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ABSTRACT

This paper uses the concept of mimicry to explore the ways in which the tensions of empire were ‘played out’ through the West India Regiments’ performance of military music and cricket. Both tools and products of the British Empire, cricket and military music could be used at cross-purposes and gained meaning and ideological significance in practice. Attention to the cultural practices of the West India Regiments sheds significant light on the connections between early twentieth-century social change and the dynamics of nineteenth-century colonialism. Moreover, it opens up new – and possibly counterintuitive – connections between Caribbean military history and scholarship on the social and cultural forces that have shaped Caribbean society.

You have no idea what a treat it is to see a European regiment at drill after seeing nothing but negroes for six months.¹

Good hearty Cricketers there is no doubt, but there must have been a great deal of crudity about their methods.²

From such a colonial encounter between the white presence and its black semblance, there emerges the question of the ambivalence of mimicry as a problematic of colonial subjection [...] The ambivalence of colonial authority repeatedly turns from mimicry – a difference that is almost nothing but not quite – to menace – a difference that is almost total but not quite.³

There is perhaps no starker example of the ‘ambivalence of colonial authority’ – from mimicry to menace – than the West India Regiments. Since its inception in the late eighteenth century amidst the sea of radical change brought about by the American and Haitian Revolutions, the West India Regiments embodied the social and racial tensions of colonial slave society. Initially raised through the purchase of thousands of Africans, the British Government granted freedom to all soldiers in the regiments in 1807 through the Mutiny Act – passed in the wake of the 1802 mutiny of the eighth West India Regiment on the island of Dominica. The abolition of the slave trade in 1808

further ensured that all future soldiers recruited from Africa and the Caribbean would be legally free within the confines of colonial slave society. It is next to impossible to make claims about the intentions of West India Regiment soldiers in relation to the ‘work’ of colonialism. Recruits, however, undoubtedly calculated what their options and quality of life would be as soldiers – albeit soldiers in dire circumstances – versus those available to them within the plantocracy of Caribbean society. Indeed, both the individual status of West India Regiment soldiers, and the wider existence of a standing army composed of black men, unequivocally exposed the inherent contradictions of colonialism’s ‘civilizing mission.’

As armed black men, the West India Regiment soldiers posed an ideological as well as material challenge to white superiority and colonial subjection within the British Empire. Not long after their formation in April 1800, the West India Committee – a lobbying group composed of merchants and plantation owners with financial interests in the Caribbean – proclaimed:

It is the unanimous opinion of the meeting that the stationing of Black Troops in the island of Jamaica is a means of the most dangerous policy and one which if pursued and carried into action will be productive of the most fated arrangement in the colony.⁴

Indeed, in spite of the fact that the British Army strategically maintained heterogeneity of ethnic and linguistic African recruits within each regiment in order to prevent organised protest, the early life of the West India Regiments was characterised by flashpoints such as the 1802 mutiny in Dominica and the 1808 mutiny in Jamaica. Furthermore, throughout the nineteenth century daily forms of protest by West India Regiment soldiers such as disobedience of orders, theft, work slow-downs and stoppages were common.⁵

At the same time, the Regiments were instrumental to the maintenance of the colonial racial order and the implementation of British imperial policies. For example, West India Regiment soldiers were crucial in suppressing rebellion and quashing resistance throughout the British Empire – including Bussa’s Rebellion in Barbados (1816), the Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica (1865) and the second (1823) and third (1873–1874) Anglo-Asante Wars – as well as maintaining order on a day-to-day basis across the Caribbean. Historically those in favour of the creation and deployment of the West India Regiments argued that they offered both a practical solution to high rates of mortality amongst white soldiers, and a potentially civilising force amongst colonial subjects. Whilst those opposed often invoked racist fears of attacks on white women and the threat of armed rebellion as arguments against the Regiments. Indeed as late as 1869, the *Barbados Agricultural Reporter* – on the heels of the Regiments’ suppression of the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion no less – featured an article that debated the pros and cons of maintaining the presence of the West India Regiment soldiers due to the ‘threat’ of armed insurrection and attacks on white women.⁶

Though fundamental to military campaigns and colonial rule, most interactions with the soldiers of the regiments would not have been in combat, but rather through their public presence and performance. Travellers and correspondents who wrote about their experiences throughout the Anglophone Caribbean during the mid-nineteenth century commented consistently on the public presence of the West India Regiments. Broadly speaking, this essay seeks to further our understanding of the role of the West India Regiments in the development of Caribbean society and identity. More specifically, it engages the historical ‘problem’ of arming men of African descent in a period when most were imperial subjects through an analysis of the cultural production of the British West India Regiments – in particular military music and cricket. The tensions of empire, immanent and explicit, in the actions and articulations of the West India Regiments were not only played out on the battlefield and in the writings of British colonials but also significantly through the public cultural activities of the troops. As collective rituals of empire and nation, military bands and cricket are unique historical spaces that could both reproduce and contest wider colonial relations of dominance and dehumanisation. This essay focuses on the racial and political contests played out through the West India Regiments’ performance of military music and cricket.

In spite of their role in suppressing slave rebellions and quashing African resistance to British colonialism, the West India Regiments are widely remembered throughout the Caribbean for their role in the development of West Indies cricket and the deep cultural influence of military marching bands. Scholars including C.L.R. James, Hilary Beckles, Marcia Burrowes and Sharon Meredith have written extensively on the significance of cricket and military music in Caribbean political and social history. Questions surrounding the politics of cricket have long been debated – from C.L.R. James’ challenge that,

We may some day be able to answer Tolstoy’s exasperated and exasperating question: What is art? – but only when we learn to integrate our vision of Walcott on the back foot through the covers with the outstretched arm of the Olympic Apollo,

to Rex Nettleford’s claim that, ‘Cricket culture is the vehicle on which West Indians journeyed deepest into modernity.’ There has also been substantial recent research into the links between military bands and the popular dance and music traditions of ‘Junkanoo’ (also known as ‘John Canoe’) and the drum and fife rhythms of ‘tuk’ music. However, in part due to the scattered and scarce sources, the historical role and legacy of the West India Regiments in the production of Caribbean popular culture and identity is still yet to be fully explored or understood.⁷ An investigation into the role of the West India Regiments in the evolution of popular military music and cricket stretches back the significance of these cultural practices and – perhaps more importantly – raises new questions about the significance of the military as an historical space of mimicry and cultural production in colonial societies.

Both military bands and cricket were considered by West India Regiment officers to have practical imperial purposes. Members of the British military were actually ordered to play cricket as a means to spread morality and instill discipline whilst marching bands were a fundamental part of military daily life, discipline, drilling, battles and ritual.⁸ Yet, the officers and soldiers of the West Indian Regiments confronted consistent everyday constraints with regards to their ability to participate in cricket and military bands. The activities of the West India Regiment Garrison Cricket Club of Barbados, for example, ebbed and flowed over the course of the nineteenth century depending on the availability of soldiers. And the *Barbados Cricketers' Annual* includes countless amendments to the rules in order to allow for play during inclement weather, and strict timetables for inter-colonial cricket matches so that matches would take place during the less temperamental winter months.⁹ Supplies at camp were sometimes so scarce that soldiers had to make their own drums in order to create drum and fife bands. Cricket and military bands were social and public rituals of colonialism, crucial to the expansion and spread of white superiority and British power. As tools and products of the British Empire, cricket and military music gained meaning and ideological significance in practice. The ability to perform both cricket and military music represented the validation of the British colonial project, whilst simultaneously signifying the travesty of colonial domination. The fact that enslaved people and colonial subjects were active participants highlighted the object of empire: to subdue and incorporate subjects into a colonial moral universe. However, the independence and creativity and of enslaved people and black men also contested racial superiority and the legitimacy of colonial power.

Surprisingly perhaps, the British military band was not formally organised until the mid to late eighteenth century. Since that time, raising bands for military purposes have been considered a core activity and provisions were always to be made for their organisation.¹⁰ The West India Regimental bands had both daily and combat purposes. Roger Norman Buckley writes:

It was still dark when British army camps in the West Indies bestirred themselves after the torpor of the night. Regimental musicians, wearing the gaudy tunics of the regiments' identifying facing colour, prepared for the assembly. Suddenly, the morning gun raised echoes in the night air, followed thereafter by the sounds of bugles, drums, fifes, or the bagpipes themselves, all playing the reveille.¹¹

The bands played for a wide range of military-related activities – not only daily routines – including funerals, religious masses, as well as political rallies. For example, in 1819 the *Trinidad Courant* reported that the third West India Regiment band marched and played during the funeral procession of Oliver Hazzard Perry, the American Commander who died of yellow fever in Trinidad during

his trip to Venezuela to negotiate anti-piracy agreements with Simón Bolívar.¹² And in 1868 the *Barbados Agricultural Reporter* noted that: ‘The band of the 4th West India Regiment played and marched to mark the return of white troops to the Garrison in Bridgetown Barbados after a yellow fever outbreak in 1868.’¹³ Regimental band performances cut across and articulated the complex world of colonial society – from daily military life to elite colonial leisure and everything in between.

Men of African descent were often featured as drummers or cymbalists and dressed in ‘oriental’-style uniforms in many British military marching bands in the early nineteenth century. In addition to satisfying imperial desires for the exotic, limiting men of African descent to drumming and cymbals reproduced stereotypes of African music as crude and unsophisticated.¹⁴ However, the portrayals and meanings of the public performances by the West India regiment bands were far from straightforward. Throughout the nineteenth century, there are consistent reports in the press of West India Regiment bands performing public concerts in parks, philharmonic societies, as well as at elite Christmas masquerades and military balls. For example, W.E. Sewell’s 1861 *Harper’s Magazine* essay ‘Castaway in Jamaica’ based on his six months residency in Jamaica features drawings of daily scenes involving West India Regiment personnel, and in particular the regimental band playing in public parks and at the races. *The Times* newspaper of Barbados reported in December 1867 that a Philharmonic Society was formed with ‘the aim of the society to increase the musical taste of the people of the island.’ And the *Barbados Globe* reported in June of 1868 that the Barbados Philharmonic Society was holding a concert and the band of the fourth West India Regiment was kindly, ‘lent for the occasion by the officers.’¹⁵ It was precisely in these societies across the Caribbean where the West India Regiment bands would play sold out concerts. Generally portrayed positively by the press, the West India Regiment bands were often touted as a source of pride that the colonies could produce such ‘high culture’ performed by obedient colonial subjects. From the perspective of the soldiers, such performances might have also been seen as opportunities by soldiers looking to gain work as a professional musician.

Music and drumming were fundamental to the recreation, rituals and rebellion of people of African descent throughout the Americas as well as an important means by which many enslaved people managed to gain an income and eventually purchase their own freedom, or the freedom of others. We know from the observations of British merchants such as Bryan Edwards that African instruments were taken aboard ships and that enslaved Africans had access to European musical instruments soon upon their arrival to the Americas.¹⁶ Most contemporary accounts of the music played by people of African descent, however, do not come from people of African descent themselves – and this applies in the case of the West India Regiments. There are far more reflections on and impressions of military music and performance from

officers of the West India Regiments than from soldiers. One such source are the letters of Brigadier General E. Craig Brown who was stationed in Jamaica with the then final remaining West India Regiment from 1895 until 1898, and then in Sierra Leone in 1898. Craig Brown's letters go into great detail regarding military band concerts held on the ships that he travelled on from Britain to the Caribbean. He also frequently complains about his neighbours in Jamaica's Up-Park Camp who drove him mad by playing scales on their fiddles or singing tunes, and goes into great detail about the evening concerts of the West India Regiment band in the homes of elite Jamaican families. Officers and elites, however, did not have a monopoly on music. We know, for instance, that music was an essential part of soldiers' leisure time when they had a day off or when allowed to celebrate Christmas beyond the gaze of their superiors. One letter in particular sheds light on the impromptu ways soldiers may have created and played music. On 9 July 1897, Craig Brown writes from Papine Camp, Jamaica:

We have started a company band consisting of 3 fifes, 1 side drum and 1 big drum. The latter the men made of half a barrel, 2 goat skins and some rope. [...] there is great competition for that appointment. He suspends the drum on his chest by means of a piece of slim rope around his neck.¹⁷

The patronising tone of the letter implies something distinctly inferior and potentially sinister about the entire endeavour and echoes Bryan Edward's characterisation of African music – a century earlier – as mere crude noise. However, there is equally something telling about the letter. The very fact that he notes the formation of the band indicates this was an important event. Moreover, the description suggests the men cared little of the opinion of their superiors and had their own motivations to form a band. As Jocelyne Guilbault has argued, musical discourses should not be conceived as the, '[...] mere reflection of racial projects, but rather as being actively engaged in their very production.'¹⁸ Without delving into the well-established literature on polyrhythm and the significance of the drum in West African musical traditions, it seems fair to say that Craig Brown's account sheds light on the ways soldiers produced their own identities and histories. Moreover, we can perceive the tangible ways that race is produced and challenged through cultural practices.

Indeed, one of the arguments put forth in support of the West India Regiments was that they would serve as a civilising force amongst blacks born in Africa and the Caribbean. And the coverage of the West India Regiment bands in the nineteenth century invokes the language of the colonial civilising project and reveals the way the bands were directly linked to the 'work' of empire. Military bands – on display through grand parades and drilling as well as in the international exhibitions of the nineteenth century – were representatives of the Empire. The West India Regimental bands were iconic images of empire that combined both the notion of colonial subjection and order with the spread of British culture across the world. The press both in the UK and the

Caribbean gave extensive coverage of the bands' performances at exhibitions, such as the 1851 Great Exhibition where the first West India Regiment's Band gave excellent performances and 'proved an attraction at the Crystal Palace.' The pictorial *World of London* published images and descriptions of the second West India Regiment's Band performing at the Colonial and India Exhibition of South Kensington in 1886 where they 'played to high musical standard.' It was noted in particular that members of the band were 'all Christians' and 'all spoke English.' As such, their musical performances became a spectacular manifestation of the success of the civilising project on the individual soldiers, the units they were part of and, it was to be hoped, the societies in which they had been recruited and served.

However, coverage was not limited to the British Press. Caribbean papers such as the *Georgetown Daily Chronicle* of Guyana describe the exhibition in detail as well as the Victoria Cross that had been awarded to Samuel Hodge of the fourth West India Regiment in 1866 and of the role of the Regiments in the imperial campaign against the Asante in 1873–1874.¹⁹ The Regimental bands consistently participated in similar exhibitions during the early twentieth century. For instance, the band appears in Zealley and Hume's *Famous Bands of the British Empire* where they inform readers that the West India Regiment Band [...]

was the feature musical attraction at the Canadian National Exhibition held in Toronto in 1922. [...] Their performances were surprisingly good and the colourful Zouave uniform, designed especially by the late Queen Victoria in 1858, were indeed picturesque. [...] The band recently toured through England and were very successfully engaged at the Wembley Exhibition.²⁰

Photographs and postcards of the West India Regiment band evoke the more intimate and banal ways that the Regimental bands figured in colonial imagination and mythmaking. Images and fantasies of colonial order such as a photograph of the West India Regiment on parade sent as a Christmas card in Jamaica in 1903 circulated the British Empire (see [Figure 1](#)). The text reads: 'This is just to wish you a very happy Christmas and a glad New Year' and was sent between friends who lived in Jamaica.

Quite a different source of insight into the more intimate and informal facets of soldiers' lives can be found in the diaries and photographs of Major General Charles Howard Foulkes. Foulkes' descriptions of camp life in Sierra Leone are filled with references to West India Regiment soldiers playing in drum and fife bands during their private time and during holidays, in particular Christmas. One series of photos of West India Regiment soldiers holding a 'Christmas Masquerade' in Sierra Leone in 1898 during the Hut Tax expedition are truly extraordinary.

These informal portraits of West India Regiment soldiers celebrating Christmas with a masquerade offer a completely different perspective on the soldiers' lives than postcards such as the one discussed above ([Figure 1](#)). Foulkes does not offer

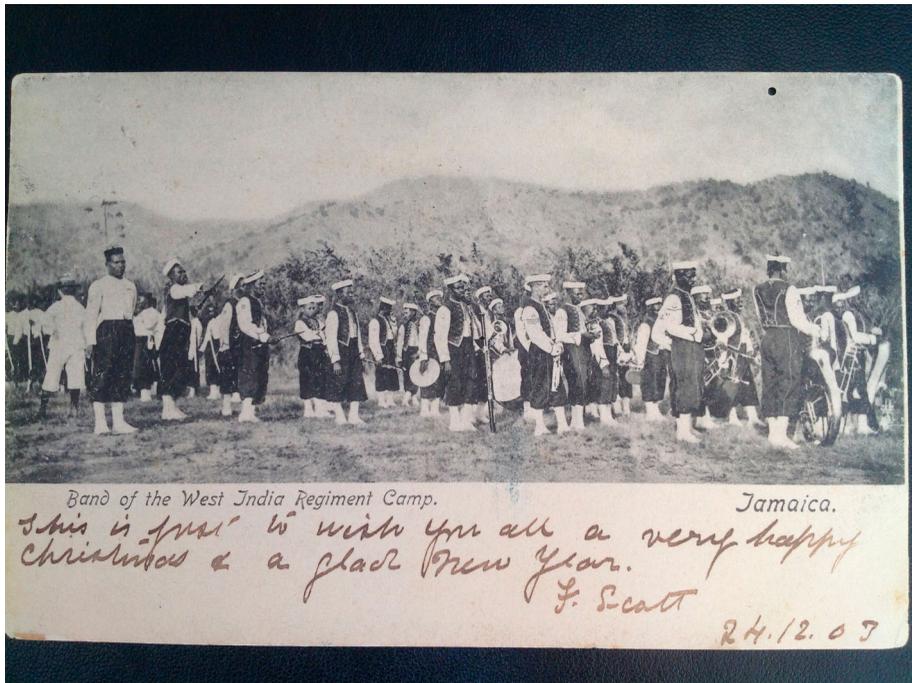


Figure 1. Photo of postcard from author's collection. West India Regiment band, Christmas 1903, Jamaica.

comment in his journal on the masquerade aside from the basic captions that accompany the photos. However, it is clear that the soldiers have formed a rudimentary drum and fife band, including a large drum around on of the soldiers' neck. There is another soldier who is wearing a mask and large costume whilst stilt-dancing. No white officers appear in the photos and there is no information about whether these celebrations were approved, illicit, or spontaneous, though the stilt-dancing indicates that some preparations had been made ahead of time. The lack of written sources by West India Regiment soldiers themselves should not preclude examining and interpreting the historical and social significance of their actions. As Julie Saville has argued in a different context, social judgements were 'written' through the public rituals of military music and cricket (Figures 2 and 3).²¹

These images immediately recall carnival and masquerade celebrations such as 'Junkanoo,' 'Shaggy Bear' and 'moko jumbies,' not to mention similar stilt-dancing traditions in Cuba and Haiti.²² Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries similar masquerades were a central feature of Caribbean and West African culture. The masquerades were strongly connected to rites of death and honouring ancestors. Scholars of these rituals in the Caribbean, such as Peter Reed, have argued that nineteenth-century Jonkonnu performances '[...] actively engaged the processes of expropriating, transporting, and exploiting countless Africans.'²³ And Michael Craton has argued that Jonkonnu is a 'ritual of conflict.'²⁴ The images perhaps leave us with more questions than



Figure 2. Image courtesy of King's College London and the Foulkes' Estate.

answers, but unequivocally show the multiple ways cultural practices and performances can create contradictory meanings. Furthermore, they ask us to consider the ways 'rituals of conflict' may have gained new meanings when practiced by men of African descent as members of colonial armies.



Figure 3. Image courtesy of King's College London and the Foulkes' Estate.

Foulkes' photos beg the question whether the West India Regiment had an instrumental role in the spread and rise of these practices at the turn of the twentieth century. In Trinidad, Barbados, Jamaica and the Bahamas, nineteenth and early twentieth-century masquerade and stilt-dancing celebrations would be accompanied by drum and fife bands similar to those described by E. Craig Brown.²⁵ Masquerade and stilt-dancing eventually became centrepieces of anti-colonial and nationalist cultural discourse in the twentieth century – especially in Trinidad, Barbados, Jamaica and the Bahamas. The military drum and fife band – in particular in the form of 'tuk' music in Barbados – were also mobilised in the era leading up to independence and after independence as forms of national folk and traditions.²⁶

The National Defense Force of Jamaica and Barbados continue to the present day to wear the Zouave uniform that had been originally adopted by West India Regiment soldiers in the mid-nineteenth century. The uniforms are on display in particular at times of national commemorations such as Independence Day and military parades. The below image (Figure 4) is of the Barbados Defence Force Band in Zouave uniform at the Holetown Festival in February 2017.

The Holetown Festival is one of Barbados' most important national celebrations together with Independence Day and the Crop Over festivals. The festival marks the arrival of Barbados' first English settlers in 1627 and is usually used to showcase what is considered the traditional and national culture of Barbados. Military marching bands and the military tattoo are central features of the Holetown



Figure 4. Photo taken by author at Holetown, Barbados, February 2017.

festival. The Barbados Defence Force Band opens the festival with a parade and they are often joined by secondary school marching bands. Tuk music and military style marching bands are both significant ways that young people receive musical education in Barbados.²⁷ The moment captured in the photo above – with the Barbados Defence Force winding down their parade and a group of secondary school students dancing and joking with each other – eloquently conveys the prosaic performance, iconography and ritual of Barbadian national identity. Indeed, the Defence Force parade was immediately followed by a performance of the Barbados Queen of Calypso, Aziza, who sang her original song: ‘One People, One Nation.’ The song was written for the fiftieth anniversary of Barbados independence and calls on the Barbados people to unite in spite of socio-economic hardship and religious differences. The reverberations of the Zouave uniforms and marching bands in the popular construction of contemporary national identity in Barbados highlights the ways in which, through their public performances and cultural practices, the West India Regiments shaped Caribbean society.

The connections between Caribbean independence, service in the British military and the ascendance of West Indies cricket from the 1940s to 1970s are common knowledge across the Caribbean. By way of example, as a young man Sir Everton Weekes – one of the most renowned cricket players from the Caribbean and a key member of the West Indies team who famously won the test series against England in 1950 – was excluded from playing in his local cricket club in Barbados, the Pickwick club, as they only accepted white players. However, after joining the Barbados Regiment in 1943 he played with the Garrison Cricket Club on the cricket grounds of St. Ann’s Garrison, where West India Regiment troops were stationed in the nineteenth century. The West Indies victory in the second match of the 1950 test series was the first time the West Indies had won in England. The entire series was viewed by many as a competition between colonised and coloniser and became extremely politically charged. The 1950 victory marked the beginning of the global ascendance of the West Indies cricket team that eventually came to dominate the sport by the 1970s. Rather than solely linked to events of the mid-twentieth century, Weekes’ story should be seen through a longer lens on the relationship amongst slavery, cricket, and the military in the Caribbean.

Though sources continue to remain extremely scarce, scholars have steadily been able to unearth the roots of an African/slave lineage of cricket in the Caribbean.²⁸ The oldest known cricket artefact with origins outside of Britain is a buckle from the Caribbean that portrays an enslaved man playing cricket. It is thought that the buckle had been owned by the first Baron Admiral William Hotham, who was the Governor of Barbados during the late eighteenth century. The diaries of Thomas Thistlewood reveal that enslaved people would both play and assist in their owners’ cricket matches.²⁹ And in his

book *Globalising Cricket*, Dominic Malcolm refers to evidence of ‘satirical’ cricket games of enslaved people who were not allowed other forms of recreation. In 1805 West India Regiment officers and soldiers formed the ‘St. Ann’s Cricket Club’ at St. Ann’s Garrison in Bridgetown, Barbados, as a means to promote ‘civic virtue’ – the first official cricket club in the Caribbean.³⁰ Public cricket games were being held at least as early as 1806 when it is believed the earliest mention of cricket appeared in the *Barbados Mercury* on 10 May advertising that the fourth West India Regiment would have a role in a match to be held at the Garrison. In 1808, the *Barbados Gazette* reported that the third West India Regiment and the Royal West Indies Rangers held a match on the grand parade.³¹ In July 1833, the Trinidad Cricket Club ran an advertisement in the *Trinidad Gazette*, promoting the club and public matches.³² And in 1838, there is mention in the *Barbadian* of the use of the garrison for a cricket match between the Garrison team and the 78th regiment – more than half of the Garrison team players were lower-ranking soldiers.³³ The early involvement of West India Regiment soldiers in Caribbean cricket clearly challenges simplistic top-down and white-dominated narratives of the spread of cricket in the region: that is, that cricket spread from elite white British visitors to colonies (including military officers) to elite white creoles and then to the broader societies. By the mid-nineteenth-century cricket was ubiquitous in British Caribbean society. Advertisements for cricket balls and bats, such as the one below from the 1907 to 1908 Barbados Cricketers’ Annual, appeared almost daily in the newspapers, almanacs and cricketers’ annuals of Barbados, Trinidad and Jamaica throughout the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³⁴

The same papers that ran adverts for cricket gear would promote and report on cricket matches held on military grounds such as St Ann’s Garrison in Barbados and Up-Park Camp in Jamaica where West India Regiment troops were stationed. The first inter-colonial cricket match between Barbados and British Guiana – a critical moment for the development of West Indies cricket – was held at the garrison in Bridgetown, Barbados in 1865. The Garrison team remained a major team in Barbados throughout the last half of the nineteenth century. One description of a match at the garrison involving the fourth West India Regiment in August 1868 states, ‘The match attracted a large number of visitors, all of who were met with the utmost hospitality at the hands of the military.’ The Barbados Cricket Club was formed in 1892. Until that time the main clubs in Barbados were the Lodge, the Garrison, the Wanderers and the Pickwick teams.³⁵ Similar clubs were formed in Jamaica, Trinidad and Guiana for the purposes of inter-colonial play. By 1896, St. Kitts, Trinidad, Jamaica, Antigua St. Vincent and St. Lucia had all joined in inter-colonial cricket.³⁶ The 1896–1897 Barbados Cricketers’ Annual report shows that the inter-colonial and local cricket matches were still consistently played at the garrison and that at least half the Garrison team was composed of low ranking soldiers (Figure 5).

The Barbados Cricketers' Annuals – starting in 1894 – are an important source of information on matches, rules, and players at the turn of the twentieth century. The reports of cricket matches also offer a rare insight into the racial dynamics of the sport in the late nineteenth century. For example, the Barbados Cricketers' Annual consistently describes the play of the Garrison team in local and inter-colonial matches in a thinly veiled racial code: it is consistently described as playing 'poorly' or erratically, or scrappy.³⁷ In his classic book *Cricket in Barbados* Bruce Hamilton comments that, 'During the 1860s and 1870s soldiers of the Garrison were the only serious rivals to the Lodge cricketers [...] good hearty Cricketers there is no doubt, but there must have been a great deal of crudity about their methods.'³⁸ Though not the focus of this article, the discourses on cricket reflected and produced various meanings of masculinity. For example, certain styles of play were described as expressions of a refined and civilised masculinity, whilst crude and brutish descriptions of regimental players reveal a racialised violent masculinity. In *The Development of West Indies Cricket*, Hilary Beckles argues that racial exclusion in cricket intensified in the late nineteenth century.³⁹ It is important, however, to note that even non-white teams implemented exclusionary policies, and this division can also



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SELLERS OF CRICKETING GEAR

Figure 5. Barbados Cricketers' Annual 1907–1908, image courtesy of the British Library.

be seen in some ways as a legacy of the West India Regiments, or at the very least as part of the complex social and racial hierarchy that the Regiments were implicated in maintaining.⁴⁰ For instance, the *Cricketers' Annual of Barbados* consistently complained not only about the play-style of the Garrison team but also about the poor organisation, sportsmanship and quality of play of the Spartan team. Formed in 1893 as a club for middle-class black players, the Spartan team became a key institution in the development of West Indies cricket and produced more test cricketers, including Clyde Walcott and Wes Hall, than any other club in the Caribbean. The language used to describe both the style of play and quality of players in late nineteenth-century and twentieth-century cricket publications is thoroughly racialised and eerily foreshadows the controversies over the supposedly overly aggressive, hyper-masculinised form of fast bowling employed by the West Indies test side in the 1970s and 1980s.⁴¹ Cricket continues to not simply reflect but produce the social forces at work within Caribbean society as the decline of West Indies team embodies the neoliberal policies, individualism and a vacuum of political leadership that characterises contemporary Caribbean society.⁴²

Creolisation is often invoked as a theoretical framework to explain the continued significance of military music and cricket in Caribbean society. And, indeed, one might argue that the West India Regiments are the perfect case study to demonstrate that the evolution of Caribbean military music and cricket sowed the seeds of nationalism. This reading, however, tends to neutralise and elide the ways cultural practices produce – historically and presently – both hegemonic and subaltern meanings and subjectivities. When used to describe ‘new identities’ – individual or shared – disarticulated from social tensions and hierarchies the concept of ‘creolisation’ does not account for the ways culture acts as a significant force of social domination and social change. This is particularly relevant with regard to the neo-colonial present and possible futures confronting Caribbean societies today.⁴³

Another analytical lens that is frequently brought to bear on subaltern Caribbean popular culture, and in particular non-written cultural practices, is that of ‘African traditions.’⁴⁴ Yet, this approach often essentialises African traditions and fails to explain the different and new meanings traditions may be put to. As Homi Bhabha has argued,

The right to signify from the periphery of an authorised power and privilege does not depend on the persistence of tradition; it is resourced by the power of tradition to be re-inscribed through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness that attend upon the lives of those who are in the minority.⁴⁵

Rather than seeds of a unified national identity or examples of authentic ‘African’ traditions, the play and performance of military music and cricket

exposed and produced racial and political tensions inherent in nineteenth-century colonial Anglophone Caribbean society.

At the turn of the twentieth century the public spaces occupied by the West India Regiments – the very spaces where regimental cricketers and military bands played – became focal points of popular culture and political discourses on the ‘masses.’ In his 1893 book *Stark’s History and Guide to Barbados and the Caribbee Islands*, James Henry Stark waxed quasi-nostalgically about the social harmony of colonial life in the following passage set at the garrison in Bridgetown:

The Savannah is not only the parade-ground of the troops, but the play-ground of the garrison, and for that matter of the island as well [...] Here in the afternoon the visitor will find in full swing the games which had been laid aside for months before he left home. He will see in one corner of the great green parade ground, a cricket match being fought out between rival companies of a regiment or between a garrison or a civilian club [...] at another part of the grounds he may find the officers ‘at home’ with their friends, and the military band discoursing sweet music [...] One of these garrison meetings form a sight well worth seeing by the visitor, with the fluttering pennons, the gaily colored dresses of the negroes, the picturesque uniform of the Zouave soldiers of the West India regiments, [...] There is a spirit of rollicking fun shining in the ebony faces of the negroes, and bursting into loud shouts of laughter at the slightest incident that seems comical; while above the hum and cheers of the crowd swell the strains of the band the whole picture framed in by that belt of wonderful green.⁴⁶

The West India Regiment, and the spaces that they occupied and performed in, figure prominently throughout Stark’s portrayal of late nineteenth-century Barbados. More to the point, the public life of the military is clearly shown as interconnected with daily life more generally. One might read Stark as using the public life of the West India Regiment as a metaphor for the glories and benefits of colonialism. By the turn of the twentieth century, the grounds where West India Regiment soldiers would drill and train had become spaces of mass public celebrations and sporting spectacles. Stilt-dancing, similar to that documented by Foulkes of the West India Regiment soldiers in Sierra Leone, Christmas masquerades, and marching bands and parades would attract hundreds of people. Yet, Stark’s idyllic description of public life and leisure in late nineteenth-century Barbados – and the role of the West India Regiments in it – elides the racial and political strife that characterised these societies at the turn of the twentieth century. Stark’s glowing description of colonial harmony belies the social and economic shifts emerging within the colonial order. One would never perceive from this pastoral scene that, ‘The half century from 1880 to 1930 was one of remarkable intellectual, cultural and political ferment within the Caribbean.’⁴⁷ Indeed, wages worsened for the vast majority of people in the Anglophone Caribbean over the last half of the nineteenth century. When combined with the decline of the sugar industry, this resulted in a steady stream of rural workers to the towns and cities, producing both increased repression of popular public life and greater popular political

mobilisation. The persistent and undeniable ambivalence of colonial domination, and the centrality of cultural practices to colonial relations and power, becomes crystal clear when Stark's comments are juxtaposed with E. Craig Brown's description of overseeing the West India Regiment band at the horse races in Kingston on 18 December 1896: '[...] all we had to do was sit in the empty grand-stand and watch drunken niggers beating on tom-toms on the race course.'⁴⁸ What may have been a popular celebration or military sporting day attended by the wider public is depicted from E. Craig Brown's perspective as an inauthentic and degenerate copy of civilised rituals.

Writing in 1974, in part as a response to the political debates surrounding the 1967 novel *Mimic Men* by V.S. Naipul, Derek Walcott states that in Naipul's version of Caribbean mimicry all actions are, 'conducted before a projection of ourselves which in its smallest gestures is based on metropolitan references. [...] every movement either ambitious or pathetic, and because it is mimicry, uncreative.'⁴⁹ Walcott rejects this concept of mimicry and instead argues, 'What is called mimicry is the painful, new, labourious uttering that comes out of belief, not of doubt.'⁵⁰ Walcott insists that out of the colonial contradiction of mimicry and menace, the actions of Caribbean people have given, and continue to give, birth to new, creative, innovative ways of being and thinking. The historical and cultural question of 'mimicry' lies at the core of any interpretation of the West India Regiments as well as Caribbean society as a whole. Attention to the cultural practices of the West India Regiments sheds significant light on the connections between early twentieth-century social change and the dynamics of nineteenth-century colonialism. Moreover, it opens up new – and possibly counterintuitive – connections between Caribbean military history and scholarship on the social and cultural forces that shape Caribbean society.

Notes

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 32. *Trinidad Gazette*, July 26, 1833.
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