could] reach” the living quarters, while the outdoor areas were “stifling pestilential yards.”⁵ These yards were also communal spaces where social gatherings took place (Brereton 1981:135), especially among people sharing a common language or ethnicity, such as a barrack range surrounding a “yard where the Martiniquians dance.”⁶ The barracks, moreover, also provided considerable profits for upper-class landlords. Barrack consolidation in downtown Port of Spain was partly due, according to the *Gazette*, to the “wealthy and influential proprietors who, doubtless very proper and estimable people themselves, ... draw a considerable portion of their incomes from these abominable dens.”⁷ Overpopulated and unsanitary sources of income for landowners, the barracks assembled groups in downtown areas that bore the same origins, language, and ethnicity.

Allied to urban migration was the pervasive influence of English Victorian society. At its core, Victorian culture held respectability and reputation as high values (Noel 2021:117). Poverty, sex, and alcohol, for instance, were associated

5 *POSG*, October 8, 1887, pp. 3–4.

6 *POSG*, March 17, 1846, p. 2.

7 *POSG*, October 19, 1896, p. 5; see also *SFG*, August 25, 1883, p. 3.

with vice, while wealth and hard work were championed as virtues. Victorian culture also promoted the sanctity of class lines and property; the importance of legal marriage; and the subordinate position of women—values which French creoles and the Black middle classes shared with the English elites but which, among the popular groups, remained mostly alien (Brereton 1979:4–6). Concerning women, the model Victorian lady—along with reading books and writing letters—was expected to submit to a restrictive dress code (De Verteuil 1984:11). Women were also expected to remain indoors throughout the day and to refrain from housework, ideally leaving household chores to servants (Brereton 1979:59–60). A cultural zeitgeist which permeated late nineteenth-century Trinidad, Victorian morality transformed upper-class values and influenced local culture.

Victorian morality also affected class relationships. It was presumed, for instance, that upper-class women undertake social work or, at least, fundraising projects aimed at assisting the poor (De Verteuil 1984:11). Such charitable work, it was surmised, would rescue the lower orders from perceived sin and illicit unions (Brereton 1979:57). The upper classes, moreover, were also concerned with vagrancy. In 1876, for example, police chief Fraser claimed that “the greatest evil with which we have at present to contend is the vicious idleness in the lower classes of our towns, ... who infest our streets ... [despite their] full enjoyment of the most exuberant health” (Brereton 1979:123). For the upper classes, working-class behavior epitomized a lack of decorum—and even a lack of sobriety—and charges of indecent behavior and obscene language were common throughout the late nineteenth century, even though the police rarely understood the patois spoken among the working classes (Trotman 1984:71). The problem was such that colonial authorities even took to systemically quarantining lower-class women—generalized by many police as prostitutes—in hospital wards under the rubric of treatment for sexually transmitted diseases and even moral contagion,⁸ further segregating groups in what was already a fractured colony.

A third development in the late nineteenth century was the consolidation of the Black middle class as a societal force. During the mid-nineteenth century, the group had already been on the rise based on their access to education, and by late century, the Black middle class was formed by teachers, lawyers, doctors, and civil servants (Brereton 1981:122–29). But for as much as education supported the rise of the group, the educational system itself was linked to an imperial agenda, supporting an English-based curriculum focused

8 *SFG*, June 4, 1881, pp. 2–3; *POSG*, November 5, 1881, p. 3.

on European mores and disconnected from local problems. In Trinidad, students did not so much learn about domestic history or culture as much as they studied imperial royalty and literature, exposed to materials largely foreign to them. The system also pushed the English language in lieu of provincial idioms such as creole and patois, not to mention other languages entering the colony (Brathwaite 1993:259–60). In this regard, the Black middle class's access to education served to both support their own social mobility and buttress their appreciation of European culture and the English language in a process which approximated their morals and cultural standards to the Victorian norms of the times.

As their influence grew, the Black middle class also began to influence popular expression, and one such way was through the implementation of music competitions during Carnival (Guilbault 2007:45). These contests were structured to present groups which performed popular music in formats resembling European art music. For this, organizers encouraged the use of European musical instruments in place of the instruments traditionally used during Carnival (Guilbault 2007:45); singing in English (Gibbs 2016:241); and the introduction of musical elements identified with Catholicism, such as religious part-song, all in a bid to “elevate” popular music (Charles 2016:30). Music competitions also offered prizes for songs which promoted the merchandise of sponsoring firms (Rohlehr 1990:51). Prize offerings increasingly became a regulatory tool to reinforce Black-middle-class values, as it championed, through prize distribution, the suppression of perceived obscenity; the usage of Europeanized attire; and the elimination of overtly sexual performances (Gibbs 2016:109). Restrictions over female participation, which were many times implemented to avoid female sexual expression, were also adopted (Rohlehr 1990:55). Introduced during the end of the nineteenth century, the music competition sculpted popular culture as artists and performers became increasingly attracted to the format and, especially, to the offered prizes.

The shifting circumstances transformed Carnival, known since the 1870s as Jamette Carnival (Cowley 1996:73). The word “jamette,” a creolization of the French word *diamètre*, referred to barrack dwellers supposedly involved in disreputable activities—petty crime, prostitution, vagrancy, for instance—and alluded to the group's perceived position below a reasonable “diameter” of respectability (Scott 2002:296). Come Carnival, jamettes assembled in what were known as bands, groups which came together as loose associations linked to the yards and barracks (Brereton 1981:132). In these bands, revelers marched through the streets in a midnight procession called Canboulay. During Canboulay—Carnival's opening act since the 1840s—these bands paraded through Port of Spain while flaunting sticks and flaming torches (Elder

1998:40), moving through the city's streets and squares between midnight and dawn. The word Canboulay—a corruption of *cannes bruléés*, or burnt cane (Cowley 1996:20)—referenced practices linked to enslaved labor on the sugar fields, such as branding cane stubs to fertilize soil or eradicate pests (Cowley 1996:20); burning sugar fields to deliberately hurt planter profits; or trespassing from one estate to the next to harvest sugar from fields accidentally or even deliberately set ablaze (Liverpool 2001:161–62). After abolition, Black revelers appropriated Canboulay, performing the labor marches in what was perhaps a commemoration of the end of bondage (Cowley 1996:80). Bands of masked revelers paraded “from one end of the town to another”⁹ (Cowley 1996:38) while encircling drummers and singers, who all marched behind mock kings and queens elected precisely for the season (Elder 1998:40). A Black procession associated with group bonding and recollections of enslavement, Canboulay fortified communal ties between revelers; showcased revelers' sway over an English colony bearing multiple ethnic influences; and functioned as a potent tool for revelers to claim urban spaces in a fractured society.

But Canboulay and Carnival were also linked to violent disputes over territory. In 1838, Emancipation year, Carnival was marked by a “ferocious fight” between bands in the downtown areas of Port of Spain. The “Damas,” a French-speaking band with its roots between Henry Street and the River Saint Anns—or the “French streets”—fought the “Wartloos,” an English-speaking group fixed in the adjacent Corbeau Town area, associated with the English (Cowley 1996:32–34).¹⁰ By the 1840s, bands of 10 to 20 revelers were regularly parading the streets while wielding “a good stout quarter-staff” in groups associated with the Kalenda¹¹ stick-fighting rituals of the pre-Emancipation era (Day 1852:313–14). By the late 1850s, interband fighting also incorporated brawls between bands and the police,¹² while during the 1860s, fights between the bands conspicuously included women (Cowley 1996:60). Throughout the 1870s, the bands persisted in their “strange liking for breaking each others' sconces”¹³ during a period of increased violence and heightened media attention—and vilification—of the season.¹⁴ Driven by group identification, fighting, and dis-

9 *Trinidad Standard*, February 23, 1846, p. 3.

10 *POSG*, March 2, 1838, p. 3.

11 Kalenda, a West African ritual of music and dance that brought stick fighting to the Caribbean, was embedded in African notions of kingship, and, in Trinidad, was linked to secret societies and networks among the enslaved. For more concerning Kalenda, see Liverpool 2001 and Riggio 2020.

12 *POSG*, February 17, 1858, p. 3.

13 *Trinidad Chronicle*, March 2, 1881, p. 3.

14 *POSG*, April 17, 1875, p. 3.

putes among disparate groups linked to their own yards and barracks, Canboulay held claims over territory as a recurring feature, claims which, crucially, involved fierce contention among segmented groups.

As the barracks grew and as the bands continued to commandeer the streets, the colonial authorities soon took to repressing Canboulay. Seeing that the police, throughout the better part of the 1870s, had failed under the corrupt and inefficient Captain Fraser,¹⁵ in 1877 the local government hired Arthur Baker, a ruthless police chief who persecuted Canboulay (De Verteuil 1984:68–70; Cowley 1992:252).¹⁶ In his first years as chief, Baker succeeded in restricting the procession. But in 1881, his forceful restrictions spurred what are known today as the Canboulay Riots, a violent clash between revelers and “the police, when the Queen’s staff was opposed to the Creole baton,” resulting in a “full crop of broken heads in the regular mêlée that ensued and in which Capt. Baker rendered himself conspicuous,”¹⁷ heralding, finally, the extinction of Canboulay in 1884.¹⁸ The chief’s aggressive stance, however, did not so much eradicate reveler claims over territory as transform the ways in which such groups expressed themselves. Indeed, with Canboulay’s demise, revelers embraced alternate expressions, and disputes over territory took on new forms rather than being eliminated.

One way this occurred was through reveler performances of the Pierrot and the Pisse-en-lit. Marching through the streets while pontificating and even physically fighting rivals, Pierrots retained the disputes over small-scale territories, much as the bands had done during Canboulay. Although the Pierrot preserved some of the violent aspects of the procession, the figure also sublimated some of that violence in his rhetorical outbursts—outbursts which also involved challenges over control of small-scale enclaves. These verbal challenges, moreover, obliquely commented on the educational system established within the colony, a system which supported imperial values while remaining distant from the population at large. Similarly, the Pisse-en-lit showcased the jamette despite Victorian morality, presenting a broken and abused figure within the very spaces which colonial authorities sought to cleanse. But while certainly an act of resistance, the Pisse-en-lit also displayed the jamette in a reiteration of the disputes between bands linked to the yards—

15 *POSG*, January 13, 1877, p. 3; *POSG*, March 10, 1877, p. 3. For corruption, nepotism, and Captain Fraser’s mental-health scandal, see Cowley 1992:252.

16 See also *POSG*, February 11, 1880; *SFG*, March 5, 1881.

17 *SFG*, March 5, 1881, p. 3.

18 *SFG*, March 1, 1884, p. 3; *New Era*, March 2, 1884, p. 2. Captain Baker was also a major figure during the Canboulay Riots of 1881.

bands which had also disputed territory with the police. The Pisse-en-lit perpetuated the female jamette's participation in Carnival despite the middle-class's attempt at sidelining the group. The figure, finally, pointed to the horrors jamette women endured in the segregated spaces created by colonial officials—be those spaces the overgrown yards or, crucially, the hospital wards. In this regard, the Pisse-en-lit represented a reclamation of the body while marching through the streets in her bloodied dress. As figures participating in Carnival, the Pierrot and the Pisse-en-lit reworked the problem of territory linked to migration, issues associated with morality, and new concerns brought about by a rising Black middle class.

3 The Pierrot

Not quite prince nor clown, late nineteenth-century Pierrots presented themselves as “an imitation of the old jester.”¹⁹ Their costumes featured a bobbed cap²⁰ and colorful strips of cloth and ribbons, such as “yellow and black rosettes”²¹ sewn onto their long white garments,²² with both cap and gown padded for protection (Cowley 1996:81). On their frocks, Pierrots added bells and mirrors, while on their legs and feet they wore “stockings criss-crossed with coloured ribbons, and patent leather shoes decorated with small buckles and coloured ‘Pompons.’”²³ Pierrots brandished a “long whale bone whip,”²⁴ while some also flaunted a fighting stick, occasionally loaded with lead.²⁵ Such sticks were sometimes carried by an accompanying page boy, who marched alongside the Pierrot, who cleared the way by cracking his whip (Carr 1956:281–82; Cowley 1996:81). As a garish figure, the Pierrot craved attention, and as a stalwart contender, he heralded conflict.

19 *POSG*, February 6, 1894, p. 2.

20 *Daily Express*, February 13, 2019. The *Daily Express* article was written by historian Bridget Brereton. In the article, she references a primary source by Lionel Fraser's son Percy Fraser. Lionel Fraser was the police chief who had failed to control Carnival during the late 1870s, and who was eventually replaced by Captain Baker. His son Percy Fraser wrote a memoir called *Looking Over My Shoulder*, written between 1939 and 1948, which features accounts of Carnival in the late nineteenth century, which is referenced by Brereton and which I utilize here. At the time of writing, I could not access the primary source.

21 *POSG*, February 15, 1899, p. 4.

22 *SFG*, December 2, 1882, p. 3.

23 *Daily Express*, February 13, 2019.

24 *SFG*, December 2, 1882, p. 3.

25 *POSG*, February 6, 1894, p. 2; *POSG*, February 10, 1894, p. 3; *POSG*, March 7, 1894, p. 3.

Pierrots were extraordinarily performative. Parading the streets, these towering figures rambled on about recondite historical events, while at other times they spelled out convoluted words in a satirical show of their supposed wisdom. During their byzantine rants—usually in Creole or French patois (Carr 1956:282–84)—Pierrots “[marched] grandly along on tip-toe followed by an admiring crowd, ... amusing themselves by making long speeches as they [tripped] along.”²⁶ Pierrots were witnessed as “gaily dressed, ... followed by a large crowd of admirers” while they “swaggered along the streets, bragging of their achievements, their bravery and their fearlessness”²⁷ in what was an arrogant and perhaps intimidating display. While the center of attention, Pierrots exhibited their knowledge to expectant throngs or even other Pierrots (Cowley 1996:126)—demonstrations which could make or break the figures in their thirst for recognition. Brash, quick-witted, and rough, Pierrots sought to establish a following and, in their spouts of erudition, looked to make their mark upon the curious multitudes.

The Pierrot’s history in Trinidad harkens back to the time of enslavement. The figure had been brought to the island by French immigrants, who early in the nineteenth century introduced the character to the indoor carnivals of the French and British landowning elites (Liverpool 2001:269). According to the *Trinidad Gazette*, the “clownish *pierrots*, which once made so great a figure in the days of yore” were a recurring element of “the princely balls given at the Governor’s residence,” events which regularly brought together “numerous and highly respectable”²⁸ guests. While dressed as the Pierrot, the upper classes also “did not disdain to parade in the open streets,”²⁹ marching through the towns of the British colony in a display outside their ostentatious parties. During this period, revelers played Pierrot as a clown or jester in roles which resonated with the European tradition linked to the figure (Liverpool 2001:269).³⁰ But after abolition, the recently freed took to dressing as the Pierrot, integrating the character with the midnight bands of Canboulay while the original Pierrot fell into obscurity. As part of a band, the figure was renowned for participating in Canboulay fighting itself, adding to his costume the sticks associated with Kalenda, the Black fighting ritual of the pre-Emancipation era (Riggio 2020:215). According to nineteenth-century traveler Lewis Inniss, “as a preliminary to enjoying a good Carnival it was necessary for its votaries—especially those who intended

26 *SFG*, December 2, 1882, p. 3; see also *POSG* March 7, 1894, p. 3.

27 *Public Opinion*, February 20, 1890, p. 3.

28 *Trinidad Gazette*, February 20, 1822, p. 2.

29 *Trinidad Sentinel*, February 2, 1860, p. 3.

30 For details concerning the Pierrot in Europe, see Storey 1978 and Evans 2015.

to jeur [*sic*] Pierrot (play as clowns) [*sic*] to visit Gasparillo in order to select a suitable stick”³¹—sticks blessed during sacred rituals (Cowley 1996:2). Part of popular Carnival, the Pierrot roamed the towns alongside the bands, wielding his sticks and whips in the fights between the different groups associated with Canboulay—workers, migrants, and yard-dwellers, to name a few.

After just a few decades, however, the figure abandoned Canboulay altogether. By the 1870s, Pierrots were solely seen during the daytime, while Canboulay’s fighting bands persisted in their midnight grip over yards and streets (Cowley 1996:81). During this period, Pierrots led their own groups of stick fighters, serving as elected kings of daytime bands (Cowley 1996:80), preserving royal titles from the times of Canboulay. And the figure retained his arresting clout. For onlookers, “a fully dressed Pierrot was an imposing sight,” who “would walk along the streets proudly, with his head high up in the air, and uttering the most absurd things telling of his prowess and past victories,” all while he continued to be shadowed by a “large crowd of followers and supporters, men and women armed with sticks and stones.”³² But in contrast to the fights of Canboulay, initiated by the bands, daytime brawls were sparked by the Pierrots themselves, who initiated challenges with pompous speeches in attempts to throw off opposing Pierrots. Whip lashings were then exchanged, which escalated into outright fights—fights which would then include the accompanying stickmen. Onlookers afraid of such brawls would quickly flee, such as Percy Fraser and his teenage friends, who although they “would follow a favourite Pierrot everywhere he went,” also retreated when a fight broke out, climbing, on one occasion, “over the Rosary Church wall to avoid the stones and broken bottles flying about.”³³ Although Pierrots had severed their immediate ties with Canboulay, the princely figures persisted in their leadership of bands; in their fighting dispositions; and in their domination over foes—features linked to Canboulay but reconfigured by Pierrots in their move away from the procession.

The Pierrot continued to fight and claim small territories, even as Canboulay declined. In this regard, the figure perpetuated the territorial disputes which had been associated with Canboulay. In 1881, the year of the fateful Canboulay Riots, Pierrots were witnessed, just a few hours after the gruesome battles, roaming the streets while “gorgeously and expensively dressed,” wielding their whips while making “bombastic speeches ... some of them being outrageously absurd—[with] one player declaring his cousinship to the late Duke of

31 For a first-hand account, see Inniss 1932.

32 *Daily Express*, February 13, 2019.

33 *Daily Express*, February 13, 2019.

Wellington”³⁴ in what was yet another show of might. After the procession was extinguished, Pierrots continued to dispute territories, arrogating streets and squares as their own in often violent contentions, which grew in proportion and incidence. During the Carnival of 1886, for instance, “three pierrots [were] sent to prison for fighting[,] their attempt to escape arrest ... impeded by elaborate costumes, one of them having ‘tripped over his tail.’” Concerning these behaviors, “Sergeant Major Brierley said he had no desire to press for the punishment of the prisoners, but he wished to warn them against doing the same in future, as they had broken the law.”³⁵

The fighting persisted well into the 1890s. During the 1893 Carnival, “three *Pierrots* Wm. Frank, Charles Edwards, and John William were charged with fighting and committing a breach of the peace.”³⁶ The following year, a fight between two Pierrots almost ended in tragedy when one of the men charged upon his rival after his page boy had handed him a fighting stick, a “rod made of thick wires strapped together,” only to be held back by a witnessing officer before he could strike.³⁷ Also that year, two Pierrots were charged for carrying weapons, and one of them, a man named Watson, appeared in court “gaudily dressed, plumed, and accompanied by a tinkling of bells,”³⁸ answering to the charges not as Watson but as Pierrot. Wielding deadly weapons and fighting more and more among themselves, Pierrots amplified the confrontational and often violent features linked to Canboulay.

In their performances, Pierrots preserved the disputes associated with the now-extinguished Canboulay procession—a crucial point concerning the figure. Walking the city streets, these animated figures confronted other Pierrots as they moved in and out of territories claimed by adversaries, asserting their suzerainty over blocks and squares (Carr 1956:282). In their showcasing of abstruse erudition and spelling prowess, Pierrots humiliated opponents in order to commandeer more territories, accompanying their spellings with prancing and twisting to emphasize their impatience (Liverpool 2001:270). Eloquent and braggadocious Pierrots usually held the upper hand, while those who failed to express themselves fluently, or to swagger convincingly, could be literally clobbered and beaten (Hill 1972:38). In this regard, Pierrots reconfigured the band contentions over territory into bouts among themselves, dis-

34 *Trinidad Chronicle*, March 2, 1881, p. 3. The Duke of Wellington was famous for defeating Napoleon in the Battle of Waterloo.

35 *POSG*, March 13, 1886, p. 4.

36 *Public Opinion*, February 14, 1893, p. 5.

37 *POSG*, March 7, 1894, p. 3.

38 *POSG*, February 6, 1894, p. 2.

putes which, at times, evolved into bitter fights which always held territory as the quintessential object of dispute—a legacy of the inter-yard strife of Canboulay, perpetuated by the Pierrot.

Even as the Pierrot preserved essential features linked to Canboulay, both expressions retained their own unique characteristics. If the bands had been linked to yards and barracks, the Pierrot fought over streets and squares; if the bands had based their fights on stick, tongue, and origin, Pierrots fought while wielding whip, lore, and language. But much like Canboulay, the Pierrot had his history fettered to Trinidad itself. If Canboulay had sprouted from the fields of cane, the Pierrot was linked to the French themselves—the masters of former years—who had introduced the figure to the island. In his role as a prince, the Pierrot also furthered Canboulay's mock kings and queens, claiming the streets and squares of Port of Spain as the supreme overlord. Both the bands and the Pierrots were also linked to violence. Brandishing their sticks or whips—or sometimes both—both fought for territory, fiercely claiming city spaces through their might and brawn. Moving away from Canboulay, however, the Pierrot embraced speech and rhetoric in such disputes, with his words and wisdom also functioning to lay claim to territories and defeat his rivals. If Canboulay had rooted on the island the conflicts over territory, the Pierrot retained that sense of discord and struggle in his feuds—a crucial theme in local Carnival which persisted even after the authorities excised the fiery procession from the land.

Much like Canboulay, the Pierrot's performance recalled Emancipation. If the Canboulay bands had moved while bearing sticks and torches, the Pierrot revived such campaigns, claiming space as territories linked to an imagined African past and place. On one occasion, passersby witnessed a group of Pierrots clamoring about how they were “the descendants of Mungo Park,”³⁹ a Scottish explorer who had surveyed West Africa during the eighteenth century, while in another instance—upon a rival Pierrot's intrusion into his area—one such figure stated: “I am the king of Dahomey, but I also rule over many countries that I have conquered. Do you now visit my dominions to offer your subjugation, or do you come as an enemy to dispute my rule?” (Carr 1956:282). As contentious figures, the Pierrot's territorial claims harkened back to a diasporic place, reworking the enslaved experience of uprootedness even decades after abolition. Indeed, Pierrots recalled the fraught circumstances linked to the forced circulation of enslavement, retorting to displacements, extirpations, and coerced excisions which constituted the Black experience. In their consol-

39 *SFG*, December 2, 1882, p. 3.

idation of an imagined African territory in the New World, the Pierrot reshaped the mappings of exile and exodus, reworking the systemic racism which usually dismisses the historical element of Black experience and culture at large (Gilroy 1993:111–12). Claiming overlordship of Dahomey and coupling his lineage with that of a diligent explorer of an Africa left behind, the Pierrot's claims over territory were much more than simply the hijacking of territory: Pierrots rehearsed a renewed rooting, reconfiguring a hostile territory into a newfound place: new idioms, new roots, new weapons.

The Pierrot's rhetorical outbursts and arrogant displays of abstruse erudition also mocked education. The new educational system carried the contours of an English heritage, having little to do with the environment and reality of the Caribbean. Trinidadians, for instance, came to know more about English kings and queens than they did about their own national figures or even their colonial experience. The focus on the English language reinforced the imperial tongue, sidelining the creole and patois—and other languages—spoken by the multiple groups established on the island (Brathwaite 1993:259–60). In this regard, the Pierrot's declamations of Shakespeare and esoteric English history—usually retained through rote memorization (Carr 1956:282–84)—and his spelling of convoluted words obliquely criticized the state of education in a performance which displayed knowledge in a contentious manner but which, deliberately, did not critically engage with it. This feature would be amplified, a few years later, by the Pierrot grenade, an offshoot of the Pierrot who spoke a mixture of patois, creole, and English and, as a central feature, showcased his mock erudition by spelling out intricate words to crowds in a charade-like pantomime, persuading them to spell out the often-difficult words themselves (Carr 1956:284). In his own performance and in his influence upon the Pierrot Grenade, the Pierrot's verbose challenges and contentious intellectual demeanor paralleled the changes in Trinidad's educational system, and his verbal battles reinforced the possibility that this figure, in its local iteration, also served as an instrument to challenge an educational system which did not critically engage with local culture.

A festive character which amalgamated several figures—the jamette, the French elite, the local creole, the toiling migrant, the yard-dweller, and the uprooted Negro—the Pierrot juxtaposed tropes and symbols which, while seemingly incompatible, coalesced to form an alloyed character whose parts were greater than the whole. Many were the faces that penetrated the Pierrot, who showcased marks and sketches from a past and present which were, through him, superimposed onto the island. As the jamette, the Pierrot tracked onto the streets of Port of Spain the lavish indoor parties of the late eighteenth century, his very first stage; as the local creole, he sounded of the old

patois heard throughout the colony overtaken by British interlopers, drawn to the fecund canes of wealth; as Canboulay's royalty, he cast the dreams of the noblest of kingdoms into the barracks which, come Carnival each year, celebrated its own princes and jesters; as the yard-dwelling migrant, he tainted the central spaces of the colony with the darkened stigma of the plantation, an embarrassed site born under slavery which persisted, year after year, under indentured servitude; as the uprooted Negro, finally, he conceived of an imagined Africa left behind, crafted now in memory and cast into the New World where he now settled. And in his actions, his contradictions persisted—if at first he joked, soon he shamed; if at first he preached, soon he flogged. An amalgam of wares and weapons, the Pierrot remained a local mosaic of worldly customs, a heterotopic garden of varieties within a monocultural colony of export.

However, as the costume grew in popularity—and as Pierrot-associated violence increased—law enforcement took to cleansing the streets of the polemical figure. During the 1880s, the colonial authorities revived Ordinance No. 6 of 1868, prohibiting people from “appearing masked or otherwise disguised except at such times and in conformity with such regulations as may from time to time be allowed by public notice” (Garcia 1884:94), a law which, among other things, the police applied to the Pierrot. In the 1890s, law enforcement began to demand individual licenses from revelers who planned on dressing as the figure,⁴⁰ and at the tail end of the century the police arrested numerous Pierrots for fighting.⁴¹ After the colonial authorities had succeeded in extinguishing Canboulay, they turned to dampening polemical carnival figures, one of which was the Pierrot, who preserved the territorial claims linked to Canboulay—even if in his own way. As an effect of the colonial government's initiatives, by the turn of the century, the character had all but disappeared, soon becoming effectively extinct.

4 The Pisse-en-lit

Perhaps the most controversial character in Jamette Carnival was the Pisse-en-lit. In one of its forms, the Pisse-en-lit referenced “disguises of men and women, and *vice versa*”⁴² in which “one sex should wear the dress of the other.”⁴³ On

40 *POSG*, February 16, 1892, p. 11.

41 *SFG*, March 9, 1889, p. 3; *POSG*, February 10, 1894, p. 3; *POSG*, March 7, 1894, p. 3; *POSG*, February 14, 1893, p. 3.

42 *The Herald and Venezuelan News*, February 9, 1894, pp. 2–3; see also *POSG*, February 16, 1892, p. 11.

43 *The Catholic News*, March 1, 1885, p. 2.

such occasions, the Pisse-en-lit featured “persons travestied in garb other than those which pertain to them and who take advantages of Shrovetide thus to present themselves before the public.”⁴⁴ At other times, the character alluded to “women in their bedroom costumes,”⁴⁵ specifically white nightgowns decorated with ribbons and lace (Crowley 1956:196) which, when transparent, as was sometimes the case, also showed off the wearer’s semi-nude body (Franco 2001:190). This particular version of the Pisse-en-lit could be worn by either men or women, who presented themselves as “gaily dressed pseudo women, ... dancing through the streets with flaunting skirts, and handkerchiefs, to the accompaniment of chac-chac, flute, clarionet, violin, and cuatro.”⁴⁶ In this configuration, the Pisse-en-lit problematized femininity (Ramsay 2021:216), even though the costume was worn by both men and women (Franco 2001:160), challenging Victorian mores through its public presentation.

Much like the Pierrot, the female Pisse-en-lit was also a performative mask. While parading the streets, she carried a piece of cloth stained with fake blood, represented by red dye or paint (Crowley 1956:196; Franco 2001:160; Martin 1998:232). While the name “Pisse-en-lit” translates as “pee in bed,” another of its implied meanings is the release of menstrual blood, indicated by the cloth she carried (Franco 2001:161). In her display, the Pisse-en-lit could expose her underwear and breasts to passers-by; publicly simulate sexual intercourse; carry a chamber pot on her head; and/or hold sticks protruding from between her legs (Crowley 1956:196; Liverpool 2001:277–78). Her performance was such that the newspapers of the times associated the Pisse-en-lit with “indecenty”⁴⁷ and “obscenity,”⁴⁸ and whenever the figure was absent from Carnival the papers claimed the season featured greater “respectability”⁴⁹ or even “a strict observance of morality.”⁵⁰ In her female iteration—the most well-documented in both primary and secondary sources⁵¹—the Pisse-en-lit walked as a spectacle and, for that period, was a sexual aberration.

44 *Public Opinion*, February 14, 1893, p. 4.

45 *New Era*, February 23, 1885, p. 2.

46 *Public Opinion*, February 20, 1890, p. 3.

47 *New Era*, February 23, 1885, p. 2; *The Catholic News*, March 1, 1885, p. 2; *POSG* February 10, 1883, p. 4.

48 *New Era*, March 3, 1879, p. 2; *POSG*, February 10, 1883, p. 4.

49 *Public Opinion*, February 20, 1890, p. 3; *Public Opinion*, February 22, 1896, p. 3.

50 *The Herald and Venezuelan News*, February 9, 1894, pp. 2–3.

51 Although there are descriptions of both the clothes and the actions of the female Pisse-en-lit in both primary and secondary sources—sources used throughout this text—descriptions concerning the male Pisse-en-lit are scant at best and are usually limited to simple statements that women were dressed in men’s clothing. For these references, see *The Catholic News*, March 1, 1885, p. 2; *POSG*, February 16, 1892, p. 1; *Public Opinion*, March 1,

In all likelihood, the Trinidadian Pisse-en-lit was a modification of a popular Martinican character, the chie-en-lit (bed shitter), a figure who smeared mustard or gelatin on her buttocks to simulate feces (Franco 2001:161). Likely as an effect of Martinican migration, the Trinidadian Pisse-en-lit was an offshoot of this character, shifting her stain to the genital area in what signaled an association with sexuality and even prostitution. In 1877, police chief L.M. Fraser claimed that, in Port of Spain, “each succeeding year shows a rapid spread of prostitution,” while in 1884 he was shocked at “the steady increase in the number of girls of very tender ages who unblushingly enroll themselves amongst the recognized and registered prostitutes” (Trotman 1986:247). The chief’s observations are supported by the intense migration toward the cities and the marginal employment opportunities for arriving women in what was, especially during the 1880s, a period of economic distress. Under such conditions, some women may have shifted to prostitution since their earnings could surpass those of menial jobs—sewing, laundering, domestic service, for instance—buttressed by a large male market in what was, after all, a major port hub (Trotman 1986:248–49). However, although some jamette women may have turned to such work, many others were forced to register as prostitutes in a city immersed in sexualized power brokering—especially between police and lower-class women—and a Victorian morality which supported the generalization of Afro-creole women as prostitutes (Franco 2001:169). The rise of prostitution and elite, stereotyped views concerning jamette women amplified societal tensions, spurring change in the cultural arena and in class relations at large, with one of the responses among the popular classes being the expression of the Pisse-en-lit.

These developments brought important changes with regard to the law. The local elites of the times, who controlled legislation, were less tolerant and more prudish than their social counterparts had been during the early nineteenth century (Brereton 1979:171). In 1869, for instance, legislators passed Ordinance No. 18, the “Ordinance for the Better Prevention of Contagious Diseases,” which, despite its name, solely addressed venereal infections. Under the law, if a police officer held “good cause to believe that a woman therein named is a common prostitute, the Justice may, if he thinks fit, issue a notice” in the form of an official summons. Then, if “the woman examined is found to be affected with a contagious disease she shall thereupon be liable to be detained in a public hospital, ... legally in the custody of the person conveying or detaining her,” to be

1892, p. 4; *Public Opinion*, February 14, 1893, p. 4; *Public Opinion* February 14, 1893, p. 5; *The Herald and Venezuelan News*, February 9, 1894, pp. 2–3.

“discharged [only] by the surgeon of the hospital by writing under his hand” (Garcia 1884:223–30). Along with confining jamette women to hospital wards, the ordinance also encouraged dangerous mercury treatments (Noel 2021:116–17) and contributed to a noted increase in officers extorting sexual favors from barrack women, be they prostitutes or not, who may have acquiesced from fear of falling prey to the law’s directives (Noel 2021:116; Trotman 1986:251). This possibility is further supported by the rape statistics of the period, which showed an increase between 1870 and 1889 and remained elevated for the last ten years of the century when compared to the previous decades (Trotman 1984:64). This increased incidence of rape and a state policy which punished jamette women stimulated a sense of revolt among yard dwellers, such that the rise of the Pisse-en-lit, among other things, served as a response.

Under the new legal regime, jamette women were indeed detained. According to the *San Fernando Gazette*, the Colonial Hospital in San Fernando, by the beginning of the 1880s, was hosting invasive exams and quarantines, serving as “the receptacle of the most infected, immoral, and degraded portion of the female inhabitants of the Town.”⁵² But as the police enforced the law, it soon became clear that the local authorities did not solely target the containment of physical contagion. Soon the *San Fernando Gazette* also took to warning its readers to avoid sending their friends and family to the hospital altogether, claiming “it is obvious that the contact between these two distinct classes of female patients should be completely removed”⁵³ in what was a class-biased view. In the colonial capital, moreover, the *Port of Spain Gazette* held they “have had several complaints [regarding] the scandalous scenes of obscenity and scandal occasioned, on Wednesday mornings, by the band of prostitutes who go up in a body to the Hospital, in compliance with the provisions of the contagious diseases Ordinance.” The newspaper then beckoned law enforcement to “devise the means of preventing the moral contamination which such public obscenity is calculated to produce”⁵⁴ in yet another display of prejudice. By the early 1880s, it was clear the law was being invoked to contain yard women in general, who were perceived by media outlets and the local populace as an immoral societal group.

It was around this time that the newspapers began to report on revelers dressed as the Pisse-en-lit. Historian John Cowley references an 1879 newspaper article which claimed that, for that year’s Carnival, there had been an “enourmous [*sic*] proportion of masked men who unsexed themselves to enjoy

52 *SFG*, June 4, 1881, pp. 2–3.

53 *SFG*, June 4, 1881, pp. 2–3.

54 *POSG*, November 5, 1881, p. 3.

the strange silly novelty of wrapping their big frames in a shapeless bundle of female apparel" (Cowley 1996:83).⁵⁵ That same year, the *Gazette* alluded to "obscenities, both in gesture and words, which offend the eye and ear at every turn"⁵⁶ in what was a likely reference to the Pisse-en-lit. Finally, the *New Era* also reported on "numerous bands of blackguards who assumed the dress, and imitated the department of dissolute and abandoned women; the wretches and refinement with the ribald thrash [*sic*, likely "trash"], obscene utterances, and indecorous distortions of the body, and the avowed defiance to the higher laws of morality" in what, for the paper, was "a retrograde step in civilization, and a taunt to religion."⁵⁷ A costume which would reach its height in popularity throughout the 1880s and early 1890s, the Pisse-en-lit emerged alongside the growth of yards and barracks, strict Victorian morality, and legislation concerning jamette sexual behavior.

Throughout the 1880s, the newspapers would continue to focus on the figure, reporting on both men and women as the Pisse-en-lit. In an 1883 *Gazette* issue, a writer stated that "we are at a loss to understand why *carte blanche* was ... given to the vile prostitutes which infect our town." The article went on to claim that "the indecent costume of the pisse-en-lit should be prohibited altogether in future Proclamations, and the Government must be fully prepared to put down with the greatest inflexibility all fighting with sticks, and all obscenities"⁵⁸ in a reference to both the Pisse-en-lit and the persistence of band fighting. In 1888, the *Gazette* referenced men performing as the female Pisse-en-lit, reporting on "the bands of men dressed as women" which "paraded the whole City, from morning to night, repeating the same song, containing *doubles ententes* of the most obscene meaning, and dancing in the lewdest manner." In the piece, the writer also maintained that "a small band of four of these, seeing a lady and her daughter at the window, sang an obscene distich of the most indecent character in the crudest words" in what set "class against class, disturbing the harmonious relations that should exist between employers and employed."⁵⁹ Once more, the newspapers associated the figure with an underclass which undermined Victorian values, a figure which moved through the city and placed yard women center stage, tarnishing a putatively pure bourgeois space during a period noted for heightened morality.

55 In the notes, the author is unclear whether the referenced newspaper is *Fair Play* or the *Trinidad Chronicle*.

56 *POSG*, March 1, 1879, p. 3.

57 *New Era*, March 3, 1879, p. 2.

58 *POSG*, February 10, 1883, p. 4.

59 *POSG*, February 15, 1888, p. 3.

But for as much as the female Pisse-en-lit was adopted by both men and women, it was femininity which was the main subject of the masquerade. Indeed, the Pisse-en-lit brought to the downtown areas of Trinidadian cities a female jamette who, for the elites and authorities, embodied the grime of the slums and barracks where she resided (Noel 2021:124–25). Stained with blood—even if symbolic—the figure implied both menstruation and violence, with the blood representing female unruliness (Franco 2001:165) while the stick protruding between the Pisse-en-lit’s legs signified ferocity, even becoming, at times, a literal weapon (King 2011:218). The character also protested the perverse colonial policies endured by Black female subjects living at the margins of empire, serving the jamette’s construction of a novel image for Afro-creole women (Franco 2001:159). Such a spectacle, however, was not so much an exception to the reigning moral codes as it was a symptom of the twisted policies imposed by its imperial agents, epitomized through law and policing. In this regard, the figure illuminated a social context in which imperial signifiers referenced the female jamette as a carrier of disease (Franco 2001:171). Scouring for gonorrhoea and syphilis, imperial doctors regularly defiled the jamette body during obligatory examinations, crippling them with probing instruments and dangerous mercury treatments which poisoned the exposed female bodies (Noel 2021:116). As if prodding and poking were not enough, after treatment jamettes were detained in wards or banished, once again, to the yards where they seemingly belonged—where contamination and sin could be acceptably dumped by a perversely virtuous empire—morally quarantined, where their festering diseases could abide, and where the jamette’s supposed depravity could be forgotten.

But in full view during Carnival, the Pisse-en-lit incorporated the very form which had been cast to the fringes, consigning to central spaces the corrupted body which had been cobbled together at the hospitals in the first place. Now walking the city streets, the Pisse-en-lit contaminated the central nodes of a colony which, much as in the case of the Pierrot, already contained the essential marks and traces of the figure. Given such wicked circumstances, the Pisse-en-lit’s expressive capabilities were magnified as a figure who, in all her explicitness, maximized her effect precisely by being surveyed. On display, she optimized her generative capabilities, rendering a jamette body disfigured by abuse and sculpted by the sharp and scintillating paraphernalia of empire but commanded, nevertheless, by the jamette herself. In this sense, the jamette not only voiced her protests concerning state policy by parading the Pisse-en-lit costume, but she also validated her own survival (Franco 2001:175) in the face of a perverse societal order. By marching through the cities and showcasing the violence she endured, the Pisse-en-lit recast the jamette body broken

in the wards and barracks, exhibiting a vigorous new jamette who, ambiguously, also incorporated a moribund apparition: violated, bloodstained, bilious.

But it was in the Pisse-en-lit's employment of her very own physicality that she was at her most effective. As Samantha Noel has boldly posited, the Pisse-en-lit epitomized a "primary surface on which battles over sexual propriety and 'metaphysical commitments of culture' were contested" (Noel 2021:125), as it was upon the jamette herself that the Pisse-en-lit's most vital fight for absolution took place. The Pisse-en-lit's struggle, then, was also a biopolitical⁶⁰ one—to use Foucault's term—since her fight was both located upon her own physicality and, crucially, concerned with the redemption of that very body. In all her repugnance, the Pisse-en-lit not only responded to a warped colonial health agenda but also, through her exposure, fought over the body itself—a body which, in late nineteenth-century Trinidad, was exploited by imperial agents and segregated in hospital wards. In this regard, the figure showcased how the history of the body is linked to ways of being, serving as a potent site through which, in the case of the Pisse-en-lit, Black femininity may transform physical and metaphysical geographies of domination (McKittrick 2006:51–52). Being that her very self was a contested space, the Pisse-en-lit was much more than merely a moral deviation or an act of resistance: she was also a manifestation of cultural plurality in a colony penetrated by Victorian morality; an imagined infection to be cleansed from supposedly fecund land; a surrogate to racial and class-based segregation; and a site at which sex and sin could be violently disputed, but which solely scarred the jamette female body.

Given the controversy surrounding the Pisse-en-lit, it comes as no surprise that the press soon called for the figure's erasure. The upper classes viewed the costume as yet one more indication of jamette immorality, as did the Black middle class, and both groups wanted to see the figure eradicated (Scher 2007:116). In January 1894, police chief Edmund Fortescue, leaning on Ordinance No. 6 of 1868, determined that "it shall not be lawful for any person ... to appear ... in the dress or costume commonly called and known as 'Pisse en lit.'"⁶¹ The following Carnival, the *San Fernando Gazette* announced that "the most objectionable features of years past, such as men and women dressing in bed attire and parading the streets ... have been thrown down;"⁶² circumstances which

60 Biopolitics is policy which takes charge of life, coming into contact with the intimacies of the body itself; see Foucault 1978:140–44.

61 *POSG*, January 25, 1894, p. 3.

62 *SFG*, January 26, 1895, p. 2.

were repeated once again in 1896.⁶³ Facing pressure from both legislation and the police, the Pisse-en-lit costume began to fade.

Allied to these conditions was the fact that Carnival was undergoing important changes—shifts which partly came about from the greater involvement of the upper classes in local culture. In 1887, Trinidadian elites had already been involved in the preparation of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, which commemorated her 50-year reign over the British Empire. In the following year, the Black middle class, along with the White elite, participated in another Golden Jubilee—that of Emancipation—marking 50 years since the end of bondage. After these major events, both groups increased their participation in Carnival (Cowley 1996:107,113), while the Black middle class also began investing in Carnival competitions which featured popular music, exalting Black contributions to local culture. During such events, organizers modified jamaette exhibitions through their suppression of presumed obscenity, offering cash prizes to participants who followed their rules (Dudley 2003:16–17). The few women who did participate were encouraged to dress in homely Europeanized attire (Gibbs 2016:109), a move that was supported by a colonial state favoring modesty in dress (Noel 2021:118). Soon the masquerading bands outside the competition began to feature more and more male leads, as it was the men who were receiving the cash prizes, circumstances which further dampened female opportunities. Such efforts reduced female participation generally (Rohlehr 1990:55) and, along with the prohibitive laws which targeted the Pisse-en-lit, further contributed to the decline of the figure, which by the end of the century was excised for good.

5 Conclusion

The Pierrot and the Pisse-en-lit were part of an unsettled cultural arena which featured unbridled migration to the cities, the consolidation of a Black middle class, and a growing Victorian morality. With the suppression of Canboulay, Pierrots perpetuated band fighting linked to an intensifying yard culture and, above all, territorial contentions, adding rhetorical battles and whip lashings to their own brawls which, at times, also involved stick-fighting bands. Concerning the Black middle class, the Pierrot tacitly commented on the group's association with education, teasing both the group and the system for emulating foreign cultures dissonant with local conditions. Finally, while legislation and

63 *SFG*, February 19, 1896, p. 3.

policing were certainly crucial for eradicating the figure, media and societal pressures over Pierrot-fighting served as foundational support for local authorities to eliminate the contentious figure—a figure which, although extinct by the end of the nineteenth century, was also pivotal in the eventual emergence of the Pierrot grenade.

Regarding the Pisse-en-lit, intense migration stimulated both rampant yard growth in a city unprepared to house and employ such a massive influx—amplifying petty crime and prostitution—and magnified interclass contact in the downtown areas of major cities. The concomitant rise of Victorian-age morality reinforced class tensions to the point that jamette culture was associated with promiscuity and sin, buttressing draconian laws for the control of female behavior. Finally, the growth of the Black middle class and their rising interest in local culture shifted the ways in which the popular classes interacted during Carnival. Although legislation and policing were crucial for the extinction of the Pisse-en-lit—as had been the case with the Pierrot—the Black middle class’s involvement with Carnival, notably through music competitions, shifted gender roles and performances during the season, further supporting the demise of the Pisse-en-lit. Both born from and broken by the conditions of the late nineteenth century, the Pierrot and the Pisse-en-lit emerged out of a fraught setting, coming to their demise as the circumstances gradually and decisively changed.

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