Carnival in Africa

Join the Party!

Amanda Carlson and Courtnay Micots

Tourism-fueled economies in Africa and the travel industry produce photo-rich websites with seductive, color-saturated images that draw people to fabulous carnivals across the continent. These industries have vastly outpaced scholarly documentation of carnivals in Africa, which are often assumed to be an isolated and recent phenomenon, but in fact exist in all corners of the continent—Morocco, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Togo, Nigeria, Cameroon, Angola, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Ethiopia, and Kenya to name a few. Some are very new—although usually built upon an existing performance tradition—while others, such as in Angola and Cape Verde, are thought to be centuries old. As carnival events are growing in popularity, we hope this collection of articles will encourage others (scholars, artists, communities) to join the party and experience the complexity of carnival in Africa.

At this time, we know of only two full-length books about carnivals in Africa: *Coon Carnival New Year in Cape Town: Past to Present* (1999) by Denis-Constant Martin and *Kakaamotobe: Fancy Dress Carnival in Ghana* (2021) by Courtnay Micots. Many other carnivals are mentioned in disparate texts covering diverse regions and disciplines—a fair number published in *African Arts*. However, many references to carnivals in Africa fly under the radar because authors do not use the term "carnival" even when the event fits the definition of carnival or includes many characteristics of carnival. Until now, the literature on carnival has primarily focused on the Caribbean and Latin American epicenters. The weather vane of carnival history and theory indicates a strong wind blowing steadfast out of Trinidad & Tobago and Brazil (with carnivals that are well known among revelers and scholars alike), but this special issue hints at the vast scope of carnivals in Africa and the geographic decentering of carnival studies. The articles in this special issue demonstrate that Africa is not only a point of origin to explain diasporic performance traditions, Africa is also a place of return and reinvention—disrupting linear models of influence.

Humans have found many reasons to form processions and dance in the street. Factors that contributed to carnivals in Africa include the Portuguese (early super-spreaders of Christian festivals and processions), emancipated returnees from the Americas, British maritime culture (suppliers of goods, ideas, and people among the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa), diplomatic programs and global festivals (e.g., the First World Festival of Negro Arts in 1966 in Senegal and FESTAC '77 in Nigeria), and the intensification of globalization and shifts in the economy (moving from oil to tourism in Nigeria, for example). Another important piece of the puzzle is that festivals were almost always built upon the many preexisting performance traditions involving processions and masquerades. Carnivals in Africa are responses to multicultural societies and power dynamics within the continent.

The articles in this issue cover a variety of performance events, and the authors—who come from diverse disciplines and are at various stages in their careers—address four festivals from the coastal region of West Africa. The case studies include long-established carnivals (Fancy Dress in Ghana), festivals of recent import from the Americas (Calabar Carnival in Nigeria), older festivals that have become carnivals (Batanga Carnival in Cameroon), and annual festivals that tap into carnivalesque elements yet are not carnivals per se (Epé Ekpé festivals in Togo). Even so, these case studies are a small slice of a much larger story that could potentially shift how we look at carnival and the trajectory of research moving forward.

Coming to Terms with the Language of Carnival: What Is and Isn't Carnival?

In Africa, the term "carnival" is increasingly used to describe diverse events that can contribute to the global history of carnival. But, who gets to determine what is or isn't carnival? The word "carnival" has a European etymology, but that does not mean that similar rituals weren't happening elsewhere. Because most scholarship on carnival weighs heavily on its early European roots and later manifestations in the Americas, our understanding of carnival in Africa may be somewhat skewed and the language we use should be carefully considered. As we add perspectives from Africa and a broader range of scholarly voices, an understanding of carnival may expand to include a broader range of processional festivals and other carnivalesque performances.

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1 Characters represent the variety of musical traditions in Cape Verde on this *papier-mâché* float. Represented are a *funana* musician with an accordion and a *batuko* performer with a traditional woven belt and a *ferro*, an iron instrument. Creole Carnival, Cape Verde, Santiago Island, February 12, 2013.
Photo: Šara Stranovsky

European carnivals emanate partly from Roman Saturnalia, a festival of several days or weeks in December during which, as one ancient senator complained, the "whole mob has let itself go in pleasures" (Seneca 1917). This is common in carnivals, but despite the seeming chaos, carnival is "ordered according to rules about what it inhibits or does not allow to surface" (DaMatta 1986: 28–29). Saturnalia was appropriated by early Christians for their pre-Lenten celebrations by the eleventh century, when the forty-day fast for Lent was established by the Catholic Church. These celebrations, which included a parade through the city, continued for centuries and spread throughout Europe. The Latin term *carnem-levare*, or "to remove oneself from flesh or meat," was applied to the celebration. Italians eventually shortened this to *carnevale*, meaning "flesh farewell." Later, this was translated by the Spanish and Portuguese to *carnaval*, the English to *carnival*, and the French to *Mardi Gras* (Fat Tuesday). Self-indulgence, laughter, disguise, and unruliness became part of the festivities as early as the fourteenth century. Elite members of society held masked balls while the rest of the population, primarily male, organized into groups that held other loosely structured events, such as processions and mummings. Mummings consisted of groups who wandered through the streets performing and begging in return for money or food (Mauldin 2004: 3–4). Carnival activities often bracketed Christian rituals, taking place prior to Lent, which ends with the Easter celebration. Some of these ideas found their way into African performances. African carnivals often coincide with the calendar of religious holidays (Christian, Islamic, or indigenous).

Contemporary scholars who want to explain carnival lean heavily upon literature rooted in the European tradition, whose contemporary flagbearer is the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975). His ideas have been widely applied to ritual behavior in the most universal sense and his writing about French carnival in the Middle Ages has been pivotal. He explained that the time and space for carnival activities is "a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming" (Bahktin 1984: 24), involving rituals that navigate between the sacred and profane. He described carnival as a procession that "does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators" and therefore belongs to the community (Bahktin 1984: 7). In Africa there is a wide range of scenarios defining the relationship between actors and spectators. And the dynamic of belonging takes on different meanings in the African context, which is heavily laden with community-based social structures unique to

2 Revelers appear in large *papier-maché* heads or in groups of performers in costume. In this image, a group wears bells around their waist and ankles, rope tied around their upper arms, various frilled headpieces, cut-off trousers with fringe, and a white substance smeared on their faces and bodies. Bissau Carnival, Guinea-Bissau, 2013.
Photo: Angela Marchisella

those communities. Bahktin's contribution is undeniable, yet the definition of carnival can be expanded.

Scholarly voices in the Americas have certainly expanded the conversation about carnival, most notably with regard to themes of oppression and resistance. Brazilian Roberto DaMatta examined the Brazilian social world through specific ritualized events by focusing on military parades, religious processions, and carnivals (DaMatta 1991: 26). His approach to such national rituals differs from Bahktin, who dissected a literary text and focused upon events that exhibited carnivalesque behaviors. From an anthropological perspective, DaMatta adds to our understanding of carnival in terms of how order and disorder come into play. DaMatta noted a division between two types of social events: those that were highly ordered, like ceremonies, birthday parties, funerals, and military parades that demanded planning and respect, and those dominated by merrymaking, diversion, and/or "license," where behavior is free from the rules and creates a sense of disorder (DaMatta 1991: 29–30). The alternate space "permits people to destroy and react violently without fully assuming the political consequences and implications of their actions" (DaMatta 1991: 31). Destruction can take place literally or figuratively and has been documented in numerous carnivals tied to the Atlantic specifically for the purpose of expressing tensions and resistance to their oppressed predicament under European and American hegemonies. However, these events are also about joy, as they encourage social cohesion in communities newly formed or broken apart by foreign policies.

Because the location from which one watches carnival informs perspective, research on carnival in Africa offers a reorientation. It could potentially test broader conceptual frameworks, as was the case when scholars began to discuss carnival and other art forms in the Americas (and other locations attached to the Atlantic) in relationship to Africa. For example, Robert Farris Thompson used the terms "Black Atlantic world," "African-Atlantic world," "circum-Atlantic rim," and "Afro-Atlantic art" (Thompson 1983: xv; Thompson 1995: 50; Thompson 1987: 41) to emphasize how Africa has participated in and defined the many worlds that have been touched by the Atlantic Ocean. Paul Gilroy utilized Thompson's first term and wrote a book on the Black Atlantic, which he frames as a culture inclusive of people who are African or have African heritage, along with other unempowered groups, such as indigenous people and people from Asia. His focus is on how people produce something new out of the historical experience of the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism that brought people together in the Americas, leading to the fractured identity among those oppressed resulting in what W.E.B. DuBois describes as "double consciousness" (Gilroy 1993: 16; DuBois 1903). These terms are helpful in some ways for talking about carnivals in Africa, but also problematic. Concepts of "Blackness" in Africa are signifcantly different from the Americas, and carnival history in Africa is not only tied to the Atlantic.

Every decentering requires new terms, and the scholars in this issue use many different phrases to describe complex performance events in Africa. With a continuance of this discussion, scholars can tease out the nuances through their research and reflect upon the how the African perspective of carnival might reorient our conversations. Here we offer an overview of carnivals in Africa in order to demonstrate how extensive carnival culture is on the continent and to point out complex local, regional, and international influences. This is an overview in broad strokes—not a systematic review of the literature—for the purpose of framing emerging scholarship on carnvial in Africa.

NORTH AFRICA AND UPPER GUINEA COAST

Because Africans have many processional traditions with masquerades, it should come as no surprise that Christian festivals and pre-Lenten carnival rituals would resonate in Africa. In close proximity to Europe, the sharing of goods and ideas between Africa and the broader region has been occurring since ancient times. With the improvement in seafaring navigation in the late fifteenth century, Portuguese explorers, traders, and missionaries (followed by other European contingents) became increasingly involved along the African coast. At this time, before the development of racial hierarchies, Africans and Europeans had more in common than not. This period of contact resulted in marriages and offspring that created mixed-race populations, whose Luso-African identity and higher status through connection to education and employment continues to this day—frequently predicated on language, religion, and skin color. This is particularly true with Carnival in Cape Verde, also known as "Creole

3 This float depicts Sierra Leonean president Ernest Bai Koroma on a horse. He was running for reelection later that year and easily won. A number of floats promoting the ruling party as well as infrastructural projects they initiated, like roadworks, appeared in 2012. Lantern Festival, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 2012.
Photo: Sam Anderson

4 Former Liberian president Charles Taylor appearing before the International Criminal Court is reenacted on this float in 2012. The figure was puppeted to bow before the judge. Taylor received the guilty verdict for crimes against humanity during the Sierra Leone Civil War just a day before the procession, so artists must have organized this float at the last minute. Lantern Festival, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 2012.
Photo: Sam Anderson

Carnival," which was heavily influenced by the Portuguese and in contemporary times is defined by Brazilian samba—an art form based on music and dance from Central Africa that was transformed by Afro-Brazilians (Fig. 1).

Carnival is celebrated on all the islands of Cape Verde for the three days before Ash Wednesday; the biggest carnivals are Mindelo on São Vicente and in Ribeira Brava on São Nicolau. The current carnival tradition can be traced back to the nineteenth century, possibly to the twelfth century. The end of carnival is referred to as "Carnival Funeral" or Mandinga funeral, which concludes carnival and honors the Black ancestors (Positivosonline 2013). However, one could also say this is a ritual highlighting differences between Luso-Africans and their darker neighbors. Carnivals are often sites for expressing shared heritage as well as differences.

The Boujloud Festival in Morocco, popularly known as "Moroccan Halloween," is a three-day event that derives from a Berber tradition wherein people parade around wearing sheepskin, goatskin, bird feathers, imported rubber masks, or charcoal face paint. It happens after Eid al-Adha, an Islamic celebration of Abraham's willingness to give up his son as an act of devotion to Allah. Masqueraders run into the crowd and touch the audience, especially children, with sheep hooves, which is understood as a blessing. The characters who wear scary masks are symbolic of good omens that repell evil (El Amraoui 2014). This festival seems to navigate the relationships between Arab/Islamic and Berber identities as in Cape Verde.

In 1993, Doran H. Ross published a photo essay for *African Arts* on carnival in Guinea-Bissau, a pre-Lenten festival that begins on the Sunday preceding Ash Wednesday with masked children in groups meandering in an unplanned, casual march through the streets of Bissau past judges (Fig. 2) (Ross 1993). Ross's photo essay was meant to compliment the work of Daniel J. Crowley (1987), whose interest in carnivals took him to Salvador, Brazil, and Guinea-Bissau (a Portuguese colony from 1879–1974). When Crowley and his daughter Eve Crowley conducted their research in Guinea-Bissau in the 1980s, performers wore *papier maché* masks of monstrous characters like dragons, sea creatures, and figures of the "occult." As he described them, they exhibited "goggle eyes, beetling eyebrows, tongues, sharp shark's teeth, horns protruding from foreheads and jaws, barbed tails, web-like wings and ears, fish scales, beaks, and skull and crossbones …" (Crowley 1989: 76). There is no mention of the festival's origins, but he notes that government officials pondered "how best to use this living, popular festival in pursuit of national and even international goals" (Crowley 1989: 78). In line with the era, the government was already thinking about how festivals could benefit the nation.

There are probably many more examples of Catholic and

Islamic festivals and processions merged with local masquerades and other festival performances. As we look further down the coast, Islamic influences have decreasing prevalence due to the shift in demographics, while influences tied to the transatlantic slave trade become more prominent.

LOWER GUINEA COAST

Lantern Festivals in Senegal, Gambia, and Sierra Leone have been discussed in publications by John W. Nunley and Judith Bettelheim in the mid-1980s as "festivals" and later by Jenny Oram as "parades" (Nunley 1985; Bettelheim 1985; Oram 1998). A lantern procession is a parade of floats with layers of complex iconography that is easily comparable to other carnivals, but the term is not applied by Bettelheim. Although, she compares the houselike constructions of the lanterns in Senegal and Gambia to those worn in Jamaican Jonkonnu, particularly the "House John Canoe" character, who is linked to the resistance against White plantation owners in Jamaica[1] (Bettelheim 1985: 51–52, 1988: 48). While "festival arts" is a more comprehensive framework, perhaps scholars have also become accustomed to thinking of carnival as something that occurs in relationship to Africa, but outside of it.

Liberia and Sierra Leone received returnees from the Americas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who brought many performance traditions with them, adding to the complexity and richness of the performance environment. Lantern Festivals in Freetown, Sierra Leone, were introduced in the 1930s by the trader Daddy Maggay. The events had been organized by the Young Men's Muslim Association (YMMA) and patroned by political groups, the military, and businesses. When Nunley documented the festivals in 1985, they aligned with the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Since its recommencement following the civil war, the Lantern Parade has moved to the night before Sierra Leone's Independence Day, further aligning it with the nation-state rather than with religion (Figs. 3–4).[2]

Nunley's contribution to the understanding of carnival arts in the Caribbean and African Atlantic Rim cannot be overstated. He recognized an early link between Ode-Lay performances in Sierra Leone and carnivals in the Americas, but he did not apply the term "carnival" in the African context (Nunley 1981, 1987, 2010).[3] Jollay (or Jolly) and Ode-Lay performances include strolling masquerades that rely upon dichotomies such as fancy versus fierce, include the inversion of social order, and operated as part of a resistance to colonial pressures. Influences for Jollay may have come from the Caribbean or Africa, but likely were a combination of both.

Nunley also speculates about the cross-fertilization of performance traditions up and down the coast. He compares Jollay

5 A fancy *fairie* (fairy) masked devil of the Central Professor Jollay Society in the 2016 holiday celebration. Fairy Jollay, Freetown, Sierra Leone, December 27, 2016.
Photo: Amanda M. Maples

6 A Firestone Society fancy *fairie* (fairy) with a textile mask in Freetown to celebrate the New Year in 2017. Acrobatic Jollay, Freetown, Sierra Leone, January 2, 2017.
Photo: Amanda M. Maples

7 A slavery-themed skit performed by Egyaa No. 2 in Masquefest 2012 is reenacted to promote healing from historic trauma and promote social cohesion. Fancy Dress, Winneba, Ghana, January 2, 2012.
Photo: Courtnay Micots

8 A slavery-themed skit performed by Red Indians No. 4 in competition promotes education and healing from historic trauma. According to one organizer, "We celebrate it for our young people to see how our forefathers suffer from that slave trade" (Ibrahim Sualla, interview by Courtnay Micots, December 29, 2021). Fancy Dress, Swedru, Ghana, December 25, 2021.
Photo: Courtnay Micots

masquerades in Freetown, Sierra Leone with Ghana's Fancy Dress in his chapter that discusses the confluence of performance influences present at the turn of the century that led to the creation of Jollay, a fancy performance celebrated on Christmas, Boxing Day, and New Year's Day (Nunley 2010). Jollay in West Africa, like Jonkonnu in the Caribbean, includes masqueraders in fancy dress and warrior costume, which Nunley traces to Kru sailors, merchants, and migrants who came from Liberia to Sierra Leone, Ghana, and Togo in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[4] The Kru had similar Christmas masking performances that derived from fairy tales (Nunley 2010: 60), which may explain the name for Fairy Jollay types (Figs. 5–6).[5]

In Côte d'Ivoire, Popo Carnival in Bonoua is celebrated for two weeks every year around Easter. According to one website, Popo is an "accomplished word meaning mask." Preceding the event are football (soccer) matches, street theater, and dances. After worship on Sunday, a parade appears with giant puppets, floats, folk dances, and brass bands (Hutchinson 2016). The carnival, known for its "eccentric transvestites and its big popular ball to hunt 'King Popo' (a big *papier-mâché* monster)," includes parades of masked men who perform dances, "burlesque scenes," and skits that may include a reenactment of the slave raids of prior centuries (Petite Futé 2021). Like other carnivals across the Atlantic, many African carnivals are based around social hierarchies that emerged from ethnic rivalries, and slavery within the African continent is reenacted or "played" for cathartic effect enhancing social cohesion (i.e., Carnaval de Oruro in Bolivia and Fancy Dress in Ghana) (Figs. 7–8).

Fancy Dress, which occurs across four regions of southern Ghana, is held primarily between Christmas and New Year's Day. It stems from a confluence of performance activities on the coast since the late nineteenth century, including both local and foreign forms of dance, masking, skits, and theater.[6] While Courtnay Micots provides a broad discussion of this carnival in her article in this issue, simlar traditions have been performed in Lagos, Nigeria, reinforcing the influence of these festivals on neighboring communities. One website states that the Lagos Carnival is known as the "Fanti or Caretta Carnival of Lagos" (Hometown.ng 2018). The inclusion of "Fanti" belies a possible Fante origin from the former Gold Coast, where Ghanaian Fancy Dress is held today. The Lagos Carnival takes place during the annual Lagos Black Heritage Festival in May. The carnival may date back to the colonial period and be inspired by the community of formerly enslaved Afro-Brazilian's migrants and their descendants (Mark 2015; Hometown.ng 2018). Lagos Carnival today was "reinstated," or perhaps reinvigorated, in 2010 with costumed performance troupes displaying an eclectic mix of Nigerian, Brazilian, and Cuban heritages (Hometown.ng 2018). Like many of the carnivals along the coast, Lagos Carnival has a complex history deserving further research.

Other carnivals have popped up in Nigeria, such as Abuja Carnival (in Nigeria's capital), which features a parade of traditional dances from all over the country. However, the most successful is Calabar Carnival in Cross River State, which began in 2004

9 During Batanga carnival, a float represents a ritual canoe with a raffia skirt used for rites of the *jengu* "water spirit" society, with a leader in the prow holding a red-dyed raffia whisk. The canoe is wrapped in cloth commemorating the deportation of Batanga people in 1914. Batanga Carnival, Kribi, South Province, Cameroon, May 2012.
Photo: Georges G. Dimwemwe Mabele

and has been branded "the biggest street party in Africa." The types of traditional dances featured in the Abuja Carnival are relegated to a separate event in Calabar called "Cultural Carnival," which is usually a day or so before the main event, Calabar Carnival. This state sponsored event is modeled after Trinidadian carnival, which has systematically been exported to many cities around the world with Trinidadian or Caribbean communities. Calabar is unique in that there is no Caribbean diaspora (Carlson 2010). Inspiration has come from Brazilian carnivals too, although no direct Brazilian connection exists. Calabar's connection with the Caribbean was made tangible by a visit from a Cuban masquerade that is a direct descendent of the Cross River region, discussed in this issue by Ivor Miller. The carnival is also the focus of articles by Umana Nnochiri and Nsima Udo.

In the coastal city of Kribi, Cameroon, the Bantanga Carnival is organized by the Batanga people and is considered a "commemorative festival"(see Miller, this issue). Based upon annual collective rites of individual communities, this large-scale (or unified) event with participants from all villages was established in 1916 to celebrate the return of thousands of Batangas who had been deported to other parts of Cameroon due to fighting between Germans and French in World War II. The Batanga Carnival includes a huge parade with floats representing the ships used to deport the people in 1914, and the mermaid water spirit and her attendants. The event incorporates ethnic groups from all over Cameroon who reside in Kribi (Fig. 9). In innovative and symbolically potent ways, the processions and floats of the Batanga carnival encapsulate the history and values of the people, that are celebrated and elevated through ensemble performance.[7]

The Lower Guinea Coast offers numerous research opportunites for anyone interested in carnival. The region has a particularly complex carnvial history that includes cultural convergences and government involvement.

EAST AFRICA

East Africa, and especially the Swahili Coast, is a melting pot of cultures, religions, and polities resulting from Indian Ocean trade networks and trade with the hinterlands. Other factors include a long history of slave trading (distinctively different from the transatlantic slave trade in terms of duration and practice), early Greco-Roman influence, Portuguese influence, and European colonization.

Today in Ethiopia and Eriteria, where they have the oldest Christian cultures on the continent, the Ashenda (or Ashendiye) Festival occurs in August and has its roots in older traditions such as the Christian celebration of the ascension of the Virgin Mary into heaven. Costumed revelers throw necklaces of flowers and palms into the crowd while shaking their shoulders to the beat of the *kebero* drum (Figs. 10–11). Ashenda takes place in Lasta Lalibela, North Sekota, and Tigray and marks the end of a two-week-long fast known as Filseta. Known as "Ashenda" in Tigray, "Shadey" in Wag Hemra, and "Solel" in Raya Kobo, these events are a "joyous outburst of tradition that engulfs locals with cheer" (Sahle 2016). Online sources refer to these events as festivals and/or carnivals.

Beni ngoma dances across eastern Africa were studied by Terence Ranger as "a parody and a consummation of military drill," but not as a carnival per se. Competitive dances between *ngoma* societies "imitated" European dress and were conducted as a form of mockery during the time of colonialism; apparently they no longer exist (Ranger 1975: vii). These events included boat floats and African-styled European military uniforms that have been richly described in colonial reports, interviews, and other scholarly sources,[8] but we could not locate visual documentation. It would be interesting to compare how events such as this functioned in comparison to Black Atlantic carnivals with regard to publicly acceptable forms of subtle protest.

In Kenya there is the Mombasa Carnival, which occurs in November and is organized by the Ministry of Tourism. It is publicized as a "street party" consisting of two parades that converge on Moi Avenue. The carnival is publicized in tourist guides and features the city's multicultural communities represented by music, dance, performers in costume, and floats (Lonely Planet 2019). There is also the Maulidi Festival celebrated by Swahili people that attracts visitors from all corners of the world. Tom Mboya Olali, professor at the University of Nairobi, writes, "Lamu Maulidi [on Luma Island] is a hybrid festival that is part pilgrimage, part carnival, and part mystical Islamic ceremony." While it is associated with the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, its inception is a mystery and may be linked to Egyptian events in the eighth century; however, the unique Lamu version is believed to have been developed by Habib Swaleh Jamal al-Layl after 1866. Some of the pilgrims participate in the festivities by visiting the nearby town of Shela and participate in the dancing, engage with women of loose virtue, and imbibe alcohol (Olali 2015), which

10 Ashendiye marks the end of a sixteen-day fast. It is celebrated annually with traditional dressing, cultural costumes, and dances. Girls are the main participants of the festival, dressed in traditional clothes decorated with long grasses and singing traditional songs in groups according to their ages. Girls gather in their village and go house to house singing and playing drums. Owners of the houses usually give them money, food, or other items for their effort. Then the gifts that are collected from the community members are offered to poor people. Lalibela, Ethiopia, August 2019.
Photo: Sehin Tewabe

11 Ashendiye is usually celebrated for a successive three to ten days in August. Though mainly a female-dominated event, young boys also have a role. Lalibela, Ethiopia, August 2019.
Photo: Sehin Tewabe

sounds more like carnival, with its upending of rules, than a traditional Islamic festival. Olali explains,

> Like any festival, the Maulidi is both a ceremony (that is, a ritual event whose stages are rather precisely defined) and an entertainment, containing a certain measure of exuberance. In regard to my use of the word "carnival," whose ambiguity is fairly evident, I use it here without any particularly nuanced purpose, but simply in order to convey the massive extent to which people take part in the pilgrimage, and also to suggest that the Maulidi is a demonstration of a particular religious sensibility which combines feelings of wonder and of emotion with a sociability deriving from an assembly of the entire Swahili community in the Lamu archipelago (Olali 2015).

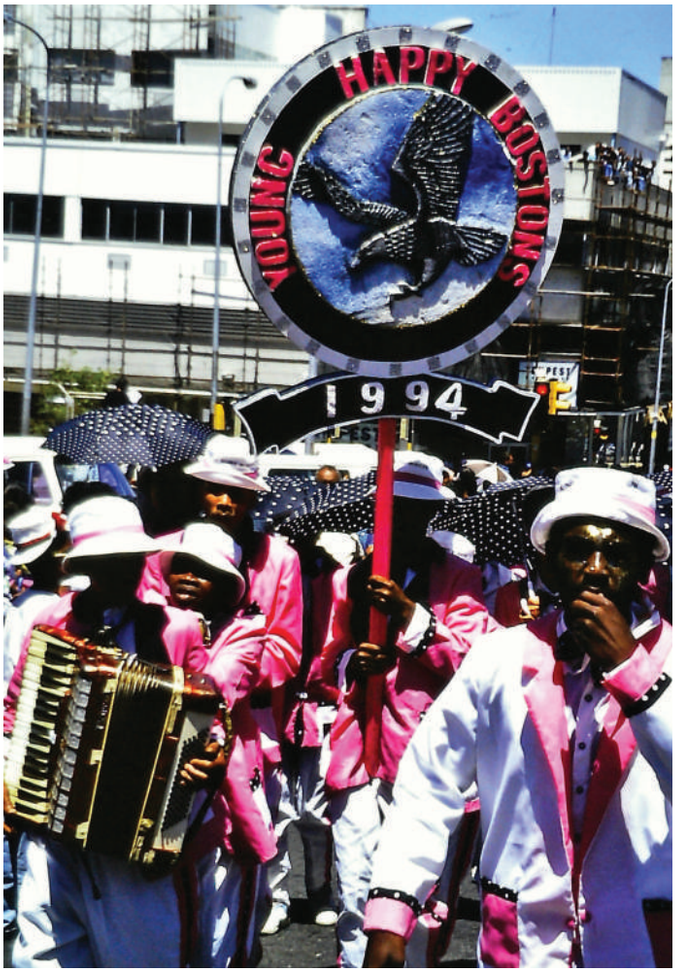
Thereby, Olai points out how slippery the term "carnival" can be.

The Quelimane Carnival takes place in the capital of Mozambique, a former Portuguese colony, and is referred to as the carnival of "Little Brazil." During colonial times, the carnival was celebrated in club halls, where both colonialists and freemen participated. In 1990 the carnival began to be celebrated in street parades in late February/early March. Festivities start with bands and singers performing on Friday night. Parades consist of floats and performers in costume. According to one website, "During the festivities, the participants wear masks, mostly homemade, which reflect the appearance of some animals of the region. Likewise, these masks are also vehicles for protests of the events that happened during the colonization process of Mozambique" (Ramon n.d.). Across the continent, it seems that carnivals are a publicly efficacious way to examine the injustices of colonialism.

CENTRAL AFRICA

While central African influences upon carnival in the Americas have been widely recognized, we did not uncover much scholarship or online presence about carnivals in central Africa, with the exception of Luanda Carnival.[9] This is surprising because of the long history of Portuguese involvement and strong connection to the transatlantic slave trade. Specialists in this region may have more to contribute that we could not find.

Luanda Carnival in Angola stands out as one of the oldest carnivals on the continent. David Birmingham describes carnival in Angola as a "flexible response to the traumas of change." Beginning as early as 1620, carnival has been used by the populace to exhibit carnivalesque sentiments under a variety of regimes. The date of March 27 was selected in 1987 by political leaders to coincide with the date of the South African withdrawal from Angola in 1976 and thus is not linked to the Lenten



12 Board and musicians of the Young Happy Boston Klops, during the Tweede Nuwe Jaar (second new year) street parade (Wale Street). Kapse Klopse, Cape Town, South Africa, January 3, 1994.
Photo: Denis-Constant Martin

calendar. Carnival groups are led by a President, King, Queen, and Count, each with special roles to play. Behind them are the musicians playing a variety of percussion instruments, especially drums. They have "charm carriers" who spiritually protect the drums from damage by rivals (Birmingham 1988). Like all the other examples we've mentioned, traditional culture is inserted or referenced in carnival. However, this appears to be more than a nod to traditional culture.

SOUTHERN AFRICA AND MADAGASCAR

Much has been written about carnivals in South Africa, but the broader region has numerous carnivals, sometimes with many of the same artists in participation.[10] In Cape Town, South Africa, Kapse Klopse is an annual event that began in the 1880s–1890s. It takes place on New Year's Day in the area of Bo-Kaap. In the morning people gather in the street and march, singing, dressed in colorful uniforms with face makeup in black, white, or glittering colors (Fig. 12). The parade includes band and drum-major performances. Trophies are given for the "best dress" and "best board," a carved or painted emblem the troupe carries on top of a pole. The carnival is also known as "Coon Carnival," which appropriates the derogatory historical term used in the United States to refer to a Black person. This carnival includes the mimicry of American minstrelsy, a form of racist entertainment that stemmed from early nineteenth century parodies using stereotypes of African Americans. Denis-Constant Martin's research on Kapse Klopse explores how this event contribute to the development of a "coloured" identity and a reclaiming of space within Cape Town (Martin 1999, 2000). It's not surprising that concepts of race have shaped carnivals in South Africa, given that racial categories and geographic boundaries were used as a form of oppression during Apartheid.

Cape Town Carnival is the city's other carnival, organized by a team of individuals, mostly White, who secure funding from a variety of corporate sponsors (Figs. 13–14). Held in mid-March, this parade is more elaborate, with large floats and stunning costumes, demonstrating the imbalance of funding and racial power in South Africa. Despite the label of Carnival, little was observed in 2014 (by Micots) of direct carnivalesque characteristics. Rather, the event seemed to be more of a celebration to enhance community unity. Indirectly the "White" Cape Town Carnival seems to highlight the disparity of social and economic status that is aligned with racial categories in Cape Town and South Africa more broadly.

In Johannesburg, the Joburg Carnival stems from preexisting carnivalesque street parades that have existed since South Africa gained independence in 1994. These events are produced by multiethnic communities that continue to face considerable social and economic challenges in post-Apartheid South Africa. In 2004, the city-sponsored event on New Year's Eve grew from a desire for social cohesion in the midst of contemporary xenophobia and past traumas that continue to weigh deeply upon the social fabric of the country (Fig. 15). Early parades included overt political messages, such as the Hector Pieterson Float for the September 3, 1994 Children's Creativity Pageant that recreated in *papier-maché* the famous photograph of a wounded boy (Pieterson) carried in the aftermath of the Soweto Uprising in 1976 (Fig. 16). The Joburg Carnival is now overseen by the government and it is packaged as a joyful celebration to bring about social cohesion, but other messages appear as well. A performer in a backpack costume[11] pulled a large extension resembling a wheel of cheese with a section cut out. On the top were houses representing the neighborhood of Alexandria, divided from the finer homes and skyscrapers by a train. In 2012, when this costume appeared, Alexandria was experiencing rat issues. The costume was a subtle message that "politicians were eating away at them [community members]," in much the same way rats would eat cheese (Micots 2017: 97). Carnivals in South Africa clearly offer opportunities for critique while attempting to envision a better future.

Carnaval de Madagascar in Antananarivo is an example of a more recent creation; it began in 2015. This three-day event is a celebration of Malagasy cultural heritage. It occurs in June when community festivals celebrating harvests and the ritual reburial of ancestors traditionally take place in Madagascar (Petite Futé 2021). The incorporation of preexisting rituals and festivals is a common theme. It may also be that event organizers know that placing the term "carnival" on these events may bring in a broader audience with the intention of building tourism.

13 Cape Town Carnival is a newer event with groups of costumed performers, bands and floats in procession in Bo-Kaap that focuses on South Africa's heritage. Cape Town, South Africa, March 14, 2015.
Photo: Courtnay Micots

14 The secular Cape Town Carnival is organized by a team of individuals, mostly White, who are able to secure corporate sponsors to support a lavish annual parade in mid-March. Cape Town, South Africa, March 14, 2015.
Photo: Courtnay Micots, March 14, 2015

NEW RESEARCH ON CARNVIVAL IN AFRICA

The contributors to this volume demonstrate how a focus on carnival in Africa not only provides insights into specific African traditions but also raises many questions about how we define and think about carnival when we lean away from the Americas as the gold standard. The articles in this special issue stem from a specific area spanning the coastal regions of Ghana to Cameroon and illustrate the breadth of performances that exist in this region of Africa.

Umana G. Nnochiri's article, "Calabar Carnival and the Theme of Migration: A Designer's Perspective," providers an insider's perspective on carnival and reminds us of the many artists and creators who build and perform carnival each year. Their voices are too often left out of publications about carnival and yet their perspectives are critical for understanding these events. Nnochiri is particularly well positioned to write about carnival because she has designed the costumes for the Passion 4 band for over a decade, contributing to the success of this band that takes home many prizes. She comes to this role with many skills as a textile artist, fashion designer, college professor, and community facilitator. Nnochiri writes specifically about the 2017 Carnival because of the importance and magnitude of its theme, "Migration," which touches upon the DNA of carnival. She provides many insights into how Nigerians "tell stories" through a specific type of historical narrative from the perspective of the Nigerian experience. These historical narratives often appropriate the voice of objectivity, presenting both the positive and negative sides along with overt critique or criticism of social and historical circumstances. Unexpected topics for carnival revelry, such as Libyan jails, organ harvests, and taxi drivers, offer a frank look at the harsh realities of contemporary migration. In this way, historical narratives about migration offer a warning reminiscent of a public educational campaign along with homages to traditional culture mixed with beads and bikinis. Umana Nnochiri provides a thorough discussion of how this all comes together.

Nsima Stanislaus Udo is a PhD candidate in history at University of the Western Cape, Bellville, South Africa, who has returned home to Nigeria to complete dissertation research on Calabar Carnival from the local perspective and to explore what it means to have an insider's perspective. In his photo essay, "Calabar Carnival: Visualizing Cultural Authenticity and the Paradigm of the Street," Udo shares aspects of his emerging research that includes an analysis of Calabar Carnival through the lens of photography and the significance of visual representation, which is central to the carnival experience. Udo, who writes "the street functions as a respatialized landscape through which culture is intensely visualized, and visuality is performed, curated and exhibited," touches upon an extremely important element of contemporary carnivals—image making and image distribution via new media platforms. He also points out the importance of how performers move through the streets of Calabar and reflects upon the realities of daily life in contrast to

15 A variety of performers appear in the city-sponsored Joburg Carnival, including the parade leader in a fancy "Indian" costume, a local youth group wearing Ndebele beading, stilt walkers, and *papier-mâché* heads denoting popular figures from South Africa's history. Joburg Carnival, Johannesburg, South Africa, December 31, 2014.
Photo: Courtnay Micots

16 The Hector Pieterson Float was designed by Lucas Matome for the Children's Creativity Pageant**,** organized by the Afrika Cultural Centre. Johannesburg, South Africa, September 3, 1994.
Photo: Kamal El Imam El Alaoui

the narrative of carnival through a collection of photographs that present these tensions.

"From Ritual to Carnival: Sacred Processions and Solidarity in Calabar, Cameroon, and Cuba" by Ivor Miller, who has lived and worked in Nigeria and Cuba for decades, explores the complicated relationship between carnival events, emphasizing innovation and competition and sacred processions that establish continuity. At the center of his research is the Calabar–Cuba continuum—the entwined histories of the Cross River region in southeastern Nigeria and southwestern Cameroon and Cuba due to the transatlantic slave trade. The author explores how the concept of community based on a relationship between the living, the ancestors, and the land through a discussion that brings together the annual Batanga carnival in Kribi, Cameroon; the Ékpè "leopard" society processions of Calabar; the modern State-sponsored carnival of Calabar; and the presence of Abakuá, Cuba's variant of Ékpè, in Havana carnival processions. Miller describes how sacred processions have become mixed in with a variety of events that are described as carnival and how this can support, transform, or undermine ritual institutions.

Elyan Hill's "Dancing Altars: Carnivalesque Performance in a Festival in Togo" addresses a religious festival (Epé Ekpé), which, unlike carnival, is performed by initiated members whose bodies become extensions of Vodun altars. Hill explores how the ritual elements of this religious festival align with the functions of carnival, utilizing carnivalesque adornments, and creating carnival space. Hill's approach requires that we look beyond carnival as an event and consider how carnivalesque elements have been incorporated into other performance traditions. Similar to other carnival events, the Epé Ekpé Festival involves migration narratives, emerging tourist markets, references to slavery in both the West African and transatlantic contexts, navigating local/regional diasporas, and visual excess.

In "Power and Play: Fancy Dress Carnival in Ghana," Courtnay Micots summarizes her findings from ten years of research on Fancy Dress, a performance tradition that is over a century old. Today, carnivals in southern Ghana include parades and competitions where new choreography, music, characters, and costume materials are constantly evolving. Micots discusses how the masquerade practice was informed by other Atlantic Rim carnivals but also local performances. She discusses how Fancy Dressers negotiate modernity and authority through a long tradition of carnival as a site of both cultural celebration and resistance in relation to the history of this region.

These articles as a whole offer a glimpse into the complex tapestry of carnival research in Africa, where carnival events operate as a nexus of many streams of influence. It is time to reorient the conversation around carnival, which is often tied to the Atlantic, to include those occurring across the African continent. Whether

carnivals have been practiced for over a century or are new ventures, performances help navigate cultural convergences, social hierarches, and political authority while using bodies creatively beneath the guise of costume and mask to upturn everyday experiences and make a festive period of abundance, inclusion, and joy. While "carnival" is increasingly being used as shorthand for "festivals" in global terms, we need to recognize that the term has never really been tied to one type of event. Perhaps it's better to examine our assumptions about carnival, as well as its current usage, and accept that carnivalesque behavior is human behavior that has been funneled into some pretty great parties around the world. Join the party; more research needs to be done.

Notes

1 Enslaved Africans sold from the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana) in the early eighteenth century carried with them memories of their hero John Conny, who fought successfully against the Europeans. Shortly thereafter lively street parades in Jamaica with masked performers shouted "John Connu" at plantation houses, perhaps in defiance. The "House John Canoe" character was illustrated by Isaac Mendes Belisario and published in 1837 (Bettelheim 1988; 1979: 10). Different accounts exist for how "Jonkonnu" became the masquerading term.

2 Samuel Mark Anderson explains that "given the sponsorship of major local businesses and the organization and judging of the government, the participants are inclined to create scenes that range from banal scenes of 'tradition' to government propaganda. If I were to offer a provisional analysis, I'd lean towards Mbembe's discussion of the 'banality of power in the postcolony' where, rather than subverting hierarchies of power, people elevate and play with the symbols of that power" (Samuel Mark Anderson, email communication, November 9, 2021; see Mbembe 1992).

3 For a comparison between Ode-Lay and Jolly with Fancy Dress in Ghana that exemplifies this idea of Black Atlantic carnival traits, see Micots 2021: 237–68.

4 Amanda M. Maples, curator of African art at the North Carolina Museum of Art, is currently researching these Freetown performances for an exhibition and publication project.

5 Nunley explores connections to Ibibio and Baga masquerades, concluding that other "fancy cross-dressing costumes of young men's entertainment societies are found along the West African coastline from Guinea to Angola" (Nunley 2010: 62–65).

6 In an early twentieth century journal, Robert Ernest McConnell writes about a carnivalesque performance that he witnessed during a Christmas visit to Lagos. He describes a "wild orgy of [?] and dancing …. expects a dash …. may bedeck himself with feathers and other parts, while around their ankles is a collection of metal-ware, largely discarded sardine times … All day long this is kept up! … in the Wangara quarter …. Among the companies of the Lagos people will be found men dancing on stilts with perhaps grotesque headdresses …. an indecent dance" (Robert McConnell, Ernest. ca. 1910. Wellcome Institute Library (London) MS3355).

7 Ivor Miller, email communication, November 9, 2021.

8 The Papers of Professor Terence Osborn Ranger archive at the Bodleian Libraries in Oxford, England unfortunately does not contain any images either (Lucy McCann, email communication, November 4, 2021).

9 We were wondering if carnival traditions exist somewhere along the Congo River in places like Libreville, Bata, Port Genbi, Madingo-Kayes, Pointe-Noire, Kinshasa, and Brazzaville .

10 Carnival circuits and carnival diplomacy are another area deserving of more research. It's worth noting that Rwanda, which does not host carnival, has a national dance troupe with a rigorous international touring schedule that includes appearances at carnivals in Africa and elsewhere.

11 These costumes have an armature that fits onto to the performer, usually over the shoulders and/or around the waist, to support a larger extension overhead, behind, or around the performer.

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