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*DREADNESS: The Mystic Power, Philosophy and  
Performance of Shadow 1941-2021*

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# MAN CYAH TAKE HORN: THE INTERSECTIONS OF COLONIALISM, CAPITALISM AND GENDER STEREOTYPING



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Viking Ding Dong's *Hornin' First*, Jaiga's *Old Dog*, Nessa Preppy's *Horn Back*. Contemporary Soca. Odes to what may be one of our most traumatic national pastimes: Infidelity. We should have horning entered as an Olympic sport. The stories some of us could tell of either being on the receiving end, or is giving as good or better than we ourselves get. Then there are those of us who stand quietly by and watch horn share like an unholy sacrament while actively pretending we eh see nothing because that is not we business. But there is one song, one that, like a cautionary epistle to *the man dem*, stands head and shoulders above the rest. One that has become so iconic, it is the foundation on which most of the creative contemporary treatment of this licentious sacrilege stands. None other than Shadow's 2000 smash hit *Lookin' fuh Horn*. But *we go just call him* Shadow since he was never too big on the fan bestowed "Mighty".

This work will trace and dissect the sexual and socio-political polarities between genders as mirrored in the elements of misogyny in calypso. This essay asks: How are these narratives, rooted in colonial and capitalist constructs? This in no way presupposes that the concept of infidelity is not a feature of all cultures rooted in patriarchy. What I seek to do I examined the unexplored legacies of trauma bequeathed to black bodies through coloniality and capitalism that are tied to our social and cultural frameworks. This paper asks 1. how the inheritance of those constructs serves to devalue genders, 2. who continues to benefit from these stereotypes across class, race and gender lines, and 3. who has borne the brunt of its disservice and the resulting violence. This work is in no way intended to be an indictment of Shadow but rather an acknowledgement of his ability in the tradition of

the griot and philosopher, through the dark witticisms of the midnight robber, to take a bird's eye view of a landscape and weave a story that not only entertains, but also craftily comments on phenomena that continues to present day.

### **Shadow, The Mighty Oracle**

Atillah Springer says in a love letter to de man on his transition, "that a shadow is a thing that appears when the light is obscured. It is the darkness that we are, it is our truth. Dear Shadow, you were and are our truest self, grappling with the reality of darkness while holding desperately to the certainty that we are also made of light" (Springer n.p).

Born in pre-Independence 1941, Winston McGarland Bailey was a man both of and beyond his time. Birthed from the belly of the cultural mecca of Belmont, Port-of-Spain and then further forged in the mystic country side of Les Coteaux, Tobago, he taught himself to sing and write calypsoes while minding cows and goats in the pasture, Shadow was decidedly other. Alien. His first musical grounding coming from the jig, reel, violin and drum. Despite his family initially thinking he *culdna* sing, he managed to leave a discographic legacy spanning five decades. His dread and terribleness as griot, orator and musical obeah man was rooted in his ability to exist in multiple realms at once: the then, the now and the present continuous. With a voice that resonated like a wail directly from the ancestors and a persona clad investments that paid direct homage to the Midnight Robber and literal blackness, the "bassman from hell" was one that left an undeniable mark on the creative landscape.

Ours is a schizophrenic space, grappling for self-determination while also dabbling in the image of the metropole to find validation and credibility. The underbelly of the refrains of taking calypso and soca to the world always seems to be the vulnerability and latent inadequacy of needing validation from the foreign gaze. A gaze rooted in imperial respectability and the trappings of coloniality. Shadow *din ha time fuh dat*. His obsession was with our local space and its dismissiveness of his efforts, particularly in the realm of that destructive thing we love so much: competition. Dey fed up rob Shadow in the Big Yard. Till he sing a whole song asking the judges *What's Wrong with*

*me?* But it was that very wrongness that was so right. Is so right: the present continuous. An example reaching across the realm, the great divide, through his music that still speaks authentic truth to power. A beacon for anytime, or anything that makes you question your own strangeness and Obeah. Bukka Rennie talks about Shadow's strangeness:

He comes in the midst of a quest, a demand, and an imperative of political Independence, to transform society unto an industrial basis as a platform to facilitate true development, but this "de-colonisation" process is bogged down by Euro-centric parameters that rejects the genuine self-determination of a people as it rejects everything about Shadow's persona: his blackness, his ethnicity (Tobagonian-ness), and most of all his artistic expressions which are described as "growls and groans and animal-like noises. Despite acclaim by the masses, official society kept seeing Shadow as a clown and his lyrics as childish, crass foolishness, and his singing was described as "baying", in other words, inhuman. Simply put; Shadow's raucousness disturbed the smooth urbane existence of the Port-of-Spain brown-skin middle-class creoles....But the fact is that Shadow emerged after 1970, in the wake of a groundswell of "black consciousness. (Rennie n.p)

While other greats of the form such as Kitchener, Sparrow and dem other fellas, may have been considered more colourful, humorous or relatable in their demeanour, antics and lyrics, Shadow purposefully stayed true to himself and his own, what we would now possibly call, social awkwardness and anxieties. Looking at him in countless interviews now in preparation for this work only served to endear him to me. The nervous laugh. The sometimes halting speech. Always gracious, sometimes wary of receiving compliments, reassuring fans that he would continue to do the work that would allow him to be worthy of their adoration. All this while being extremely sure of his own dreadness as a lyricist and observer of the world. He channelled his perceived quirks into his music. What some would call quirks I would refer to as a predestined call to action. There was a special kind of Obeah that became a clearly identifiable musical and performance philosophy, which nurtured an ability to see and hear with eyes and ears not of this realm. An ability that he talks about in his music explicitly. *Bassman, Feeling the Feeling, Tension, Pay the Devil, What's Wrong with Me*. These songs all speak of his strangeness in some way. A dread ability to see, hear and feel beyond the knowledge system and sensibility to which coloniality is tied: "To accomplish this, Shadow summons inspiration and creative strength, not from 'Heaven' as the ethics of

this Western, Graeco-Roman-Christian world would want to suggest, but from ‘Hell’” (Rennie n.p). Mason notes, “(Shadow) grew up with his grandparents, Evlan and Elly Bailey, in Les Coteaux, a village in Tobago much associated with the African spiritualism of obeah, the atmosphere of which could often be detected around his music” (Mason, n.p.).

It is this visceral instinctive strangeness and unabashed vulnerability that has made the man’s work a cannon of dreadness within the form. It is this dreadness that allowed him to speak on things of and beyond his time. What was Shadow seeing within the society in the year 2000 that prompted him to pen *Lookin’ Fuh Horn*? A chune so big that while many then wined, chipped or undoubtedly snickered, there were various quarters for which it was a source of deep introspection. And still today, because here we are with conversations surrounding gender roles, stereotypes and violence being what they are. Maybe it was that 1999 would have seen the passing of the domestic violence act in Trinidad and Tobago. 2000 was also the year that he penned *Domestic Violence*. It cannot be that one song existed in a completely different world from the other. It begs us to connect the dots. Something was undeniably happening within the society because by 2002 a United Nations report by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women found that as far back as the early 1990s, gender-based violence, including sexual attacks on women and young girls, was “pervasive” and had “long been a matter of grave concern for the Government.”(Steuart, and Mendes-Franco n.p) At the time, the government implemented a supposedly robust and comprehensive programme to specifically tackle domestic violence, but was it possible that Shadow, Obeah man that he was, could have seen that decades later, rates of gender-based violence would still dominate headlines in the twin island Republic? That by the time we got to 2020, forty-five women and two girls would be murdered in the space of a year.

Was Shadow able to see that much of the gender-based violence and upheavals at that time would continue to spiral as a result of shifting power dynamics and an upsetting of the patriarchal framework we had been gifted through colonialism. This is not to say that we didn’t long exist in a culture where it was perfectly acceptable to *pelt a hurry hand* or two to discipline and establish control. The difference in more recent times

with power and financial agency dynamics having shifted from the man towards the woman, one can suspect that the slap or need to lash out is not simply in that moment about maintaining control, but also about men's continued loss of control. Bukka Rennie also makes a point of highlighting that, "He was the first calypsonian who in dealing with man/woman and gender relationships in song put the sexes on equal footing and in fact in most instances placed women in control of the situations and in a position to determine [the] outcome especially where their bodies and their sexuality are concerned" (Rennie, n.p).

The concerning statistics of the now, with regards to gender based violence moved in the direction of being perpetrated by men against women suggest that *man cyah take horn*. Whether it be a woman's real or perceived sexual "indiscretion", or a desire to simply end a sexual liaison for whatever reason, there is a statistically supported trend that proves man-kind's inability to deal with bruised egos. The source of the ego being a desperate need to hold on to the stereotypical toxic trappings that signal masculinity within Caribbean lived experience. The breadwinner, the head of household, the sweetman or sexual stud, father of many children, keeper of many women, inability to control masculine sexual urges, having unlimited and unfettered access to women's bodies, gatekeeper of selective Christian dogma, the stoic man devoid of emotion except for drunken revelry or anger. All problematic real life stereotypes mirrored in the music of that era that we loved so well.

In 2020, 20 years after the release of *Lookin fuh Horn*, 899 people, 649 women and girls and 205 men and boys received support via the Victim and Witness Support Unit. By November of 2021 the figure was just 41 shy of the figure of the previous year. These statistics are daunting and studies have been done on the reasons and rationales behind the continuous phenomenon of gender based violence, one of the more recent being a 2018 Qualitative Study by the Office of the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago in collaboration with UN Women. The figures and the recorded accounts of victims, beg us as a society to reassess where we have gone wrong, what have we missed? How are we socialised and what generational cycles do we need to break in the raising of our children, not just our boys, in order to elicit change? While our women may be the physical victims of our socio-political inheritance, our men have

also borne the brunt of the systemic abuse that has conditioned manhood particularly Black manhood, from the time of the oversexualized buck going from plantation to plantation at the behest of the plantation owner. A shackling subservience to capitalist ideologies by inextricably linking it to the validation of their humanity. As a result, anything that now threatens that familiarity can result in a disconcerting dissonance that may manifest violently.

You looking for horn, plenty, plenty horn, boy....

You ent working nowhere You don't have a pay day

You think it's so the thing does work

You think it's so I wish you luck

Without money to buy honey

You're headin' for misery

She want hairdo and callaloo

And you ent have nothing

The song is a story. A simple conversation between a lovable uncle whether by blood or otherwise and a younger compatriot. The lyrics serve as a script, one that any good director cannot help but deconstruct. The rhythm. The actor's beats, the space where the thought and motivation for action happens. It is these storytelling beats that are mirrored in the music. Angst that rides on the crescendo and staccato of the brass. So while we wining hard on the chorus we also find ourselves, interrogating the motivation and thought that prompts the delivery of the line of questioning in the verses. Is it real concern for his young compatriot's manhood? A warning/ An admonition? *Because uncle see trouble coming dong de road and is trying to save you pain, but yuh lil harden.*

The narrative in *Lookin' fuh Horn*, while provocative in its turning of the power dynamic of expected infidelity on its head in favour of the woman, also ties up mankind like market crab. In essence immobilising the man against the demands of

capitalism and western perceptions of success i.e. employment, being able to provide necessities and comforts, while equating not having money as a valid reason to inflict emotional trauma. This trauma is inflicted by the women, who is phenotypically supposed to be a partner and confidence keeper, who instead has been weaponized by a system which in many ways, is weighted against them both from the time of the plantation.

### **Financial and Sexual Agency, Body Autonomy and Do so Doh like so**

So what if *ah horn* by a woman has always been about reclamation of agency. From granny who *would ah take a chance quietly* in the face of grandad who she was financially dependent upon, bringing home other children *fuh she to mind*. We love to wistfully talk about how marriages of yesteryear used to last 50 plus years but no one talks about why granny had to stay and *how much outside woman she tolerate or how much outside chirren she mind*. Fast forward to mommy and aunty who were a little louder about their dalliances as they began to find their voices in the midst of forging financial independence. *Plenty mysterious "uncles" and "cousins" who were most often good good friends with yuh father*. To the now millennial jammettes, for whom there is a greater open ease and acknowledgment of sexual agency and body autonomy. So what really constitutes the parameters of *ah dread horn* from both sexes? Why has it been that men *cyah take it*, while women have managed to navigate the indiscretions of men since time colonial, without statistically concerning measures of bloodshed?

*"The only reason I eh take Esther and leave Stanley ass is because I eh have nowhere to go an ah doh make enough cleaning and ironing to mind she by mihsself."*

*"Buh Stephen, yuh meet Jo one way and then want she to change when allyuh get together. How the same fire that yuh did like in the first place, suddenly yuh cyah take? She mouth too hot. She does dress too sexy. But yuh meet she with the hot mouth and sexy outfit. You too boldface!"*

The above scenes with Josephina and Stanley, and Jo and Stephen, of the ambiguous then and now, scored with the Shadow classic which acts almost as the conscience of the piece, prompts conversations about agency and expected gender stereotypical



roles. What knowledge or belief system determines those stereotypes? Who is the breadwinner? How much control does that give within the relationship? How is financial agency linked to sexual agency, then and now? What factors contribute to having financial agency? Has that dynamic changed and why? While the contrasting sketches do not explicitly explore the trauma porn of on-screen domestic violence, there could have easily been very obvious alternative endings for both scenes, where I as director made a choice for both Stanley and Stephon, in those specific instances, to walk away. If only life was as simple as a directorial choice.

As girls and women became more educated, out performing our boys at school, emerging with access to better paying jobs, more frequently jostling within the workforce for the very roles once upon a time only open to men, or even starting their own businesses, there was a shift. Shadow asks in *Lookin' for Horn*

Employment

Before enjoyment

You learn trade? No

You have good grade? No

You're a smart man? No

A magician? No

But how reasonable is it to expect affirmative answers to these questions in an ongoing climate of exceptionalism within our colonial inherited education framework? Where a minority across gender lines, but particularly a smaller percentage of our boys, are succeeding *in spite* of systemic inequities. We have long used the successful exceptions to justify the larger inefficiencies that we wish to continue to ignore or refuse to find the willpower to fix. Launcelot Brown addresses these concerns in a study on male academic underperformance in the Caribbean: "...the issue of male underachievement is not a recent concern" (n.p). As stated in the conference report, *Addressing Male Underperformance in the Education System: Intervention Strategies* (Trinidad and Tobago [T&T]. Ministry of Education, 1997), the "Male Identity Crisis in the Caribbean" and

the resulting disengagement from the education process were brought to public attention by Miller in 1986" (3). Using Miller's work as a frame of reference, the conference report observed that perhaps, in addressing in the society "issues of inequality with regard to females ... the Gender and Academic Achievement ... pendulum had swung too far from them [the males] resulting in the disequilibrium that was being observed in terms of male identity and achievement" (3). The continued debate indicates that from 1986 to the present, the issue has defied resolution (Brown 40).

There then came a higher rate of separation, divorce and single female parent households. Women simply did not need to be solely dependent on a man. The terms of engagement had changed, even amongst the lower societal echelons and therefore they were able to have more control over their lives financially and sexually. There are those who, with this newfound sexual agency chose to leverage sex for material gain and financial security. Men and women came to a supposed understanding, the arrangement of the sugar daddy or blesser. But therein lay the problem. It seems some men either didn't read or found a problem with the contractual fine print after the fact.

The same colonised education system, that despite being problematic and steeped in inequitable distribution of resources where girls were outperforming boys, is the very system that continues to stymie any changes to how we socialise children across gender lines. The education system is still very much wrapped up and warped in dogma that tells girls they are to be chaste, pure, and that they are to bear the burden of responsibility for male behaviour. *A man is violent. But wha she do to provoke de man? A woman is raped. Yes but wha she had on?*

### **Morality or nah?**

Shadow, always played the Midnight Robber archetype, a perpetual mas within the music that acts not just as a societal conscience but also as a guiding spirit or philosophy for the actor assuming the role, in this case Shadow. His music, a national internal dialogue, saying out loud the things we shudder to actually talk about or deconstruct. And so has this musical conversation, not just with an imagined young man but more so, it is the Dread Wizard from hell, as confidant and gentle mentor to

every “young man” who may be missing that influence in their lives; lives that may not leave them with many options. The counterpoint of him being from hell as opposed to coming from Heaven is always instructive. Hell is symbolic of all that which accepted hegemony told us was bad, evil, other. Shadow’s Hell is a reparative space.

Shadow fills a void of male mentorship, actively making a point, at least in this instance, of going in the other direction to the widespread misogyny that existed in the calypso form. There was no other male calypsonian having these conversations so explicitly in song at that time. Storytelling that evoked the kind of dread vulnerability that this kind of discourse demands. The wizard wields Obeah as healing and guidance. The genuine intent: the disruption of status quo and power dynamic. There can be arguments however about the moral code attached to the concept of a horn from either of the sexes. Simple unkindness or mean spiritedness. A messing with karmic forces. After all, three (3) years later Shadow also sang *Horner Man Crying* where:

Somebody horn de horner man

What goes around comes around

Somebody horn the horner man

A horner man horn de horner man

A horn also forces conversations about dishonesty and loss of mental, emotional, and some may even say spiritual trust. Then there is the physical consideration, with the possibility of transmission of sexual diseases that comes with *the excitement of double dippage*. Is it all this that makes a horn so dread? Maybe we should be asking who or what system of knowledge decided that monogamy should be absolute and any deviation is so grossly transgressive that it has the capability to be emotionally unhinging to the point of violence? Particularly when perpetrated by a woman.

According to a new article in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society: B*— part of a special issue on the biology of cultural conflict — “approximately 85% of human societies have permitted men to have more than one wife...and both empirical and

evolutionary considerations suggest that large absolute differences in wealth should favour more polygynous marriages" (24). (It would be easier for men in the top 1% to support 3 wives, at least financially, than for a man in the lowest quartile of earners to support one.) Yet in much of the world, particularly the wealthier parts, monogamy – albeit with cheating around the edges – has flourished. Why? The aforementioned article says the answer lies in the "group selection" advantages conferred by the one-wife norm, which reduces the pool of men who can't find any wife at all, making them less likely to become socially alienated and violent. And the practice helps the elite, too: "By shifting male efforts from seeking wives to paternal investment, normative monogamy increases savings, child investment and economic productivity" (Shea n.p).

So when Shadow asks the question "Why you want to marry?" And then follows with "You doh have no money. You ent working nowhey. You doh have a pay day..." Politics that is now further warped by the sensitivities of race and gender dynamics. These peculiarities specific to the coloniality of gender politics are not singular to consecrated marriages but to all copulation that wants to mimic marriage even without attached legalities. Laura Kipnis, cultural critic specialising in sexual politics and gender issues says that: "...marriage is an insidious social construct, harnessed by capitalism to get us to have kids and work harder to support them. Her quasi-Marxist argument sees desire as inevitably subordinated to economics. And the price of this subordination is immense" (O'Rourke n.p).

The price of that subordination has been death for countless women at the hands of men, and men at the hands of other men in their quest for financial security and dominance. In the face of death and the loss of agency that is engrained in coloniality and capitalist constructs, we are forced to think of the body as the last or only bastion of power that anyone has at their disposal. So what if a horn at its very core is an instinctive rebellion or resistance to what we have been conditioned to accept as norm. Knowing that this norm has never served us. Maybe the horn is the pull of that which is transgressive as a subconscious subversion or escape of established power constructs across gender lines and stereotypes. A manifestation of base instinctive human freedom.

## Intersections

Connecting the dots. Did Shadow write a simply constructed, sonically captivating, mindfully brilliant song that are masterclass on social commentary regarding gender politics? Absolutely. It is not however immune to being troubled or problematized. In fact its ability to be dissected to this extent, that it allows various intersections to breathe within it, that every line can take us through the rigours of examining how a horn is *not* in fact *just* a horn, is testament to the completeness of the work. A horn, particularly in a Caribbean context of ongoing coloniality is a minefield of human adaptation and response to the colonial project, the plantation economy structure that we lack the will to deconstruct, capitalism and all the resulting generational trauma therein.

The messy entanglements of human interpersonal interaction are evident. If yuh hornin' ask yuhself why. It is not just as simple as *well ah like de man* or *the woman bess*. What emotional, social or financial need is the dalliance filling? If we know of cases of gender based aggression or violence, without blaming the physical victim, because that is non-negotiable, let us instead start interrogating the societal factors that still currently exist which produce men capable of murder and mutilation on receipt of any behavior from women that is considered transgressive, horn being the most egregious:

*"If I cyah have yuh, nobody cyah have yuh. Is better you and me dead."*

No they aren't demons or monsters as we tend to say in times when anguish leaves us bereft and unable to make sense of horror. We are birthing them and raising them and telling them that they are deserving of trauma if they deviate from or are unable to live up to gender expectations and norms. It is potentially Shadow's "young man". The performance of the song at that year's Dimanche Gras was playful and witty. The sketch and actors to accompany what was by then a crowd fav, left the Grand Stand screaming in their glee as Shadow sang the customary highly anticipated new verse:

*"...sis watching you in yuh old clothes yuh laziness expose and she see Alfred in fancy threads, well padna yuh now dead!"*

The translation being *lil boy yuh see dat, dat have trouble in it. Is best you leave that*

*alone!*

Women are empowered to be brutalised. We are conditioning men and women through a lens of coloniality that says to transgress monogamy is deserving of ridicule, punishment up to and including a promise of death. We are dealing in inequities across systems that were never designed to do anything but oppress and frustrate. We are telling men, particularly black men, that their value is tied to capitalist trappings: things, by any means necessary. We are telling women that in retaliation for decades of an unfair power dynamic that once stripped them of their agency, that now man-kind should be measured by material wealth since they bring not much else to the table.

Friday evening people passing with box of fried chicken

She watching you in your old shoe

She feeling to hit you

Somebody will horn you

You better believe it

I hope you could take it partner.

Walk Good Wizard.

Walk in Power.

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