

## Good Liming in Trinidad: The Art of Doing Something

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*Trinidad and Tobago is a playful culture where locals proudly “lime” often and with great zealousness. This essay describes the elements of liming to further understanding of how and why these events are centered in play. I contend that liming is an activity engaged in by all Trinidadians—men, women and children, from all socio-economic classes, and that it involves both public and private spaces. These spaces include street corners, beaches, clubs, and private homes. Although liming has been defined as “idling,” this does not adequately explain these events that often involve at least a few of the following: eating, drinking, dancing, storytelling, and just general merrymaking. What is valued is the ordinary becoming extraordinary. I posit that liming is play in both the activity and the attitude based in a mindset of living in the present and practicing one’s freedom.*

I arrived in Trinidad in August of 2011, I had never been to the Caribbean before, and was immediately hit with the wall of humidity. Soon after with the many stares as “whites” in Trinidad and Tobago are a minority group. I was greeted in Creole, a newfound Trinidadian friend commenting that I “reach,” or arrive. Many things struck me about Trinidad initially but what I knew quickly was that Trinidadians are friendly and gregarious people and that the culture is generally laid back. Although these initial reactions still held true, even after three years in Trinidad, both the culture and the people showed themselves to be more complicated. That being said, the culture is all about the lime. And this playful phenomenon provides the possibility to further understand this small Caribbean island.

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Thomas Hylland Eriksen in his 1990 essay, "Liming in Trinidad: The Art of Doing Nothing," defined liming as the "art of idling" (1). Although his article brings to light valuable notions surrounding liming, it is my hope to expand the definition of liming beyond his article.<sup>1</sup> Eriksen's notion of liming as doing nothing is based in the assumption that an "activity" is only "productive" if it exemplifies the Western ideals of work and production.<sup>2</sup> However, viewing liming as "idleness" does not adequately explain these events, which center the everyday life of Trinbagonians, Trinidadians or "Trinis."<sup>3</sup> Given that Trinidad and Tobago culture is centered around liming, cultural identity celebrated *through* liming, this essay focuses on this activity outside of the traditionally negative assumptions

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<sup>1</sup> It is necessary to briefly note where my analysis of liming is similar to Eriksen's research. I agree with Eriksen that liming does entail "sharing of food and drink, the exchange of tall stories, jokes and anecdotes etc." (3). I also found that liming does not have "formal rules," as Eriksen argues, but its "value to the participants is entirely contingent on the shared meanings that can be established spontaneously" (3). Although liming can be a public activity, I disagree that this is a necessity for a lime; this assumption automatically excludes women (as some women would not "lime in the street") and upper class Trinidadians who tend to have more private limes. Eriksen is right that "not just anybody can lime together" (4), but this is changing in terms of gender and ethnicity. Men and women who are from different areas of Trinidad and have different ethnic or religious backgrounds do lime with each other, especially the youth. Mobility in liming seems to be based more so in young people who attend college or trade school, and Trinidadians who work in professional jobs. Although there are urban working class men who lime in the street with male friends, this is a very specific type of limer. As well, although Eriksen did not see these clubs or parties with loud music as "limes" (because you could not have a conversation), most Trinis did think these were also limes (as in everywhere can be a place to lime), conversation wasn't always a necessity but having a heightened experience is. I should note that my hope is to build and expand on Eriksen's research, rather than simply critique it. As many of my participants would say, black urban males on the street corners *are* liming, however all Trinis lime.

<sup>2</sup> Eriksen's overall tone of his article about liming is positive (in that he is not necessarily looking at the phenomenon through a Western lens), however his definition does connote this idea. This was confirmed by many discussions about liming with Trinidadians. One memorable quote from a participant in my ethnography is "liming is the opposite of idling."

<sup>3</sup> I use the term Trinidadian and Trini interchangeably, although often "Trini" is more a causal term to use. It varies whether or not a Trinidadian would appreciate a "foreigner" (a negative term they use for those who are not from the Caribbean) using the word Trini. I only started using the term after I had been in Trinidad a few months and felt accepted by much of the culture. Trinbagonian is the term used for people from Trinidad and Tobago. It is only used formally and the islands have such distinct histories that a Trinidadian would rarely use this word, and if you are from Tobago you will often refer to yourself as a Tobagonian. Because I am focusing on Trinidad in terms of my research, I won't apply this term within my essay.

mediated on the work versus play dichotomy. That is, the Western standard that work is productive, thus a vital engagement based in individual discipline and capitalist ideals is challenged by the cultural norms of this country. This dichotomy of privileging work over play is based in both a history of Judeo Christianity and capitalist ideals of work and consumption. Having a good work ethic remains an important part of the capitalist ideals of individualism. Those who do not embrace this are often considered lazy, and in many cases are vilified as having bad character flaws, of being selfish or immature. The dichotomy of work and play privileges one over the other. Play has been seen as trivial, unproductive, and a waste of time. As Roger Caillois states, play was an integral part of Western culture at one time, now play is “merely tolerated.”<sup>4</sup>

This research describes the elements of liming to further understanding about how and why liming is play. Play is defined as “a project of active fun, at its purest when players experience the flow of play apart from the mundane cares and woes of everyday life” (Csikszentimihalyi & Bennett, 1971, p. 2). Play has been discussed as both an activity and as an attitude (Csikszentimihalyi 1975; 1981) this is also reflective in liming. That is playing—the “activity”—and playfulness—the “attitude”—go hand in hand. For play to happen, those involved must have a playful attitude. I define liming as play, and more specifically as a “heightened form of communication” or “verbal art” (Bauman 1975; 1986). Richard Bauman’s definition is specifically used to discuss performance and language. His definition is applied in this way but also expanded beyond this by combining Bauman’s linguistic research on how play *looks* with psychological research on the desire to play and playfulness. This two-tier approach provides the opportunity to understand liming as both an activity that is *acted out* and an attitude and desire to participate. This allows me to approach both the questions of *what is liming* and *why lime*.

Through interviews and participant observation, this research will expand and clarify the nuances of this important phenomenon of Trinidad culture (although I did lime in Tobago, the differences in culture with these two islands requires me to only focus on Trinidad within this essay.) This research is centered in participant observation, a small focus group, and many impromptu interviews and discussions with students and fellow colleagues at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago. My participant observation lasted for one year (September 2011-September 2012) and was based in a phenomenological methodology. As Linda Finlay states, phenomenological methodology is concerned with returning to “embodied, experiential meanings

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<sup>4</sup> Play is not an invention of modern culture. To invoke this, is to reflect on pre-modern rituals, which celebrated good harvests, to envision culture a time long ago. However, Johan Huizinga declares play preceded humans: “play is older than culture, for culture, however inadequately defined, always presupposes human society, and animals have not waited for man to teach them their playing.” (1)

... fresh, complex, rich descriptions of a phenomenon as it is concretely lived” (6). The focus group consisted of six female graduate students and was conducted after the ethnography (November 2012). Finally, the culture of Trinidad invites conversations in hallways, on street corners, and in my own classes. Although not planned, some of these impromptu interviews and discussions provided important insights that I include in this study.<sup>5</sup> My research questions are: (1) What is liming? (2) And, why lime? Within these two research questions there are several sub-questions. In terms of the question, What is liming, I also ask: What does this activity encompass? Who limes? Where do they lime? How do you know you are liming? In terms of the question, Why lime, I also ask: What purpose does liming serve for Trinis? And, how do Trinidadians *practice* their culture through liming?

Although liming can be defined as “hanging out,” or “partying” or “relaxation” these terms do not adequately explain these events that often involve at least a few of the following: eating, drinking, dancing, and storytelling. Eriksen discussed liming as a male working class urban inactivity, which occurs spontaneously in public spaces. Given my own engagement in liming and discussions with locals about liming, I contend that liming is an activity engaged in by all Trinidadians—men, women and children, from all socio-economic classes, and that it involves both public and private spaces. These liming spaces include street corners, beaches, clubs and private homes (Trinis would say “you can lime anywhere.”) The events are often planned, but also impromptu.<sup>6</sup> That being said, those events that continue on well beyond the initial proposed time frame are most valued as they demonstrate the lime is a good time.

Trinidadians like to enjoy themselves and take pride in their playful ways. Trinidad, like much of the Caribbean, has a stereotypical image presented to the West, and certainly the laid back vibe, and the sea and the sand does exist there. However, Trinidad is different than many of the other islands in the Caribbean (and for that matter, they are all different from each other in culture, language, and lifestyle). Trinidad is rich with oil thus the need for tourism on this island is not necessary as it may be in Jamaica, or Barbados, or even Trinidad’s sister island, Tobago. Because Trinidad doesn’t rely on tourism for its livelihood, the ways of the culture are not as necessarily “willing to serve” as they may be on

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<sup>5</sup> This includes a number of quotes throughout the essay, which were sayings I heard many times over in different contexts. Although these sayings are in Creole English, I paraphrase them for the sake of readability. The only exception to this is the phrase “wine on em” used later in the essay. “Wine of them” isn’t a clear transition, as the phrase means both wine on us and wine on me.

<sup>6</sup> This differs from Eriksen’s contention that although limes don’t have “rules,” to be a lime it must be “spontaneous.” Given I was often invited to lime, I contend that limes don’t require spontaneity. However, limes that are planned can be judged more harshly than those impromptu ones if found to be a “bad” lime.

the more tourist-based Caribbean islands (an example is the awful customer service found on most of the island.) Trinidadians do consider themselves better off than other islanders in the Caribbean because they don't have to participate in tourism for their livelihood.<sup>7</sup> Trinidad boasts being the richest island of the Caribbean. Despite this, the infrastructure in areas of the island does not reflect their wealth, trash littering many of the streets, narrow poorly kept roads, and flooding in the northern cities. They are a proudly lawless people, who demonstrate this pride through excessively fast driving, their heart pounding loud music, and their propensity for boot legged DVDs. Trinidad is lively and Trinidadians pride themselves on being fun and interesting.

I was told by more than a few Trinis, in more than a few different ways, that I had "a little Trini in me." Sometimes this would be phrased as a question: "Do you have family here?" "Have you been here before?" Or sometimes it would be comments, like the one above. From my own perspective, I felt surprisingly at ease with most Trinis, I found the flow of communication to be effortless (even moments when I didn't understand the Creole dialect, or moments when they didn't understand my use of English.) What I was struck with almost immediately was that there was something about my personality that matched that of many Trinidadians. I saw this and they did. I tend to be gregarious, I laugh easily and often, I'm friendly, I can tell a good story and I have a sharp wit. All of these traits are highly desired in Trinidad culture and provided an easier transition to engaging in my research despite the fact that I was a minority given my race and nationality.<sup>8</sup> Sonya Corbin Dwyer and Jennifer Buckle examine the issues of the insider and outsider in ethnographic research, and the space between the two. They claim that although being an insider to a culture provides access to the population, there can arise the problem of perhaps being too similar to those being studied. Referencing the research of Brian Fay, the authors argue that someone from the outside might be able to more adequately conceptualize the experience as they would not be as enmeshed in the culture.

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<sup>7</sup> There are many examples of this but one will suffice. I attended a party when I first arrived in Trinidad. At one point I was with a group of Trinidadians, a few feet away three other people stood, it was obvious that these two groups knew each other. The Trini man next to me comments, "those are Jamaicans. They think they are better than us." With that the group of Trinidadians erupted with laughter as the Jamaicans grimaced. It was only much later that I realized the joke is that it is the Trinidadians who consider themselves better and "better off" than other islanders.

<sup>8</sup> I should also note that I was able to bridge attending both working class and middle and upper class limes given that my background is working class (I am the only person in my family to attend college), thus I was able to fit in. Given that I am a college professor, and Trinidad is very hierarchical, I was also able to attend limes that were middle and upper class. This flexibility given my background was invaluable.

Given my initial conversations with Trinidadians about liming and their lack of reflection on their engagement in liming, I consider my relationship as an outsider to be a benefit. Clearly, the fact that my personality traits connected with Trinis did offer me the ability to occupy “a space between” an outsider and an insider. I am not a Trinidadian and this was never in question but I was told on more than one occasion that I could “lime like a Trini” and thus I was able to make that bridge.<sup>9</sup> As Fay argues, “there is no self-understanding without other-understanding” (241) and my ability to connect with Trinidadian culture provided a rich basis for this research. I understand my research as based in “descriptions” using “phenomenological reductions” to disclose the meaning of liming. I understand my findings to be both descriptive and interpretative.

When I started my research on liming in September 2011 I began by asking Trinidadians what liming was. I realized very quickly that this approach would not yield the results I had hoped for. Trinis would shrug, or say “you wouldn’t understand,” or generally seem annoyed. I found this interesting as I was not asking these questions during a lime but it seemed that even asking this question in passing resulted in killing the *possibility* of a lime. I soon began liming with Trinis and rather than ask this question, I became both a participant and an observer. On a few early occasions, I would talk about liming with other Trinidadians making simple statements like, “I stayed up too late liming,” and I would be met with knowing smiles and enthusiasm. I quickly found that Trinis like to be mischievous in a way that you don’t see in most of Western culture. Be it staying up too late, or coming to work the next day wearing your carnival make-up from the night before, or hanging out at the Rum Shop at 8am, Trinis don’t all participate in liming to this degree but it is rare to find a Trinidadian that condemns this type of behavior. When this type of behavior is condemned it does invoke the dichotomy of reputation versus respectability that is the basis of a great deal of research on the effects of colonization and resistance in Caribbean culture.

Many scholars discuss the notion of reputation versus respectability, mostly notably Peter Wilson, who studied the relationship of Caribbean people to their specific colonized past. Respectability is connected to the colonizers’ notions of work and morality, while the concept of reputation is centered on being free and

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<sup>9</sup> There is one exception to this, I did not lime on the street with urban men. Eriksen explored this in depth in his essay and I could not bridge that given that I am a white woman. I did lime with groups of women but most of my research was within mixed groups made up of men and women. I did lime with groups from different socio-economic classes, different ethnicities and races, and in different spaces (including clubs and bars, beaches, river limes, private homes, fetes, malls, and other more impromptu settings.) In all I attended 29 “planned limes” and over 35 “impromptu limes” (I am noting 35 that were recorded in some way, there were more than this that happened during my ethnography that never made it “on record.”)

not subscribing to the ideals of the “white” colonizers. Respectability aims at maintaining hierarchy, focuses on the importance of education and career, and often invokes religious purity and faith. Reputation is part of a history of resistance to colonized forces, reflecting ideas of freedom to do as one likes unbridled by the ideals of the Western world. Most often these binary opposites are tied to the sexes: women in Trinidad are understood as more focused on respectability, while men on reputation (Wilson). However, this has been contested. Jean Besson found that West Indian women also have a reputation system. Although different from that of Trinidad men it is still a part of this resistant movement. This is an important acknowledgement as the relationship to reputation is tied to historical resistant movements against slavery. To write Caribbean women out of this history by placing them only within the colonized views of respectability is problematic. Currently you can see ideas of respectability as practiced by those who are of Christian or Hindu faith, those from upper class socio-economic status, and often, but not always, those who are college educated. However, the majority of Trinidadians are working and middle class, so the practice of reputation abounds.

In Trinidad, the notion of reputation is specifically tied to the historical character, the *Badjohn*. Generally a *Badjohn* is considered a dangerous person, possibly a violent criminal. This notorious character is now often employed to describe black urban working class males in Trinidad who *lime* on the street. There is also the question of visibility in liming. Trinidad is a hierarchical culture, structured around social class standing. Middle and upper class liming, or a group of women liming, may take place in a public setting—such as a beach—but not often a street corner. The exception to this is being in downtown Port of Spain liming at the clubs, often times groups of people will hang around in the street during these limes (and it appears it matters little in terms of sex or social class, although there is a class hierarchy in clubs, the more “exclusive” charge a pricey cover.) That being said, it was noted to me on many occasions, with different groups of Trinidadians, that all *Trinis* lime, no matter their age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, or socio-economic status, although they all don’t lime in the same spaces or with each other.

There are elements that are often present when a lime occurs, as outlined above, and even though liming may encompass relaxing or partying or simply hanging out, this does not necessarily signal a lime. An example here will help clarify. Early on in my ethnography, I went to the mall with a Trini woman friend (going to the mall is often a liming event for Trinidadians, both men and women.) The first visit to the Trincity Mall lasted around four hours with much shopping and lunch. As we left the mall, my friend exclaims, “thanks for the lime.” Around a month later we went back to the mall again, we were there for about the same time, engaged in what was seemingly the same activities. Afterwards, I remark, “thanks for the lime,” she shrugged at me and responded, “not

really, that was more about shopping.” I reflected on this for a long while and the only difference between these two events was the energy level and enthusiasm that day. The first trip to the mall seemed to go very quickly and was more exciting than the second visit. It appeared as if liming is more about a heightened experience than a specific type of activity.

Very different activities are the play of liming but the attitude of a “good limer” is guaranteed to be playful and engaging. One of the often agreed upon components of play across these distinctions is that during play one will become so engrossed in the activity that one may lose track of time, or at the very least, will be focused so intently on the activity that outside considerations (such as work) are temporarily forgotten (Combs, Miracle, Norbeck). This component is a central part of liming, particularly if it is a “good lime.”<sup>10</sup> Trinidad, like the majority of the Caribbean, does not subscribe to notions of Western time. This means that being late is fairly customary (10-20 minutes late for a meeting, 2-3 hours late to a social gathering). The fact that the best limes are ones where time and work and other worries are forgotten is concretely connected to play. During play “time is distorted” (Miracle 63) or more specifically, play is “a break in pace that is markedly different from the activities preceding or following it” (Norbeck 2). A similar distortion of time happens when you are part of a good lime. Losing oneself in the activity of liming is undeniably the key to a good lime. That said, liming does involve several other elements.

The elements that are part of a lime include eating, drinking, dancing and storytelling or good conversation. All of them don’t happen at once, as a lime may involve telling stories and not dancing, or dancing and not conversation. That being said, Trinidadians relish drinking and eating, so it is rare that these two fundamentals are not at a lime. Sharing of food is a central part of Trinidad culture and often present at social events. An intriguing example of how much Trinis enjoy food is reflected by the fact that Trinidadians with different religious backgrounds will attend each other’s religious celebrations. Trinidad has sixteen public holidays, ten of them religious.<sup>11</sup> The largest religious groups include Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Hindus. Often times Christians will participate in Hindu celebrations, such as Diwali, while Hindus will attend

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<sup>10</sup> The “good lime” seems to be characterized by a heightened experience. Lack of food or drink or good conversation can easily kill the lime but I was at a number of limes with food and drinks that went sour because it was “boring” (as Trinis would comment.) Eriksen notes, “a lime with no juice is truly dreadful” (4). I found that this could be true but I also found a lime with no enthusiasm was equally if not more of a problem.

<sup>11</sup> These religious holidays observed are: Spiritual Baptist Liberation Day, Good Friday, Easter Sunday and Monday, Corpus Christi, Eid-al-Fitr, Diwali/Deepavali, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day.



Christmas limes. In discussing this with Trinis they will say “any excuse for a lime,” and “Trinis like good food.”<sup>12</sup>

After living in Trinidad for a couple months I invited a few friends over to play cards. Although I had drinks, I did not even consider cooking for them or even offering snacks, as it was an early afternoon gathering. My guests starting talking about food about an hour into the lime, then as soon as they were there, they were gone. I realized after this that my lack of offering food to them was not proper etiquette. My less than successful first lime at my house was due to the fact I had not prepared food, or even had snacks available. In most Trinidadian houses you will see a bottle of peanuts or Chana (dry roasted chickpeas) on the counter for guests. Trinidad manufactures many snack foods including an assortment of potato and corn chips, chocolate bars, and other sweet candy. This love of food (and not necessarily all of it healthy) has boasted the island within the top five of the “fattest nations” (Daily Express).<sup>13</sup> This island, like other Caribbean countries doesn’t condemn those who are overweight. In fact, the men in Trinidad prefer their women have “curves,” and women are generally confident, no matter their weight. Most Trinis eagerly indulge in food and it is often a topic of conversation. Food is constantly critiqued, when eating out at a restaurant or eating at a river lime that has been catered, or eating in someone’s home (although if the food was terrible, a Trinidadian would not insult the host but surely would comment afterwards to her or his friends.) Also the speed in which food comes to the table, or is ready at an outdoor lime is a reason for conversation. I attended a river lime where the caterer didn’t arrive to cook the much-loved Trinidad food, Roti, till almost early evening. Given that this event started mid-day there was much grumbling and conversation. The lack of food, late food, or not “tasty” food can move a lime from the good to bad category fast. Just as quickly, a lack of alcoholic beverages can do the same damage.

Trinidad is considered a party island. Beyond the tradition of Carnival every year, Trinidadians do enjoy their drink and most are happy to indulge when they can. Notions of the celebratory nature of Trinidad have been critiqued. Peter Minshall, a well-known carnival organizer (“masman”), has stated that

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<sup>12</sup> Although this seems like an acceptance of religious diversity, Trinidadians would say it is more about the party (or the day off to lime) than about tolerance. Trinidadians did not have strong feelings towards other religions one way or another (the one exception to this is the occasional issues people have with political parties that were often drawn on lines of race and religion: Afro Trinidadians are mostly Christian while Indo Trinidadians are mostly Hindu; each of the two political parties represent close to fifty percent of the island).

<sup>13</sup> The research was conducted by the UN based Food and Agriculture Organization, released to the public in 2013. The Daily Express is a local Trinidad and Tobago newspaper that reported this information. It should be noted that the U.S. was ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in this list, Trinidad and Tobago was ranked 5<sup>th</sup>.

Carnival used to be the time of the year when Trinidadians could be carefree, where they could relax and celebrate. He now states that Carnival is just a reflection on what happens all year long, albeit more intense (Narine). An example of the seriousness in which Trinidadians like to party can be seen during the State of Emergency that was declared in August 2011 (BBC News). The spiking of the murder rate in Trinidad provoked a state of emergency in which a curfew of 9pm until 5am was declared; no one but the police force was allowed to be on the streets during this time frame. Curiously Trinis did not protest (although they did complain). They did however work around this curfew so they could still lime. The bars in many areas of Trinidad would open the doors earlier in the evening, and lock the doors at 9pm, allowing Trinidadians to party in the bar until 5am. The owners would then open the doors and the patrons would leave after a long night of liming. Rum is the drink of choice by many and Trinidad produces eight types of rum from three distillers. Also, Trinidad has two beers—Carib and Stag—that are locally brewed, as well as many types of alcohol and wine are imported. Beers can also be bought from bars and taken home. There is no clear law (that is enforced) in terms of driving with open container, so this is also part of the culture. Eriksen noted in his research on urban men liming on the street that the lack of alcohol was the difference between a good lime and a bad lime (although a good lime could be better when other elements were brought in, alcohol was necessary.)

In terms of my experiences liming and conversations about liming, I did not find that alcohol was expected at every lime (for instance a Christian church group lime would not necessarily have alcoholic beverages, nor would a work lunch lime). If drinks are expected but there isn't enough to go around, the lime may lose steam quickly. A lack of drinks at a lime is treated as hostile as a lack of food, if the expectation is there. How this is dealt with may vary from Trinis going and buying alcoholic beverages and bringing them back, or leaving the lime completely in search of a "good lime." That being said there can be plenty of good food and drink and the lime can still be considered a "bad lime." This phenomenon is closely connected to how I define liming as play or heightened communication. There is the need for an amplified experience or a moment where the ordinary becomes extraordinary. Liming is an activity that often involves the consumption of food and drinks, however it is not simply that. For a lime to be successful, there is a level of energy that needs to be there. This is based in the playful attitude of the limers themselves—often being reflected in dancing or storytelling or both.

Trinidad is an island of music, founded on the steel drum and based in the musical language "rapping" of Calypso. There is always music playing in Trinidad. Given that Trinidad does not have sound ordinances, music blasts loudly from Trinis' cars and homes at all times of the day and night. Music is played in the mall, and in the local pharmacy. At Christmas time the musical churning of

Parang is wildly embraced by most Trinis. Although Parang began in Trinidad curiously most songs are sung Spanish and many Trinis don't know the language (Parang is said to be a type of Soca, although it doesn't have the same dance vibe.) Aside from this brief time of the year it is most likely that you will hear the music of Carnival almost year round. Soca is derived from fusing Calypso with the beats of East Indian music, creating a music that is all about dancing (Guilbault). Over the years, the most popular genre of this music has become more frenetic in pace. The beat of the popular Soca music currently is very fast and the answer to the music is to "wine, wine, wine."<sup>14</sup>

Dancing in Trinidad often involves wining, which is essentially "winding" your hips in a circle. Men wine on women, women on men, and women on women, or you can wine by yourself. For someone new to the culture, it can be a shocking sight to see this sexually provocative gyrating and grinding dance. Appearing as sexual foreplay, wining is usually considered a fairly common practice at clubs and parties. Although it can be sexual foreplay more often than not it isn't, it is just the way that many Trinis "carry on," as they would say. Women have become more visible in the public sphere in terms of work and play. It has become a norm for women to wine alone or wine with other women (rather than only with men.) Daniel Miller states this is more about autosexuality not homosexuality, this result of "wining [being] seen more as a threat than an invitation by men" (1994, 124). Often at limes women would line up with their backs to the wall and wine (which would not allow men to "wine on em.") This cultural shift is due to women increasingly becoming the breadwinners in their household, often achieving higher education degrees, thus empowering women in all levels of Trinidad culture. It is curious, as Trinidad women still want to wine and engage in this dance. However, they have adapted to be able to do this without feeling obliged to wine with men.

I should note that although many Trinidadians attend fetes and Carnival and drink and wine, not all Trinis find this behavior appropriate. Those of a stricter Hindu or Christian faith, and some of those who are of upper class socio economic status will not participate in the wining, or play Soca music, as would the majority of the population of Trinidad. For example I attended a Christmas lime in an expensive apartment complex in downtown Port of Spain. This lime differed from other Trinidad Christmas limes I attended as there was only hip hop music playing, everyone was dancing but not wining, and most of the alcohol was imported, a signal of wealth in the country is to offer guests only imported beer and alcohol. Although not all upper class or religious Trinidadians outwardly condemn the more common working class types of limes. If they do,

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<sup>14</sup> Many songs every carnival season have lyrics about wining. Machel Montano, a very popular Soca artist, has many songs that are popular during the season with most of them being about liming and wining.

common expressions are that *those* Trinidadians are “ignorant,” meaning foolish, and *their* behavior is “embarrassing,” specifically referring to how this is seen in the “West.” These reactions are reflected in ideas of respectability previously discussed. Many of those Trinidadians who don’t appreciate this part of their culture will “escape” the Carnival by spending time on the beach or leaving the island for this time period. These same Trinidadians do lime. They just don’t lime in the same way.

To return to the discussion of Soca music, clubs and bars play the music, as do fetes that begin after Christmas and continue on until Carnival. Carnival organizations will bring in Soca artists to play live at outdoor venues. Carnival marks the end of the Soca season, complete with songs of the year. A short break ensues and then the new Soca songs start to circulate. It is common that each year there will be 3-5 Soca song favorites that will be played repeatedly around the island. Throwing a party and not playing Soca, may be disappointing to some Trinis, however if you at least have good hip hop music playing or something upbeat, that may suffice. However, not having any music present at the lime is often considered boring.

There are some exceptions to this though. A beach lime, a lime where you are watching a film or TV,<sup>15</sup> or a lime that may involve some interesting stories being told may not need a background of beats. If there is anything that is beloved more than their music by Trinis, it is good conversation. Those who can wind a story, make a Trini laugh, or otherwise have a sharp wit about them will earn the respect of a Trinidadian quickly. Most Trinidadians love the art of conversation and are experts at it. Even the exchange of small talk in Trinidad can be a heightened event, or a verbal art. Richard D.E. Burton argues, “perhaps no exchange in the Caribbean is ever truly humdrum [it always evolves] into a minidrama or ‘happening.’ In the rum shop, on the street corner or beach, conversations are uninhibited, animated and intimate, full of banter, joshing and confidence” (158). Specifically Burton is speaking of men’s liming culture in public places. However, I found this in public as well as more private spaces, with men and women. The only real difference is how the banter would take place and the choices in conversation. I found with Trinidad men there was more boasting, while with Trinidad women there was the same amount of joshing and teasing (“picong”) but often times this would be directed mostly at men (not at each other.) That is, men would engage in the same sort of “playful derogation” that Wilson spoke of in 1973 and subsequent authors have discussed since (Miller, Sampath, Eriksen, Burton). However, less examined has been how women relate to men and other women. It was discussed by Burton the possible “stigmati-

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<sup>15</sup> Trinidadians do lime while watching TV or during a film. This often presents itself as commenting back to the screen and emoting during whatever they are watching. Often times theatres will be filled with Trinidadian laughter and talking throughout the movie.

zation” and “sexual harassment” suffered by women who invade the public liming spaces of men (164.) From my experience this harassment could go both ways quickly, as Trinidad women were happy to “give it back to men in doubles.” As well, the competitive nature of women over men, and the notion of the public “cuss out” are still a part of Trinidad culture,<sup>16</sup> but that doesn’t overshadow the relationships women have with their women friends which I found in all liming spaces I occupied. Often times these women “liming groups” are as important to women as men, which has not been discussed in previous research.

The “competitive verbal ritual” which has been said to affirm the equality of one within their liming group of men, is not as present in women’s conversational manner. However, the “style, humor and rhythm” (Burton 161) that women used in conversations was overall very similar to Trinidad men. Both conversational styles hold great value on making people laugh. Eriksen acknowledges the importance of being funny in conversations, he states, “during a lime ... the ability to make people laugh is highly esteemed” (8). It should also be noted that many liming groups among Trinidad youth consist of both men and women. This shows a blend of conversational styles that have been seen as more divided by sex in the past.

The idea that you could start a conversation with someone in passing that is funny, interesting, or outrageous enough to hold your attention so that you lose track of time, or continue this on later in the day or evening, is considered the best way to start a lime. The notion of liming is not always a planned event, and when it is impromptu it is most often started with good conversation. While living in Trinidad, I found I had the most interesting moments with Trinidadians in passing. A quick and humorous conversation with my administrative assistant at the University of the West Indies, becomes a conversation with her entire office, all of us gathered together laughing and talking, or different people piping in across the room. Trinidadians have a saying in Creole—Trinidadians are “fast”—meaning nosy. If something intriguing may be discussed across the room, or there is any gossip to be had, a Trini will likely try to get in on it. Trinidad is a culture of play—of liming—not work, so even in the workplace you want to enjoy yourself as much as you can, when you can. This is directly a reflection on this move between respectability and reputation. This is obvious in many ways but one example of this slippage is the change in language use and conversational style. In speaking with my administrative assistant, her style of speaking would depend on the type of conversation taking place. Formal forms

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<sup>16</sup> A “cuss out” is usually about infidelity is almost always a woman “cussing out” another woman or a man. It is mostly based in working class culture. Often these cuss outs are meant to be public events. The two I witnessed in Trinidad involved a woman standing over a man or another woman (who were sitting) and telling them off. A crowd would gather to view. It was brought to my attention that the woman who was “giving” the cuss out would often turn around and cuss out members of the watching audience.

of British English would give way to Creole if the conversation moved from a discussion that was serious and work-related to casual chat about our weekend. A few Creole words were always part of the vernacular, not withstanding the conversational topic. For instance, the word “reach” (meaning = arrive) and “real” (meaning = a lot) would be sprinkled into formal conversation. The desire to infuse the work environment with playfulness was always present. This verbal art of Trinidad communication is reflected in research on the way that play is specific in language and gesture. In terms of language there are specific types of paralinguistic patterns of voice quality (Bauman 1975), this includes the rise and fall of the voice, the play of using language for imitation, joking, and sarcasm. As well, gestures during play include “mock astonishment, rolling eyes ... gestures of amazement and other emotions” (Combs 10). This verbal art and performance is noted as the “kind of talk (that) attempts to show rather than tell wherein the ‘story is not reported so much as it is rendered’” (Combs 10). I found that most conversations in Trinidad were “rendered,” if there was a need to “report” Trinidadians would do this but not enjoy it, or do their best to try to make it more interesting than just a list. Anything that could be related through a story is. If it could not, there was a tendency to still try to make the communication creative and engaging.

Liming is play. Liming is a heightened form of communication, an intensified experience, a verbal art, an everyday playful activity and attitude that defines Trinidad culture. In terms of my first research question: What is liming? Liming is a playful cultural practice in Trinidad. All Trinis participate in liming although they may lime in different spaces. Food, drink, dance (wining), storytelling and conversation are often essential features of the lime.

The difference between a good and a bad lime may be the absence of the elements above, or may just be the difference between whether or not the lime is an intensified experience. The ideal of liming being an amplified activity is key to know when you are liming and “not liming.” Although it often appears as a decision that only Trinis are allowed to make, I did find that I became more able to recognize a lime after six months of fairly constant liming with Trinis. However, that being said, I did realize that most situations that are a party (be that at a club, at the beach, or at a private home) are considered limes that then will be judged as good or bad. Other activities, including going to the mall, being at work or in class, or passing conversations with someone could become limes but didn’t unless they became enjoyable and thus a heightened experience. These moments are particularly valued by Trinis, as they are unexpected and impromptu. It became clear that Trinidadians are always on the look out for a lime, hoping that any seemingly ordinary experience will be transformed into a good time.

In terms of my second research question—why lime—I found, through my ethnography and focus group, that Trinidadians lime because it is a central form

of communication for their culture, they lime to show their independence, to practice their freedom. Specifically they lime because as a culture and a people their everyday lives are centered on living in the present. This idea is connected to my previous statement on how Trinis are always on the look out for a lime; they are always hoping that the present moment will be interesting and enjoyable.

Because the practice of liming is a central part Trinidadian identity it becomes difficult for Trinis to answer the question of why they lime. The question is met with confusion or treated as trivial, the overwhelming answer, why would we *not* lime. Or, a common statement “that is the Trini way.” After I had finished my yearlong ethnography I was invited to present my study to a graduate communication class on Research Methods at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. I asked them ahead of my presentation (before they knew of my findings) to provide a written response to a few questions, the central questions: “What is liming?” “How do you feel when you are liming?” And “think about a memorable lime. Now describe this with details.” The responses of these six graduate students, alongside many conversations over that past year help to answer the second question, Why lime? What purpose does liming serve for Trinis? And, how do Trinis *practice* their culture through liming?

The responses to the question “how do you feel when you’re liming?” were mostly similar. Students responded that they felt “relaxed, fulfilled and happy,” and “entertained, happy and carefree.” Out of six female graduate students all but one used the words: free, carefree or relaxed to describe their experience of liming. Only one student had a different take on liming, she stated, “recently I feel guilty liming because of the amount of work load. Even when I try to relax, I just feel like I’m wasting time and money.” Although this one student was feeling guilty about liming, two other students commented on liming as “a time to get away from the everyday responsibilities of life” and liming as the “ultimate stress reliever.”

Liming also appears to indicate one’s social standing. One student commented that “[Liming] makes you feel important to an extent when you say ‘I’m going to lime with some people,’ not everybody has a group to lime with and it gives you some status when you say ‘I’m going out to lime.’” This is a significant statement, as it appears that liming groups are as important to women as to men in terms of reputation. There is a status to liming and having people to lime regularly with.

The students defined liming as “spending time with friends in a leisurely manner. It could be accompanied by food or drink,” “an activity that people engage in to amiably socialize/bond with each other,” and “a social process whereby you hang around with one or more persons for fun, recreation, to relax, or for entertainment. It involves socializing with persons you may or may not know, sharing stories, laughter, food and in particular drinks.” Most of the defi-

nitions mentioned food or drink, conversation or storytelling, and dancing. One student stated that limes “can be spontaneous or planned, and can occur at a public or private location.”<sup>17</sup>

What was most remarkable about these written commentaries from students is the length in which several students discussed their most memorable limes. Trinidadian students are creative (their creativity in public presentations is remarkable) but it is rare to find a Trinidadian student that *likes* to write, even at a graduate level. The depth at which three of the six students wrote about these limes shows that not only was this lime remarkable at the time it happened but also even the writing about it later provoked serious interest. These stories of memorable limes shared several elements within the narratives. First, all of these limes involved food or drinking or both, whether they were at a beach or a club (although the majority of them discussed a beach lime.). Second, two of the six essays discussed the lime group as “expanding” as the lime carried on. For example, one participant discussed how a group of five ended up as a group of twelve as strangers began to lime with them as the day carried on. Third, two of the six limes were impromptu in how they began. One student said, “and in true Trini style it was a very impromptu invitation.” Fourth, and most important, all of these six narratives shared there was a heightened experience defined by the lime being extended longer than previously planned, or that they lost track of time during the lime as they were having such a good time. One specific participant’s narrative is a good example. The essay is two pages single-spaced. The lime began as a beach lime that lasted from 9:30am to 10:30pm (the last couple of hours spent at a friend’s house). The writer detailed that it began with three friends and ended up with 21 people total. Beginning at Maracas Beach, the lime moved to Blanchisse Beach, then Las Cuevas, then back to Maracas Beach, and then to a friend’s for dinner. Three meals were consumed, bake and shark at both visits to Maracas Beach, then a “home cooked meal” at one of the limer’s homes. Other events aside from the eating and swimming (what Trini’s call “bathing”), include hanging out on the hoods of their cars talking and joking, taking photos with their cameras, hiking up the side of a cliff, and board games that were played as they waited for dinner. There was no drinking that was discussed, which may be due to the fact that most of the group was friends from the same church. In her conclusion she reflects on the lime:

Our never-ending lime came to an end at about 10:30pm. Our drive home was not without much laughter and reflection on what happened all throughout the day. We reflected on the fact that we did not plan to meet the others but it

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<sup>17</sup> This student also mentioned that she believed that one can lime “by oneself,” which is interesting as it provokes an attitude of playfulness even though the activity would not then be social? This is a curious revelation that can’t be fully considered within this essay.



turned out to be an extremely fun and enjoyable time by everyone because it was spontaneous ... I think the spontaneous limes are the best because there is so much more adventure and surprises along the way.

This participant's recollection of the details of the lime, including the food and how the lime gained energy as it went on. The accounting of detail was a bit tedious but there is also an obvious desire for the writer to convey why this lime deserved to be called a memorable one. I did discuss my research with these students. They thought I was onto something (providing an important insight that they thought Eriksen's research was a result of public liming culture in the 1990s, not today.) As is fairly typical of Trinis, they were interested in what I thought of their culture. Eventually wanting to ask me questions about my experience, and when I said I found some of the limes "exhausting," they laughed and teased me. Several of them inviting me to lime with them at a later date, wanting to also be part of this narrative I was working through. This was considered a compliment. Trinidadians would say that I was "lucky" to be invited to limes given I wasn't a Trini. This meant that I had "a little Trini in me." This confirmed my notion that for my presentation to be warmly regarded, the moment needed to become its own sort of playful event.

Socializing and being part of a "good lime" is a significant experience and not only is a practice that Trinidadians engage in but a practice that confirms their own identity as Trinis. There is a status in having groups to lime with and to being a "good limer." It is not important simply to lime, but to lime well. Liming is an art form. This can be seen in the regard for those individuals who can tell an entertaining story, or a good joke, and bring the energy that warrants you be regarded by your fellow Trinis as a "good limer." Play has often been defined as those moments where "you feel yourself in an 'as if' time and place that differs from work, worry, anxiety, boredom, fear, ennui, or other states of existence. You have indeed let go" (Combs 9). Trinidadians define this "let go" as a "free up," to free up is the practice of Trini identity: to play, to free up from the cares of the world. This is more central to how Trinidadians' understand themselves than any other activity. Being a Trinidadian that is boring is considered almost shameful in a culture where few transgressions are. As several Trinis told me in different ways: "we are Trini cause we lime." I posit that liming is play in both the attitude and an activity based in a mindset of living in the present, "letting go" and being free.

In the West the dichotomy of play versus work continues to privilege work. Play being a reward for hard work, at its best, and a waste of time at its worst. A culture built around play is a stark response to much of the Western world in which play is an activity of the privileged, the reward of the activity of work being presented to many as the consumption of goods replacing the lack of free time. Trinidadians would often say with a smug smile: "Americans work too much." The sentiment often was that they had it better than those in the States.

The contention was always the same: anyone can be a good worker but are free enough to give yourself over to a good lime?

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