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Warri's Warriors: From West Africa to Barbados, Men's Social Space from Slavery to Post-Colonial Times

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Abstract

Barbados was a Warri-playing country throughout the Twentieth Century, as evidenced by the presence of masters who were excellent at the game. Warri arrived in Barbados, and elsewhere in the Caribbean in the minds of people forcibly taken from West Africa. To some the game seemed innocuous but clearly it was powerful and so over 400 years became culturally central in the lives of men in the new plantation-based society. In Europe, North America and the Caribbean many museums have acquired Warri (or Oware), which are elaborately carved wooden game boards. As museum objects, they represent a curiosity of a place, time, and art form, but Oware boards have never before this analysis been considered as a central component of male agency during slavery and under colonial rule. This paper illustrates how overlooked or misunderstood aspects of Caribbean material culture can be studied to re/position slave activities into contemporary heritage dialogues.[1]

> *Games are among the least suspect elements in the behaviour of a subject people and therefore no stringent measures are taken to suppress them* (Herskovits: 1932, p.23)
>
> *Wari is not a game of chance. The nearest analogy in European culture to that which the natives of the Guiana*

> *Bush, the Negroes of the coastal region of the Guianas and of the islands of the Caribbean Sea take toward this game is that which we take toward chess* (Herskovits: 1932, p.32).

This essay argues that when Barbadian males played Warri (or Oware) they collectively engaged their African cultures and organised themselves in opposition to the slave plantation and colonial systems in the Caribbean. The study uses documents and contemporary ethnographic interviews to show that slave plantations and the colonial suppression of male activities and interactions were circumvented when men played an apparently innocuous game of Oware. When men played this game, they were re/creating the activities and structures of important African male groups, and thus facilitated the production of male creole social space. For more than 350 years Barbados was among the most controlling of Caribbean slave societies, and after emancipation from 1834 to 1966 Barbadian society continued to be harshly dominated by English epistemologies, this therefore is an appropriate case by which to better understand the use of Oware for male agency building and the subsequent persistence and cultural importance of Oware throughout the 20th century.

During slavery in Barbados and elsewhere in the Caribbean, men of African ancestry achieved agency (defined as personal and group power to control their lives) through a sub-rosa activity associated with playing an apparently innocuous game called Oware[2] (Figure 1). While African men did use this game for recreation, it had the more fundamental social and cultural functions of enabling them to organise themselves illegally and plan for efforts that served their collective purposes. The game was a likely choice for these agency-building functions because any West African man who was brought into a Caribbean slave-based plantation would know of it. It is further argued that for some West African peoples, such

Fig. 1 Three Views of an Oware game board from Ghana, West Africa
Photo: Stoffle, 2015

as in Ghana among the Fante, the game was used for male social bonding, and functioned to integrate socially-key, non-kin-based groups like the Asafo (Datta: 1972, p.110). Some data records that the game was associated with spiritual activities and that the game board itself was sacred (Herskovits: 1932, pp.34-35). Later in the analysis we discuss a number of African observations that document the spiritual interpretation of Warri.

The widely shared cultural meanings of Oware in pre-colonial Africa provided the foundation for new forms of creole social organisation among enslaved men of African ancestry in the Caribbean. Responding to continual suppression, this creole resistance process, based in part on the Oware game, began during slavery and continued during the harsh period of English civil domination from the end of slavery in 1834 until national independence in 1966 (Browne: 2012).

This analysis extends our previously published two-part discussion regarding how women of African ancestry in Barbados and the Bahamas achieved personal and community agency by participating in the *sub-rosa* activity called Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (Stoffle et al.: 2009 and 2014). This essay also expands on an earlier study of Caribbean men's agency using Oware (Stoffle and Baro: 2016). Together these four essays widen the dialogue regarding how captured African people wrested control of their lives away from the colonial managers of the industrial agriculture plantations where for hundreds of years they lived and worked as unfree labourers (Williams: 1944).

Oware created a unique and positive creole social space (Stoffle et al.: 2014, p.47). The social space concept was first suggested by Olwig (1985, p.227) who observed for St. John that drawing on cultural resources *brought with them* (emphasis added), enslaved Africans built an Afro-Caribbean culture in an attempt to create their own autonomy and an independent existence. Burrowes (2013, 2015) argues that in Barbados post-slavery communities combined their African-Caribbean heritage into their immediate

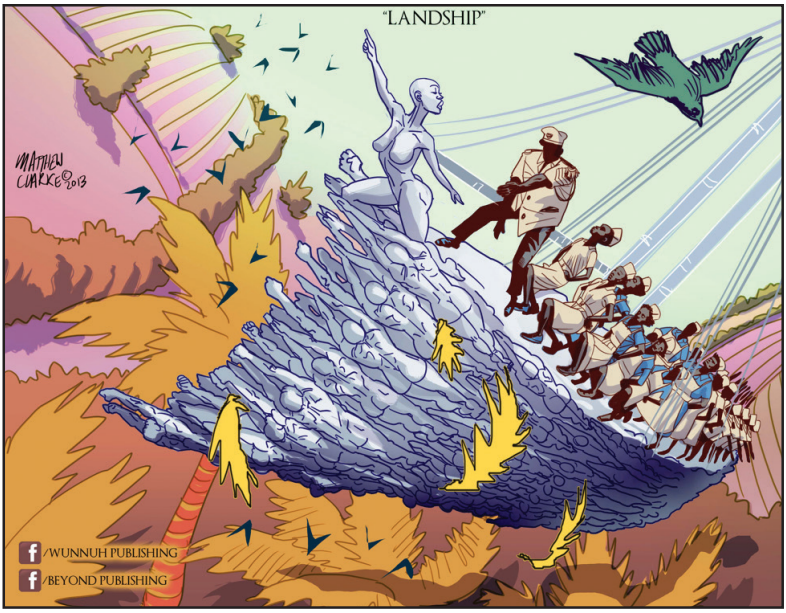

Fig. 2
Matthew Clarke's Graphic Novel Image of Landships in Third Dimension

lived experience and created what may be seen as a *third space of existence* which granted them access to the world of the intangible, the spiritual, as they *learnt to walk/ sail good* in their day to day existence. Landships, for example, were designed to counter the immediate harsh lived environments and create constructs of sailing free/ly on land. Mathew Clarke, a contemporary Barbadian graphic artist has imaged this third space of existence with a ship composed of ancestors' bodies that are being sailed by a Landship group (Lynch and Clark: 2014) (Figure 2).

African Oware was re/conceptualised as a foundation of a new creole social space for Caribbean men during slavery: a space that physically occurred in the yards of slave quarters and nearby 'talking' trees. Warri actually permitted the participants to be in an alternative dimension. As such, Warri, like Landships, is

potentially a component of new heritage discussions of ancestral persistence, agency and identity.

Cultural Background

Oware is a very old style of game, perhaps going back for thousands of years in parts of Africa. It involves a game board or platform usually made of wood, which contains playing cups and game piece holder cups [Plate 1], which are filled with various small round objects ranging from pebbles, to cowrie shells, to nicker beans (*Caesalpinia bonduc*) which are valued as playing pieces in Africa and Barbados (Farnum-Badley 2019). Two or four persons can play together, often while others watch, *kibitz*, and wait for their turns. Today, the game is played throughout West Africa and the Caribbean. People in the Caribbean often attribute the game's origins to the West Africans who were brought against their will to work on colonial slave plantations. Foremost scholar of African retentions in the New World, Melville Herskovits (1932, pp.35, 37) asserted that Oware arrived during slavery in the Caribbean and derived from one form of the game found among the Ashanti of the Gold Coast. So based on his first hand ethnographic fieldwork in Africa and the Caribbean, he concluded that Oware was an African cultural retention found throughout the Caribbean. Also key to the present analysis is that the game of Oware is documented as having been a foundation for the formation and perpetuation of social relationships between men in West Africa itself (Datta: 1972, p.110).

Methods

This analysis is based on historic documents, prior ethnographic observation, and contemporary informal discussions with African and Caribbean citizens. The analysis builds upon, and in some respects reinterprets earlier ethnographic descriptions and analysis of Oware. New data used in this analysis largely derives from first-

hand observations and the family knowledge of the Oware game of African and Caribbean citizens.

Discussions of this game conducted by the authors generally were guided by the following topics:

1. Do you know of the game of Oware?
2. By what other names have you heard it called?
3. In what country do you know that it is played?
4. Is it played by men or women or both?
5. Do the people who play the game together have a special relationship?
6. Are there any religious or spiritual aspects of the game?
7. Is this a pre-colonial African game? Or (for the West Indians) did this game come from Africa during slavery times?

The authors have discussed Oware with friends and acquaintances. The people they interviewed were either from Africa or the Caribbean and had personal knowledge of the Oware game as it was played in their home countries. All the people who shared their knowledge of Oware did so voluntarily and without pay.

Oware: African and Caribbean Observations

This section documents the spatial distribution of the game over the past hundred years or more. Documents and interviews (N=17) selected and presented in Table A support the argument that in Africa, many people identify it as an old game that was traditionally played before the European conquest and disruption of African societies. It continues to be played in Africa in part because it is traditional and still useful, but also because it represents African culture before Europe disrupted it.

Documents and interviews (N=20) selected and presented in Table B support the argument that in the Caribbean, people take

Country	Cultural Group	Time Frame	Name of Oware	Oware Descriptions	Primary Source
Benin	Fon	20th century	Jungkook	Mixed with Vodu practices	E. Reclus 1959
Burkina	Bwas	20th century	Chunca	'the game of the truth' (eternal cycle of nature and life)	Hampate Ba 1965
Nigeria		20th century	Oware		Mwale 1996
Nigeria	Yorubas	20th century	Warri		Muller 1930
Ghana	Ashanti	21st century	Oware		Stoffle 2014
Ghana	Ghana	21st Century	Oware		Pickering 2015
Ghana	Ashanti & Brong Ahafo & Akan	21st century	Oware		Pickering 2015
Ghana	Asafo	historic	Oware		Datta 1972
Guinea	Fante	19th century	Mankaala	'the game of planning seeds'	Cheickh Anta Diop 1963
Ivory Coast	Malinke	21th century	Oware		Stoffle 2014
Liberia		21st century	Oware		Stoffle 2014
Central Africa	Aissata	20th century	Bau		Sanderson 1913
Mali	Swaheli	19th century	Awale		De Voogt 1997
Mauritania	Bambara	19th century	Wooli	12 holes interpreted by many as the 12 months of the year	Rene Caille 1898
Senegal	Serer People	20th century	Nsumbi	Viewed as a divination art for great wizards	Abdoulaye Bara 2015 Diop 1975

Table A: African observations about Oware

a somewhat similar view of Oware as being a traditional cultural pattern that arrived from Africa. While Caribbean societies based on industrial plantation agriculture emerged in the 1600s to serve the economic interests of European colonial powers, the people who worked as unfree labourers during slavery and afterwards,

Country	Cultural Group	Time Frame	Name of Oware	Oware Descriptions	Primary Source
Antigua					Herskovits 1932
Antigua					De Voogt 1997
Bahamas					De Voogt 1997
Barbados		19th century	Wari		Culin 1896
Barbados		20th century			Herskovits 1932
Barbados		20th century			Collier 1935
Barbados		20th century	Wari		McConney 2015
Barbados		21st century	Warri, Pit and Pebble		Farnum-Badley 2015
Barbados		21th Century	Warri		Toppin 2015
Barbados		20th century			De Voogt 1997
British Guiana	Aku, Oku	20th century	Wari		Cruickshank 1929
British Guiana		20th century			Collier 1935
French Guiana	Aluku Maroons				Bilby
Grenada					Herskovits 1932
Dominica		20th century			Herskovits 1932
Dominican Republic					Culin 1896
Martinique		19th century			Culin 1896
St. Lucia		20th century			Stoffle 1965
St. Lucia					Herskovits 1932
St. Lucia			Wawee		Gardiner 1895 (Culin 1896)
St. Kitts		20th century			Herskovits 1932
St. Kitts		20th century			Collier 1935
St Vincent					Wiltshire 1952
Trinidad & Tobago					Herskovits 1932

Table B: Caribbean observations about Oware

today largely identify themselves as coming from Africa or Asia. When people today talk about heritage they often ignore their obvious colonial roots and speak instead about themselves as resisters of slavery, rather than its victims.

Mapping Oware over the past hundreds of years is essential because this establishes that it was played throughout the Caribbean and Africa. These observations go with descriptive text, only a few bits of which can be provided here. People generally saw playing Oware as a part of their ancient heritage. Together, these observations document an argument that African men brought to slave plantations in the New World would have known about Oware, valued it as a culturally important activity, and engaged in activities centred on the game, some of which were not for the purpose of recreation.

Africa

There are dozens of sources that document Oware as it was observed across Africa by Europeans during their early expeditions of discovery (Zaslavisky: 1999, pp.116-136). English traveler/trader Richard Jobson who had been in Gambia in 1620 wrote in his account *Golden Trade* (1623):

> *"In the heat of the day, the men will come forth and sit themselves in companies, under the shady trees, to receive the fresh aire, and there passe the time in communication, having only one kind of game to recreate themselves withall, and that is a peece of wood, certaine great holes cut, which they set upon the ground betwixt two of them, and with a number of some thirty pibble stones, after a manner of counting, they take one from the other, untill one is possessed of all, whereat some of them are wondrous nimble."*

Using such observations and his own experiences, Mwale (1996, p. 57) concludes that:

> *... in many countries in Africa and elsewhere the game [Bao] has different names and sometimes a different appearance. In Ethiopia the game is called Gabbatta, which has three rows with reserve pots (larger than the main playing holes), at each end of the board. In Nigeria the game is known as Wari or Oware and has two rows with reserve pots on each end. Bao is also known as Mweso and Omiveso in Uganda (Mwale: 1996, p.57).*

Some of the observations used in this analysis derive from co-author Baro who was born and raised in West Africa and now runs an active research programme in multiple countries there. He concludes, from his personal and professional experience, that if the origin of humanity is Africa, it would be true to say that the origin of gaming is also African. Some of the early Arab explorers who came to Africa around the 10th century mentioned a game similar to 'Awale' that, according to them, had been played on the African continent for thousands of years (see for example the works of Ibn Khaldum, 1332-1406, Ibn Battuta who died in 1377, and other Arab scholars). The game also plays an important role in the *Epic of Sundjata* (c.1210-1255 or 1260), the first king and founder of the Mali Empire.

De Voogt (2005) fully documents the development of Oware and similar games, which he calls African chess.

In Nigeria Muller (1930, p.313) observed for Nigeria that:

> *In the days of slavery a very large number of our negro slaves were drawn from those parts of Africa where Mankala is now being played. In Nigeria it is generally called Warri, a name which may have some local connection with the city of Warri in Nigeria, although in and around Lagos, Nigeria, it is more often called by a name that sounds phonetically like "I-You". The origin of this word, too, is obscure, though it may have some relation to the pidgin English so commonly*

> *used in that part of the colony. The author, while living in Nigeria for a year among the Yorubas, learned from them to play the game as described below. It is played purely for recreation by men, both young and old.* (Muller: 1930, p.313)

In Central Africa

In Central Africa Sanderson (1913, p.726) observed that:

> *Bau, the national game of the warlike Swaheli, is very complex and the manner in which the native foresees moves involving intricate mental calculation conveys a salutary lesson to the European who misprizes the intelligence of the Bantu as a race. I have dealt with this game (Bau) at some length as, apart from academic interest, I have found it by no means to be despised as a pastime.* (Sanderson: 1913, p.726)

Table A presents a summary of the most available references in English and this research's contemporary interviews regarding the presence of Oware in various parts of West Africa. The most common assessment, regardless of the source, is that Oware is an ancient (pre-colonial) game that was and is played throughout West Africa (Collier 1935).

Caribbean

Herskovits' (1932, 1941, 1971) multiple studies of Oware as an African cultural survival in the Caribbean provides firm documentation of its widespread distribution and common use. He provided a map that shows 14 Caribbean countries where he knew of, or observed, Oware being played during his 1928 and 1929 fieldwork expeditions.

Herskovits' (1932) eyewitness observations include (1) Dutch Guiana, Saramacca tribe, (2) Dutch Guiana, Djuka tribe, (3) Dutch Guiana, coastal negroes, (4) British Guiana, (5) Trinidad[?],

(6) Grenada, (7) Barbados, (8) St. Lucia, (9) Martinique, (10) Dominica, (11) Antigua, (12) St. Cristopher, (13) Haiti[?] and (14) Louisiana. His doubt about his observations in Haiti are discussed below, but the Trinidad doubts derived from him being told it was played there, rather than seeing it played in person.

Herskovits observes (1932: p.30) that in the islands to the north of British Guiana when "wari" was mentioned, Trinidad was always one of the places named where it was said the game was played "strong." His observation continued with the conclusion based on his African research that it is played with the Ashanti rules of the Djuka langa-holo version, with slight variations in Barbados, St. Lucia, Grenada, Dominica, Antigua and St. Kitts.

His, and a few other published observations and contemporary interviews conducted as part of this study, are discussed below to illustrate the general pattern observed.

Lesser Antilles

In St. Lucia, Mr. Gardiner wrote a letter to Dr. Brown Goode on May 2, 1895:

> *The game of Wawee was bought in St. Lucia, but I found it in use also in Barbados and Martinique among the negroes. As far as I could ascertain, they supposed it very old and came from their fathers. I suppose it came from Africa; but no one seemed to know anything about it* (Culin: 1894, Footnote #6).

Also in St. Lucia in 1965, in the village of Canaries, Stoffle (who was a Peace Corps Volunteer living in the community at the time) observed each evening the local fishermen sitting under either a small dock and/or, a nearby overhanging building, playing an Oware game on a board that contained systematic sequences of holes. During his time in the community it was the only game he saw being played by the adult men in public.

Fig. 3 Barbados Warri Players in Speightstown 1996.
Photo: De Voogt 2005

Herskovits observes (1932, p. 31) that in Barbados, the game was being played on Philadelphia Lane, just off the waterfront, and the players were mainly rowers whose boats took passengers ashore from the ocean-liners that call at the principal port of the island. The rules of the Djuka and Paramaribo form of the game were in force here, and as far as this game was concerned it was mainly tactics of play that were learned.

Jones documents in 1993 a gathering of Warri players she called Warriors in Bridgetown, Barbados (Figure 3).

> *"Typical of the players the host of the gathering is 77-year-old William "Ossie" Haddock a retired engineer, artisan and gentleman of the old school. His friend Laurie Greaves is a sprightly and articulate 72-year-old farmer and former lighterman. The baby of the bunch is Frederick "The Lord Jesus" Jackman, a 57-year-old shoreman popularly regarded as the country's top Warrior* (Jones 1993)." *"Also present were Michael Haddock, 27 and Marcus Watts, 21, who are Ossie's son and nephew. They have found no serious competition in their own age group"* (Jones 1993).

In 2005 Barbados Warri was attributed as having come from Africa and viewed as culturally important "as something we do, in other words as a part of our heritage from Africa and as we remade it here" (De Voogt 2005). He even found a modern modification

of Warri in Speightstown which was more sophisticated and made the game harder to win (De Voogt 2005, p.190). For some reason Oistins players in the south, including women, began winning at higher rates with this new variant of Warri (Figure C).

According to the contemporary Warri scholar Farnum-Badley (2019) Barbados' anthropological heritage is rooted strongly in the cultures of the Asante and Yoruba peoples. A Yoruban version of the game called Ayo Ayo became known as Round-and-Round Warri while the more popular Asante version was called in Barbados Warri.

Greater Antilles

Herskovits (1932, p.264) adds to the complexity of the Oware story based on his ethnography project in central Haiti where he found that Oware was not played in the interior of Haiti. Its absence was a surprise to him because he had observed Oware throughout the West Indies (Herskovits: 1932). He noted, however, that the game was being introduced in the national capital of Port-au-Prince where it was played by longshoremen who had learned it from the sailors of nearby islands.

Coastal South America

In British Guiana, Graham Cruickshank (1929, pp.179-180) writes of his observations of the Oware game which was being played by native Africans, still alive and bearing facial scars, and African Creoles – whom he defines as the first generation descendants of native Africans. He quotes an old man of the Yagba nation as saying 'the game's the thing?' He described it as a 'sweet game', meaning one wholly gratifying. His game board was much worn by use. The first generation Africans then in British Guiana, were 'liberated Africans' from the Yoruba, Abunu, Ijesa, Egba, Ondo (or Doko) Yagba tribes. Locally, they were known as Aku or Oku, and they commonly played Oware. Cruickshank's observations support the theory that the value of playing Oware

continued to be refreshed in the New World after the end of slavery by liberated Africans (Adderley 2006).

Table B presents a summary of some references in English and the authors' contemporary interviews about the presence of Oware in various parts of Caribbean. Like our findings for Africa, the most common assessment is that Oware is an ancient African game brought over largely due to the forced transportation of Africans as slaves, and now played throughout Caribbean by their descendants.

Situating Oware Then and Now

According to Herskovits (1932, p.32):

> *The place which a given cultural fact holds in the lives of the peoples who possess it is as important as the mere fact of its distribution and details of its form. Indeed, this cultural matrix in which a social fact is set is indispensable if we are to obtain the entire picture regarding the cultural phenomenon which is being studied.*

Thus, following Herskovits' advice, we proceed to inquire into the social setting of the game of Oware in the lives of the people who play it. Especially important for this analysis was its role in the early stages of industrial plantation slavery when the societies of the Caribbean were being structured by forces formal and informal, but most centrally by a brutal form of capitalism that had little use for the unfree people but their labour (Williams: 1944).

We need to be cautious in our interpretations, however, especially about extrapolating them to other places and times and assuming ideas about Oware and its functions for African men. Always a cautious scholar, Handler (2009, p.5) says that:

> *... variations on the game in the Caribbean region suggest that wari could have been introduced separately at various*

> *times by different peoples during the era of the slave trade as well as after the abolition of the slave trade; moreover, the game also could have been diffused from one location to another during the post-slave trade era.*

Even taking these cautions into consideration (both of which are discussed above for Haiti and British Guiana), Handler does not dismiss the likelihood that captive Africans introduced Oware during the slave trade.

Out of Africa and Reborn in the Caribbean

To review, the premise of our argument is that (1) Oware came from Africa during slavery, and since it existed as a common cultural pattern throughout West Africa, any man taken from there would have known the game. Our argument further asserts that (2) the game was commonly played by men in the Caribbean during slavery because it seemed innocuous to Europeans who therefore permitted it to be played. We also assert that (3) while the game clearly was a form of recreation, it was primarily perceived by the players as a way of making a positive creole social space; it created another dimension in which they controlled their own world. Finally, we argue that (4) playing the game served uniquely to bind together the men who played it and consequently it became a foundation for plantation-based social organisation amongst enslaved men.

If our assumptions are correct, then the analysis must turn to what men did with this new creole social space. Given that men were not encouraged to gather, and they were actively discouraged from developing social relationships, any positive social relationships would have had to have been, like the game itself, *sub rosa*; that is, apparently casual but actually meaningful.

Farnum – Badley (2019) provides both observations and interpretations of the use and meaning of Warri during slavery and perhaps after emancipation.

> *I have found the characteristic six pairs of receptacles carved out of half buried stone or on a barely accessible cliff side ledge. This is evidence that players would have huddled there for secret contests. Because it was repressed so thoroughly, artisans would never waste much time finishing beautifully carved Warri boards. It was not practical to own an elaborately decorated board when you could expect that it would be ordered burnt or destroyed as soon as it was discovered. The Warri board craftsman in Barbados held one specification uppermost ...It had to be a piece of wood that could "dash away easy".*

Other than the game being largely invisible to colonial society, there are few eyewitness records of men's secret activities during slavery, except when they became public in a violent event such as a revolt. After such revolts, colonial investigations took place and there was some documentation of men's activities that had occurred immediately before the revolt (Craton: 1982; Handler: 1982). More difficult to document is what men were doing on a day-to-day basis, like the women were doing with ROCSAs.

Evidence of male social formation during slavery can come from extrapolations back through time based on observed contemporary patterns. It is well known that men in much of the Caribbean form strong and useful relationships with each other in small groups variously called 'crews', 'cliques', or just 'the boys' (Smith: 1965, pp.58-62; Wilson: 1971, 1973, pp.169-184). Smith documented such social networks of men in Grenada, where, as elsewhere, relationships are developed early and persist throughout life. Interestingly, in Grenada and Isla de Providencia where Wilson worked, and elsewhere, there seems to be a structural design to crews that assumes men will have different skills, thus resulting in the networks having members in various types of occupations (see especially Wilson: 1971, pp.26-28). This means the members of the network can draw on a wide range of resources.

Small-scale informal male associations established during slavery probably conducted activities devoted to the common good, and all of these activities were undoubtedly forbidden by the colonial managers. Browne (2004, pp.120-122) observes for Martinique that slaves found discreet ways to resist their exploitation by plotting sabotage and devising ways to serve their own interests. Such acts of resistance represented a crucial assertion of self in the midst of its denial within the plantation system.

The Transition to Modern Society

The heritage foundation of West Indian societies is industrial plantation production, the profit margins of which were based on unfree, or largely unfree, labour. The indelible influence of industrial capitalism on the formation, operation, and persistence of West Indian societies led Charles Wagley in 1957 to define the region as 'Plantation America'. Unlike other cultural regions in Africa and Asia that became colonies of European nations, the aboriginal inhabitants of the Caribbean were rapidly destroyed, permitting Europeans to create *sui generis* the exact export production-based societies they desired. These are technically termed 'plural societies', which means there are sharp differences in culture, status, social organisation and race between the controlling minority and the rest of the population – what Smith calls for Grenada the 'elite' and the 'folk' (1965, p.234). The dominant minority thus holds the power to make laws that impose distinctive modes of work, religion, and values on the majority. Due to this rigid form of society, the majority of 'folk' made their own creole ways of life in opposition to the 'elite'. This dual social system (one colonial, one creole) is what Wilson (1973) called 'reputation and respectability'.

When European colonialism in the West Indies ended, beginning in the mid-1960s, the people of these societies had no pre-colonial social forms and foundation values to which to return. Lacking clear ancestral cultural models to draw upon after

colonialism, the Caribbean is almost unique in the intensity and complexity of its heritage debates. Setting aside the few expressed heritage ties to pre-colonial Native American populations, the people of most of the contemporary nation states look for, and debate, the authenticity of creole heritage ties deriving from the actions (and the actors) that resisted the abusive system of slavery.

Jones in 1993 talked about the game largely being played among older men, but at the gathering were young men who were already experts and committed to Warri. The same year a newspaper article entitled "Old Warriors Just Play Away" documents the general decline and yet persistence of Warri being played by masters E. Mascoll and C. Greene in Speightstown (Browne 1993). Farnum-Badley (2019) three decades later also observed that the game was played less and less but it is clear that throughout these decades masters remained in the island of Barbados. He supports the notion of using the game as a way of strengthening the mind.

In Barbados, according to De Voogt (2005, p.189) Warri and many other cultural activities did not receive formal attention until the government invited Edward Kamau Brathwaite to help address the problem of *sub-rosa* heritage. Then the Minister of Education and Culture reinstated the Crop Over festival in 1974. Incorporated into this festival was the game of Warri as well as other formally suppressed aspects of heritage. A few years later the National Cultural Foundation organized the Warri players into informal clubs. Bridgetown was to compete with Speightstown and northern communities. This action brought new structure and national stature to the Warri competitions but largely cross cut and ultimately diminished former local Warri playing groups such as those at the Harbour and in rural areas.

Oware and the Future of Caribbean Heritage

Warri persisted in Barbados and out of hundreds of years and tens of thousands of competitive games experts emerged who were regionally recognized as excellent. Simply the fact that the

game persisted and remained shared across society documents its cultural centrality to the African Ancestry men of Barbados. Alex De Voogt's extensive study led him to conclude that Oware is like African chess and that the masters should be perceived as mentally outstanding and celebrated as such (De Voogt 2005). He personally observed and studied the Barbadian masters in the late 1990s, such as Frederick "Lord Jesus" Jackman, Laurie Greaves and Dan Hinds, noting their intensity of play and quality of reasoning and the respect they received from fellow players and the society at large.

We observe that for most West Indian societies for which the authors have direct data, Oware is now played much less frequently than in the past. Why this has occurred, for example in Jamaica and Barbados, is not clear. When the Deep Water Harbour was constructed in Barbados it displaced the urban center of Warri playing (De Voogt 2005, p.189). Note Herskovits' 1932 observation that in the 1930s the Harbour was a center of Warri play. Despite the general decline of Warri playing in Barbados, it is clear is that men's social groups continue to be a vital component of social organisation in these two societies, as occurred in most other Caribbean societies (Stoffle 1969). These crews, cliques or groups continued as they had for hundreds of years throughout the lifetime of the individual member and are regularly renewed in rum shops, in backyards, and under trees where people gather to talk and play. Today in Barbados the game of preference is often dominoes; but in fact, playing that game still serves to strengthen relationships in the men's group, just as playing Warri did over the past hundreds of years.

Here we again raise the question of what is or could be the current meaning of Warri as an active and culturally central component of contemporary Barbadian heritage. Museums in Barbados and the Caribbean are moving away from their origins as only representing the colonial society to now speak about the African-Caribbean foundations of plantation society (Cummins, Farmer, and Russell

2013). Some people in Barbados, including the Barbados Museum and Historical Society, are considering reaching deeply into the past by establishing a totally new International Transatlantic Slave Trade Museum (Laurie 2019). The questions "who are we and why?" continue to be asked and of course they can only be answered by the people themselves who will decide what is central in their lives today by drawing on key traits, events, and people from their past. Potentially, however, playing Warri during the early periods of slavery and afterwards could be celebrated today as times when agency for men was initiated and facilitated. It could also be centred as a primary heritage foundation for male social organisations that have lasted into modern times.

Endnotes

[1] Paper Presented at Winds of Transformation: International and Caribbean Futures for Teaching Holistic, Inclusive, Tangible and Intangible Culture and Heritage, October, 2015, Barbados, West Indies

[2] Oware is one of a number of names for this kind of traditional pre-colonial African game. As recently as August 2019, author Cummins observed the term Awalé in current use in Cotonou, Benin. Other regional or ethnic terms are Ayo (Barker: 1975), Bao, Mweso, Omwest, Fuwa, Chain, or Changena (Mwale: 1996), Warri (Muller: 1930), and many of these names that fall under the broader game category called Mancala (Barker: 1975).

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