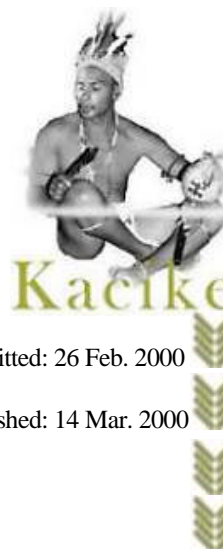




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## The Contemporary Context of Carib “Revival” in Trinidad and Tobago: Creolization, Developmentalism and the State<sup>1</sup>



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“...the claim to specialness is part of the world-systemic political game, and it plays a central role in the operation of the system”

*Immanuel Wallerstein (1991: 275).*

### ABSTRACT

The problem addressed here is the putative resurgence of an indigenous community and traditions (in a region widely and long perceived as lacking either) within a context of extreme socio-economic change. Included in this process of change is the apparent crisis of official Creole nationalist ideology emerging within the conjuncture of the 1970 Black Power ‘Revolution’ in Trinidad which challenged the outward-oriented cosmopolitanism and inward-oriented provincialism of Creole Nationalist ideology. The crisis can also be seen as gaining further momentum in the 1980s (into the present) with the shocks engendered by neoliberal structural adjustment, plummeting social expenditure, high unemployment, the reworking of patron-client networks, the withdrawal of the state from a leading role in development, and the acute upsurge of racialism. The questions treated here are: Why is there a renewed interest in Carib

(re)identification now? Is this an outcome of “de-hegemonization” in the centre of the world-system? The resurgent Carib Community, organized as a limited liability company and connected to the state via its leader, has read and sifted prevailing local and global trends in defining and establishing itself. This can be seen in terms of its position towards Creole/Trinidadian identity (and its demise), the ethnic segmentation of the society, and neoliberal developmentalism with state technocrats’ emphases on community development, self-reliance, and the improving of the balance-of-payments in part via marketing ethnic products and cultural tourism. The Carib Community’s ability to read and sift these trends also extends to its perception of, and relation to, the global organization and construction of aboriginality. This paper examines how the terms and processes of social incorporation are reworked in a context of heightened crisis, with special reference to the reworking of indigeneity as a multilateral enterprise involving the vesting of interest by numerous actors and institutions.

### ***Introduction***

The resurgence, reorganization and reconstruction of indigenous communities and traditions in the Caribbean within a context of socio-economic crisis poses a problem for our understanding and explanation of ethnicity and culture. First, the Caribbean has long been perceived, both within and without, as region where indigenous peoples and their traditions are extinct or nearly so. This raises the question: why do we see this resurgence of indigeneity *now*? Second, the context is that of a twin set of crises: one, the crisis of Creole nationalist ideology of a “Mother Trinidad and Tobago” which was believed by its upholders to have largely overcome its internal “recalcitrant others,” and; two, the crisis for state-led development occasioned by neoliberal structural adjustment.<sup>2</sup> A second question arises when we consider how these crises not only constrain but even enable the emergence of sub-national or even alter-nationalist ethnic and religious communities throughout Trinidad.<sup>3</sup> The specific focus of this paper is the Santa Rosa Carib Community of Arima, Trinidad, its development as a business enterprise, its reorganization as a distinguishable community, and its forging of international connections and relationships.

In general terms, the crisis of a national creolized identity entails the ethnic segmentation of the society along the lines of increasingly polarized, rigidly exclusive, essentialist and oppositional categories of ethnicity and racial identity. A significant portion of the society is the product of an ongoing history of miscegenation – a mixture that is as often denied as it is celebrated, and, as often overtly proclaimed as it is covertly sifted for the most congenial elements of an individual’s chosen/imagined racial genealogy (a process not immune to the occasional fabrication of fictitious, racially favoured ancestors). In the eyes of ethnic partisans, the national is at best a potential state, at worst an imaginary abstraction.<sup>4</sup> Many, if not all of these movements and communities have themselves assiduously developed working alliances, friendly ties and other relationships with a plethora of global institutions, transnational actors, and relevant diasporic partner communities. Ironically, the latter are not always considered as “global” but as internal or lateral to these reconstituted communities. I believe that the

profusion of revitalization movements in Trinidad itself acts as an accelerant to the formation and development of further resurgences of sub-national identifications. I would also agree with Immanuel Wallerstein and Ulf Hannerz who suggest that revitalization movements stem, in large part, from both the pressures and possibilities emanating from the world-system.

The crisis of state-led development under a regime of neoliberal structural adjustment has resulted in Trinidad's technocrats developing policies that promote community development, self-reliance and tourism. The first two of these policies were especially the concern of the National Alliance for Reconstruction government of Prime Minister A. N. R. Robinson (1986-1991), the first government to begin concerted and sweeping structural adjustment. Tourism promotion, at the community level, has been the hallmark of the United National Congress government of Prime Minister Basdeo Panday (1995-2000) and the state's Tourism and Industrial Development Corporation (TIDCO), the latter seemingly ever-present in local political machinations. I see these developments as key influences on the form and dynamic of many of these newly emergent and redefined micro-communities, regardless of their sometimes-open rejection of the state and national institutions.

Thus a major question at the back of this research is: what happens to ethnic identity and cultural expression under neoliberalism in the Caribbean? My hypothesis is that "marketing the cultural product," in the official pronouncements of technocracy, is a powerful stimulus and framework for the (re)creation of *ethnic groups as business organizations*.<sup>5</sup> This points to the possibility of there being a *symbolic mode of accumulation*, embedded in a wider political economy of tradition, where traditions are valued for their developmentalist potential and global significance, as well as being heralded as cornerstones in the building of the nation. Brackette Williams in similar vein has explained that the "boundaries that mark identity distinction also mark ownership of cultural products and the symbolic significance they have in civil society;" moreover, she instructively observes that, "no ethnic group can afford not to measure its accomplishments against those of others. In search of a legitimate place in the nation, each group must guard its gains and insist on all credit due" (Williams 1989: 412, 435). Ideas of *credit* and *value* thus become in actuality more than just metaphorical constructs, and attain multiple levels of meaning from the economic, to the political, to the cultural, developing along a local-global continuum. *Strategies of legitimacy* thus become central expressions of the struggle to establish *value*, strategies that often resort to what Bhabha calls "the artifice of the archaic" (Bhabha 1995: 207).

By the "symbolic mode of accumulation" I mean literal capital accumulation derived from: the establishment of the value of products on the basis of their symbolic importance – emblematic (in the case of the Caribs) of environmentally-friendly practices, of self-reliance, and of basic ways of satisfying basic needs; the value of the products of traditional practices in terms of their representation of symbols important to the nation, that is, an Amerindian ancestry of the modern nation thereby indicating a long-term, European-like national history; the value of the traditional material culture of "endangered indigenous minorities" that requires preservation, and thus, inevitably, funding; the value of indigeneity-on-display for cash-in-hand foreign visitors, thereby contributing to "national development" by helping to address the balance-of-payments crisis. To use Michael Moerman's terms (see Moerman 1965 and 1968), we see that

even the most seemingly inane, insignificant or trivial practices can take on special value in multiple ways given the right context. This symbolic mode of accumulation dwells within a larger political economy of tradition, which recognizes the ways in which cultural property is produced and presented and the conscious and purposeful transformation of the symbolic into capital, aided by an array of actors and institutions of political and economic nature, operating within a local-global continuum. (This is a preliminary means of locating the practice and production of tradition within a world-systemic framework.)

### ***Globalization, Creolization and the Crisis of Hegemonic Creole Nationalism.***

While miscegenation, linguistic creolization, and religious syncretism have been and continue to be ongoing historical processes (however muffled or denied at present in the increasingly audible assertions of Trinidadian ethnic activists), only particular crystallizations and ideological formulations of the “right mix” have been dominant at different times.<sup>6</sup> An Euro-Creole society, dominant for most of Trinidad’s history, involved a hegemonic notion of creolization involving a pattern of upward (towards the “white”) identification and a downward (away from the “black”) distancing. Some argue that the Afro-Creole successor, dominant from the 1960s to the 1990s,<sup>7</sup> also has an inherent bias against “African consciousness” (let alone East Indian culture).<sup>8</sup> Creole nationalist principles attempted to work against a history of ethnic division, but were charged with having “only fostered difference” insofar as Creole nationalism preserved, perpetuated and yet harshly judged racial and ethnic “otherness” (see Taylor 1993: 265). By preserving and perpetuating otherness, whilst denouncing it, I mean Dr. Williams’ fashioning of a vision of a “Mother Trinidad and Tobago” – “No Mother Africa, No Mother India, No Mother China, No Mother Syria, No Mother Europe...just a Mother Trinidad and Tobago and mother does not discriminate among her children” – which came to be seen as being a Mother with children of “different fathers.” When calling people to the nation, Williams and other Creole nationalists chose to call them via the vehicle of their separate racial and ethnic identities. Recently, artist and poet Le Roy Clarke wrote:

If we were to seriously examine our claims that we prosper as a harmonious ‘society’ [on another occasion he argued there is no Trinidadian society and no Trinidadian]; that, as diverse as we are, we have managed to create a model, ‘where every creed and race finds an equal place’ [a verse from the national anthem], we would find that our claims are merely boasts in which we excel by fooling ourselves and others for any of many reasons that may be revealed under real analysis. (Le Roy Clarke, “Hard on the Humour of Hard,” *Trinidad Guardian*, Saturday, February 21, 1998, p. 11)

Dominant configurations of “Creole culture” thus involved a continuation of a colonial ethos of hybridity, i.e., as a relation between the “mixers” and those to be passively “mixed in.” The emergence of what often seems to be a “pervasive lack of

mutual knowledge and communication between the various ethnic groups of Trinidad,” has also been referred to as “negative indifference” and “plural acculturation” and leads to the preservation and rigidification of racial and cultural differences. Moreover, it is also a “major ingredient in the middle class Creole ideology” which emphasizes the society’s cosmopolitan mixture while pronouncing the alienation of the East Indian half of the population an “aberration” (Oxaal 1968: 22-23).

Whilst proclaiming itself a cosmopolitan blending of especially European and African cultures, an almost mystical/mystifying “new national culture”<sup>9</sup> that was to overcome divisive particularisms, in many ways it revealed its basis as a micro-spatial specification or localization of the power culture of the core of world-capitalism. The central institutions thus were Christian churches, schools, the plantation system, the labour market and the national educational system based on European colonial models of pedagogy with a high volume of European and North American content. Michael Lieber (1981: 86), similarly argued that, “in the Caribbean politically powerful and usually white bourgeoisies have laid down the rules, invoking and enforcing those rules through the schools, churches, courts, newspapers. This elite had imposed a cultural design...upon a politically subordinate black majority.” At the same time capitalist social relations worked effectively through the labour market in helping to effect ethnic segmentation – effectively establishing the polar identities always referred to in Creole ideology – and this was often elaborated through the use of space, creating and reinforcing social worlds under Creole or East Indian “control” (Clarke 1993: 133). Colin Clarke also amply details the extent to which increased racial segregation, socially and spatially, is now “typical of Trinidadian society” (Clarke 1993: 134). We see then contradictory tendencies in the development of hegemonic creolisms: pronouncing unity and assimilation yet unable to undo the daunting social structure bequeathed by colonialism. Colonial institutions in the history of Trinidad are thus found to have kept the immigrant groups residentially, occupationally and culturally apart to the extent that, “a body of shared values did not emerge to weld the disparate peoples into any sort of coherent community” (Premdas 1993: 137).

Where I may disagree concerns the view that absolutely no shared values emerged, at least insofar as we recognize capitalism as also being a system of values, a system very widely adhered to by people in Trinidad, along with a pronounced and generalized preference for individualism and luxury consumption. What locals refer to as “Americanization,” remains regardless of any and all ethnic conflicts, the dominant and shared way of life. Indeed, some local intellectuals see the root of ethnic conflict in Trinidad as being a battle over negotiating different avenues and special access to the “white, North American ideal.”

Internal processes of putative “de-creolization” (or anti-Creolism, to be more accurate) have begun to emerge via globalized ethnic revitalizations and the development of local alter-nationalisms. Observers note that ethnicity has become, now more than ever, “implicated in the power struggles of everyday life,” permeating all of Trinidad’s political, socio-economic and cultural institutions and practices (see Yelvington 1993: 1). Ralph Premdas (1997: 1) also observes that numerous ethnic identities are now being (re)asserted, even invented, all of which he sees as serving to undermine the state as a carrier of a dominant cultural core and as an exclusive unit of loyalty. Premdas also stresses that these newly (re)assertive ethnic groups and movements are engaged in a

quest for security, status and resources, “in a sea of cacophonous [sic] contestations over shares, equity, redress, rights, wrongs, etc.” Selwyn Ryan (1997: 11) goes as far as to say that in a situation where scarcity obtains, “culture is being imagined and invented to be used as a resource to capture public and non-state resources.” Ryan (1997: 13) adds that, “much of what is currently being identified as Hindu, African or Orisha culture in the context of the Caribbean are little more than collective fictions or myths manufactured by political and cultural entrepreneurs who seek to use them as part of their political, social or economic stock of capital.” Friedman makes the argument (1994: 199) that the heightening presence and representability of groups such as Fourth World peoples is the outcome of de-hegemonization at the centre of the world-system, the same centre which formed a major defining part of local Trinidadian creolism. Trinidad has reached a stage where the dominant paradigms of Creole identity are openly challenged and contested along lines of renewed and reinvented ethnicities, linguistic decreolization, and changing gender relations that deny “the nation” of its “mothers” and even of its “manly men.”<sup>10</sup> Provincialisms have become globalized, paradoxically, and with the aid of ever-improved communications technology, are having a serious impact on the restructuring of loyalties and envisioned possibilities in countries such as Trinidad.<sup>11</sup>

It is interesting to note not only the number and names of the new “African” organizations in Trinidad (“African” never having been as common and popular a designation as is currently the case), such as the National Association for the Empowerment of African People (NAEAP), the Organization for the Preservation of African Culture (OPAC) and the African Diaspora Unified Movement of Trinidad and Tobago (ADRUM), but also the fact that they all involve some measure of international diasporic connections, inputs, assistance and encouragement. Many of these are viewed as very recent reactions to similar organizations among the Indian population.

It is also interesting to observe – and this has been widely commented upon both locally and abroad, by ordinary individuals and academics – that a pronounced “West Indian” and “Trinidadian” identity seems to have evolved more among migrant communities in North America and Britain, indeed even the racial tensions that prevail back home subside abroad if not rendered altogether irrelevant and redundant. This may be case of being more at home abroad.

I see these developments as inevitably bound to the socio-economic crisis that mushroomed following the end of Trinidad’s oil boom and the rise of neoliberal ideology and practice.

### ***The Crisis of the Developmentalist State.***

Under the “guidance” of international institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, Trinidadian governments and all the dominant parties have accepted, domesticated and implemented neoliberal structural adjustment measures in both philosophy and practice. The outcome has been the withdrawal of the state from an active and central role in fostering development via state ownership of the “commanding heights” of the economy. Furthermore, plummeting social expenditure, rising unemployment, and increased poverty had all served to alert the population to the “scarcity” of valued

material resources (that is, the inequitable distribution of resources). Albeit a sketchy description, how does all this amount to a “culture of crisis” and what are its dynamics?

Analysts, such as Emile Sahliyeh (1990), locate the roots of ethnic and cultural revitalizations in a pervasive “crisis atmosphere” that stems from: 1. The inconclusive modernizing efforts of secular elites in the Third World; 2. the growing disillusionment with nationalism; 3. problems of state legitimacy and political oppression in many Third World countries; 4. problems of national identity; 5. widespread socio-economic grievances; and, 6. the erosion of communal traditions. Furthermore, with regard to the engineered scarcity of resources, Abner Cohen’s situational “interest groups” approach seems to have some validity when we begin to speak about the impact of material scarcity on ethnic organization and resurgence (see Cohen 1969). For Cohen the,

earning of livelihood, the struggle for a larger share of income from the economic system, including the struggle for housing, for higher education and for other benefits, and similar issues constitute an important variable significantly related to ethnicity (Cohen 1974: xv).

I must agree with this to some extent since all ethnic groups in Trinidad – literally without a single exception (and I can make this seemingly absolute statement with some confidence) – have either an explicit and formally structured economic agenda, or have actual economic interests and enterprises, or at the very least bear serious economic gripes which at times burst forth in their members’ monologues. Cohen further explains that, “in the perennial request for livelihood in a divided labour market, competition for a greater share of income results in the formation of interest groups,” and that one can look at the role of ethnic identities in the “formation of self-help organizations focused primarily on enhancing the group’s economic competitiveness” (see Williams 1989: 405 for an further exposition of Cohen 1974).

Both *supranational* and *infranational* processes<sup>12</sup> arising from economic and cultural globalization have aided the transformation of the state as a central unit of loyalty and social relevance. The state has seemingly retreated into its own exclusive identity-making, aggravating popular perceptions that those who govern serve themselves and their supporting elites: public service as ‘serving oneself to the public.’ Perhaps never before the 1990s has one heard so many declarations of the “sanctity of parliament,” of “permissible displays of behaviour in this august chamber [parliament],” about “the dignity and integrity of Ministers,” etc. This reinforces the view that the state is almost daily called upon to justify and promote itself, a subtle and dangerous admission of the decay and growing irrelevance of Trinidad’s fossilized and arcane version of Westminster democracy. The rise of a state technocracy, distanced from the mass of the population, and the state’s increasingly evident inability to solve problems within its borders, mark a growing crisis-driven redefinition of the state. Party politics have also entered into crisis: the threat to post-oil boom patron-client networks has led parties to increasingly appeal to race in order to win or maintain constituencies.<sup>13</sup> Simultaneously, however, when in power these same parties appeal for stability through national unity. Added contradictions emerge from the state’s encouragement of a global economic orientation while expecting national political allegiance from citizens, many of whom have important multiple ties with agents and institutions in other countries. Globalization

and the crisis of Creole nationalism have acted as both medium and outcome of the development of sub-national micro-communities whose local legitimacy, in a society with such pronounced external orientations, is validated and enforced by supportive global networks, institutions and trends.

Yet, the state has retained a commanding position as broker amongst communities and interests in this crisis. Its position has changed rather than being rendered altogether obsolete. These transformations have also had a cultural impact: the language of technocracy has entered popular discourse: almost all organizations in Trinidad, of all types seemingly, embrace terms such as “coming on stream,” and speak of “project evaluation,” “coordinating officers,” “meetings of council,” “articles of association,” “revenue earning potential,” and call for new “policy modalities.” The language of private sector business has long had a cultural impact, possibly from the time that corporate theatre in the form of CBS’ “The Young and the Restless” became so vastly popular in Trinidad. The onus is placed on ethnic associations to organize formally, with their own bureaucracy, elected officers, mission statements, and are required to register formally as corporate bodies, and draft legal “articles of association,” in order to receive state recognition, funds and other resources.

Observations of these phenomena lend credence to Brackette Williams’ thesis that, “how the distribution and legitimation of the power some groups have in the state to constrain the actions of other groups...shape both their [ethnic groups’] need to organize and the character of their organizational efforts” (1989: 406). Williams views the state as a set of power-broking apparati intervening among competing groups, which seems to be the case here, and sees such intervention as a factor in establishing the material and symbolic conditions for the production of ethnic groups (1989: 427). Williams’ analysis stresses “the state as the purveyor of the policies and constraints that both formally define and informally direct politically and morally acceptable forms of competition and cooperation” (1989: 405-406). Where I might disagree, if I have understood all of Williams’ propositions, is that nationalist precepts and principles continue to guide, inform and condition the claims, demands, and formational practices of ethnic groups. I think it may be useful to think more about statist precepts, principles, and models of organization, and to try to better understand how globalization alters and shapes Williams’ nationalist precepts. The problem then is that, like the ethnic groups it manages and governs, the state itself has difficulty in establishing and maintaining continuity in a changing world-system. Moreover, accepting everything Williams argues still leaves us with the need to carefully elaborate the sources of the state’s centrality, especially in the very new nation-states such as Trinidad and Tobago, and to understand the implications of change in the world-system. Does the state’s power rest on coercion? On manipulation of the public purse strings? On symbolic power and prestige? On patronage? On the gullibility of a duped populace?

For a state whose cultural make-up is questioned, all such ethnic groupings feel the need to proclaim their value to the development of the nation, both symbolically and economically, even while they may challenge the contents of established perceptions of the “true nation.” Very important also is the state’s *heightened* role in funding various groups’ cultural events and festivals (always with conditions attached) and the various groups’ competition to secure these funds. Ryan (1997: 19) reveals the tremendous sums of money, in some cases hundreds of thousands of local dollars, are spent by the state on



groups' cultural festivals and in subventions to ethnic and cultural associations. This is happening even while public bodies plead that they have no funds or resources to adequately provide services to large parts of the population, including areas that go without any water supply for *months*. Ryan notes, to cite one example, how Emancipation Day activities, now observed by many more Afro-Trinidadians than ever before, received \$419,000 TT as opposed to \$67,000 in previous years (Ryan 1997: 20), regardless of the fact that an Indian-dominated party is in power (or perhaps, more accurately, because of it). This is important for as Brackette Williams (1989: 435) explains: "Designated ethnic celebrations provide forums for such [ethnic] groups to display colourful proof that they too have contributed to the national foundation," however, "[e]thnics...are not the autochthonous ancestors who have the power to turn feathers and flourishes into brick and mortar."

### ***The Re-Engineering of Indigeneity.***

Having set out the rudiments of an outline of the context of crisis and its manifestations, we can now explore the specific phenomenon of a resurgent indigeneity in Trinidad, although I do not provide here a satisfactory ethnographic description of the group concerned. The Santa Rosa Carib Community (SRCC), based in the city of Arima, numbers 30 regular members, at most, and is led by a return migrant from Detroit who is also an elected Councilor on the Arima Borough Council, in charge of Culture, and is a member of the Peoples National Movement (Arima is often cited by PNM politicians as being a "traditional" PNM stronghold). The community was organized as a limited liability company in 1976 and, along with its plans to preserve, retrieve and symbolically reclaim national traditions as being Carib, is also hoping to build a cultural tourism facility in Arima, with the support of public funds and the involvement of private interests. The Carib Community is allocated \$35,000 TT annually for preparations involved in the Santa Rosa Festival, a Catholic feast for St. Rose held every August 23<sup>rd</sup>, funds provided by the Ministry of Culture and the Arima Borough Council. The Caribs are to receive private lands to be used in partnership with a prominent local political figure. The Mayor of Arima, Elvin Edwards, says that the presence of the Caribs' leader on the Borough Council has been both instrumental and beneficial to the Carib Community, even though he represents a mostly non-Carib constituency.

The Carib presence in Arima is deemed by almost all the local powers- that-be to be of special significance in highlighting the uniqueness of Arima and its people. Identified by the state in 1990 as the only legitimate representative of the indigenous peoples of Trinidad and Tobago, this effectively gives Arima a monopoly of indigeneity, one that may also have economic benefits for key interests in the city, whilst bestowing legitimacy on the Carib Community. The fact that prominent nationalist intellectual and leader, Dr. Eric Williams, spoke of Amerindians as 'ancestors of the nation' (and some even see him as having Carib ancestry), adds the weight of nationalist legitimacy. The temporality of this resurgence is important to note, seeing that this group really gained prominence and support from local and foreign sources in the 1990s though it began its "rebirth" in the mid-1970s. The SRCC is also a member of the newly formed Caribbean Organization of Indigenous People, founded and first chaired by a Belizean

anthropologist, and boasts of its ties to large North American indigenous bodies, such as Canada's Assembly of First Nations.

I refer to this case as one of "re-engineered" indigeneity. By indigeneity I mean a generalized sense of being or becoming indigenous, or acknowledging an indigenous heritage, the act of making claims to being indigenous, and purposefully acting on those claims. By re-engineering I mean to highlight those aspects of this phenomenon such as formal, bureaucratic, business organization; internal shareholders and external stakeholders; multilateral connections; internationalization; and, marketing and commerce – all designed to achieve security, stability and special recognition for the given group.<sup>14</sup> I see this phenomenon as a case of "neo-traditional development," harnessing custom to commerce (see Sahlins 1994), and developing traditions for both material and affective gain.<sup>15</sup> The *value* of such traditions is determined in the local and global economic and cultural marketplaces. This value is further enhanced when endorsed and defended by powerful international organizations and by indigenous bodies elsewhere in the world.

I have also been looking at how, at the international level, United Nations agencies (to name one example) have played a critical role in the formulation and organization of a new and globalized aboriginality. At the local level, UN bodies can act as "guarantor" of the legitimacy, importance, and authenticity of a group's identity and organization as indigenous. Significantly, UN commissions in Trinidad have held events in association with the Santa Rosa Carib Community. Indigenous perspectives and concerns are being increasingly voiced in many United Nations fora, and the UN has become very important in indigenous peoples' struggles to organize, define and advance themselves. The UN's role has been symbolically and politically heightened with the International Year (1993) and Decade (1994-2004) for Indigenous People, in addition to an array of UN projects centred on indigenous people and the drafting of important declarations. Often, indigenous people world-wide are cast in an homogenous manner as people knowledgeable of valuable traditions and as victims of discrimination. The activities of the UN and large transnational indigenous bodies may well have the outcome of producing a global aboriginal "imagined community" (to use Benedict Anderson's concept), the creation of a "global ethnoscape" of indigeneity. In the process, UN agencies have by their own admission been drafted into the process of cultural preservation: "strengthening cultural identity" of indigenous peoples is an established goal; setting up networks of indigenous communities and organizations for the sharing of information and experience is another established goal (and a process the SRCC has itself already participated in); promoting an international "trade fair" for indigenous products was also a declared goal of the UN; and, the "right to be different," the "right to development," and the "right to revitalize" of indigenous people was made into a matter of international concern and responsibility.<sup>16</sup>

Re-engineering thus occurs in a local-global continuum: the construction, organization and transmission of symbolic resources (images, motifs of indigeneity) and material resources (funds, international conferences, projects) legitimizing, supporting and aiding the re-creation of indigenous communities. The "reinterpretation of tradition"<sup>17</sup> is a defining feature of this case, with the role of "culture brokers" selecting and interpreting traditions for a particular clientele whilst operating in conjunction with political, economic and religious hierarchies within a given "social organization of

tradition” (see Antoun 1989: 4-5, 17). Antoun defines the “social organization of tradition” as a “universal process found among all societies at all times once particular hinterland communities become linked to overarching political, economic and religious structures and implicated in the concomitant processes of debt, politics, social control, and the quest for salvation” (1989: 17).

***Chaos’ Capital: Brokering New Terms of Social Incorporation.***

In brokering and negotiating new terms of social incorporation, no longer as atomized and faceless nationals, but as organized and distinctive ethnics, it is of vital importance to a group such as the SRCC to be able to appeal to established precedents and recognized categories in order to legitimize itself and make itself intelligible to the public, in part because they require public recognition and assistance. By these precedents and categories I mean, to name some, the general preservation of “race” as an accepted construct,<sup>18</sup> and its heightened emphasis in popular discourse within Trinidad’s crisis context; the preservation of “Carib” as colonial racial category; the acknowledged legitimacy of ethnic forms of organization; and, the international attention to indigenous peoples.<sup>19</sup> As Brackette Williams explains, addressing the work of A. Cohen, most individuals “are ‘only too happy’ to give definite expression to their uncertain ideas and feelings through the symbolic conventions of their society” (Williams 1989: 403). For groups such as the SRCC, the past is a resource, the present is a platform, and the future is a project.

The SRCC’s ability to sift and read the global cultural scene for useful and established ideas of indigeneity and tradition is of central importance. I rely here on Roland Robertson’s observation that,

some of the most significant cultural phenomena of our time have to do with responses to and interpretations of the global system as a whole. More specifically, globalization involves pressure on societies, civilizations and representatives of traditions, including both ‘hidden’ and ‘invented’ traditions, to sift the global cultural scene for ideas and symbols considered to be relevant to their own identities (Robertson 1992: 46).

The SRCC constitutes itself not only within a diaspora-like regional Carib network but also defines itself, in part, in and through a network of globally organized aboriginality. Where their public presence is asserted, and even marketed, I believe that the act of presentation is itself an act of constitution, and must conform to certain demands and expectations.

In the end, my intention was to indicate not only the continuities made salient by the crisis of Creole nationalism and statist developmentalism, but to also point to those aspects that render crisis an opportunity for certain groups and agents. Moreover, I believe that the temporality of these new ethnic resurgences in Trinidad, their organizational forms and political orientations, are not just coincidences of crisis, but constructs arising in and from crisis.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper, titled “Crises of the Creole Nation and the Developmentalist State, and the Re-Engineering of Indigeneity in Trinidad and Tobago,” was presented at the Annual Meetings of the *American Ethnological Society*, Toronto, Canada, May 7-10, 1998 (in association with the Canadian Anthropology Society). Conference Theme: Culture and Systemic Collapse. Panel: “Democracy, Citizenship and Development: Local Transformations in a Global Context.” My thanks to Professor Karen Leonard at the University of California – Irvine for her comments at the session.

<sup>2</sup> Neoliberalism, as it is known in the Caribbean and elsewhere in the periphery, involves privatization of state enterprises; retrenchment of state employees; decreased social spending; the forcing of international competitiveness for local firms previously aided and shielded by subsidies, tariffs and negative lists for imported goods; the devaluation and eventual flotation of the currency; rising prices and declining real wages; and, the reintroduction of foreign ownership of local resources. The official ideological translations of these factors include a greater stress on individualism, on law and order, on succumbing to the commands of the state, and on globalization: the imperative to become effective international players.

<sup>3</sup> Trinidad and Tobago is a “multi-ethnic” society composed of descendants of East Indian indentured labourers (43% of the population), descendants of African slaves and black West Indian migrants (43% of the population), with the remainder an assortment of French, Spanish, English, Corsican, Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian, Portuguese, Venezuelan, and Chinese people. It is important to note that many of these ethnic communities, and religious groups (Orisha, Baptist, Hindu, Muslim, Catholic), have begun to develop their own separate corners of the society, with their own separate communal organizations, cultural events and business enterprises.

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, I have found the national lumped with the “alien” (read “remote” and “distant”) insofar as leaders of the various ethnic revitalization movements construct the municipal and the regional as the only truly local places

<sup>5</sup> This is what Prof. James Weiner refers to as “literal corporatization” of groups in remarking on the current global state where “culture is business.” See also Weiner (1998).

<sup>6</sup> This is what Brackette Williams refers to as a “homogenizing heterogeneity,” assimilating elements of heterogeneity “through appropriations that devalue and deny the link to marginalized others’ contributions to the patrimony” (Williams 1989: 435). She also refers to the same phenomenon as a “transformist hegemony.”

<sup>7</sup> This is roughly the period of Trinidad’s independence from Britain and of its almost continuous rule by the Afro-Creole dominated Peoples National Movement founded and led by the nationalist historian and intellectual, Dr. Eric Williams.

<sup>8</sup> Writing almost three decades ago, David Lowenthal perceptively claimed, with regards to the strong European bias of dominant creolism, that if there was a Creole culture it would be, “a culture hard to identify as a whole because in essence it is an absence....European preferences and modes of thought are deeply embedded, and West Indians on the whole are not eager to uproot them” (Lowenthal 1972: 268).

<sup>9</sup> I am here reminded of Ernest Gellner’s statement that, “nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it *invents* nations where they do not exist” (see Anderson 1991: 6 and Gellner 1983). I also believe there is less and less evidence to support Ulf Hannerz’s view that the creation of a state can be a “self-fulfilling prophecy” in terms of becoming more nation-like if by that we mean developing a unitary cultural identity and the adhesion of the populace to that identity (Hannerz 1987: 548).

<sup>10</sup> It would be impossible to begin to catalogue the myriad manifestations of these tendencies. We can note in passing however that significant portions of the dispossessed and marginalized Afro-Creoles are turning away from the mainstream Creole identity and turning to movements like the Jama’at al Muslimeen. Others note that the syncretic religions demonstrate processes of purging themselves of elements lacking in original purity, as in Orisha worship now re-emphasizing the use of the Yoruba language and eliminating Hindu icons and symbols (see Houk 1993: 161). It is increasingly apparent that there is a generalized tendency amongst each of the ethnic groups to return to some perceived pure origins, to aggressively promote their contributions to the nation as outweighing all others, to speak of each of their histories as separate from each other, and to retreat to separate corners of the society, both symbolically and literally (as with the development of “private communities” for the moneyed classes). The 1998 Carnival season

provided graphic evidence of many of these tendencies, but this will have to be left for future papers I am preparing.

The gender correlates of Creole nationalism have also been eroded if not debunked. Creole nationalism's inherent masculinism has been undermined by both the ascendance of women in the economy and professions and who refuse to be relegated to the role of "mothers of the nation," valued only for making sons, in addition to the simultaneous economic displacement of many men from male-dominated sectors affected by current retrenchment (i.e., port workers). Added to this is the increasing awareness, and furious controversy, of patterns of widespread bisexuality and homosexuality, with the recent publication of national estimates that up to 45% of adult male Trinidadians have had some homosexual experience. Moreover, the presentation in the media of gay issues and concerns is also a recent and highly debated development.

The view that, "nationalism typically has sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope," is further developed by Cynthia Enloe (1989: 44, 54). A detailed treatment of the manner in which the ideology of male dominance, seen here as key to Creole nationalism, has been "subverted by the reality of male marginality" and "increasing female self-reliance," appears in Olive Senior (1991: 181) See also Mohammed (1991: 35).

<sup>11</sup> As James Clifford explains, globalization involves a re-framing of loyalties, identities and group connections. These new connections parallel if not displace those that were once monopolized by states in relations with their own citizens and citizens of other states. Clifford notes: "Peoples whose sense of identity is centrally defined by collective histories of displacement and violent loss cannot be 'cured' by merging into a new national community. This is especially true when they are the victims of ongoing, structural prejudice. Positive articulations of diaspora identity reach outside the normative territory and temporality (myth/history) of the nation-state....Association with another nation, region, continent, or world-historical force (such as Islam) gives added weight to claims against an oppressive national hegemony" (Clifford 1994: 307, 310).

<sup>12</sup> These terms are borrowed from Hobsbawm (1992).

<sup>13</sup> Indeed, in the opinion of some, nationalism failed to "deliver the goods," literally: "If nationalism could not promise a better life for the people, what was it good for?" (Oxaal 1968: 177).

<sup>14</sup> Needless to say, "security, stability and special recognition" are not mutually exclusive insofar as these can be derivative of each other or mutually reinforcing. The "crisis context" makes these real imperatives in the minds of such groups, trying as they are to make their way in an increasingly impoverished and increasingly hostile society.

<sup>15</sup> I realize that there are numerous criticisms that are made of notions of ethnicity that see it as situational and as an instrumentalized advantage-seeking strategy. While I would not disagree that there must be some element of "primordality," specifically in terms of an actual historical basis and experiential substrate behind a resurgent ethnic identification, I would suggest that nevertheless the affectivity inhering to an identification may also be derivative of its efficacy as a strategy of gain, though the reverse may not necessarily be true. Indeed, my informants in the leadership of the Carib Community have repeatedly emphasized that they feel that it is only when they can show that a real income can be derived from the practice of traditions, that actual infrastructure is being constructed, and that careers and livelihoods are to be made, that then they will be able to encourage the "non-doers" at the margins of the group to become involved and to become proud. In return, that serves to bolster the numbers and prominence of the group as a whole, which renders the group less easily dismissed as they claim was the case in the past (i.e., government officials not responding to their demands for state lands on the basis that they were so small and not real indigenous people, that is, racially mixed).

<sup>16</sup> For further details on this, see Principle 22 of UNCED's "Rio Declaration;" Article 8j of the Convention on Biological Diversity, which stresses the need to respect, preserve and strengthen indigenous knowledge; see also the ILO Convention 169; and, the UN Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.

<sup>17</sup> I borrow this concept from Antoun (1989). I would also suggest that related concepts in anthropology are also pertinent: Nicholas Thomas' discussion of the "reform and reformulation," "objectification," and "articulation" of tradition (Thomas 1989); Handler and Linnekin's "reinvention" of tradition (Handler and Linnekin 1984); and, Hanson's "culture invention" (Hanson 1989), to name only a few. The purpose of the re-engineering concept is to highlight contextual factors, often overlooked in these portraits of autonomous 'inventive' agents, the vesting of interests in such processes, and the economic and

bureaucratic nature of such resurgence along with the renegotiation of symbolic value. Some recent work on “symbolic ethnicity” is also of relevance here (see Spratt 1994).

<sup>18</sup> In fact the leadership of the SRCC is particularly sensitive to their “mixed blood,” lamenting the fact that it makes them less real, and expecting that people who look like “real Caribs” should do more to get involved with the SRCC. This is somewhat troubling, for while race allows the SRCC the space to be different, they themselves reinforce the common perception in the society that extinction is to be equated with the passing of a race, of identifiable phenotypical difference, rather than with the passing of traditions or even the process of self-identification as indigenous. This lends weight to the view that *identifiability* becomes critical to mounting an effective and ‘credible’ self-identification.

<sup>19</sup> Pronouncements of the SRCC in the media underline that their traditions have been “endorsed” by “esteemed and reputable” international authorities (such as UNESCO, Survival International, Greenpeace) as “worthy of emulation” and preservation. In return, the state played a role in funding Carib cultural events and formally organizing for the UN’s International Year for Indigenous People in 1993.

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