

## *CLOWNS: IDENTITY AND SURVIVAL IN ST. KITTS & NEVIS*

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### Story Synopsis

In St. Kitts & Nevis everyone is a clown.

It is a rite of passage native to those privileged descendants of this island-paradise—the smallest sovereign nation in the Western world. Boys and girls await the day to circle the capital and culminate at the “Circus,” its center, for the jam-session that is St. Kitts’ annual carnival. Before St. Kitts & Nevis gained its independence from Great Britain in 1983, prior to the military coup scarring Robert Bradshaw’s nearly half-century reign and even pre-dating sugar’s stronghold over the island’s economy, there were clowns.

In the wake of the collapse of its cash crop, sugar cane, clowning in St. Kitts & Nevis is no laughing matter. Tremendous employment cuts and subsequent, restless young people have led to the formation of gangs bent on material acquisition at any cost. With a population of forty-four thousand, one murder in St. Kitts every two weeks in 2009 ranks it with El Salvador and Colombia as one of the deadliest places in the world.

While World Bank initiatives have worked to “modernize” Kittitian and Nevisian industry, they also have functioned to make illegal arms importation more fluid and to dilute the unique culture of this “Jewel of the Caribbean.” Relaying St. Kitts & Nevis’ tension between “development” and “identity” in the Modern World, *Clowns* takes a macro- and microcosmic look at the circus of economic globalization on this tiny, independent federation.

The mysticism unique to clowns and circuses is as natural to St. Kitts and Nevis as are its out-of-this world sunsets, scenic black rock deposits from its dormant volcano, black and white sand beaches and “Bloody River.” These islands are where other West Indians go to vacation, a hideaway that British tourists (former colonizers) keep close to their hearts. Geographical standouts and cultural markers unique to St. Kitts and Nevis will anchor each clown’s unique sound-off on the island, his/her place within it and how “it” came to be; its current conundrum, the tail-end of a long-history of struggle and triumph through dire straits.

With Carnival as the backdrop, a variety of native *Clowns* will explore the proposed friction between cultural identity and economic survival. Despite the island’s size, socio-economic lines of demarcation run deep. Culminating in a comprehensive discussion atop Liamigua (one of the most beautiful places in the World) amongst its stratified populace, “*Clowns*” is a dream preferred toward resolving the systemic problems in my parents’ homeland.