The Clash of Cultures in Post-Creole Trinidad and Tobago

Selwyn Ryan

Monoculturalism vs Multiculturalism: Civilisations in Conflict

The question of how one accommodates and manages diversity within the context of the nation state is by no means a new one. It is an age old issue that gave rise to centuries of warfare in Europe. The issue was supposed to have been resolved in 1648 by the famous doctrine - cuius regio eius religo (the king's faith is the religion of the kingdom) which was enunciated in the Peace Treaty of Westphalia. Despite the Pax Westphalia, there continued to be considerable controversy as to what should be the role of the state and the relationship which those who live within its borders should have with it. Political philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes were of the view that having regard to the conditions of the time in which they lived and the social characteristics of man as they understood them, the monarch should be all powerful and that corporations and social groups should surrender their rights to the Leviathan or “mortal god” as Hobbes termed him, in the interest of peace, order, prosperity and good government.

Hobbes took the concept of sovereignty to its logical conclusion, and argued that corporations and groups were like “worms in the entrails of natural man.” As such, they should all submit to the will of the Behemoth. If they insisted on exercising their presumed liberty, society would return to a state of nature in which life was “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.”

The absolutist views of Hobbes were endorsed by several other political thinkers in the 17th, 18th and 19th century who were concerned with ensuring the viability and sustainability of the fledgling nation state. Social analysts such as Marx, Weber and Durkheim also argued that groups whose bonds were defined by considerations of status would inexorably give way to associations and organisations which were based on class or some other functionally or contractually defined principle.

There were of course other sharply contrasting views as to what the ideal relationship between state, nation and group should be. One model, which we might conveniently characterise as “liberal” or “pluralist,” held that groups, whether ethnic or cultural, were prior to the state, and as such, the latter should recognize their primacy. The basic argument here was that the state must derive its legitimacy from groups which lay at its base and not the other way around. Obedience to authority was conditional. Officials of the state were trustees, no

Editor's Note: This paper is an abbreviated version of a larger study on the issue of cultural conflict in Trinidad and Tobago due to be published later this year. While the paper deals with conflict, the author is of course aware of the extent to which Trinidadians of all ethnicities participate actively in a range of cultural and social activities which have now become common to both. The burden of the paper is to indicate that homogeneity and normativity - the “all ah we is one” nostrum - masks a great deal of alterity.
more, no less. English liberals like L. T. Hobhouse (1928: 146-147) recognized the validity of the claims being made by minority groups in Europe, viz., that what was being sought was not limited to equality of franchise or equal rights, but "cultural equality," the right of groups to a certain life of their own."

The monocultural model is perhaps best exemplified by France. The French authority paradigm does not recognize the existence of national or linguistic minorities within its borders. Nationality is based on the concept of *jus soli*, and Frenchmen enjoy equal cultural and linguistic citizenship and rights as individuals, rather than as members of a group. France's national ideology also holds that the "ancestors" of all French citizens are the Gauls, regardless of creed, race, or place of origin. As Monsieur Jean-Claude Jarreau, the Adviser on Immigration to the French Minister of the Interior put it while rebuking Islamic groups who were seeking to create religious enclaves in France, "when somebody emigrates [to France], he changes not only his country but also his history. Foreigners arriving [to settle] in France must understand that from henceforth, their ancestors are the Gauls, and that they have a new homeland" (The Economist, November 16, 1996:93).

Islamic groups however demand that their children be allowed to wear hijabs and other culturally distinctive dress. They also insist on the right to send their offspring to schools in which Islamic religious values would be inculcated. They feel that Western values have not only led to a loss of identity and an erosion of community, but have proven to be a failure in the face of all the social ills which bedevil modern society.

French authorities were particularly critical of the activities of Muslim extremists who refused France's invitation to be assimilated on an equal basis and were trying instead to establish an Islamic homeland in France. To quote Jarreau once more: "Muslim extremists have begun arriving in France as colonisers with gods and weapons in their baggage. Today, there is a real Islamic threat in France which is part of a great worldwide wave of Muslim fundamentalism." The fear is that the "barbarians" are at the gates once more.1 Mr. Jarreau, like others in Europe and elsewhere, was of the view that Islam, an absolutist religion, is "indigestible," and that if immigration from the Muslim world was not arrested (there are said to be some 20m Muslims in Europe), the work of the crusaders of yore would be completely reversed.2

The French government has argued that Islam can have a secure place in France provided it is willing to be as unobtrusive as are other religions. The government has in fact admitted that assimilation is no longer working as it used to, and that groups now show a greater determination to resist gallicisation and the "mission civilatrice." There is indeed a great deal of fear of an Islamic takeover of certain areas of France, and concern that Islamic cultural assertiveness could lead to urban terrorism and general social unrest such as was witnessed recently in the former Yugoslavia, the republics of the former Soviet Union or in Central Africa.

By way of comparison with what obtains in France, countries such as Germany, Japan and Korea base their theory of citizenship on the principle of *jus sanguinis*, on blood or ethnic origin. Whereas France is a "political" nation and French racism is based on the practice of citizenship, countries such as Germany, Japan and Korea are ethnically based nations. Thus, it has always been more difficult for these countries to give citizenship and equal treatment to people who are not of German, Korean or Japanese ancestry. The Turks and the Koreans, both of whom have lived and worked in Germany and Japan respectively for generations, experience grave difficulty obtaining citizenship in these countries. This difficulty even applies to those born in the latter countries. Neither Japan nor Korea is comfortable with internal diversity.

Another approach to the question of diversity is that represented by the United States and the countries in the Americas. Most of these countries - at least until recently - deemphasized the fact that there were peoples occupying the lands of the New World prior to the arrival of European immigrants. They preferred to regard themselves as countries of immigration. Although the countries of the Americas are more tolerant of cultural diversity than is the case with those in Europe, Angloconformist "founding elites" were culturally pessimistic about what was happening to the United States, given the number of immigrants that were coming to its shores, and much concern was expressed about "racial suicide." Angloconformists nevertheless saw it as their mission to socialise "exotic" or "tribal" immigrants into the dominant or core values of the society as these were understood or constructed by them. They verily believed that the world revolved around western values inherited from Rome and Greece.

Assimilation or homogenisation was to take place in the crucible of the "melting pot," a term used by Israel Zangwill in 1908. Zangwill argued that given economic growth and cultural assimilation, the hyphenated ethnic groups that made up American society would inevitably and inexorably disappear. American Marxists and socialists held similar views.
As Herman (1997: 371) observes, the "melting pot image suggested that these immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, including Jews, could all become Americans as healthy and normal as any Anglo-Saxon or Nordic physical type. Being an American was a question of social and cultural integration, not racial integrity." The same monocultural hegemonic model informed the manner in which most Caribbean and Latin American countries sought to deal with "minority" or marginalized groups. Everyone was expected to conform to the Eurocentric model, even as that model was being modified by the accretion of "creole" influences derived from Amerindian and African cultural forms and values.

While the assimilationist model was accepted by some, particularly those of the first generation, it was resisted by out-groups which felt that capitulation to eurocentricism was tantamount to committing "cultural suicide." At times, the effort to resist and rescript was open; at others it was sub rosa. Dissident groups strove to retain valued aspects of their culture and to have these recognised and respected as valid inputs into what they argued would be a more enriched and a more truly national culture. The result would resemble a patchwork quilt or a tossed salad as opposed to a pureed melted pot. Some argued that one could be both cosmopolitan and tribal, depending on context and on what aspects of one's identity or status or "soul" one wished to construct and project. Others would reject cosmopolitanism as being inappropriate or dysfunctional.

Writing about contemporary Latin America, Dennis Goulet (1991), rightly observed that a process of cultural resistance and re-ethnicization was very much at work among Amerindians and Afro-Americans. Cultural communities, he noted, could preserve their identity over long periods of time, even under conditions of extreme duress, thanks to what he called "secondary adaption":

Secondary adaption occurs when an oppressed community or culture exhibits subservience in its surface behaviour, an apparent servility which lulls the dominant cultural group into complacency and lessened repressive vigilance. At a 'secondary' or covert level, however, the oppressed group engages in cultural resistance; in code language it affirms its sense of identity and pride, mounts educational campaigns against domination, at times even organizes open revolts.

Goulet notes that many groups have become aware that it is only by reasserting their differentiated cultural identity that they can press their collective claims upon society.¹

¹ Advocates of multiculturalism emphasize the positive benefits of diversity and the virtues of having individuals and groups retain the right to practice and enjoy their own cultural forms and values while at the same time enjoying full access to the commonly shared norms of the society. This paradigm is seen as benefitting individuals and groups as well as the larger society. It not only enriches the community, but reduces pressure and alienation that might give rise to social conflict.

With the retreat of socialism and all that it assumed about the inevitable triumph of class over status, sub-national groups which seemed to have disappeared, or which it was assumed would eventually disappear as the world became one cosmopolitan village served by a globally dominant media and globally assertive conglomerates, are becoming increasingly "re-ethnicised." Diasporas are not in fact disappearing, and this is true whether they are defined by religion, - or by some other secular marker such as language, colour, race or place of origin. Everywhere, counter hegemonic identities are being asserted to give physical ammunition to hitherto "invisible" groups, or those who were assumed to have no history or culture worth preserving. Cultures presumed to have died are once more being resurrected and brought as dowry to the marriage of civilisations, in some cases amidst "holy violence." As Michael Howard (1984: 6) observes:

... the common Western assumption that cultural diversity is a historical curiosity being rapidly eroded by the growth of a common, western-oriented, Anglophone world-culture, shaping our basic values is simply not true.

While economic dispossession is fuelling much of what is taking place, "ghettos" are also being reproduced among elements that are not economically dispossessed. The ghetto is in fact being modernised. Samuel Huntington sought to capture the ethos of what is taking place globally when he wrote in his recent book, The Clash of Civilisations (1997: 20-21), that "culture and cultural identities... are shaping the patterns of cohesion, disintegration and conflict in the post-cold war world... Global politics is being reconfigured along cultural lines."

As Huntington continues (207), "the term la guerra fria was coined by the thirteenth-century Spaniards to describe their "uneasy coexistence"
with Muslims in the Mediterranean, and in the 1990s; many see a civilisational cold war again developing between Islam and the West.

Maximilian Forte (1996: 271) has also noted that the assumption that globalisation refers only to the triumphal spread of Western secular technology and culture is incorrect. Modern communications technology also facilitates global awareness and the spread of notions of difference. As he writes:

Globalization itself can no longer be seen as merely Western expansionism and Western cultural homogenization - it contains multiple currents of counter-Westernization and is the framework for many cultural revitalizations whereby diasporas are now more solidly structured and integrated, homelands' revivals are felt globally, local revivals structured globally, where the ethos of community can now be understood as an international phenomenon.

Ali Mazrui (1990: 137-14) has likewise commented on the extent to which the world of politics is riven by conflicts that have a cultural rather than a class dimension. Mazrui does not however seem to believe that this is a new phenomenon. In his view, the "we vs them confrontation" is the most persistent theme in world order perceptions. This dichotomous framework of world order perceptions amounts to an iron law of dualism. Mazrui argues that the degree of dualism is likely to be sharper in societies where monotheistic religions such as Islam and Christianity compete than in those where polytheism obtains. In the former, there is only one God who should have no rival. In contrast, "polytheistic religions such as those in most of Africa and Asia are more tolerant because they are ready to accommodate additional gods." Mazrui is however aware that many religions in Africa and Asia accommodate both monotheistic and polytheistic elements.

Recent studies (Wasserstein 1996) show that notwithstanding Hitler's quest for a "final solution," Jewish culture is beginning to flourish once more in Europe. Synagogues, religious schools, ethnic newspapers and Kosher food establishments are beginning to reappear in many cities. In other areas across the globe, religion has also begun to take on a fundamentalist character. Gilles Kepel (cited in Huntington 1997: 96) has referred to this retreat of secularisation as la revanche de Dieu (the revenge of God). The evidence seems to support Huntington's argument that religion is the principal defining characteristic of civilizations, and that inter state or within state fault line wars or conflicts are almost always between peoples of different religions. This is particularly so when the religions are of a proselytising type and claim moral superiority over the other with which it is in conflict.

Pitched battles over multiculturalism are also taking place in Canada. Indeed the term multiculturalism emerged first in Canada in the sixties to address the problems faced by that country as it sought to accommodate the rival claims of its Francophone and Anglophone communities. Interestingly, elements in the Francophone community did not welcome the multicultural paradigm which informed the 1965 Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. They viewed it as a tactic designed to reduce the founding status of the French population to the same level as that of more recent immigrant groups. The Canadian case is a very complex one which cannot be considered in any detail here. Suffice it to say that the conflicts over language, and culture are serious, and may yet lead to the break up of Canada as a nation.

Australia too is trying to give up the Anglocentric assimilationist policies of the 40s and 50s, and has formally adopted multiculturalism as a response to cultural diversity. Not only are Australians seeking to "restitute" justice to the aboriginal populations; they are also seeking to come to terms with the fact that Australia is in Asia. Australia's Prime Minister, Paul Keating, argued that Australia had to cease being a "branch plant" of the British Empire and become "enmeshed" in Asia. To quote him further, "Australia cannot represent itself to the world as a multicultural society, engage in Asia, make that link and make it persuasively, while in some way ... remaining a derivative society" (cited in Huntington 1997:151). In 1973, the Australian Government published a document entitled "A Multicultural Society for the Future," which was to inform its new approach to dealing with cultural diversity. This document was replaced in 1989 by a new policy paper, entitled "A National Agenda For a Multicultural Australia." The new policy shifted focus away from specific ethnic groups towards a broader social strategy that targeted all Australians.

The National Agenda identified several dimensions of multiculturalism for all Australians. They were:

the right to cultural identity, the right to social justice and the need for economic efficiency which involved the effective development and utilisation of the talents and skills of all
Australians. These dimensions were seen as exercised within limits which included a primary commitment to Australia; an acceptance of the basic structures and principles of Australian society including the Constitution and rule of law, tolerance and equality, parliamentary democracy, freedom of speech and religion, English as the national language, equality of sexes, and the obligation to accept the rights of others to express their views and values.

The new policy is still being contested by Anglophones, but it does seem that it is broadly accepted, perhaps because of the relative weakness of the Australians are such that they cannot readily be meshed with those of Asia.

Few countries, Canada being one of them have attempted to identify in official terms what are their "core values," those which capture their very essence. It is more than likely that any attempt to do so in a multi-ethnic society would provoke conflict rather than consensus. This is particularly so if the characterisation being attempted is restrictive and exclusionary. Singapore was one country which attempted such a task. Singapore's ruling elite expressed concern that Confucian ideas of filial piety, morality, and duty to society which had sustained Chinese society in the past were being progressively replaced by a Westernized individualistic and self-centred outlook on life.

The Government took the view that Singapore was an Asian, and not an Anglo-Saxon society, even if Singaporeans wore Western dress and spoke English. It argued that if Singaporeans became indistinguishable from Americans, Britshers, or Australians, or worse, a poor imitation of them, Singaporeans would lose the edge over these societies which enabled them to hold their own internationally. Following an extensive national debate in the society between 1989 and 1992, a White Paper was produced which defined the "Shared Values" of Singaporean society as being:

- Nation before [ethnic] community and society above self
- Family as the basic unit of society
- Regard and community support for the individual
- Consensus instead of contention
- Racial and religious harmony.

What is noticeable about the Singaporean document is its inclusivity. It does not identify any values that would not be embraced by the Chinese, Malay, Indian or European people living in Singapore. In doing so, the document met the criterion identified by many advocates of multiculturalism as being indispensable if meaningful cultural coexistence was to be achieved. It identified values that were shared by most cultures rather than those which divided its members. As Huntington (1997: 318) put it: "Instead of promoting the supposedly universal features of one civilisation, the requisites for cultural coexistence demand a search for what is common to most civilisations. In a multi civilisational world, the constructive course is to renounce universalism, accept diversity, and seek commonalities."

The same strategy should of course be required within states, the inhabitants of which should search for and identify and proclaim those values, institutions and symbols which are shared by all. This is of course easier said than done, especially in societies where scarcity obtains, and in which culture is being imagined and invented to be used as a resource to capture public and non-state resources. It is also difficult to achieve in societies where the relative political, economic and social positions of the constituent groups are changing rapidly in response to new opportunities and with it, the ranking afforded their cultural values and institutions.

The question then is whether multiculturalism as a deliberate political strategy would lead to an amelioration of social conflict as some optimists believe, facilitate segregation or resegregation, or give rise to an intensification of conflict and political failure as pessimists like Arthur Schlesinger, Samuel Huntington, and others argue. Schlesinger argues that multiculturalists are very often ethnocentric separatists who see little in the Western heritage other than Western crimes. Their mood is one of divesting Americans of the sinful European inheritance and seeking redemptive infusions from non-western cultures. (cited in Huntington 1997, 305) Huntington is also pessimistic about the con sequences of multiculturalism, at least in the United States. As he broods.

Leaders of ... countries have ... at times attempted to disavow their cultural heritage and shift the identity of their countries from one civilisation to another. In no case to date have they succeeded and they have instead created schizophrenic torn countries. The American multiculturalists similarly reject their country's cultural heritage. Instead of attempting to identify the United States with
another civilization, however, they wish to create a country of many civilizations, which is to say a country not belonging to any civilization and lacking a cultural core. History shows that no country so constituted can long endure as a coherent society. A multicultural United States will not be the United States; it will be the United Nations. (Ibid., 308)

Interestingly, Nathan Glazer (1997), the doyen of American sociologists, who initially espoused the assimilationist dream, has now come to the conclusion that the melting pot strategy has failed, and that multiculturalism is the only meaningful option for the United States.

As we turn specifically to the case of Trinidad and Tobago, where the two dominant ethnic groups are almost evenly balanced, we raise the question as to whether multiculturalism is likely to succeed only in countries where the constituent groups are numerically and culturally weak and not too strategically placed as is the case in Australia. Is success determined largely by the manner in which diversity is politically managed, or are there structural and conjunctural factors which determine whether the co-legitimisation of constituent cultures or conflict and political collapse becomes the norm? The UNESCO sponsored document “Multiculturalism: A Policy Response to Diversity,” drawing on the Australian model, is optimistic that multiculturalism is a viable option for securing social cohesion in most societies, even though it agrees that positive outcomes are not guaranteed. To quote that paper:

The tensions which exist within multiculturalism should not be ignored, but that they can be resolved within broad limits is evident from the Australian experience. Increasing changes associated with globalisation and the dynamic changes involving population movements will inevitably produce newer forms of ethnic contact and dynamic pressures for internal changes. The potential for ethnic conflict to remain a major social phenomenon is unlikely to end. One issue which will need to be monitored further is the actual extent to which states retain their ability to formulate domestic policies without reference to larger international imperatives.

Strictly understood, multiculturalism can be workable as a basis for social cohesion and integration. However, it may not be the only way in which social cohesion associated with ethnic diversity is produced. The Australian experience has highlighted how (despite being under close local examination and critique), in the absence of extensive power differentials, and despite recession, it has been very resilient as a specific set of policies and programs.

Any effort to formulate policies of managing ethnically and culturally diverse societies needs to consider not only the specific programs and practices, but also the social context and the objectives of the State and its citizens. Successful management of multiculturalism and multiethnic societies requires not only a democratic polity, but the struggle against social inequalities and exclusion.

What follows in the remaining pages of this paper is a brief attempt to examine some aspects of the struggle for multiculturalism as it has manifested itself recently in Trinidad and Tobago. Our narrative focusses mainly upon developments which have followed in the wake of the General Elections of November 1995, an election which resulted in a tie between the Hindu led United National Congress (UNC) and the Afro-Trinidadians dominated People’s National Movement (PNM) which, with the exception of one five year period (1986-1991), had governed Trinidad and Tobago since 1956. The electoral deadlock was broken by the decision of the National Alliance For Reconstruction (NAR), which won two seats in Tobago, to enter into a coaltional arrangement with the UNC which allowed the latter to form the Government.

What we have witnessed since that “epitomising event” is a veritable clash of cultures, as one long dominant group is being urged to move over and make room for another which is seeking, in a sort of “long march,” to “overtrump” the other by implanting its representatives and its people and its cultural ornaments in the interstices of the state apparatus and other public spaces.
Calypso vs Chutney

At the centre of the current controversy is the question as to what constituted the core culture of Trinidad and Tobago. Was it the activities associated with Christmas, Easter, carnival, calypso, limbo, steelband and “better village” folk art as most creoles believe? In the post-independence era, the “creole” element in the society - and the term here is used to refer to Europeans born in the Americas, Afro-Trinidadians and mixed elements of the population, and to some extent the local Syrian and Chinese population - had come to define the national culture in terms of the artistic forms indicated above rather than in terms of the European forms which were dominant during the colonial era. Those were the core ingredients of the national mix which found official validation and representation in the country’s national airline, British West Indian Airways (BWIA). The spirit or ethos of the society, its value systems and its way of life, were seen to be driven by what took place in the context of those festivals and artistic forms and structures. Thus the oft heard remark that Trinidadians had a “carnival mentality” which informed what they did - work and politics included - and how these things were done. As the Mighty Power once put it in song, “calypso and steelband is the culture of Trinidad.”

Indo-Trinidadians, especially those who were Hindus or who lived in the rural areas, had problems with this hegemonic characterisation of the national culture of Trinidad and Tobago, and in the period under review, their more outspoken elites have been insisting that the dominant “creocentric” discourse about Trinidad’s history from which this depiction was derived and constructed was a “myth” which had to be fundamentally deconstructed and rescribed. The complaint was that the only Indians who were accepted into “Trinidad culture” were those who were stricken by cultural amnesia and thus prepared to erase everything in the area of culture that their forefathers had died to preserve. In the view of Indian cultural nationalists, the reality was always quite different, especially if one abandoned the urban centres where most of the Christianised cosmopolitan Indians who had accepted the ideology of assimilation lived, and paid attention to what was taking place behind the sugar cane veil and bamboo curtains in the rural villages of central and south Trinidad. As Brinsley Samaroo observed:

There’s a vast ignorance about the rural population - the areas of darkness are considerable. Indians have become convinced the West has nothing superior to them, since 1845, they’ve waited and they still feel they don’t belong; so there’s a resurgence of Indian culture. It is an Indian culture which couldn’t be found in India: the caste system of extremely specific, occupational specialisation has been simplified into a generalised prejudice against dark-skinned, non-Brahmin Indians; Hindu and Muslim differences, indeed many communal differences, so important in India, are subsumed in Trinidad into a general Indianness; many gods and goddesses have been abandoned. The Indian community is reshaping itself, just as the Africans did centuries ago. (Sunday Express, May 16, 1993)

Before we proceed further with this analysis, two conceptual issues need to be clarified. We have used the term “culture” throughout this essay as if it were an unchanging phenomenon which is given and that somehow the members of that culture possess fixed traits that are inherent, somatic and “primordial.” Culture is however not stored within the “castle of one’s skin.” There is in fact nothing essential, intrinsic or bounded about culture, which is always being reimagined, reinvented and transformed in contradictory ways. Indeed, when deconstructed, much of what is currently being identified as Hindu, African or Orisha culture in the context of the Caribbean are little more than collective fictions or myths manufactured by political and cultural entrepreneurs who seek to use them as part of their political, social or economic stock of capital. While Indians were not stripped of the values and beliefs which they brought with them to the Caribbean, as was the case to some extent with respect to enslaved Africans, that inheritance has been substantially creolised in the 152 years of its incubation in the Caribbean. “A place on a map is also a place in history.” We however persist in using the term “culture” loosely, because whatever academic theorists might say, to the man in the street, the concept is “real,” and he structures much of his behaviour as if it were.

The other issue which needs to be clarified relates to the varying meanings of the term “creole” in the context of Trinidad and Tobago. In the Americas, the term is used to define Europeans who were native born. This was so in Trinidad as well. Thus one refers to “French creole” a term originally used to define persons of French ancestry who were born in the Caribbean but which was later employed to define all local whites. The term creole, “kilwal”
or "kinwal," as some Indians pronounced it, was also used by Indians to define persons who were recognizably African. For the latter group, the term in fact had a derogatory significance, and few Indians would have described themselves as "creole" or claim to be "creolised"; neither did they condone marriage to a "kilwal," someone of another "caste." As Morton Klass (1961:xxv) observed in Amity, the village in which his study was done, "the villagers consider themselves and their ethnic group distinct from the "creole" society and its culture."

Some Indians have recently begun to claim the creole label for some of their cultural contributions, in part because of assertions by "others" that the things which they bring to the cultural pot are "oriental" and not indigenous and born of struggle as are carnival, calypso, steelband, bongo, limbo or the Spiritual Baptist religion. As Lovelace (1988:340) had argued:

... it is the Africans who have laid the groundwork of a Caribbean culture—those Africans who struggled against enslavement and continued their struggle against colonialism—and the reason that they did so is that they had to. They had no choice but to become Caribbean and address the Caribbean landscape and reality. No other group had to. The Europeans didn't have to. Whether in the Caribbean they were indentured servants themselves, they retained their king, their parliament, their pope and bishops, their architecture, their laws, their form of clothing, their games. They retained their culture. They couldn't change it because it was through their institutions at home that they were culturally and politically empowered. In fact what they did was to impose their institutions upon the countries they had subdued.

The Indians also were tied to their culture because in this new land where they were strangers, it gave them a sense of being. They had their pundits and divali and hosa and their weddings and teas and had no reason to want to change them. Their religion gave them a hold on self in a situation where without it they would have been purely economic animals, and quite naturally they held to it. There has been, so far, nothing more serious than the removal of its place. Whether those old forms are going to endure in the midst of modernity and with the fact of their increasing political power, which should demand a greater national concern instead of a sectional one, is a question now being debated.

In response, it was said by some Indians that their songs, food, drum rhythms and various dance forms which they brought with them to the Caribbean from India, did not only survive, but have been drastically transformed by the Caribbean environment. In short, they have been creolised and indigenized. Religious festivals or cultural events like Divali, Hosay, Phagwa, Ram Leela and Ramadan, even though of Hindu or Islamic provenience, have now been thoroughly Caribbeanised, and in the case of festivals like Phagwa, Hosay, or the redramatisation of the Ramayana epic (Ramleela), have been "carnivalised" and "contaminated," much to the chagrin of purists who are now seeking to delink them from art forms which are associated with the Afro-creole fragment of the society. Some also claim that creole cultural forms now being held aloft as authoctonous, have an African ancestry. Why then should Indian derived art forms not be deemed "creole"? This point was raised by Professor Michael Craton in the 1991 Elsa Goveia Memorial Lecture. As Craton (1991:128) wrote:

A serious charge that can be levelled at [Kamau] Brathwaite's concept of creolisation when applied to the British Caribbean as a whole is that it is concerned mostly with the blacks, only nominally with the whites, and with the East Indians not at all. Indeed, as far as I know, no one, black, white, Indian or other, has yet attempted to argue that creolisation encompasses all equally, or the East Indian even at all.

John La Guerre (1993), Rhoda Reddock (1996), and Patricia Mohammed (1987) have since addressed this issue of creolisation as it affects the Indian community. As La Guerre (1993) wrote in his "Dilemmas of a Cultural Policy in Trinidad and Tobago":

...there was a process of creativity no less compelling than was the case with the African; for adaptation, creation and recreation began as soon as the recruiter took his prize to the depot and from there to the port of Calcutta. In the depot, and during the Middle Passage, the Indian was also forced to adapt to new castes, mores and standards and values. All cultures - including European, Indian and African - were forced to adapt and recreate in the Caribbean. Given
the fact of European dominance in the political and economic sphere, it was not surprising that European norms, culture and values for substantial sections of the community, became the object of striving; but equally important is the fact that a great deal of what has been described as "African" or "Indian" culture, involved a process of adaptation, recreation and syncretism.

In the past few years, Indo-Trinidadians have become even more strident in their demand that the cultural icons of the society be restructured to reflect the fact that Trinidad and Tobago is a multicultural and not a monocultural society. They have demanded, inter alia, that the country's highest national award, the Trinity Cross, be renamed since the "cross" is a Christian symbol. They have likewise demanded that national prayers should not be terminated with the "Christian" word "Amen," and that Indian dances, musical instruments, festivals, and other cultural inheritances be given equivalence with Easter and Christmas, other Christian festivals, and Afro-creole musical and other artistic forms, both in terms of media coverage and state patronage. There has also been an Islamic revival, fed in part by contact between Trinidad Muslims and revivalist elements in the Middle East and Asia Muslims, including African Muslims, have also been insisting that they too resent being marginalised by the reigning creole order. The latter have demanded that their daughters be allowed to wear headscarves (the Hijab) to state supported Christian schools, even though the latter's regulations concerning uniforms did not allow it. The content of the primary school curriculum is also an area of contestation. Concerted efforts are likewise being made to remove the few remaining laws which discriminate against Indians in any way, and to have Hindi taught formally in the country's secondary schools.

These demands have provoked strong resistance within the Christian creole community which has accused Indo-Trinidadians of being culturally aggressive and of refusing to concede that Trinidad is neither an Indian nor an African nation, but something that was sui generis. Indians however insist that their contributions to this new evolving multicultural synthesis be given the respect and legitimacy it deserves.

One by-product of this militant Indo Trinidadian assertiveness has been the effort to develop an Indian musical answer to the calypso and soca in the form of the "pichkaree" and "chutney" competitions. Indians are of the view that their music (other than that provided by the tassa drum, and perhaps the tabla and dholak) was neglected and even suppressed by media owners and managers who deemed it unfit for mainstream exposure and who therefore relegated it to special time slots reserved for "ethnic" music. Indians argue that their music, whether classic, (raaga) folk, or inspirational, should be incorporated into the mainstream and played throughout the day as are the various forms of western music. Over the years they fought to establish that music and visual programmes that relate to their cultural experience should not have to be enjoyed at special times or on special days. There was also the general complaint that the established media and the advertising companies had a class bias and catered mainly to the urban creole and ethnically mixed population, and was therefore blindered to the fact that close to half the population was rural and Indian, and swayed to other rhythms or had an interest in cultural offerings of Indian provenience.

Rather than wait on the established media to come around to their point of view, Indians took advantage of the opening up of the media in the eighties and established radio stations which virtually play only Indian music. The first station, which was established in 1994, became so popular that some families boasted that they never changed their dials to any other stations. Advertising revenues earned by that station prompted two others, including one owned by the state, to follow suit.

The pichkaree competitions, which were started some seven years ago, were designed to provide an opportunity for Indo-Trinidadians to articulate their experiences and their grievances, historical and otherwise, in song. As Raviji, one of the activists in the development of this art form observed:

The forum is being looked upon as a potential serious forum arising out of the Indo-Caribbean experience. It seeks to provide the forum to air the views and aspirations of the ordinary man and woman who do not have the opportunity of media, Parliament or singhasan. It seeks to contribute to the dynamic evolution of Creole culture from the base of its own genius; this, through retaining its traditional aesthetic value and sensibilities while consciously applying its Caribbean experience. (Sunday Guardian, February 16, 1997)

The songs, which may be in English, Bhojpuri or some creole Indian dialect, are regarded as functional equivalents to calypso. They are however
required to take traditional Indian culture as their point of departure, and to be sung to the tunes of old folk songs (mainly chowtal or Phagwa songs) or old Indian film tunes. Some of the themes of the 1997 competition were the 1997 calypsoes, the performance of the UNC Government, crime levels, women's issues, changes in Indian dress and cultural forms, and chutney music (Guardian, March 23, 1997). Panday approved the development of this new art form. "The forum", he observed, "was designed to utilise poetry which has always been a feature of our culture. [It seeks] to stimulate and encourage composers to record the aspirations, views, and the history of the Indians in the Caribbean" (Express, April 31, 1997).

One pichkaree artiste, in a composition, "What is National?" complained that the "state was guilty of refusal to treat [his] culture as national." As he continued:

Like Pichakaree, you will agree
Is truly culture of T & T Like playing jhaal and
singing chowtal
While you are seated on a paal 150 years after arrival

We still playing dholak and dhantal
So how the hell the only thing national Is
steelpan and carnival?
The PNM gone but we still on trial
Because the nation in denial. (Sunday Express, May 25, 1997)

Another song, which won the 1996 Pichkaree competition, also challenged those who sought to define a Caribbean cultural policy at a Carifesta conclave held in Trinidad and Tobago in 1995. It argued that it was impossible for Trinidadians to talk about a Caribbean cultural policy without first seeking to formulate a national cultural policy which took note of the Indian contribution to it (ibid.)

Chutney singing competitions also provide opportunities for Indo-Trinidadians performers to sing about their experiences. The art form had a "traditional" beginning. "Spicy" chutney songs were sung at prenuptial social gatherings wherein women told brides to be what to do and how to behave on the night of their wedding. The songs have now been taken out of the privacy of the community and are performed on stage, much as would happen in a calypso tent. According to classical sitarist, Mungal Patasar:

...chutney is a beat made up of the dholak (drum) dhantal (iron rod) and harmonium. Some of its roots lie in the Bhopuri folk songs brought from India by the indentured workers who came here between the 1840s and 1917. The songs were about everyday concerns like work, love, marriage, birth and death, which originally only the women would sing in Hindi, often behind closed doors, sometimes to suggestive role playing. Sometimes people would make them up on the spot, in long bus trips. Chutney has now changed: it's jumpy, catchy, with influences from soca: it's become much more public. People love to dance to it. And that is why it's become so popular in Indian Trinidad: people love the beat and can relate to the songs. Men and women now sing it publicly in contests for prizes, mixing Hindu and English lyrics, and since the 1980s, large scale chutney dancing events have been increasing in popularity at venues like the Samar Entertainment Complex in Debe, Lal's Cultural Complex, and Simplex in Princes Town. (Guardian, June 1, 1997)

Brinsley Samaroo also observes that

In phagwa, in those bawdy, wild chutney shows, grassroots Indians are creating their own Indo-creole cultural and physical space in which to get on bad. A lot of middle class people complain, but the shows are packed. And it offends my own middle class sensibilities; [but] that fact holds no currency - chutney is a very popular, very West Indian syncretism. And Indians have created these chutney shows where they can go, Reini Complex or Lal's Simplex and wine without having all the Africans you'd find in a calypso tent. (Sunday Express, May 16, 1993)

Many in fact regarded the apparent popularity of chutney during the 1996 Carnival among non-Indians as evidence that Indians had finally arrived. As the Political leader of the UNC, Basdeo Panday put it:

The level at which chutney music has entered the Carnival celebration this year [1996] is indeed symbolic of the times in which we now live - the time of awakening and of coming together of our people as never happened before. There is a new energy flowing in the country, and we should do well to capture this in Carnival and the music market... (Guardian, January 22, 1996)
Plans are afoot to open a “Chutney Soca Review Tent” during the 1998 carnival season. The organisers claim that there was need for a “medium through which chutney artists would be able to bring their music to the forefront of Trinidad Carnival.” The tent is said to be a response to what occurred during the 1996 and 1997 carnival seasons. To quote the tent’s promoter: “the outpouring of chutney music in 1996 and the almost rapturous reception among the mostly African carnival crowds must be seen as part of a development that is wider than music” (Express, July 13, 1996).

One of the problems of chutney soca is that no one seems to be certain as to what are its defining characteristics. Several performers, many of whom are Afro-Trinidadian, have complained that they do not know what the rules are. Some complain that the competitions seemed to be judged by persons with a classical Indian music bias rather than a soca bias. It is also not clear whether the songs are to be sung in Hindi, English or, if a mixture of both, in what combinations. One exponent of the medium, and the person who won the Chutney Soca Monarch competition during the 1997 Carnival season, felt that chutney soca must maintain some element of traditional chutney if it is to be distinctive. “I believe that the chutney flavour must be maintained in any thing that reflects or tries to incorporate chutney in it. If it is chutney soca, then there must be an adequate blend of chutney and soca, not calypso, chutney and soca” (Express, February 12, 1997). The question of course is just what is an “adequate” blend. The problem seems to be that the Indian performers want to ensure that the contests and the big prizes that are associated with them are won by them and not by the calypso singers.

Plans have been announced to set up a chutney museum and a recording studio to assist chutney artists in developing their skills. According to the National Chutney Foundation, whose aim is to promote, enhance and research the art form, there was need for a facility which would not only provide information, but a place where exponents of the music could go and “let their creative juices flow” (Express, November 6, 1996). There has also been a call for the establishment of a “Sonny Mann Festival.” Mann, it was said, was the person primarily responsible for the increased popularity of chutney just as “Spree” Simon was responsible for “inventing” the steelband. His 1996 song, “Lotayla,” was said to have “awakened the consciousness of all our people toward a thrust for national unity and national development” (Guardian, June 4, 1996). According to Sat Maharaj, Secretary General of the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha (SDMS), the country’s largest and most influential Hindu religious organisation, “all our people love Chutney. Sonny Mann’s “Lotayla” was a favourite of every ethnic group as was Bro. Marvin’s hit tune, Jahaji Bhai. Indian music is a pervasive influence. The dholak, dhalant, bansuri, sitar, tassa, hand organ and other musical instruments are now taught at schools, and all children must have access to their instrument of their choice (Sunday Express, May 25, 1997.)

Chutney may be “rising” along with Indian social, economic and political power, but purists are unhappy about this development. Mungal Patasar (1995:84) observed that Chutney is a bastardized form of Indian music and has its flaws. It is limited to very few tunes; the lyrics are the words of bhajans or religious songs and the singers themselves are helpless in the area of creating new tunes. Modern day thinking is that Trinidad Indian music is moving ahead. People are led into a false sense of comfort that Chutney is an advanced form of Indian music. We should be careful in stating this assessment. Chutney is definitely an easy music in which to revel, but it should never [have] been seen as representative of the whole of Indian music.

Some also have concerns about the vulgarity of some of its lyrics and the bawdiness of the dancing associated with the shows, particularly that displayed by older women. To them, the behaviour at these shows resembles that which obtains at big calypso and soca shows which they have always denigrated and characterised as being typical of the much despised creole carnival mentality. Cultural impresario, Moean Mohammed, sees modern chutney as a “degeneration of classical chutney” and has called for a revival of “good pure chutney that abstains from denigration or desecration of religious beliefs.” Traditional music forms such as bhajans and kirtans must, he believes, remain undiluted. Mohammed also believes that Indians in Trinidad were talented and should seek to create an indigenous music that was not “slavish to India” (Guardian, June 1, 1997). Older or more orthodox Hindus have also argued that some chutney songs, including the popular Lotayla, have served to bring Indian family institutions and values into disrepute. Speaking of Lotayla, Brenda Gopeesing had the following to say:

More and more, our community is faced with the continued denigration of our values by those within our own ranks. Our value system
is not only being compromised for financial gain, but also being sacrificed on the altar of national unity... (Sunday Express, May 25, 1997)

Younger Indian women, particularly those with feminist perspectives, are resentful of the strictures of the traditionalists. Roseanne Kanhai for example (1995:23-24) has observed that chutney is a vehicle for the empowerment of Indian women. Chutney, she argues represents an attempt on the part of established media and that non-Indians do not participate in

It is undeniable that a liberation movement is taking place. No longer can the stereotype of the docile, sexually passive Bhowjee hold sway. The Bhowjees have been able to take what is valuable to them from the calypso/carnival culture. The locations of chutney may resemble the calypso tent but, these women stay within their communities, performing for predominantly Indian audiences. As these Bhowjees expand their Matikor space, drawing creative energy from their familiar surroundings, it is clear that they will not be repressed. Collectively, they are demanding the right to celebrate their female bodies in a way that denies neither their Indian heritage nor their claim to elements of Afrocentric cultural expression available to them.

Despite the growing popularity of chutney and the greater tolerance and even acceptance which is now shown towards some Indo-Caribbean cultural forms, there are still complaints that Indo-Trinidadian cultural events are not covered sufficiently in the established media and that non-Indians do not participate in Indian cultural events such as Indian Arrival Day. One letter writer bemoaned the fact that American cultural imports are given greater media exposure than Ramleela which he claimed went largely unnoticed in our “so called plural society.” “Elements in our society do not regard Indian culture as a part of the Trinidad mosaic, but they embrace imported observances. Trinidadians may soon see the day when Thanksgiving and July 4th are celebrated here (Express, November 11, 1996).

Similar remarks have been heard with respect to the place given to “chutney” and “chutney soca” in the musical market place by the Tourism and Industrial Development Corporation (TIDCO), one of the official agencies responsible for cultural decision making. It is argued, for example that “chutney” is now a vital part of the musical culture of Trinidad and Tobago, and what is more, has greater potential as an export product than either calypso or soca. As a spokesman of the National Association of Chutney Artistes of Trinidad and Tobago complained:

An entertainment industry ought to develop a twelve month cycle. In this respect, TIDCO should support the major cultural tourism events that spread throughout the year, and abandon carnival, which is already assisted by other state agencies like the National Carnival Commission (NCC) and the Ministry of Culture. In so doing employment created will not be seasonal but permanent, and the industry will grow. It is an insult to a nation for a government to set up a commission to see about one event, carnival, which never had an export potential and [which was] primarily designed for high consumption in terms of importation of expensive costumes by the tens of thousands, which creates a drain of foreign exchange of millions of dollars. Further, the wealth accumulated locally is concentrated in the pockets of a few downtown merchants who have the option to siphon the money to Syria, Lebanon...

Chutney music is the only entertainment activity that goes on every weekend, every month in Trinidad. It has developed its market in U.S.A., Canada, Holland, England, and is now moving to Asia, Africa and Latin America. Yet it is the only entertainment activity that was never assisted by the state.9

It should however be noted that calypso music has also developed a year round market in Caribbean, European and North American cites at the various carnivals held therein. It is also worth noting that while a majority of the persons who sing calypsos are “creoles,” many Indo-Trinidadians benefit financially, particularly in the provision of amplification and recording equipment.

The SDMS vs The Ministry of Culture

The Ministry of Culture is now being bitterly attacked by Hindu Pundits and the SDMS which claim that the UNC Government, which they helped elect, has been discriminating against them in the allocation of funds. As one pundit told Prime Minister Panday, “its a sad day for Hindus and Indians in Trinidad and Tobago.... When the PNM was here, we never had any problems for funding (Express, June 2, 1997). The Secretary of the SDMS likewise charged that over the 40 years during which Trinidad
was self-governing, the Ministry of Culture deliberately underfunded Hindu cultural activities and had allocated more resources to non-Indian cultural activities, especially to steelband, carnival and Emancipation Day activities. SDMS Secretary Sat Maharaj in fact described the Ministry of Culture as being the “last bastion of racism in the country” and demanded that its capacity to fund culture be withdrawn. The state, he said, had no “business in culture.” When it becomes involved, it becomes divisive. Maharaj called for the disbanding of the Ministry of Culture and its replacement by a Ministry of Multicultural Affairs.

Charges of official discrimination have been denied by the Ministry which claims that prudence and accountability has to be observed in the allocation of funds. It was noted that grants are budgeted long in advance and given under specific heads related to national days and festivals and that the Maha Sabha and affiliated Hindu organisations get more than Afro-centric organisations. In 1994 the former received $289,000; in 1995, the year in which the 150th anniversary of Indian Arrival was celebrated, the figure was $510,000, and in 1996 it was $238,000. The figure for 1997 was less than in each of the preceding years because budgeted funds were not allocated. This had to do with the failure of the SDMS to submit audited accounts for grants made in 1996. One senior Ministry official also argued that the Maha Sabha should compare itself with other religious organisations and not with cultural bodies, an assertion that was challenged by the Maha Sabha which insisted it was an educational and religious organisation, as well as “the biggest cultural group in the land” (Express, May 24, 1997). As in the case of Islam, there was no separation between religion and culture.

Several smaller Hindu and Islamic groups however expressed dissatisfaction with the hegemonic role which the Maha Sabha claims for itself, and there are frequent disputes about how moneys channelled through the SDMS are reallocated. The Ministry in fact now distributes funds directly to the relevant groups, said to number in excess of forty, but finds it difficult to do so. As the Minister of Culture noted, “we prefer dealing with an umbrella organisation, but people complain that when money is given to the Maha Sabha, they do not benefit from it. This is why these various splinter groups come to the Ministry.” As to whether Hindu groups got less than other groups, the Ministry published figures to refute such allegations.

Interestingly, some Hindus claim that the Indian community is being sacrificed, even though a Hindu led regime is in power, and that Indian culture is being stifled in the name of “national unity.” As Brenda Gopeesingh complained:

Does the elusive dream of national unity mean that we must give up the space we have been forced to carve for ourselves while our groups still wear a beggar’s cap as they seek to solicit funds for the Indian Arrival Day Celebration of 1997? (Sunday Express, May 25, 1997)

Gopeesingh was lamenting the fact that an Afro-Trinidadian girl was declared winner of the high profile Miss Indian Cultural Pageant, 1997. She felt that the choice of such a person (she was an unwed mother) was a flagrant insult to the traditional Indian family system which celebrated marriage and childbirth within marriage. The Prime Minister did not however agree with Gopeesingh’s concern. He felt that Miss Ramirez’s entry into the contest was a goodwill gesture similar to that made by designer Peter Minshall who has incorporated tassa drummers and Indian dance forms into his Carnival presentations (Express, May 27, 1997).

Controversy also surrounded plans to formally introduce the steelpan, the designated national instrument, into the nation’s schools. The SDMS has argued that pan is not national and as such it would not be permitted in schools controlled by the Maha Sabha until the harmonium, an instrument used in Hindu devotional and other types of music, is introduced into non-Hindu schools. As the Secretary of the SDMS put it, “today, you saw a guitar being played in the temple; but we have reservations against one instrument. When we have 200 harmoniums in our schools, then we will allow it in our schools. In the meantime we have put an embargo on it.”

Maharaj argued that symbols are important in society, and that the SDMS would struggle to have those that define the society changed to reflect its multicultural reality. As Maharaj explained: “When a Hindu is a prime minister, it is a symbol, and that is why we make noise when we see ads on television showing different symbols for different races.” (sic) Maharaj was also pleased that a “Hindu name will soon appear on the nation’s currency notes.” Maharaj was referring to the fact that the newly appointed Governor of the Central Bank was an Indian [even if not a Hindu] (Guardian, July 20, 1997).
The Clash of Siege Mentalities

Indo-Trinidadian assertiveness has provoked a counter-reaction within Afro-Creole society as well as within the Christian fraternity generally. In terms of the latter, we note that while the growth of fundamentalism within the Protestant and Catholic churches is part of a world-wide desecularisation phenomenon, in the context of Trinidad and Tobago, this growth is also energised by what is taking place in the non-Christian community. Concern has been expressed by some Christian fundamentalists that the country is being overtaken by non-Christians. These concerns were publicly articulated when policy issues such as legalising the sale of alcohol on Sundays and casino gambling were put on the national agenda by the UNC Government. The call by the SDMS for the cessation of the use of “Amen” at the end of the prayer which is said before Parliament begins its deliberations, the call for the abolition of the term “Trinity Cross” and its replacement by a more denominationally neutral term to denote the country’s highest national award, and the proposal to delete Catholic religious days like Corpus Christi and Easter Monday from the calendar of holidays to make room for Baptists Liberation Day, also provided occasion for the ventilation of Christian rage. Christians note that a majority of the population, some 60 percent, is Christian.

As a parallel development, there is also evidence of an Afro-centric religious reawakening. The Baptists have become more vocal in their demands for legitimization and for a piece of the material and symbolic pie. The Baptists demanded and were allocated a national holiday to mark their survival and triumph over colonialist attempts to extinguish them as a group. They have also been given lands by the state on which to build a religious park to house a Cathedral and a school, as well as premises in a high profile part of Port of Spain to host their meetings and functions. They have likewise demanded and have been given a place in the national Table of Precedence which previously included only the major Christian denominations, the Hindus, the Muslims, and the Bahais.

Orisha elements have also become more publicly visible, and quite a few prominent individuals have begun to associate openly with its activities which are progressively being purged of its Christian and Hindu additives in an attempt to achieve greater ethnic “purity.” As James Houk observed (1995:37), “the Orisha religion was originally dominated by lower-class Africans, and they still constitute a large segment of the membership; however, Orisha worshippers now include business executives, military officers, university students, government workers from ministers on down, and others drawn from the middle and upper classes.” Supporters of the movement have also called for a national holiday to be added to the list to honour “Lord Shango.” The government has said it is considering it. In the interim, the Orisha faith was given a place in the Table of Precedence.

Note also needs to be taken of the increasing number of Afro-Trinidadians who have embraced Islam which they regard as a religion which is more relevant to their ethnic identity as they have constructed it. For some, embracing Islam means a “return” to the religion of their African ancestors. The Imam of the Jamaat al Muslimeen claims that whereas in 1969 there were only a handful of African Muslims, there are now some 20,000 (Ryan 1991). The growth of a militant Afro-Trinidadian Muslim community has served to challenge Indo Trinidad Muslims to examine their religious practices which are largely informed by Indian as opposed to Middle Eastern cultural forms. Indeed, there is evidence that the activities of African Muslims associated with the Jamaat al Muslimeen have contributed to the revival of fundamentalism among Indian Muslims in Trinidad and Tobago (Ryan 1991). The activities of the Jamaat al Muslimeen may also have had the effect of “provoking a more vigorous revitalisation of Catholicism in Trinidad.” (Forte 1986:279).

Concerns about the growth of Indo-Trinidadian political, social and economic power and the success with which 150th Anniversary of Indian Arrival Day was celebrated has stimulated a competitive response from those who organize and patronise African Emancipation Day. In 1996, Emancipation Day activities were more lavishly organised than ever before and were patronised by substantially larger numbers of Afro-Trinidadians. This was largely due to the fact many of the latter were traumatised by the defeat of the PNM in November of the preceding year, and therefore made it a point to show support for their group. The Government was also of the view that the defeat of the PNM had served to demoralise Afro-Trinidadians, and that it was in the national interest to defuse these anxieties by giving significantly more financial and other support to Emancipation Day activities. Whereas only some $67,000 had previously been given annually to support these activities, $419,000 was given in 1996.

Despite this renewed Afrocentric assertiveness, we seem to be witnessing the passing of creole society, at least in its old form. The term “creole society” of course means many things. In one sense,
the entire society is now "creole." In talking here about the passing of creole society or of "post creole" society, I am referring specifically to Afro-creole society. During the 19th and much of the 20th centuries, that society had to struggle with Euro-creole society to have its values, institutions and practices decriminalised and socially legitimised. These included, inter alia, African drumming, the Canboulay, Shango, the Shouter Baptist religion, steelband, calypso, and various other folk arts. Afro-Creole culture came into its own and enjoyed its "golden era" between 1962 and 1986, the period which coincided with political independence and the PNM's control of the reins of political power. During that period, and particularly in the years following the "Black Power Revolution of 1970" (Ryan and Stewart 1995), the state privileged Afro-creole cultural institutions and practices which it claimed were neither "African" nor "Indian", but Trinidadian. Much of this was of course politically opportunistic and calculated to appease certain proletarian elements and to gain political muscle and mileage.

Some creoles complain that too little was done to promote either the folk arts - no pan theatre, no programmes to teach music to panmen etc. - or the fine arts - no museums, concert halls etc., even when money was available in the oil boom years 1972 to 1982. African cultural nationalists also believe that the PNM and the establishment generally disprivileged and denigrated the African element of the creole mix, and that what one had was an Afro-Saxon aristocracy which wore Western cultural masks. Afro-creole cultural hegemony, such as it was, was however contested by Indo-Trinidadians as well as by cultural imports from India. Creoles however brushed aside the claims of the former with the argument that Indo-Trinidadian culture was "ethnic", "quaint," and that its aesthetics were alien to the Caribbean.

As we have seen however, Indo-Trinidadians employed various strategies to maintain their religious and cultural inheritance in the face of the onslaught from the wider creole society and from the West, and even though much was lost, enough was retained, reinvented and thrust forward to the point where Indo-Trinidadian cultural forms now compete vigorously and successfully with Afro-Creole equivalents (Klass 1991). These challenges were fuelled and sustained by the growing economic wealth of the Indo-Trinidadian community. especially that acquired during the years of the oil boom (1972-1982) (Vertovec 1992), the advances being made in the field of education and in the job market, both in the public and private sectors. All of these developments served to stimulate pride and assertiveness within the Indo-Trinidadian community. The outcome of the 1995 election, which saw an Indo-Trinidadian political party holding the reins of power, also strengthened those who have been demanding parity and equivalence (and in some cases dominance) in terms of the allocation of symbolic and material resources, especially those in the gift of the state. The same factors which led to the growing strength of Indo-Trinidadian culture within Trinidad and Tobago have served to weaken Afro-creole social, economic and political power. All the evidence points to the progressive decline in the power of the Afro-creole community generally and young Afro-creole males in particular vis-à-vis other ethnic groups. Afro-creoles are faring less well in the struggle for advancement in the educational system, in the quest for the newer knowledge based jobs that are becoming available in the restructured labour market, in the area of business, the bureaucracy, and of course in the area of politics. In a sense, the outcome of the elections of 1995 formally heralded the death of "King Creole." (cf. my "King Creole is Dead! Long Live What," Sunday Express, November 26, 1995). Even if it may be argued that the news of the "monarch's" death was much exaggerated, there is little doubt that he has been mortally wounded, and will never again rule unchallenged, even if physical death is cheated.

There are of course some who argue that the "golden age" of creole culture is far from over, and that given its inner strength and the challenges being posed, it will regain its creative impulses and would continue to inseminate Indo-Trinidadian cultural forms to the point where they would cease to have any distinctiveness. Others argue that cultural border crossings are in fact taking place in all directions, and that what will emerge after the "clash" will be a distinctive amalgam of both muses as well as what is on offer from the globalised world.

Burton Sankeraalli has argued that the new developments in the area of culture will serve to intensify rather than neutralise the "siege mentality" that is already in evidence and which the political process exploits:

The prominence of chutney soca in the Carnival this year starkly reveals the reality of parallel mainstreams in contemporary Trinidadian society. Here each ethnic group has its own shows, its own dominant music, its own crowds, largely its own artists, and even its own radio stations. Such parallel mainstreams increasingly characterise what
is occurring in our society. Hence in Trinidad and Tobago what we have are in reality not two, not three, but four distinct nations. The carnival also reveals that the present ethnic scenario brings us face to face with the "siege mentality" (Sunday Express, February 9, 1997).

Prime Minister Panday's hostile reaction to some of the 1997 calypsoes sung in 1996 and 1997 which lampooned him and which were equally critical of the Secretary General of SDMS, referred to above, and Afro-creole society's counter-reaction to Panday's criticisms had, in Sankeralli's view, brought closer the day when this clash of "siege" or "ghetto mentalities" might turn nasty and "plunge this country into chaos." As he warned, "Unlike parallel lines, parallel mainstreams do meet in the clash of siege mentalities."12

One does not and cannot know where all of this cultural competitiveness would end, and what would be its social or political fall out. The long run outcome could be benign and culturally and socially enriching, or it could serve to sour even more relationships between the dominant social tribes. Optimists believe that the blending of musical forms, both lyrically and in rhythm, will serve to lubricate the clashing gears of political and economic conflict and help the society effect a soft landing into the new millennium. Some believe that douglass music might serve to accelerate the development of a "polycentric creole" or douglassia with genuine douglass politics and interpersonal relations. Whether this occurs or whether the outcome would be the creation of a society that is more "cleft," as cultural pessimists believe would be the case, depends in part on how our political élites perform, on whether or not they listen to the music and use it to build more bridges across the "Caroni," or whether they use the music to further the process of mobilization and encirclement that is already in evidence.

Cultural power, it is said, follows economic and political power. "Soft power," the ability to get people to accept one's definition of cultural reality without having to demand or physically force them to do so - follows "hard power." So argues Samuel Huntington (1997). If this is indeed true, as appears to be the case in Trinidad and Tobago, what we might witness are long, is the "collapse" of Trinidad and Tobago society along its cultural fault lines. The progressive achievement by Indo-Trinidadians of more and more increments of economic, political and cultural power over the last few decades, however disguised and veiled it might be by rhetoric about a national unity government and cultural equity, has served to deepen Afro-creole fears and concern that they are being displaced from the gayelles in which they were once paramount. What is seen by one group as a legitimate and long overdue reconstruction of the social order that recognises the validity of their cultural contribution, is, and may well continue to be seen as an unacceptable loss of power by the other. Lenin once said, that the central and critical question in politics is Kto Kovo? Who will rule and who will be ruled? Will power be shared or monopolized? Those are questions that are currently being asked in Trinidad and Tobago.

Towards a Polycentric Creole Society

While UNC rhetoric about creating a government of national unity and the granting of official holidays to satisfy all groups is important, and do help to satisfy the longings of hitherto marginalised and alienated groups that they have achieved their due place in the sun and have become valued members of the "Trini posse," much more is required to build and sustain a genuine multicultural society in which, as the national anthem says, "every creed and race find an equal place." We note that there are some extremists who regard the Indian song, Sohini Raat, as the true Indo-Trinidadian national anthem (Mirror, January 19, 1996).

While the outcome of the current clash of cultures and the quest for a politics of national unity is not preordained, the results of opinion surveys done by St. Augustine Research Associates (SARA) in May 1997 indicate that the two dominant tribes construct reality differently. Despite extensive commingling, they "see" the universe through different cultural lenses.13 Opinions were sharply divided on almost every issue along the fault lines of religion and race. Distrust was also shown to be widespread. Mr. Panday's call for a government of national unity and cultural equity may be well meant, but the evidence is clear that the "creole" population is skeptical of the call, and it may well be that the problem is their unwillingness to have such a government led by someone in whom most have no trust.14

Prime Minister Panday however professes to being optimistic about the future of Trinidad society. He believes that the critical steps which his government has taken since November 1995 have brought to a near end the politics of alienation and ethnic dispossession. Panday rightly notes that unless a society gives recognition to people's
achievements, and incorporates them in the mainstream, there would always be feelings of alienation and frustration. This was the case with the Shouter Baptists and the peoples of Indian descent, both of whom he claims felt acute cultural marginalisation under previous administrations. In the case of the latter, the unofficial celebration of Indian Arrival Day represented an insistence that their presence be noted. As Panday observed at a function marking Indian Arrival Day 1997:

It was more than just a celebration; it was almost a protest, a statement of denial, a social event to give sustenance to a depressed spirit searching for acceptance. It was highly religious and took on a religious flavour.... Today, Indian Arrival Day as a national holiday, is contributing to a shift in behaviour from one of mere existence in a distant land, to one of genuine involvement and belonging in Trinidad and Tobago. Indian Arrival Day has unleashed an energy that was too long dormant, a creativity that was too long asleep. It has awakened a consciousness about responsibility that transcends self and involves the concept of community. We shall survive only if we become a community. (Express, May 20, 1997)

Panday made the valid point that political unity and national unity are not necessarily one and the same. In his view, the problem with the national discussion about national unity is that it has stopped at the point where some groups are concerned about what they have to give up to accommodate the claims of other groups. His vision of Trinidad and Tobago society, however, did not require any group to give up any valued cultural resource. It was not a zero sum game. As he put it, "my vision of national unity has nothing to do with shedding one’s cultural identity. That is the soul of the individual. Diversity is our strength."

All of this is of course true. The question, however, is whether claimant groups could be incorporated without requiring those who were once dominant having to give up something of value, material or otherwise, or which leads them to feel that they are being rudely displaced. Monoculturalism as an official ideology is dead in Trinidad and Tobago and it remains to be seen what form multiculturalism would take. Will the old Afro-creole society reassert its dominance, give way to an Indo-creole alternative, or will there be what Forte (1996;235) calls "a newer more inclusive, more equitable polycentric creolisation process?" Can a "win-win" - "we are all creoles and Caribbean men" - outcome be negotiated? 14

My own view is that we are in fact witnessing the passing of the Afro dominated creole society and that in its stead, a new polyethnic alternative is emerging to fill the vacuum. Instead of the proverbial "melting pot" in which all unique ethnic differences are to be eliminated, what we see evolving, albeit with much noise and stridency, is a mainstream that will be fed by numerous cultural tributaries, all of which would in time be able to claim that they bring to the confluence the best and worst of what we are as a people. The mainstream will contain much that is common to all in terms of shared values and symbols, but it will of necessity also include elements that are distinctive and valued only by segments of the population who share a particular identity. In sum, the content of what is to be the creole society of the future is currently being reconstructed, and only time will tell what the new end product would look like, and how it would function. 15

We thus return to Huntington and reformulate him in the following way - in a multicultural world, the constructive course is to renounce universalism or coerced assimilation, eschew ethnic homogeneity, accept diversity and seek commonalities. Only in this way would we avoid fault line civil wars of the sort that have become all too prevalent.
Brigitte Bardot gave voice to the many who believe that France was being overrun by Muslims. As she wrote, "France, my country, my homeland, my land is again being invaded with the blessing of successive governments by a foreign population, mainly Muslim, to which we pay allegiance. Mosques flourish while our church bells go silent for lack of priests" (Trinidad Express, January 28, 1997).

Heinz Fiedler (1997:80) has argued that the term "Islamism" should be used to describe the more extremist versions of Islam. As he writes:

Although it has the same religious roots, it is an extreme, if not indeed extremist variant of Islam with specific ideological and political goals. Without this distinction, Muslims, who created a magnificent culture, would otherwise be identified with the problematic aspects of the Islamic movement - with the probable result of bringing about a defensive stance on their part and thus creating a relationship of confrontation with the West... it is foolish and could easily become a self-fulfilling prophecy if Islam were to be depicted as a new enemy... and if Europe were to isolate itself as a "fortress" against Islam. Islamists believe that the crusading West is the enemy and that Islam is the solution, the pivot of an alternative world order. This order, based on Islamic principles, is to be achieved through resort to revolutionary Jihad - the option favoured by a minority - or through a "long march through institutions" - the option favoured by the moderate majority. The goals of both groups are however said to be the same.

Lloyd Best (Sunday Express, August 4, 1996) noted that disadvantaged groups know how to negotiate between "authorised versions" of cultural reality and "popular versions," since their survival often depended on this knowledge. As he puts it: "Once you are unfree - and African slavery in America was the same extreme case - it becomes your lot to inhabit two worlds. Uttering the authorised version is the imperative of survival. Rejecting it for the other truth, the one that people actually live by from day to day, is the compelling requirement of sovereignty and of selfhood."

The term "culture" is being used here to refer to the various musical and art forms of the society, whether "high" or "low brow," rather than to the broader concept of culture which includes a society's root values, ideals (religious and secular), life styles, habits, ways of seeing and doing things in that world.

The concepts of creolisation, acculturation, and interculturaltion were used by Edward Brathwaite (1974) to describe the processes through which the various groups in Caribbean society absorbed each other's cultural products. The subordinate groups, the Africans and later the Indians, imitated the Europeans (acculturation) while the latter inadvertently or at times consciously absorbed some of the cultural elements, including language, of the subordinate groups (interculturaltion).

In a Survey done in 1995 by the Centre For Ethnic Studies, close to 60 percent of the Indo-Trinidadians interviewed expressed the view that the media were fair and balanced in their coverage of news and events relating to Indo-Trinidadians. By May 1997, this judgement seems to have changed. Sixty-one percent of those sampled in a survey done by St. Augustine Research Associates felt that the media was unbalanced in its coverage of the UNC. Afro-Trinidadians however disagreed. Seventy-seven percent either felt that coverage was "balanced" (35 percent) or "not critical enough" (42 percent).

The media has in effect become an arena of ethnic contestation. The battle cries are freedom of the press vs the fairness of the press. One Indo-Trinididan critic complained that "the national press is a creole vehicle to maintain, protect and defend the [creole order] of things, the sacred "calypso land," their view of what is national. (Indian Review, May, 1996).

In 1996, a calypsonian, who goes by the name of Brother Marvin, sang a highly controversial calypso, Jahagi Bhai; Marvin, who said he was 50 percent Indian and 50 percent African i.e., a doula, criticised Afro-centric Trinidadians for talking about their "true" African past without recognizing that "if they took a trip back
to their roots," they would see "a man in a dhoti, saying [his] prayers in front of a jhandi." Afro-centric Trinidadians were enraged by this apparent claim that African cultures were fertilized by Indian cultures instead of the reverse being the case as they assert.

9 This reply came by way of a reaction to a position paper submitted to The Trinidad and Tobago Tourism and Industrial Development Company (TIDCO) by Dr. Keith Nurse which proposed a strategy for marketing calypso and carnival products internationally.

10 Keith Smith has commented sagely on the pan/harmonium soca chutney controversy in the following way:

I would give Sat [Maharaj] his 200 harmoniums not merely to satisfy his eminently reasonable demand for equal cultural treatment but because with harmoniums and pans in school, I know exactly what is going to happen which is that before you can say Mungal Patasar or Boogsie Sharpe, Trinidadians would have invented a new genre of music thenceforth to be known as "panmonium", and there will be nothing Sat nor I would be able to do about it... So bring on the harmoniums and the steelpans and let us strike up the national band.

Wherever you have musical forms living side by side they tend to borrow from and influence each other; so while the purists are talking themselves blue in the face about the separateness of say, chutney and soca, the musicians are serving up chutney soca or soca chutney, depending on the degree of the mix, to the winning (sorry, purists) delight of the misbehaving masses.

11 Afro-Trinidadians complain that since the UNC came to power the public service is being "ethnically cleansed." It is claimed that chief executive officers and chairmen of parastatal bodies are being routinely replaced by Indo-Trinidadians. Many top posts in the upper reaches of the public sector, including that of Governor of the Central Bank, are in fact now held by Indo-Trinidadians. The term of office of the Commissioner of Police, a "half" Indian, was also recently extended beyond the age of retirement on the ground that he had special competencies, particularly in respect of the fight against crime, of which the UNC wished to continue making use. The Minister of National Security also indicated that the Government was "comfortable" with the Commissioner. Few Afro-Trinidadians were however convinced that the reasons given were the ones that really mattered. Minister of Finance, Brian Kuei, Tung, however replied to the charge of ascriptive hiring with the retort that the UNC was only doing what PNM governments did when they were in power. To quote him:

I have seen both sides, and the policy has been consistent. We want the best people, but we also want people, unfortunately, who would support our policy and philosophy. The PNM did it when I was in a PNM Cabinet and the UNC/NAR is doing it now that they're there; and there's nothing wrong with it. It so happened that the majority of support seems to have come from a particular ethnic group. (Express, June 25, 1997)

12 Panday was outraged by some of the calypsos which were sung about him during the 1996 and 1997 carnival seasons, songs which made references to allegations that he was an alcoholic and that he sexually abused a female employed by his union. Panday was arrested and charged, but the allegations were not proven in court and were dismissed by the presiding magistrate. Panday claimed that the calypsos were racist and that his government would not allow taxpayers funds to be used to subsidize shows where such songs were aired. This in fact meant that the Dimanche Gras show, which is held on the Sunday before Carnival, would have to take on a different character. This has since been declared as policy. Many Afro-Trinidadians regarded Panday’s outburst as a threat to their cultural traditions which allowed calypsonians to use the medium of the calypso to make "politicians cringe," to borrow a phrase from one of David Rudder’s calypsos.

13 Critical race theorists in the United states and post-modernists generally have argued that there is in fact no objective reality, only competing versions of reality which may never be reconciled. Race, they argue is critical to perception and analysis. As Professor Anthony Cook of the Georgetown University Law School observes, "critical race theory wants to bring race to the very center of the analysis of most situations. Its assumption is that race has affected our perception of reality and our understanding of the world in almost every way." Other legal scholars like Kimberle Crenshaw of UCLA have argued that while race has been structured out of law, culture and history, this has been deliberately done to disempower marginalised groups. Law is never neutral. "Most people think law is being neutral if it does not say anything explicit about race. But it is not neutral. It is simply facilitating whatever power relationships were in existence when the law was put in place."
some put it, "when nothing else turns up, clubs are trumps."

Nizam Mohammed, the political leader of the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR), the party with which the UNC was associated in a coalition arrangement following the 1995 General Election, declared that contrary to what is being said, the UNC is seeking hegemony rather than "national unity," and that the NAR prefers the concept of "national harmony" as an alternative. According to Mohammed, the UNC's concept of national unity is a "hoax and a con job by a smartman called Basdeo Panday... What we are witnessing in our country is a division of our people along ethnic and racial lines (Guardian, July 15, 1997). Mohammed, like others, believes that the UNC's true aim is to have all groups in the society speak with the voice, i.e. the UNC's rather than with blended voices. As the Trinidad Express editorialised:

Democracy is built on the freedom of people and institutions to hold different ideas, different cultures and to argue for their adoption. It is the different voices singing at different pitches which produce the beauty of harmony... whereas the same tone multiplied only makes for greater volume (July 18, 1997)

12 Morton Klass notes that most of the former "East Indians of Trinidad and Tobago had adopted the "Trinbagonian" way of life - in language, in social and economic patterns, in material goods and in aspirations. Yet, when we peer closely at certain important dimensions of Indian life, we observe what some might consider remarkable evidence of continuity - in culture content and in structure. For example, all the change in the direction of "Westernization" or "Creolization" that has taken place in social relations has of course had its impact on "religion" - but there has been no turning away from Hinduism or Islam to Christianity, nor even significant decrease in public or private observance of "Indian" religions. If anything, it could well be argued that such observance has intensified, increasing the differences between Indo- and Afro-Trinidadians." (1991:59) Klass is making a distinction here between "values" which are increasingly being nationalised and widely shared, and "identities" which continue to be segmented. As Kymlicka (1995: 188-89) observes, "a shared conception of justice throughout a political community does not necessarily generate a shared identity, let alone a shared civic identity that will supersede rival national identities... shared identity derives from commonality of history, language, and maybe religion. But these are precisely the things which are not shared in a multination state.... In many multination countries history is a source of resentment and division between national groups, not a source of shared pride. The people and events which spark pride amongst the majority nation often generate a sense of betrayal amongst the national minority. Moreover, the reliance on history often requires a very selective, even manipulative, retelling of that history."
REFERENCES


Premdas, Ralph. "Public Policy in a Multi-Ethnic State: The Case of National Service in Trinidad and Tobago." U.W.I., Trinidad. N.d.
Ryan, Selwyn, and Taimoon Stewart, eds. 1995. Culture and Entrepreneurship in Trinidad and Tobago. U.W.I., Trinidad: I.S.E.R.