MULTICULTURALISM AND THE POLITICAL PROCESS IN TRINIDAD: A CASE STUDY

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This paper assesses the formal introduction of multiculturalism into the politics of Trinidad. It argues that while the notion of multiculturalism presents a perspective on our diverse culture its official introduction into the politics through a Ministry of Multiculturalism when the acknowledgement of its failure as an official political policy in several countries is evident, has primarily been undertaken as a strategy to gain political capital. This is so, since the practice of religious and cultural traditions is routinely normal in Trinidad without any threat to national cohesion or to any single religious, ethnic or cultural community. Multiculturalism as it is now being emphasised particularly when the country's politics has been gradually moving beyond race and class is not tangibly valuable for the society. It will negate the continual development of the kind of cosmopolitan cultural identity we should be working towards and foster a situation which would promote much more pronounced singular cultural group identities by placing each group into culturally or religiously determined ethnic categories. The paper thus suggests that in the pursuit of nation building, it is much better to acknowledge cultural diversity as a valuable resource and try to establish a framework for building a national cultural identity inclusive of and around those differences outside of an official multicultural policy. If multiculturalism is brought into the dialogue it should be informally introduced as an acknowledgement of the cultural expressions and contributions of groups all working to build a national community.

Key words – Cultural Diversity, Ethnicity, Multiculturalism, National Identity**,** Political Process,

Introduction

The all embracing concept of multiculturalism is perhaps best understood as a perspective on the human condition primarily addressing concerns about immigrant minorities in the developed countries. When multiculturalism was adopted as an official policy by countries such as Canada and Australia, countries which the government of Trinidad says it has modelled its policy after, it was essentially a normative response to a situation engendered by the fact that in those societies there was a need to officially recognise the growing numbers of non-English speaking immigrants and the resulting racial, ethnic or cultural diversity that developed. Trinidad's official proclamation of its multicultural policy was done as a spontaneous response to a call for its adoption by the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha, a Hindu based organisation, at an Indian Arrival Day dinner. The Prime Minister Persad-Bissessar, announced that the Ministry responsible for culture would be thereafter referred to as the Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism "to give

greater voice to the diverse cultural expressions of our common desires for individual and national identity and to promote a realignment of policies including resource allocation, to allow for a more equitable recognition and fulfilment of the needs of the diverse proponents of our culture. This is the Government's commitment to ensure that every creed and race finds an equal place in this land of ours" (Persad-Bissessar 2010:1). This announcement marked the implementation of an official multicultural policy of Trinidad and Tobago.

Theoretical arguments of multiculturalism adopt either a positive evaluation of the notion (Miller and Walzer 1995, Taylor 1994, Parekh 2000, Kymlicka 2008) or a critique of the theories based on the existing values of a liberal society which are threatened by multiculturalism (Barry 2001, Levy 2000). The model that is used to promote multiculturalism according to Inglis (1996:14) "...envisages that individuals and groups should be fully incorporated into the society without either losing their distinctiveness or being denied full participation." The adoption of multiculturalism must therefore be seen as a policy which is driven by a desire to deal with the issue of how to integrate immigrant ethnic minorities in the society or perhaps more precisely as a distinct reaction to eliminate any threat to the political and cultural climate of the society with the presence of a growing number of ethnic minority groups. Multiculturalism therefore, should not be adopted by countries in which there are ethnic or cultural communities which have settled there for over one hundred years and have developed an open, relaxed and easy going style of life with the singular problem being fierce competition for political power every five years. In countries which adopted an official policy of multiculturalism, it was done against the background of the growing racial, ethnic and cultural divide and the pre-occupation with identity and difference. It was therefore primarily undertaken to remove barriers facing immigrant minorities to participation in social and political life.

When Canada, for example, adopted its official policy of multiculturalism in 1971, the initial focus was to remove the threat posed by the desire of the French speaking group in Quebec to secede from the federal union and to preserve the cultural identity of the growing immigrant groups as part of the country's national identity; eventually, there was a gradual shift to concerns about equality, social participation and national unity (Dorais, Foster and Stockley 1994:375). Similarly in Australia, the policy of multiculturalism evolved in a very specific manner, shifting in focus from highlighting and protecting cultural identity of immigrant minority groups to addressing issues of inequality, community relations and racism faced by these immigrant minorities (Castles 1992, Dorais, Foster and Stockley 1994). Multiculturalism in Australia was placed on a 'National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia,' an agenda which, given the country's growing ethnic minority groups, sought to promote all Australian's right to cultural identity, the right to social justice and the utilisation of the skills and talents of all Australians to be part of the economic development of the country (Inglis 1996).

What was very noticeable in both Canada and Australia was the presence of a number of minority ethnic groups from a non-English speaking background. In 1991 twenty (20) years after Canada officially adopted its multicultural policy given the distinct ethnic composition of the immigrant population and the rationale for an official multicultural policy; one could justifiably lend some support to the government's decision (See Table 1). This situation was a major factor driving the adoption of multiculturalism as the model for managing cultural diversity and it clearly highlights why the model was used to design the official response to cultivate some

common sense of belonging to a new society with language and institutional differences. What was also important was that within the established framework to support the policy of multiculturalism, programmes had to be developed to facilitate and accommodate language difference in schools.

Table 1   *Canada's Population by ethnic Origin: 1991 Census*

Ethnic Group	Number	Percent
Multiple Origin	7,794,250	28.87
Single Origin	19,199,790	71.13
French	6,146,600	22.77
German	911,560	3.38
Scottish	893,124	3.31
Italian	750,055	2.78
Irish	725,660	2.69
Chinese	586,645	2.17
Ukranian	406,645	1.51
N. American Indian	365,375	1.35
Dutch	358,180	1.33
South Asian	324,840	1.20
Polish	272,810	1.01
Jewish	245,840	0.91
Scandinavian	174,370	0.65
Metis	75,150	0.28
Inuit	30,085	0.11

Source: Statistics Canada: http://www.unesco.org/most/pp4.htm

Multiculturalism put in its proper context therefore, highlights "...an awareness of the need for policies which promote ethnic and cultural minority groups participation in the society while maintaining the unity of the country" (Inglis 1996:4). Inglis (1996) contends that all of civil society must of necessity be fully engaged in the multiculturalism debate before it is adopted. This debate can be undertaken on three fronts, each based on a particular distinctive 'referent' of multiculturalism; either the demographic-descriptive multicultural usage which identifies ethnically or diverse segments of the society and then discusses solutions; the programmatic-political usage where the concept refers to programmes and policy initiatives designed to respond to and manage the diversity after debate and discussion or the ideological normative stage where the concept will be used as a slogan and model for political action or in some cases simply to gain political capital.

Any discussion on the official policy of multiculturalism in Trinidad has to be undertaken within the framework of ideological normative usage where the concept has essentially been used to

gain political capital. In Trinidad there was absolutely no honest and robust debate, which, given the country's social and political history and the state of social and political relations, was mandatory. It is the argument of this paper that the multiculturalism policy in Trinidad was adopted in response to repeated calls from a single religious community through the National Council of Indian Culture. When it was announced as the government's official policy at an Indian Arrival Day function it was done prior to any form of national discussion. In this context, the paper suggests that without the necessary debate involving all of civil society, [i] prior to the announcement, multiculturalism as it has been adopted is simply a slogan and cannot be described as a model for political action but one espoused as a tool for political capital without the sentiments of other cultural communities being considered.

Early Multicultural Trinidad

One can perhaps rightly argue that given the plurality of Trinidad the label of multiculturalism could easily be applied to refer to the country's diverse culture. This plural character and resulting 'multicultural identity' of Trinidad draws upon the fact that the country experienced imperial conquest, decades of slavery, indentureship and colonial rule which brought a mix of people to the region from Europe, Africa and Asia to settle in areas already occupied by the indigenous Amerindians. After the end of slavery, the society was divided by race, ethnicity, skin colour, class, culture and religion (Yelvington 1993). It was during the period of colonial rule however, by which time the Amerindian population was already decimated, the rigid social relations that came to characterise the post independence period and which continue up to today had its genesis. The social structure during the colonial order was characterised by a dominant white upper class below which stood the coloured middle class and at the bottom the ex- slaves and the Indian and Chinese indentured labourers (Ryan 1972). The Africans and the East Indians formed the largest majority of the population but according to Ryan (1972), the relations between the freed Africans and the Indians were never cordial. Conflict developed as the Africans considered the Indians to be a threat to their newly won freedom while the Indians feared contact with the Africans would be polluting and in this context the Indians were determined to preserve the purity of their race (Ryan 1972).

These ideas clearly influenced the political process in the pre independence period. What this suggests is that there was very little hope of arriving at a consensus on the practice of politics and on the structure and functions of governmental institutions. Once the period of indentureship came to an end in 1917 the East Indians, who Sudama (2006) noted were initially regarded as transients, were no longer looking to return to India. They were forced to come to terms with the reality of having to settle in a society in which Euro-Centric African cultural practices were firmly taking root and which they clearly did not feel a part of. They thus openly resisted full representative electoral politics at a time when there was a growing demand for representative government throughout the British West Indies, opting instead for a much more divisive communal representative system fearing domination by the African masses choosing to remain outside the emerging national community.

The position of the East Indian National Congress at the time was that the Indian community should be considered as a single political unit and should be given separate representation as a race (Ryan 1972:31). Even though some of the more radical East Indians speaking through the

Young Indian Party sought to promote class identity rather than racial identity the general feeling among the majority of the East Indians was that their welfare was not in any way linked to the Africans struggle for democratic constitutional reform (Ryan 1972:32) and therefore, it was in their interest to promote sectional politics on the basis of ethnicity to ensure that the community would get a piece of the national pie (Munasinghe, 2001:22). This separatism was further reinforced with the claim by the East Indian community that they "had been denied the benefits of education and could not maximise the possibilities of the democratic politic method" (Ryan 1972:31). This marked the beginning of the dissatisfaction and alienation that was expressed among the East Indian community until 1995 when for the first time the country had an East Indian Prime Minister.

The Challenge of Independence

When Trinidad became independent in 1962, the society was one within which there was a great degree of ignorance by the Africans about the social character of the East Indians and similarly ignorance by the East Indians about the Africans, the two dominant groups that coloured the demographic landscape. It is this kind of ignorance, promoted by the unwillingness of individuals to tolerate cultural practices different from their own, when it is in its infancy and not when the society is on its way to full maturity, that the architectural design of multiculturalism seeks to address through an official political policy. What is noticeable however, was that even then, Trinidad did not have the kind of population characteristics of Canada or Australia at the time when those countries introduced an official policy of multiculturalism. In 1960 in Trinidad for example, the country's population distribution showed 43.5 percent Africans, 36.5 percent East Indians about 2 percent European and 1 percent Chinese and a mixed population of about 17 percent (Ryan 1972:3).

This ignorance at the time of independence about social and cultural character contributed to the development of racial stereotypes and led to the promotion of explanations of behaviour and images of the two main ethnic groups, the Africans and the East Indians, by each other, which heightened tensions and threatened to destabilise the social arrangements for years. In addition there developed a high degree of racial exclusivity in racial concentration of the population in communities and in broader geographical areas with very little intermingling among the people (Hintzen 1989). Against this background of social divide, Williams in his capacity as Prime Minister just prior to independence attempted to set in motion efforts to engender a national identity and official policy on cultural diversity. His clearly stated position on citizens' patriotism and loyalty to Trinidad and Tobago given our diversity was that:

> There can be no Mother India...there can be no Mother Africa...there can be no Mother England...there can be no Mother China...no mother Syria or no Mother Lebanon. A nation, like an individual, can have only one mother. The only mother we recognise is Mother Trinidad and Tobago and a mother cannot discriminate between her children; all must be equal in her eyes (Williams 1962:281).

This declaration obviously promoted a well articulated vision for a non-racial nationalistic ideal for the country. His assertion highlighted the need to promote a non-racial ethos in an emergent nation with different cultures and ethnic groups all hoping to find their way in the social maze

and could have been used to build a formal framework for national consensus on the way forward. Part of the problem however, was that Williams was of the view that the Indian population should be completely integrated into the national community and that this integration could only be achieved through the efforts of his party the Peoples National Movement (PNM). This of course could not be easily achieved as Williams perceived since by 1962, "...the population of East Indians in Trinidad essentially came to form a mutually agreed upon life, system of social relationship and set of cultural institutions" (Vertovec 1992:92) outside of any national matrix and the norms of the developing Trinidad society with a nationalistic outlook. This situation together with Williams' blinkered view on building national consensus strengthened the process of the East Indians alienating themselves from the Trinidadian community and in the wake of such circumstances, what developed was a Trinidad society within which there was a pre-occupation with cultural identity by both Blacks and Indians and a steepening of ethnic rivalries.

Yelvington (1993) argues that by 1956 when elections took place, Trinidad was a shattered society and thus independence in 1962 meant very little to the East Indian community. The state was so deeply divided that even if the Democratic Labour Party (DLP) the Hindu based party had won the election in 1961, it would have had the same problems that the PNM faced, problems created by the intractable views of both the Africans and the East Indians about each other (Yelvington 1993). The 1961 election and the struggle over the 1962 independence constitution highlighted the deep racial divide that existed in the country. According to Ryan, (1996) prior to the 1961 election, the country was seemingly poised on the brink of war which prompted the declaration of a state of emergency as a precautionary measure in several areas but in the final analysis the contending racial rivals hesitated at the brink. In a similar manner, the fight between the PNM and the DLP over the 1962 independence constitution served notice that already heightened racial tensions could become explosive. In the end better judgment prevailed and consensus was achieved on the constitutional arrangements.

Following independence, the PNM continued to occupy the seat of power while the DLP sat in the opposition benches in an environment characterised by a fragile co-existence between the two contending ethnic groups, the PNM Africans and the DLP East Indians. In 1970 however, even though there were some unsettling disturbances in the form of the 'Black Power Revolution,' there was some indication of the possibility of change. The PNM was under attack by young black radical elements who bitterly complained about the existing racial and class discrimination in the society and demanded 'social justice and equality' under the umbrella of the 'Black Power Movement.' There was an appeal for African East-Indian solidarity to challenge the existing 'oligarchic racial and class structure' but this was rejected by the East Indian community on the grounds that it could not identify with the struggle of the Black Power Movement (Gosine 1986).

Participation level of East Indians was therefore expectedly non-existent because Black Power, as the East-Indians saw it was much more part of a worldwide struggle for African people to return to their cultural roots, to reject both white domination and that of the black political elite, and to seize political power through revolutionary struggle (Gosine, 1986). Gosine (1986) contends that the East Indians non-involvement in the Black Power Movement may have prevented Williams' fall from political office and in recognition of this and as a good will

gesture to the community he made a number of social, cultural and economic concessions to the East Indian community (Gosine, 1986: 237). Even though this did not sever the passion and the yearning for closer ties to 'Mother India,' to a large extent it contributed to a higher level of participation by East Indian in the developing nation-state of Trinidad and Tobago. To quote Gosine:

> Many East Indians indicated that in such areas as education, employment, culture and economy, they are now being given a more equitable share. Their children are now rewarded with more governmental scholarships than ever in the past and employment avenues are not blocked as they once were. East Indians also pointed out that their most significant strides since the demise of the Movement have taken place within the cultural arena...their current identification with India is now stronger than it ever was; celebrations of religious and cultural festivals are now carried out on a more massive scale than ever before...East Indian programmes such as "Mastana Bahar" and "The Indian Cultural Hour" have emerged promoting folklore, music and culture. ...Moreover, such religious holidays as Divali and Holi or Phagwa are now celebrated on a scale unheard of before (Gosine, 1986: 237)

On the face of it, taking into account the strained racial relations in the society and the demands of the East Indians these new concessions which seemed to be aimed at promoting greater inclusion of the group into the national community inclusive of their cultural traditions and 'Mother India' sentiments were welcomed. Civil unrest and bloodshed which could have taken place if the East Indians had joined forces with the Africans had been avoided and it was the East Indians who as a community that played a major role in securing a peaceful Trinidad and Tobago. Implementing a formal race relations policy would have provided a platform for initially securing a modicum of peaceful co-existence and for dealing with the cultural dynamics of a confused ignorant populace. Unfortunately, Williams did not implement any official multicultural policy but he recognised the need to be much more accommodating towards the East Indians.

While the concessions made by Williams were gratefully accepted this did not mean that the East Indians were willing to support Williams and the PNM and thus they continued to challenge the stronghold the PNM had over the political decision making process. They were able to use whatever gains they made to further solidify their position as a cohesive group within the national community cutting across religious differences to continue the struggle to be much more involved in the political decision making process (Gosine, 1986). After the Black Power Revolution therefore, the dream of the East Indian community was now being translated into inclusion into the Trinidad cultural identity but essentially on their terms. On the other hand, while Williams remained in control cracks appeared within the PNM, a once seemingly impregnable well organised political party. In addition a "yawning credibility gap" developed between the black elite and the black masses on whose behalf Williams was supposed to be governing (Ryan 1972:367) which created further fissures within the African community quite unlike what was happening within the strong cohesive East Indian community.

In the context of the slow social and political transformation taking place, it was evident that the country was beginning to accept and celebrate its cultural diversity. The communication between

the Africans and East Indians improved and it was Williams and the PNM that became the target of attack from both Africans and East Indians. In 1976, when the United Labour Front (ULF) emerged as the party to challenge to the PNM, even though there were several birth pangs associated with the party, there was a lessening of racial tension celebrated by a much more inclusive concept of 'class consciousness'. According to Basdeo Panday who had emerged as a major voice for the East Indian workers, "there has been a long stretch and racial feelings have subsided. During this time class consciousness had begun to develop...racial antagonism has fallen to an all time low and it will take a tremendous effort to drive it up to a peak in 1976" (quoted in Ryan 1996:70-71).

What is of importance here is the fact that the East Indians were becoming more and more a part of the national community with the legitimate right to continue in the practice of their cultural traditions. They were never legally excluded from the Trinidad identity but for a very long time chose to operate within a communal framework where they felt much more secure. With societal maturity however, and in the face of all the growing economic pains of the nation, their gradual inclusion was quite noticeable. The East Indians could no longer be even considered as 'a hostile and recalcitrant minority'[ii] even if they opted for a tossed salad analogy of the country's culture over that of a callaloo (Munasinghe 2001). The ideals that animated their earlier fixed disposition on nationalism as an African sponsored domination of them in the society were gradually being eroded and as they became emboldened some of their leaders verbally expressed a willingness to consider the integrationist ideal.

A New Beginning

In 1986, the PNM was out of power for the first time since winning the election in 1956. Outside of the national economic issues that raised questions about the leadership's ability to manage the economy, the party was weakened for two reasons. Firstly the founding leader Eric Williams was dead and secondly, the transition of leadership to George Chambers bypassing two East Indian deputy leaders suggested that the African element was not yet ready to accept an East Indian Prime Minister and this only served to further alienate the relatively small group of East Indian members within the party. The party that replaced the PNM, the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) was in essence a true rainbow coalition and its success at the polls symbolised a complete rejection of the PNM, and finally lurking on the horizon, some measure of acceptance of the ideal of assimilation by all groups in the society. In similar fashion to the new People's Partnership (PP) government led by Bissessar, the NAR party "...promised a new era in race and ethnic relations because it ushered in a government that was in fact a coalition of the African and Indian segments...the rhetoric proclaimed it as a dream of Afro-Indian solidarity come true" (La Guerre 2001:221). It was an example which undoubtedly did not reflect the need for any official policy on multiculturalism.

The problem however, was that the Afro-Indian solidarity did not come out of the dream phase. The NAR split down the middle along racial lines in record time exposing the fractured skeletal frame on which the party coalesced. Panday, the leader of the East Indian community for over ten (10) years bitterly complained about continued dominance by African elements with their bureaucratic monopoly, which given the size of the East Indian community was way out of proportion (La Guerre 2001). What this revealed was that race relations remained on edge in

spite of the projection of 'one love' inclusive of the African and Indian elements in the NAR. Panday began to position himself and his new political organisation CLUB 88 to launch a much more determined challenge on what he perceived to be complete African domination of the political process. In the face of all this one has to recognise the difficulty that was involved in building trust in a culturally diverse society. Yet one of the striking features of the whole arrangement was the initial commitment to develop and legitimise a true Trinidad identity without threatening existing cultural traditions.

Coming out of the Shadows

Even though the PNM was returned to office in 1991 primarily as a direct result of the split in the NAR, by 1995 the society had matured enough to have a transition in leadership which for the first time saw an East Indian Prime Minister being appointed in Trinidad. Ryan (1996) points to several factors that may have been responsible for the elevation of Panday to Prime Minister outside of the support from Robinson [iii] but what was perhaps was most telling was the improved state of race relations during the period 1991 to 1995. The Manning administration (1991-1995) officially acknowledged that race relations needed to be addressed and established a Centre for Ethnic Studies at the University of the West Indies, St Augustine to inquire into race related problems and make recommendations (La Guerre 2001:221). When Panday took office in 1995, the multiculturalist model adopted in countries such as Canada and Australia built around the growing immigrant ethnic minority groups was not applicable given the fact that the East Indians were able to retain their cultural identity without being denied in any way full participation in the social, political and economic affairs of the country. There was no expressed desire in the form of any official policy to address concerns about discrimination in spite of the fact that previously several concerns had been raised by East Indians particularly the Hindu community, about discrimination in relation to representation in the public service (Ryan 1996).

One can therefore argue that the slow transformation process of our multi-ethnic, multi cultural, multi-religious society which began in earnest after the 'Black Power Revolution' without any unsettling violence and conflict had reached a position in 1995 from which issues related to race relations could be dealt with in a much more open and comprehensive manner. With the change in government from a predominantly African based PNM to a predominantly East Indian based UNC there was the perception of perceived racial bias in how state resources were being distributed by the UNC among some members within the African community but whatever antagonisms were borne out of that the country overcame them and moved on. The problem of alienation and marginalisation articulated by the Prime Minister in relation to how he perceived the treatment of the East Indians by the former government was being addressed with the establishment of an Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) to bring the balance that was being demanded by all constituents.

In 2000 the UNC won the scheduled election and once again took office which to a large extent contradicted any argument that Trinidad with its cultural diversity and all its political and socially disquieting issues was not a mature democratic state. The problems that developed the following year within the government that forced the Prime Minister to call an election reflects a much more mature society operating within the framework of the country's republican constitution. Panday's UNC and the opposition PNM each won 18 seats after the general

election, posing a seemingly constitutional crisis. The question was which party should form the government. Power sharing in the form of a government of national unity was rejected by the PNM leader Patrick Manning. There was an agreement however, that under the Constitution President Robinson was authorized to appoint a new Prime Minister. President Robinson chose Manning to be the next Prime Minister and two days later the UNC pulled out of the political pact that had resolved the elections tie refusing to accept the President's decision. In many societies this would have led to very violent upheavals but the fact that the country was able to manage the crisis, within the framework of the constitution, in the face of all legal wrangling and pointed disagreements about the decision, overshadowed any view that Trinidad lacked the level of tolerance and discipline to resolve conflict that the multiculturalism model was designed to resolve.

The New Politics of the Multiculturalism

During the period 2002 and 2010 there was some measure of political tension primarily from the fallout due to Robinson's decision to appoint Manning as Prime Minister in 2001. To some extent this spilled over into the social and cultural relations and even though the country continued to maintain some measure of tolerance and willingness to accept the richness of its cultural diversity there were calls for the implementation of a formal multicultural policy through the voice of the Maha Saba. This was understandable given the growing apprehension about the PNM's position on promoting a much more nationalistic oriented culture. The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs which was established in 1991[iv] was at the time involved in developing the Vision 2020 Policy National Strategic Plan [v] of the government in relation to culture through it representation on the Sub-Committees, for Community Development and Culture. The importance of culture in the development process was thus placed within the framework of the overall National Strategic Plan. However, the Vision 2020 National Strategic Plan was challenged at a forum held by the National Council for Indian Culture as a "...disruptive unofficial policy of ethno-nationalism," promoted in a "…politically motivated Vision 2020 economic model," which did not have any place in the society (Kangal 2004:2).

The Vision 2020 Policy National Strategic Plan nevertheless, was quite clear in its recognition of the cultural diversity and creativity of all the people which it argued should be "…valued and nurtured". [vi] It went on to state that:

> The importance of culture to our ambitions cannot be overstated. We see culture as all-embracing, impacting each and every developmental effort… each of us must be prepared to stand by Trinidad and Tobago, respecting the collective effort to build a better nation through many changes, large and small. Our pursuit of development will not be at the expense of our uniqueness and cultural heritage. We are a people rich in diversity, and we have exported aspects of our culture around the world. Our creative minds have lit up the world stage at Olympic ceremonies and our musical artistes travel the globe entertaining the world. Stories of our past cultural achievements must have a place in our present, and anchor the ambitions of our future. Cultural awareness must be a part of the school experience for the young, and business and the society at large must embrace the uniqueness of our heritage. We must be proud of our history, of who

we are, even as we seek to stand alongside the developed nations of the world. It
is our uniqueness that will shape our competitiveness.

Such views recognise and respect the rich cultural diversity and perhaps more importantly
openly acknowledges the validity of the expressions and contributions of all cultural groups. The
problem however, was that claims of racial discrimination which have always been part of the
political discourse based on the perceptions of some group and community leaders that resources
are not fairly allocated in the society particularly between the two main contending groups the
Africans and the East Indians would not go away. The Hindu community, for example, has
always held the view that an African based PNM led government would always discriminate
against East Indians in the society, and similarly, some members of the black community hold
the view that any East Indian led government will engage in similar practices.

An Equal Opportunity Commission was established in 2000 to address this unease in the society
with the mandate to "...prohibit certain kinds of discrimination, to promote equality of
opportunity between all persons of different status" (Equal Opportunity Act, 2000). This effort to
address issues related to discrimination practices clearly did not fully meet the demands of the
National Council of Indian Culture which continued to lay claims of unfairness and inequity
against the PNM led African based party which held the reins of government from 2002 to 2010
about the distribution of state resources. Sudama makes the point that "the African presence and
cultural practices took root as firmly indigenous despite the migration and settlement of peoples
from many lands and cultures…" (Sudama 2006:1) and perhaps it was this thinking that
influenced the non-acceptance of anything less than a formal multicultural policy by the National
Council of Indian Culture.

It was not surprising therefore that the impetus for the eventual implementation of the very
political policy on multiculturalism gained momentum at the seminar organised by the National
Council of Indian Culture in October 2004 specifically to promote the idea of an official state
multicultural policy. Kangal in presenting his discussion paper presented a case for the eventual
adoption of an official policy on multiculturalism by Trinidad suggesting that it was necessary,
"…to manage our ethno-cultural diversity and /or our prevailing racial cultural ethos" (Kangal
2004:2). He was of the view that a very unambiguous state multicultural policy should find its
way into the constitution of the country. In his view the cultural policy that the Vision 2020
National Strategic Plan emphasised was not the best for a multi ethnic society as Trinidad and
Tobago and suggested that what was needed was the implementation of an official policy to
shape the future of 'cosmopolitan Trinbago' [vii] within a new constitution on the grounds of
normative conventional wisdom and the 'cross cultural navigation ethic' in the Koran (Kangal
2004). He also provided support for his argument by pointing out that "…progressive societies
have adhered to the tenets of multiculturalism.... which was motivated by a sense of social justice
based on moral, ethical and social responsibilities to improve the conditions of racio-ethnic and
gender minorities" (Kangal 2004:11).

While nothing was wrong in making such a forceful argument for the adoption of an official
political policy on multiculturalism outside of the established cultural framework and the
proposed Vision 2020 Plan, what was missing from his argument was a perspective on the

historical analysis of the social relations in Trinidad. Such an analysis should frame any discourse and would be necessary to highlight the difficulty in managing and exploiting the rich ethno-cultural diversity in Trinidad. Arguably, in 2004, Trinidad had reached a point in its historical journey in regard to social relations and political stability which the adoption of an official multiculturalism policy could erase. The political and social relations in Trinidad did not fit within the framework that was used as a design to establish multiculturalism in Canada, Australia or Sweden or any other country that promoted the idea of multiculturalism which was primarily to gain a comparative advantage in the integration of a growing immigrant population and in the case of Canada the threat posed to the country by Quebec's desire to secede.

This normative argument came at a time when multiculturalism as an official policy was being discussed as a failure and being questioned about its political correctness in relation to the variety of ills that the policy was thought to have caused (Barry 2001 and Levy 2000). Critics argued that multiculturalism as an official political policy was based on a "...naive and indeed pernicious ideology which assumed that it was somehow natural that society should be divided into separate and disconnected ethnic groups, each with its own tribal spaces, political values and cultural traditions" (Kymlicka 2008a:5) while at the same time expecting barriers to participation in national life to be effectively removed. Levy (2000) argues that diversity could be taken as an inevitable fact of life but not a goal to be furthered by means of state policy. He further noted that difference-conscious policies and not an emphasis on multiculturalism was the best way to deal with a culturally and ethnically diverse reality and that "a programme of recognising difference as a matter of right, rather than dealing with it pragmatically would not only contradict the public-order-oriented way in which states accommodated such claims but it would also be theoretically inconsistent as it is premised on the normative assumption that one's pre existing culture includes the resources for judging others in the world" (Levy 2000:32).

Evidently therefore, there had to be some other yet very significant enough reason for the continued call for 'state multiculturalism' to be established as an official policy in Trinidad at that time, yet no convincing evidence or argument could be found outside of the old view that the East Indian population felt separated and apart from dominant 'creole culture'. All that was presented were old arguments related to the adoption of multiculturalism in societies in which the dominant narrative about multiculturalism was focused on its failure and the social consequences of that failure with particular questions being raised about the political correctness of the policy. In this context, one could perhaps agree with Joppke (2004:243) that "multiculturalism recognition is perhaps an adequate demand for a domestic group that has been historically wronged like indigenous groups or the descendants of African slaves in European settler societies...or for satisfaction of the cultural needs of the non-European, non English speaking migrant population that moved to Europe and North America for all kinds of reasons".

Whatever we accept should be based on the view that what is desired is unity in diversity. How a country manages its ethnic and cultural diversity presents the major challenge. In the case of Trinidad, the set back to achieving that arrangement could be found in the early resistance of the East Indians to constitutional change which sought to introduce representative government and their support for communal representation. This of course was thrown out as impractical and improbable, the argument being that:

Communal representation, apart from the objection that this arrangement would be opposed by the chief advocates of constitutional change, there would be great difficulty in deciding what the constituencies were to be and moreover it would accentuate and perpetuate the differences which in order to produce a homogenous community, it should be the object of statesmanship to remove. The East Indians are an important element in the community and it would be a great misfortune if they were encouraged to stand aside from the main current of political life instead of sharing in it and assisting to guide its course. Finally if a concession of this kid were granted to the East Indians, there would be no logical reason for withholding it from persons of French, Spanish or Chinese descent, a situation which would become impossible." (Wood Commission Report, quoted in Williams, 1962:220)

This was in essence a rejection by the East Indian community of any nationalist ideas that dominated among the African community throughout the British West Indies in their fight for representative government. It was, as Ryan (1996) suggests, an unwillingness to identify with symbols such as self-determination and socialism and delaying as long as possible the transfer of power to native elements so as to ensure that ethnic interests would be safeguarded and promoted. This of course did not stop the explosion of nationalist feeling among the African element and the continued struggle for adult suffrage. What it did was to simply highlight the social and political divide in the country in the face of the impending inevitable implementation of full representative and responsible government in the not too distant future. When this was eventually granted the PNM emerged as the political party in control of the state. Williams, the party leader, was of the view that Trinidad needed a genuine multi-racial party to lay the foundation for the kind of cohesive force that a segmented society such as that in Trinidad needed to go forward. Williams however, was soon forced to recognise that given the social and political environment of the day, one which was characterised by fear and suspicion brought on by the early social relations between the Africans and the East Indians, he would be only speaking on behalf of the African element and perhaps, the very few East Indians who joined his party.

In 1956 there was certainly no dominant culture. There was however, cultural diversity emphasised by the multi-ethnic condition of the country. What was evident nevertheless, was that as the British authorities withdrew, one ethnic segment, the blacks, retained the legal authority to control the state and the decision making process and it was this situation that posed a major problem. The issues surrounding this could have only been resolved by engaging in dialogue and discourse. This did not happen primarily because the terms and conditions for such an engagement could not be agreed upon. Some would argue that in Trinidad at that time, there was a creeping 'hegemonic unitary creole culture' which was manifested in carnival, steel-pan and calypso and which would eventually absorb all other cultural elements and eradicate all other cultural communities. This certainly was not the case because since the 1970's the culture of the East Indians began to take root in the society and today the cultural festivities have become a major part of the national cultural landscape. There continue to be some intractable problems given the general hostility and mistrust that traditionally existed but they are not beyond resolution in an open forum highlighting both national and communal concerns.

The conflation of the people's lived experience as the society evolved from the tenuous state of its cultural and religious tolerance from the period just after the Black Power Revolution in 1970 to what it was in 2010 questions the implementation of an official political policy of multiculturalism which could be highly invidious. The implementation of a failed multicultural model to address perceived rather than real problems does not logically follow when one considers the social and political changes since 1986. Having newcomers in the society was the basis for implementing an official political policy of multiculturalism in Canada, Australia and several European countries but Trinidad certainly does not have any newcomers in its borders, not even new to the political process; those who promote the idea of multiculturalism have ancestral roots over one hundred (100) years old. While it is important for individuals to know and appreciate their roots to avoid becoming deracinated, one would have thought that with our sense of national identity contained within our cultural diversity and political processes that our political leaders would forge ahead in continuing to build bridges rather than going back to officially compartmentalise the population into cultural and ethnic categories once again. The implementation of the official policy on multiculturalism outside of the view that we simply need it to distribute state resources equally is therefore particularly questionable, more so given the fact that what dominates the narrative on multiculturalism is the retreat from multiculturalism in several countries which are still struggling with ethnic and racial diversity (Kymlicka 2008a).

Arguably, Canada has had some measure of success with its multicultural policy and rigorously continues to defend its implementation, (Kymlicka 2008a), yet questions are raised about whether or not the diversity policies are enough to treat with the distinct historical legacies and current needs of Canada's diverse groups. Speaking about his country's adoption of multiculturalism as an official policy, the British Prime Minister David Cameron referred to it as a failure and being responsible for fostering extremism. He argued that "under the doctrine of multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream. We have failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong" (quoted in Kern 2011:1). In his examination of the retreat from official multiculturalism policies by states such as Australia, Netherlands and Britain which were prominently committed to the policies, Joppke (2004) identifies several causes for the decisions to pull back. These include; the lack of public support for official multiculturalism policies without the necessary healthy debate, the inherent shortcomings and failures especially with respect to socio-economic marginalisation and the new assertiveness of the liberal state in imposing at least minimum liberal values on its dissenters (Joppke 2004:244). If over the years the PNM, the UNC and the NAR all failed to provide a vision of society to which all citizens feel they want to belong this could be best dealt with through discourse and dialogue rather than instituting an official state multicultural policy without the any input from the wider society.

There are several questions in relation to the adoption of an official multicultural policy in Trinidad and Tobago; what essentially is the agenda for a multicultural Trinidad and Tobago? is there public support garnered through debate and discussion for the policy or is it designed to please one or perhaps two segments within the society? how can the policy address socio-economic marginalisation outside of the already existing Equal Opportunities Act? would it be acceptable if specific communities demand that they be allowed to engage in practices based on values which may be outside mainstream societal values? What it seems is that the official multicultural policy of Trinidad and Tobago is designed to correct imbalances in the distribution

of state resources and to address issues related to cultural events in the country. This means that it was never well thought out prior to its implementation. Prime Minister Bissessar in responding to questions, based her decision to implement an official policy on multiculturalism primarily to satisfy the call from the Maha Saba for a multicultural ministry and to give Indian culture its "now enjoyed special status in the Trinidad government" (quoted in Kaufman 2010:3). The Prime Minister claimed that the previous PNM regime did not pay much attention to the Hindu population and therefore she would like to create a 'new national mind' based on values of respect and understanding with Trinidad shining as the best example of unity in diversity. [viii] In support, Ramlogan argued that "people think of Trinidad as a predominantly African country. We want to rectify this mis-perception. The majority is of East Indian descent. Previously there was discrimination manifest in subtle ways, one of which was the allocation of state funding" (quoted in Kaufman 2010:3).

If these are the reasons for adopting the policy of multiculturalism clearly the government started off with the wrong premise about the rationale for a multicultural policy. More importantly, it has been adopted when the consensus on multiculturalism in most countries is that it is time to move beyond multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is not about representing and pursuing the interests of a particular community outside of an honest and robust debate about where the country is at the moment in its ethnic and cultural relations, why the country is there at this present juncture and more importantly how to address the demands of all the groups in the society as the county pursues the ideal of what it is to be a true citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. What if a Muslim community wants constitutional support for men to have several wives? What the government has done is tiptoed around the very important historical perspectives on the sensitive issues of race, religion and culture by placing blame for dissatisfaction and alienation felt by the Hindu community squarely on the shoulders of the PNM when the history of race relations over the last fifty (50) years clearly suggests many other factors must be considered in any candid deliberation such as the distorted perceptions held by groups about one another at the time of independence which continue to persist outside of any national discourse on it.

The irony of adopting an official state multicultural policy as part of the political process in 2010 is that it undermines much of the gains the society has made and takes the country back to the point where emphasis on ethnic and cultural identity distinctly compartmentalises the groups. The state multicultural policy adopted by the government is primarily founded on equity in the allocation of financial resources according to cultural and religious groupings and this is not the basis for any multicultural policy. A multicultural policy should not be adopted to correct a wrong perception that Trinidad has more Africans than East Indians but to position immigrant ethnic minorities in mainstream of the society. If the government was so concerned with ensuring equity in the allocation of state resources why then was the policy not shaped through a thorough process of discussions and negotiations involving all concerned? There was a one day symposium "Towards a Multicultural Policy" organised by the Ministry of Multiculturalism which sought to address concerns after the decision was taken. Such action after the fact cannot establish the necessary mandate between the state on whose behalf the government exercises authority and civil society whom it represents.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is intended that this paper should be firstly seen as an attempt to assess the implementation of an official multicultural policy in Trinidad and Tobago in the context of the historical evolution of race relations in the country, and secondly, in the absence any robust national debate or discussion about the policy as an attempt to explain what led to the actual implementation of the policy. While we understand that transforming multi-ethnic, multicultural societies into cohesive national entities with or without open conflict in a manner beneficial to all will always provide a major challenge, it is most important for all elements in civil society to be involved in the transformation process. This paper argues that the Bissessar government, rather than acknowledge the genesis of the difficulties faced in the past and the true reasons for them and then accept the challenge building a harmonious nation with all its cultural richness through vigorous dialogue with all of civil society has chosen to adopt a policy at the behest of a singular community which will only promote much more fierce competitive pursuit of state resources and raise further questions about equity. The policy evidently overlooked the uniqueness of the country's historical context and more specifically, why after fifty (50) years some people still feels marginalised in the society. Multiculturalism was designed as a model to give all immigrant people the right to their ethnic and cultural identity without transcending the state's sovereignty and no community under Trinidad's Republican constitution has been denied that right. If that exists, there are other reasons for the condition. More compelling is the fact that Trinidad does not qualify in regard to immigrant minority population that multiculturalism seeks to address.

Multiculturalism in Trinidad now creates zones of contest among contending communities and long-winded debates about the allocation of state resources under the banner of political correctness. More importantly, it negates all the hard work undertaken since the 1970s to build a nationalistic ideal of citizenship which tries at best to emphasise the society's commonalities and rich diverse culture rather than highlight the differences by putting people into specified ethnic categories in order to divide state resources. Unfortunately in Trinidad what multiculturalism will continue to do is reinforce the racial conformation of politics and cause more problems than provide solutions to race relations. It is important for the people to respect and appreciate the country's diversity and differences but also to understand how history has shaped present social relations. Multiculturalism used as part of the political process in Trinidad ignores the fact that the country's cultural diversity has been an ongoing lived experience. Adopting an official multiculturalism policy, which is the product of a demand from the Hindu community places people in 'ethnic boxes' with labels bearing specific cultural identities as they fight each other for a greater allocation of state funding. The official political policy of multiculturalism in Trinidad therefore, encourages groups to assert their cultural differences and fails to highlight the value of the cultural richness that diversity brings and how that diversity can be used to produce a nationalistic cultural ideal.

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[i] All the discussions about multiculturalism prior to its implementation were promoted by the National Council for Indian Culture, which did not involve most of the other groups in the society.

ii Williams labelled the East Indians a hostile and recalcitrant minority when the PNM lost the Federal elections. To some it was an indictment of those with whom he disagreed but to many it was an indictment of the entire East Indian community which did not forget the remarks.

iii There was no clear cut winner in the elections in 1995. Both the PNM and Panday's party the United National Congress (UNC) each won 17 seats. It was left to Robinson who won the two Tobago seats to determine which party he would throw his support behind. He chose Panday's UNC citing the fact that the electorate had essentially rejected the PNM.

iv It was synthesized from differing Divisions and precursor Units, and remained together in this configuration until 1995.
In 1997 the Women's Affairs Division was changed to the Gender Affairs Division, in keeping with International recommendations. It was established within the guidelines of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and governed by several pieces of legislation.
http://caribbeanresumes.com/company/ministry-community-development-culture-and-gender-affairs

v Vision 2020 Draft National Strategic Plan was a 15 year plan designed by the Manning government to respond to the changing global economic, social and political landscape. Vision 2020 Draft National Strategic Plan.
http://www.meetmanning.com/home/pdf/national_plan.pdf

vi Vision 2020 Draft National Strategic Plan, 12. http://www.meetmanning.com/home/pdf/national_plan.pdf

vii This is in reference to the twin island state of Trinidad and Tobago.

viii These sentiments were expressed in an interview conducted by Jason Kaufman at the Divali celebrations in November 2010. See Jason Kaufman 2010. *In Trinidad, an Ascendant Hindu Paradise Flourishes During Divali*.
www.artinfo.com/.../in-trinidad-an-ascendant-hindu-paradise-flourish.