Multiculturalism and the Challenge of Managing Diversity in Trinidad and Tobago

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Abstract

As one of the most cosmopolitan islands of the Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago is among the few developing countries and the first Caribbean state to move towards an official multiculturalism policy. This paper examines the challenges faced by the island in its attempts to manage diversity through an exploration of the dense interconnections between the cultural and the political processes which have informed such debates in the country throughout history. It details the efforts at initiating a multicultural policy for Trinidad and Tobago and contends that the cultural and the political are intricately intertwined and are integral to the discourse on multiculturalism and assimilationism in the country. However, the political and social debates whether via music, symposia, media or commentary, suggest that there is no concrete position on the merits of an official multiculturalism policy. Nonetheless, these have undoubtedly informed the discourse, thoughts and ideas on the issue.

Keywords: Multiculturalism; assimilationism; Trinidad and Tobago; political; cultural; Indians; Africans

Introduction

Multiculturalism as a discourse emerged in the post-colonial period. Stuart Hall noted that "with the dismantling of the old empires, many new multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nation-states were created.

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Increasingly, crises in these societies assume a multi-cultural or ethnicized form" (Hall, 2000: 212). Thus, a more varied menu of possible options is presented in the post-Cold War era with the broader perspectives of where we may be headed, making it increasingly difficult to define the 'new world order'. One might argue that multiculturalism is a salient feature of this current post-modern paradigm. The catch all concept of "multiculturalism" speaks to multiple realities now viewed through post-modernist, constructivist and feminist lens, amongst others.

The deepening of globalization and complex interdependence of states and non-state actors in the 1990s have intensified the debate on multiculturalism as minority ethnic communities migrate into existing societies creating a confusing and contradictory dilemma of assimilation, fusion and blending. At the same time, it celebrates diversity and difference, albeit in a borderless, globalized world. The numerous changes which have accompanied today's globalization and the evolving dynamics associated with population movements have inevitably produced newer forms of ethnic contact. They have also intensified the pressures for internal changes as evident in the recent Arab Spring. Ethnic conflict continues as a major social phenomenon with the potential to exacerbate even further. The blurring of boundaries also challenges the Realist paradigm which underscores a dominant role for states. Their capacity to continue as the major actors in the international stage and formulate domestic policies without reference to larger international imperatives is now questioned.

Multiculturalism versus Assimilationism

The term "multiculturalism" was first coined by the Canadian Royal Commission in 1965 but the phenomenon has been an ongoing process for several hundred years. Multiple definitions have been presented which have themselves come into conflict with each other. It is generally described as an applied ideology of racial, cultural and ethnic diversity within the demographics of a specified place. Stuart Hall describes the 'multicultural' as "the social characteristics and problems of governance posed by any society in which different cultural communities live together and attempt to build a common life while retaining something of their 'original' identity." He continues that "multiculturalism, on the other hand, refers to strategies and policies adopted to govern and manage the problems of diversity and multiplicity which multi-cultural societies throw up" (Hall, 2000: 209).

Central to the idea of multiculturalism is the notion of distinct cultural identities, the need for recognition by various groups and their demands for justice in their belief that they are victims of economic, cultural and political oppression. Hobson and Lister (2002) assert that lack of recognition by some scholars "implies exclusion and marginalisation from 'full participation' in the community; thus recognition struggles are struggles for participation and influence over the boundaries and meaning of citizenship" (Hobson and Lister: 2002: 40).

Managing diversity has become a core issue in the governance discourse and has become part of the definition of multiculturalism. As governments around the world face the challenge of treating with diverse cultural groups whether citizens or immigrants, they have been forced to formulate measures and policies to treat with diversity. This has become necessary to avoid inter-group conflict which may erupt due to differences in race, class, religion and even gender.

Multiculturalism emerged in the Anglophone world of the Global North in the 1960s as a state mechanism to address the demands of immigrant and minority groups for recognition of difference and their resistance to processes of cultural assimilation. It began, therefore, as a political accommodation to minorities and a challenge to Western states to create space to accommodate diverse ethnicities, cultural practices and belief systems. It rejected the long-held view that immigrants and minorities should "assimilate" to the dominant cultures of the majority, even if that majority was native and the minority was immigrant. Thus, a role for the state has been included in definitions of multiculturalism. It can be described as a systematic and comprehensive statal mechanism to managing and treating with cultural and ethnic diversity with educational, linguistic, economic and social components and specific institutional arrangements. This underscores the dense interconnections between the political and the cultural.

The literature speaks of "multiculturalism" versus "assimilationism". The former generally treats with the state's efforts to recognize and manage diversity produced by immigrant communities while the latter treats with its attempts at facilitating immigrant communities to integrate or assimilate into existing mainstream culture. The emergence of the term "multiculturalism" is strongly associated with the unintended social and cultural consequences of large scale immigration.

It is discussed in the context of several developed countries including Britain, France, Germany and the United States. The British model of multiculturalism has historically been in opposition to that of the French where unity is more important than diversity. The French subscribes to assimilation rather than multiculturalism. Ideals such as the *unité et indivisibilité du peuple français* (unity and indivisibility of the French people), *laïcité de l'Etat* (secularity of the State) or *identité nationale* (national identity) are fundamental pillars on which French democracy hinges. French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, announced in 2011 that "If you come to France, you accept to melt into a single community, which is the national community. And if you don't want to accept that, you cannot be welcomed in France" (Meyer, 2012).

As a response to failed assimilationist policies, there have been attempts at managing diversity through multicultural policies globally. Many of these have also failed in some of the most developed countries of the world including Britain, Germany, Australia and Canada. Others such as France continue to subscribe to assimilationism while Britain has returned to it. These measures have been adopted by states to avoid inter-group conflict particularly in multi-ethnic societies, prompting a tense encounter between socio-cultural and political forces.

Developing states have also been forced to treat with diverse cultural groups within societies. The British Caribbean has inherited a rich historical legacy bequeathed by European cultures including, Dutch, English, Portuguese, French and Spanish combined with Amerindian and other immigrant cultures from Africa, India, China, Syria and Lebanon. The Anglo-Caribbean countries are also members of the family of Commonwealth nations to which Canada and Australia belong. Though there is no official policy of multiculturalism in the Caribbean, a high level of harmony and social cohesion has traditionally coloured its cosmopolitan cultural landscape as the various societies in the region practice unity in diversity. Rex Nettleford described it as "creative chaos, stable disequilibrium or cultural pluralism" (Nettleford, 2003).

Interestingly, while the developed countries of the Commonwealth have directed their policies to immigrant groups which are resisting assimilation into the dominant or mainstream society, the Caribbean, for the most part, has attempted to treat the mosaic of Caribbean peoples and cultures as indigenous and integral to the Caribbean milieu.

This is mainly due to the fact that in many islands there are no dominant mainstream cultures to which the groups should assimilate. Historically, they are mostly descendants of African slaves or East Indian immigrants who far outnumbered their colonial masters. Today, the colonizers' descendents constitute small white minorities in the islands. However, undeniable tensions have also characterized the Caribbean landscape particularly the multi-ethnic societies of Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and Suriname. This study focuses on the twin-island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago which presents a special case study for multiculturalism given its peculiar politico-cultural dynamics.

The Experience of Trinidad and Tobago

In a population estimated at *1,328,019***,** Indo-Trinidadians constitute approximately 35.4%; Afro-Trinidadians about 34.2%; Mixed 22.8%; Douglas (Mixture of African and Indian) 7.7 %; Mixed Other 15.1%; all other ethnic groups 1.4%; and a "Not Stated" category of 6.2% (Ministry of Planning, 2011: 15). For most of the island's history, the discourse has been toward assimilationism into what came to be crafted as the dominant Afro-creole culture. Yet, the island has managed to avoid any significant "clash of civilizations" to date.

Several attempts have been made to harness and manage this diversity through institutions like the Public Service Commissions, the Public Service Appeal Board/Appellate Tribunal; the Office of the Ombudsman; Public Service Unions, Judicial Review; and the Equal Opportunity Commission (2000). However, these have so far achieved minimal success (Bissessar, 2012: 10). Moreover, there has been little attempt to move toward an official multiculturalism policy until recently.

Naturally, the initiative to forge an official multicultural policy came from an Indo-led coalition government given that the Afro-dominated People's National Movement (PNM) controlled the government for the most part of the island's history. It ruled uninterrupted for thirty years from 1956 to 1986 and then again from 1991 to 1995 and 2002 to 2010. During this time, members of the Indo-Trinidadian community frequently complained of discrimination with regard to the unequal distribution of state resources such as housing, scholarships, employment and promotion.

The complaints have even extended to cries of unequal distribution of funding for national cultural/religious festivals from Indian cultural organizations like the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha (SDMS), the National Council of Indian Culture (NCIC), and the Global Organization of Peoples of Indian Origin (GOPIO). The persistent calls by these organizations for a greater share of the national pie provided the impetus for the new Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism under the current People's Partnership coalition government to consider experimentation with a multiculturalism policy as a strategy to correct the ethno-cultural evils of neglect visited by the historical past against the Indian community. As such, Trinidad and Tobago is amongst the few developing countries and the first small island and Caribbean state to attempt to initiate an official multiculturalism policy. However, this has not advanced beyond three symposia launched by the Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism.

The first symposium was held on 13 October, 2010. It attempted to address issues related to equitable access to resources and opportunities. It claimed to contemplate the preservation of unique expressions of group ethnicity and the creation of systems and institutional forms aimed at promoting racial harmony and religious tolerance amongst all groupings in society. Given the perpetual competition for a larger share of the national pie and the challenge of governance, the Ministry's stated objective was to bring together a broad cross-section of persons representing different interest groups to participate in the symposium. It was hoped that this would facilitate wide-ranging participation to inform the discourse. The symposium was segmented to afford national, regional and international perspectives. Moreover, the Ministry hoped that the forum would be an environment for distilling ideas that could be used in the formulation of a multicultural policy that embodies the inherent beliefs of the people and reflects the spirit and innate expressions of a nation.

Though multiculturalism has long existed in Trinidad and Tobago, the organizers in their wisdom saw the need to educate the public on the regional and international dimensions of the subject. Speakers from Canada, Britain and Suriname were brought in for the opening session of the first symposium. For its part, the Ministry believed that it was simply initiating a debate on an issue which it realized was extremely controversial. It was important for the society to learn about the challenges and achievements of other countries in their efforts to manage multi-ethnic societies.

In this way, the organizers hoped to explore the national, regional and local dimensions of the subject and to bring a broad perspective on the table to initiate the discussions. They believed that it might be useful for the local citizenry to learn from academic and policy experts about the efforts of foreign governments to implement an official multiculturalism policy and to share their experiences.

However, the response from factions of the audience itself reflected the problems of managing multiculturalism in an ethnically diverse society. Many viewed the symposium as a clear attempt by the Ministry and the University of the West Indies, or both, to impose a multiculturalism policy on the society from on top. They launched a scathing attack on these "foreigners" who, in their minds, came here to tell them how to do their business. Both the Ministry and the "foreigners" came in for heavy criticisms as the audience lashed out at them insisting that multiculturalism has existed in Trinidad and Tobago for a very long time, and that they needed neither the "foreigners" nor the state to tell them how to treat with it. The state, in particular, was a direct target of the criticisms in the perception that it was trying to force a multicultural policy on the population.

Emotions were running so high that the audience hardly acknowledged that a battery of local experts would be speaking in the afternoon session on the Trinidad and Tobago experience. The reactions from the public suggest not only that many in the society are confused as to what exactly is multiculturalism but that there was a high level of mistrust and suspicion as to the government's objectives in forging this policy. The symposium also brought to the fore the question of whether a multiculturalism policy is an asset or a liability for Trinidad and Tobago.

As historian, Bridget Brereton, laid the historical foundation, she underscored the various ethnic groups that migrated to Trinidad and Tobago over time and affirmed that "Clearly any serious policy of multiculturalism would wish to treat with all these cultural forms (and many others) with equal respect. No one ethnic group should claim priority or superiority for its cultural forms over others. The argument that 'we were here first', or that 'we suffered most, we were more oppressed than others', should not be allowed to guide policy or practice towards different cultural forms. "Equal respect, equal support (subject of course to numbers of participants or followers), should be the watchword" (Brereton, 2010: 6).

Sociologist, Rhoda Reddock, noted that "in Trinidad and Tobago, multicultural transformations began even in the colonial era and have continued up to the present. What they have done is to concretise in our polity and society the notion of group claims on state resources. What is interesting is that one group's successful demand often results in a similar demand from another group. This approach has also generated a plethora of discourses of exclusion" (Reddock, 2010). Reddock notes the challenges of multiculturalism by quoting Stuart Hall who contends that "the problem with multiculturalism is the tendency for it to be converted into a political doctrine, a formal singularity that is fixed into a cemented condition (Hall, 2000: 8).

Cultural studies expert, Patricia Mohammed, projected her thoughts through the medium of film. She affirmed that "I am interested in some of the silences that are more difficult to articulate and practically implement in a multicultural policy". She proposes a policy on multiculturalism while she hopes to promote ethnic diversity and the preservation of traditions which she believes must also at the same time be actively engaged with the spaces in which these are breaking down creatively towards the emergence of a collective integration - in other words "a douglarization of culture". She observes that

What gets represented and what is silenced are always political questions, not only because it concerns the allocation of resources but because it may not allow the space for the emergence of new ideologies. Instead of arguing about culture as an ideological concept, a policy needs to confront it as a reality. "Human problems persist and most of them are problems of class or money." Such new ideologies may represent the practices of a changing population composition by age, mixed ethnicity, education level, as technologies of communication and global discourses change what was constituted as the nation and society itself (Mohammed, 2010: 1).

The second symposium, again hosted by the state, was held on February 4th, 2011, and combined the Launch of National Registry of Artists and Cultural Workers. It was entitled "Towards a Multiculturalism Policy: A focus on the Creative Arts". It called on all artists, cultural workers, religious and cultural groups, academics and interested persons to be a part of the event. Like the third symposium which was held in Tobago, the second focused on local artists with the aim of facilitating development of cultural industries, research and heritage project.

It was hoped that the Registry will also optimize the benefits to be accrued to nationals from the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) and the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between the European Union and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). However, the focus of this second symposium seemed to be more on launching the National Registry of Artists and Cultural Workers than on formulating a multiculturalism policy.

The third symposium was held in the sister isle, Tobago, on 22 March, 2011. Purportedly, the findings of the Tobago leg of the symposium were the final set of inputs for the draft policy document on multiculturalism. The former Minister of Tobago Affairs, Vernella Alleyne-Toppin, affirmed that "the national dialogue on the policy attests that the government wants to involve the citizenry in the decision making process". She also underscored in her presentation that the policy would have no negative effects for Tobago. In her remarks, Alleyne-Toppin noted that "while several countries, including Canada, the United States and United Kingdom, had adopted different approaches to multiculturalism, their experiences could be used as informed sources of reference "which can help us to avoid pitfalls." There must, however, be a clear understanding that our social and cultural history is quite different from countries of the more developed world. As a consequence, our approach will not be the same as theirs. We will have to construct, as far as possible, a home-grown model which will be in sync with the needs and aspirations of our diverse population" (Connelly, 2011).

At this forum, the former Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism, Winston "Gypsy" Peters, said "the government is committed to developing a policy position on multiculturalism for a variety of pressing reasons". It was envisaged that a draft multiculturalism policy, incorporating the views of participants in the various symposia will be formulated for discussion among stakeholders before being taken to Cabinet. The objectives of this policy would be the fostering of a climate of inclusion, equitable distribution of resources, and recognition and celebration of cultural diversity. Peters affirmed that multiculturalism addressed diversity in all its forms "and the Government has placed considerable focus on this, as we seek to partner with every grouping in our diverse society, to realize our fullest potential and make even greater strides in the international arena." He said that "at the heart of the Government's thrust, was a commitment to developing a policy position on multiculturalism, rooted in attaining equality for citizens" (Connelly, 2011).

The Ministry's first symposium was followed by a response from the Caribbean chapter of the Global Organization of the Peoples of Indian Origin (GOPIO) on 29th January, 2011. The primary objective of the GOPIO conference was to formulate practical, pragmatic and useful policies that would result in genuine multiculturalism in Trinidad and Tobago. GOPIO noted that the government plans to implement policies that will produce a multiculturalism society since it has already created a new Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism. GOPIO believed that stakeholders should now come up with policies that will assist in the achievement of multiculturalism in our nation. With this in mind, GOPIO took the initiative to start the consultative and participatory process.

The issues which emerged in the series of symposia have been detailed above with the objective of carefully explaining the process and the ethno-tensions which simmer between agents of the state and various cultural groups within the country. It highlights the extent to which the political and the cultural are intertwined in attempts to manage diversity. Moreover, it underscores the views expressed by factions of the masses to the state's policy proposal while at the same time, bringing to fore the challenge faced by state in its efforts to appease multiple socio-cultural groups in the society. Ultimately, it raises the question of whether a multicultural policy would be an asset or a liability for the country.

In the context of Trinidad and Tobago, the society is multi-ethnic but the main axis of conflict becomes concentrated between the two dominant ethnic communities which define themselves in opposition to each other while other smaller groups define themselves in relation to these two. Afro-Trinidadians seemed suspicious of the motives of the Indo-led government as was obvious from public comments in the first symposium and the GOPIO forum.

The society can be viewed as reflective of a microcosm of the Caribbean's kaleidescopic milieu. However, within this milieu lies a fundamental paradox which arises from the high level of social cohesion amongst the individual groups in the society. Conversely, the ethnic distribution of the population has given rise to a severe contestation for political space, a larger share of the national pie and challenges of governance since the two major political parties are ethnically aligned in accordance with the two major ethnic groups. The problem is compounded by the Parliamentary, Westminster political system which divides the country into constituencies or seats.

As a result, a party may win the highest number of votes but would not form the government because it did not win the most seats. Indeed, a "minority government" could rise to power with fewer votes than the combined opposition parties. Moreover, the two-party system leaves little room for third parties which can gain significant votes but no seats as had obtained in 1981 and 2007. The result is that supporters of the non-ruling parties combined which often constitute the majority of the population suffer a feeling of alienation and marginalization in what they perceive as their exclusion from the governance process.

This alienation is often combined with deep-seated suspicion and mistrust of the "other" which in this context refers to either the Indo or Afro-Trinidadian ethnic grouping. It has its roots in the politics which evolved in the island even before independence was achieved in 1962. Two major parties emerged in 1956 as the two dominant ethnic groups embarked on a continuing contestation for political space. These include the People's National Movement (PNM) led by Dr. Eric Williams perceived as representing Afro-Trinidadians and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) under the leadership of Bhadase Sagan Maraj purportedly representing Indo-Trinidadians. The Democratic Labour Party (DLP) was formed in 1957 as a multi-ethnic alternative to the PNM. Dr. Eric Williams perpetuated the ethnic cleavages which would characterize Trinbago politics for decades after with his infamous April fool's labeling of Indo-Trinidadians as a "recalcitrant and hostile minority", after losing the federal elections to the DLP coalition in 1958. Tensions between the PNM and the DLP continued to exacerbate in 1961 when the PNM government introduced the Representation of the People's Bill which aimed to modernize the electoral system. The DLP viewed the attempt to institute the permanent registration of voters, identification cards, voting machines and revised electoral boundaries as a strategy to disenfranchise rural, Indo-voters through intimidation. The DLP claimed that Indo-Trinidadians would be less likely to register, and might be intimidated by "complicated" voting machines. The DLP also alleged that the PNM hoped to rig the elections by allowing Afro-Caribbean immigrants from other islands to vote, as well as to gerrymander the boundaries to ensure a PNM victory.

Since then, the politics of the island have been ethnically defined in terms of these two dominant political parties and their ethnic bases. Voting patterns and political activity are frequently explained and justified in terms of ethnicity.

Thus ethnicity came to function as a dominant ideological principle not just for social and cultural differentiation but also for political allegiance. By the late 1960s, the cultural and the political became so closely intertwined that it became difficult to separate them.

In the early 1970s, ideology, political organization and cultural identity fused when the Black Power Movement emerged. It provided an impetus for Afro-Trinidadians to rediscover and reinvent their African cultural origins and to assume the mantle of the dominant cultural group and political party. This was further reinforced by the fact that the Afro-based PNM managed to retain its name and identity up to the present while the DLP has evolved into the United Labour Front, Club 88 and the United National Congress. The latter has also merged with other smaller political parties to challenge the PNM. These coalitions actually formed the government twice - in 1986, under the banner of the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) and in 2010, as the People's Partnership (PP) which currently holds the reins of power.

The Black Power Movement provided an impetus for a counter Indian nationalist consciousness to emerge. The seeds were sown for a more assertive role for Indians since around 1960 when Indians were recipients of compulsory school education. During the 1980s, Indian consciousness underwent an ethnic revival resulting in a growing nationalism which intensified with the rise of the NAR and UNC to power in 1986 and 1995 respectively. Some attribute the 1995 victory to the wave of celebrations across the island commemorating the 150th anniversary of the arrival of Indians to the island. This ethnic pride would continue even throughout the PNM's reign from 2000 to 2010 and would explode in a 29 to 12 victory in 2010 with the rise of the first Indian female Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

The ethno-political divisions have also informed the attitudes towards a multiculturalism policy within the island. The Afro-intellectuals and cultural leaders have tended to argue toward an "assimilationist" model while their Indo counterparts seem to prefer the "multiculturalism/diversity" approach which entails recognition and celebration of the multifarious sub-cultures within the national milieu. This dichotomy could perhaps be explained by the island's history of slavery and indentureship.

Through slavery, the Afro population, for the most part, was deemed to have lost their African heritage while indentureship allowed the Indo community to preserve many of the customs and practices of India, albeit in modified form.

Thus, Indians have traditionally been perceived particularly by non-Indians, as identifying more with India and Indian culture rather than Trinidad and consequently, have not been embraced by the Afro population as authentically "Trini".

Even before the island achieved independence in 1962, what was evolving from the then dominant French Creole as a "national Trinidadian culture" can be considered predominantly "Afrocreole". For generations, Indians were alienated politically and were deprived of power and influence since the Afro-dominated PNM party held the reins of power uninterruptedly for thirty years. Even today, Indians still hold the view that what is considered "Trinidadian ideology" is fundamentally a black ideology with which they have problems identifying without losing their identity as Indians. They resent the notion of having to "integrate" or "assimilate" into some mainstream culture which does not recognize Indian culture as an integral component. This raises the question of whether it is possible to be "Indian" and "Trinidadian" at the same time.

On the other hand, the question of whether it is possible to simultaneously be black and Trinidadian hardly arises as Indian culture is branded anti-nationalist while the "Afro-creole" culture which blacks identify as their own, is confirmed by them as the national "Trinidadian" culture. The link to the polity is also frequently made by blacks in the election slogan which Indians detest, "this is PNM country". The "Afrocreole" culture has also generally been embraced by the mixed population which constitute some twenty two percent of the island's population. The drive toward a national culture was clearly articulated by Trinidad and Tobago's first Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams, who seemed to have perceived some kind of "Trinidadian" national identity as what should be the mainstream or dominant culture. Although he never defined this "Trinidadian" culture, he inadvertently subscribed to the assimilationst model in not recognizing the various ethnic groups:

There can be no Mother India for those whose ancestors came from India... There can be no Mother Africa for those of African origins and the Trinidad and Tobago society is living a lie and heading for trouble if it seeks to create the impression or to allow others to act under the delusion that Trinidad and Tobago is an African society. There can be no Mother England and no dual loyalties... There can be no Mother China even if one could agree as to which China is the Mother; and there can be no mother Syria or no Mother Lebanon. A nation, like an individual, can have only one Mother. The only Mother we recognize is Mother Trinidad and Tobago and a Mother cannot discriminate between her children. All must be equal in her eyes (Williams, 1962: 281).

This position was adopted by many Afro-Trinidadians thereafter. It was clearly articulated by the presentation of non-resident academic, Selwyn Cudjoe, who seems to speak to the view of the Afro-Trinidadian community which clamours for a "transcendent national culture that results in the formation of national consciousness and loyalty to the nation" (Cudjoe, 2011).

Cudjoe's statement's is reflective of the most pervasive ethnic distinction in the island as expressed in popular representations and public discourse – that between Indos and Afros. Moreover, it also speaks to the traditional cultural and political marginalization of Indians in the island and some of the denigrating stereotypes which have been used to brand traditionalist Indians. Eriksen asserts that this marginalization "can be accounted for through descriptions of the late arrival of the Indians in Trinidad, their illiteracy and spatial isolation, and the fact that they were for generations a "muted" group in Trinidad Creole society" (Eriksen, 1992: 23). The Indian response to this marginalization has been mixed.

The Convergence of Politics and Culture

The rise to power of the first Indo-led government in 1995 pinpoints the convergence of politics and race and the tenuous lines which separate them. Moreover, it not only underscores this prolonged marginalization of Indo Trinidadians but also highlights the fears and insecurities of the Afro population in the face of a burgeoning Indian political elite and the perceived "passing of Afro hegemony".

These insecurities have manifested themselves in many ways, most notably in the lyrics of Carnival calypsos which prompted the leader of the Hindu organization known as the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha, Satnarine Maharaj, to assert that "perhaps racist calypsos reflect the vast insecurity, deep seated mistrust and anxiety of the Afro-Trinidadian" (Ryan, 1999: 130). Even before Indians assumed the reins of political power in 1995, Constance (1991) noted that the "creolization of the Indian was seen as a threat to the African's control of the world he knew in the same way he was to take as a threat the Indian's rise in politics" (Ryan, 1999: 127). Similarly, this writer notes that the 1998 calypso rendered by the Mystic Prowler entitled "Vision of Change", while masquerading as humour, "presented an excellent parody of the anxiety and apprehension then experienced by the Afro population in the face of a UNC government which it perceived as formidably Indian" (Ryan, 1999: 159).

Although the Afro-based PNM was able to regain victory at the polls again in 2002 and 2007, suggesting that Indo political hegemony was not a permanent force, the rise of the People's Partnership coalition in 2010, led by the first female Prime Minister of the island, who is also of Indian heritage, aroused fears by segments of the Afro-population of the end of Afro-hegemony and an Indian take-over. This was evident in a very recent statement made by Deputy Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly and PNM candidate during the 2013 Tobago House of Assembly election, Hilton Sandy, who announced in the campaign platform:

There is a ship at Calcutta waiting to sail to Tobago; they are waiting to get the results of this election. If you bring the wrong results, Calcutta ship is coming down for you. You must stop that ship. We must not allow that ship to sail and if you don't want that ship to sail, what you have to do? Is vote the PNM!" (*Newsday,* 2013).

The statement references Indo-Trinidadians as indentured labourers who had sailed from Calcutta, India, to the Caribbean. Moreover, it treats Indians as alien to the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago and as a material threat to the people of Tobago. The Indo-led People's Partnership responded with an advertisement merging this statement with another made by the Opposition Leader during the 2010 general election campaign which also evoked the metaphor of the ship which has been frequently used in the historical and socio-political discourse of the country.

The reactions from Indians and Africans alike to this perceived racist statement suggest in themselves that recognition and acceptance of the Indo-population have made significant strides since Eric Williams' comments on "Mother Trinidad". This may be partly attributable to the three periods of non-PNM rule and a slow acceptance even amongst the Afro community that Trinidad and Tobago is not only "PNM country". Even Opposition leader, Dr Keith Rowley, who leads the PNM was quick to declare that he immediately upbraided Sandy on the statements. He also announced that he "did not need anyone to tell him how to relate to people who are of different race, different religion, different geography or different ethnicity". He affirmed that he has "grown up in this country and have been here now for 60 years" (Taitt, 2013). Other religious organizations, civil society and public figures including former head of the Public Service, Reginald Dumas, and political analyst, Winford James, chastised the Opposition Leader for failing to immediately refute the statements. These reactions suggest that not only is the society recognized and accepted as a multicultural one to some extent, but that there is a thin line between the contestation for political and cultural spaces.

The debate on the "Calcutta ship" statement also underscores the extent to which ethnicity is expected to be treated as a silent issue and not brought to the fore in public discourse. Politicians react violently to any suggestion that they or their party could have deliberately used race as an election strategy. Indeed, one Political Scientist was threatened by a letter written to the President by the Opposition Leader advising him to revoke her appointment as a Commissioner of the Equal Opportunity Commission for her comments on an election night television panel. Ethnicity is supposed to be a subtle and cunning technique in politics and a tool in electioneering, not an issue to be discussed in the public arena. Neither is it supposed to be publicly analyzed. At the same time, it is noteworthy that cultural differences are themselves insignificant in these contexts. They are only important in as much as they create opportunities for politicians and political parties to draw upon in their quest for power.

Trinidadian Culture and New Hybrids

What emerges, therefore, is a fundamental paradox as to whether Eric Williams' dream of "a national" culture has materialized or whether the society is essentially multicultural. Multiculturalism does seem to prevail at the societal level as evidenced by the co-existence of varied cultures and the celebration of diversity and difference. Few would question this. The contentious issue is whether there exists a "Trinidadian" culture, and if so, how can it be described and defined.

The concept of a "Trinidadian" culture is itself a complex one. On the one hand, it speaks to a homogenous dominant national culture into which other subcultures must integrate or assimilate. As mentioned earlier, this has traditionally been viewed as predominantly afrocentric, linked as it then was to the politics which was controlled by the Afro-dominated PNM party. Blacks not only held political power, but as Eriksen asserts, "the towns were dominated by blacks, the radio played black music, and the national heroes, the calypsonians, were almost invariably black or brown creoles" (Erikson, 1992: 60). This still persists to a large extent today as the afrocentric discourse continues to resist the notion of time and incremental change contending that it was the first national culture and therefore has a right to retain this privilege. In this context, assimilationism fails to recognize that there may be newer majority forms emerging and seems to hold on to some fossilized notion of a bedrock on which others must then be built in the same image and likeness.

On the other hand, what is clearly discernible is that new hybrids have been emerging producing distinct blends and fusion which incorporate customs and traditions of other cultures including Indian, Chinese and Spanish. Some may perceive this fusion of multifarious cultures as a process of what Salman Rushdie calls "chutnification" in his novel, *Midnight's Children* (Rushdie, 2006: 116). Rushdie attempted to encapsulate the tangy taste of an Indian condiment known as "chutney" used to flavour food, to make his novel more enjoyable and exciting. He anglocizes the term by adding "fication", to suggest "transformation" from the original. Other cuisine which suggests mixtures and are now viewed as typically Caribbean include "callaoo" and "pelau", the former consisting of crab cooked with a leafy vegetable and the latter, a mixture of rice, peas, meat and/or vegetables.

Similarly, Patricia Mohammed who prefers the phrase "douglarization of culture" affirms that "the old assimilationist models of culture - that we must all become clones of each other or aspire to someone's definition of a higher culture - gave way happily by the 1970s to an admission of heterogeneity and difference" (Mohammed, 2010: 4).

The very term "creole" seems part of the cultural transformation that has occurred in the Caribbean. Anthropologist, Aisha Khan, notes that "the popular definition of "creole" is a European one used to distinguish between a person born in the Caribbean as opposed to Europe or Africa but continues that "it also indicated newness: emergent cultural, racial, social forms…For New World blacks, *creole* implied both a loss (or abandonment) of African heritage and the creation of a subsequent, New World identity (although based in part on aspects of African heritage)" (Khan, 2004: 7).

While these terms aptly describe the evolving cultural dynamics in Trinidad and Tobago, they all tend to privilege one ethnic group over the other. Rushdie's concept "chutnification" while not applied to the context of Trinidad and Tobago, highlights the Indian dimension of fusion while the notions of "creolization", "pelau" and "callaoo" underscore the Afro element. Indeed, none of these categories embraces the political as a unique aspect of the island's culture which in itself has become ideologized as politicians consciously manipulate it.

Because of its fluidity and dynamism, when discussing Trinidad and Tobago, it may be more appropriate to avoid labels and engage the phenomenon as a multi-coloured, multi-layered, tapestry with its own peculiar blends, its abstract patterns moving in several directions at the same time. This is quite evident in the offsprings of intermarriages between different groups and intriguing blends of music such as chutney soca, sitar with African drumming and parang-soca. In the political sphere, it is visible in multi-ethnic political parties and coalitions which held the reins of power from 1986 to 1991 and currently, from 2010 to the present.

The Challenge of Governance

The current Prime Minister and leader of the present coalition People's Partnership government has been open to multicultural discourses in her quest to find the best formula to govern the multi-ethnic state of Trinidad and Tobago. Efforts at equity include attributing a similar if not equal share of the public purse to the various ethnic festivals of Divali, Carnival, Indian Arrival, Baptist and Emancipation celebrations. Yet, these hardly seem to satisfy segments of the population as it is viewed by many as a policy of appeasement or wastage rather than a genuine attempt to recognize and celebrate difference. It can nonetheless be viewed as elements of a multicultural policy.

Political coalitions themselves are now quite popular around the world as increasing immigration propelled by globalization witness more multicultural societies than existed before. The multicultural dilemma in Trinidad and Tobago cannot be isolated from the wider global phenomenon which is producing entirely new politico-cultural configurations in time and space. The faster, thicker, denser, wider and deeper interactions between states and non-state actors are resulting in more knowledge, different cultures and trans-border political organization, all of which are no longer confined to any particular space. Moreover, strides in mass communication and the spread of the mass media; the information revolution, and the triumph of Western capitalism since the fall of the Berlin wall, have undoubtedly produced new political and cultural forms which have not left the tiny twin island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago unscathed.

Yet, like the anti-globalization forces which manifest themselves in mass protest, nation-states still persist as the main actor in the international system. Moreover, nationalism is still guarded wearily albeit by "imagined communities" and continues to rear its head in many parts of the world including Europe, North America, Latin America, the Middle East, Africa and Asia. It should come as no surprise therefore, that despite the perceived passing of Afro hegemony, the Afro cultural and political forms still persist as dominant in Trinidad and Tobago as calypso, carnival and steelband reign supreme. The public service bureaucracy also reflects a heavy African presence.

But even while one acknowledges that culture is slow to change, the presence and inputs of non-Africans in all these have been increasing over time producing new genres of culture and politics which in themselves reflect the creation of new forms.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is perhaps the very dynamism of the culture and politics which makes forging an official multicultural policy such a challenging feat. The Trinidad and Tobago context reflects a constantly evolving society now with exceedingly high demands and expectations given the many channels of communication including the electronic social media through which these demands can be made. Some assert that it is best to leave well alone and as the old adage goes "if it not broke, why fix it". The extent of the diversity of Trinidad and Tobago is evidenced in the following newspaper extract:

Christmas celebrations will be held once again at the site of the Divali Nagar in Chaguanas. Organised by the National Council of Indian Culture the celebrations will be held from December 16 to December 18. Celebration time will be nightly, from 6 o'clock to 9 o'clock. Various groups will sing bhajans, Christmas carols, parang and perform skits on a nightly basis. On the night of the formal opening, Friday, there will be a candlelight procession and the lighting of the Christmas tree. The programme will begin with a welcome address by NCIC president Deokienanan Sharma, and will feature speakers, including the Minister of Culture Edward Hart and Chaguanas Mayor Surujrattan Rambachan. Schools scheduled to take part include the Warrenville Presbyterian and Cunupia Presbyterian Church Youth Choir. Opera singer Yolanos Sookoor and violinist Anslem Walters will perform on stage during the opening night ceremony along with the TCL Skiffle Bunch Steel Orchestra. Special guests at the opening-night celebrations will be the children of Jaya Lakshmi Children's Home and Islamic Children's Home (Jankie 2005).

One can well understand why some assume this position of non-interference. The complex diversity as exists at the social level carries a kaleidoscopic beauty of its own especially as it has not resulted in any serious violence in the island to date. This could very well be the reason for the reluctance of the current government to officially implement such a policy.

As seen, the debate on forging a multiculturalism policy had been initiated since 2010 and the last symposium was conducted almost three years ago. Faced with the challenge of governance of a plural society, one may surmise that the policy makers themselves have realized that it may be best not to sacrifice social cohesion for official state policy, despite the contention of popular Trinidadian calypsonian, David Rudder (2002) that "how we vote is not how we party".

Indeed, if one reflects on history and the daily living experiences of the people of the island, this social cohesion was achieved in numerous ways. Whether it was our trade unionist or politicians in the form of icons like Cipriani, James, Butler, Williams, Capildeo, Daaga or Panday, the struggle for equality and social justice has relegated race and class differences into the distance. Today in 2014, the political schism seems to be widening as Indo-Trinidadians seek more than ever, to carve a space in the political realm and to share in the spoils of power from which they were denied for decades as Afro-Trinidadians continue to jealously guard this space. Meanwhile, cultures are fusing the social capital into a unique multicultural mix.

Cricket and Carnival are perhaps the two most unifying forces of the diverse races in Trinidad and Tobago and have been throughout history. If politics is dividing the population then sports, music, dance and costume can serve to bring it together. Legislation designed toward promoting these two vital elements of unity can perhaps serve to further cement the bond that binds the varied races and classes.

This is not to dismiss the political dynamics. It has long been recognized that the Westminster model of governance which the country inherited has failed its multicultural people. The solution may not be just in the much bandied about "constitutional reform" but the political and the cultural can complement each other. The state can embark on genuine efforts to nurture and harness the existing social capital which as noted, are already producing interesting new cultural hybrids which can serve as binding agents. Herein lies a critical component of any multicultural policy which Trinidad and Tobago may attempt to forge.

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