MultiCultural Faiths
Social Cohesion and Inclusion
Engaging with Faith, Identity & Integration

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Diasporas in the Commonwealth
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Monash University, Malaysia
Sopari Mai to Hindus, others

La Divina Pastora to Catholics/Christians

Statue brought by priest from Venezuela in mid 18th century, claimed it had saved his life – beginning of process of mythmaking...

Worshipped by all,

Multi-religious procession on Good Friday

copper-skinned, dark-haired image
Not uncommon for one religion to utilise modes of another in services and rituals which make for the level of religious tolerance veritably exemplary, if not unique to Trinidad and Tobago.

Soparee Mai
La Divina Pastora

E.g. of cross-fertilisation of religious practices – different from ways same religions are practiced elsewhere, even ‘motherland’.
Migrant Society: Multiple Diasporas

Processes of diaspora formation: displacement, adaptation, and integration affect not only cultural, political, economic and social practices also impacted how religions are practiced and expounded. Soparee Mai/La Divina Pastora one example of assimilation/integration of faith and beliefs of different religions, through cultural practice. This contributes to strengthening the fabric of nationalism, diffuse tensions and promote tolerance in this multicultural place.
MultiCultural Faiths

Transfer of faith from motherland to diaspora; creation of new diasporas rooted in new world

Historical neutralising of religious animosities in new place in struggle to establish identity

Socialisation “systems’ strengthened respect and understanding: schools

Cultural ‘systems’ provided cohesiveness towards respect and understanding

Political ‘neutrality’ facilitated respect/understanding

Role of religious leaders & Inter-Religious Organisation

Potential divisiveness of media and new media to upset delicate balance

(Rampersad, Finding a Place (2002)

MultipleChoice – Religion, Culture, Community and Education In a Multicultural Place
Engaging with Faiths: Contexts

That faith and religion are not analogous: An aside in CF report, but should be central to define the inherent challenges, ambiguities and contradictions noted in Sen Report, Civil Paths to Peace (07).

Faith looks for common ground.
Religion thrives on difference.
Faith is inclusive, religion is exclusive
Faith is syncretic; religion is divisive

“Engagement must also be with communities and not just faith leaders”
(Foreword, Commonwealth Foundation, Engaging With Faith report, 07)

“Faiths are complex and anything but monolithic, an understanding of subtleties and diversities needs to be shared and strengthened. Concept of multiple, overlapping, sometimes competing identities needs to be popularised and promoted to key decision-makers and other actors (eg media) Interplay between faiths and cultures needs to be better understood.”

Engaging With Faith report, 07
Ethnic Mix

26% Roman Catholic
22.5% Hindu
7.8% Anglican
7.2% Baptist
6.8% Pentecostal,
5.8% Muslim
4% 7th Day Adventist
5.8% other Christian
10.8% other
1.4% unspecified
1.9% none

Religious Mix

40% of Indian
descent
37.5% of African
origin
20.5% Mixed,
0.8% unspecified
1.2% Other: Chinese,
Syrian Lebanese,
British, French
Spanish
Portuguese
Venezuelans

Population: 1.305 m
on 5,128 sq km
(Census, 2000)
Migrant Society: Multiple Diasporas

All migrants. “New” society”. First People group descended from Taino Indians who survived Spanish British colonial genocide absorbed within ‘Mixed, Other and Unspecified’. Broadly categorised African, Indian, Chinese from various regions in India, Africa, China, with strong, sometimes militant, regional and tribal or sectoral identities of their own, but in Trinidad, distinctions disappeared, become irrelevant.

Narace Samlal says a mantra as he gives Anil Binda first haircut at La Divina Pastora shrine: ‘Good Friday is auspicious for all citizens regardless of their faith. We are in a holy place, in a church, and today is full moon and Good Friday.’
Nationally, the broad categorisations are largely uncontested, widely accepted.
Within national borders are several distinctive groups each with own cultural baggage, though each participate in, contribute to creation of national culture.

(Rampersad, *Finding a Place*, 2003)

Challenge of creating the nation-state of Trinidad and Tobago from a polyglot of different migrant streams, of different motherlands, with different cultures and beliefs brought them the groups together for political/social rights.
Syncretic religions

Caribbean Hindus/Trinidad Hindus Hindu/Indian diaspora. Hindus were majority of those brought from India as bonded labourers – the main immigration stream from India between 1845 and 1917, lesser numbers of Muslims, Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists. Met Christians.

African religions underground.

It complicates & simplifies relations – with shared Common motherland, many animosities at origin neutralized in new place.
Complexity of Diaspora

At same time, they are seeding Caribbean diasporas in North America, Canada, Europe and elsewhere – as part of Hindu diasporas, Indian diasporas, Caribbean Diasporas. This adds considerable complexity and depth to discourse on diaspora, which often tends to describe diasporas in homogeneous terms.
Trinidad and Tobago
The rhetoric that became real

Myth of hybridisation internalized into belief
Images of integration pervasively present the nation as many strands in a tight weave

Rainbow country, rainbow people (Mandela), A Rainbow that is real (tourist brochure).
Tolerance - a national watchword, one of three (discipline, production)
National motto: ‘Together We Aspire, Together We Achieve’.
Real Unity:
Machel Montano and Drupatee Ramgoonai

Machel:
Well this one is called unite de nation
Why can't we all get along?
Why we fuss and fight?
Tonight we come to unite
This is Machel and Drupatee
Whey yuh say?

Drupatee:
Aap jaisa koi meri zindagi me aaye
To baat ban jaaye
Ah ha baat ban jaaye
Aap jaisa koi---

Machel:
Say every creed and race,
We jumpin' as one
Every creed could jump in ah band
Love one another united nation
Prime Minister all politician
President, police, and all civilian
Unite de nation, unite de nation

Repeat Verse 1 (nothing wrong with wining..)
Real unity, real unity
Show me, show me
Historical Processes

Of First Peoples in T&T

‘Churches and cathedrals were built on the sites of old native worshipping grounds. Native deities were replaced by Christian saints. Rituals and dances associated with previously existing gods were reapplied to Christian saints. (Assing, 2006)

Multicultural modes of practicing religion

“For the (East) Indians the Black Virgin is ‘Suparee’, the name of a seed which is used for religious ceremonies, and also the name of a powerful saint in India.”

-- Priest entry in parish records, 1871
Religious conversion and education efforts strengthened/preserved Indian/Hindu languages/culture (hymns in Hindi, translations of religious texts into Indian languages; strengthened resistance by Africans to reclaim)

‘Converts’ straddle ancestral and new religion – attend churches, pray in schools as converts; practice ancestral religion in home and community, maintained religious practices/beliefs, even when ‘converted’ into others

Jahaji Bhai (brothers of the boat) ‘Christian Hindus’, Presbhindhus
Jahaji Bhai: Brother Marvin

I am the seed of meh father
He is the seed of meh grandfather
Who is the seed of Bahut Ajah [great grandfather]
He came from Calcutta
Ah stick and ah bag on he shoulder

He turban and he kapra
So I am part seed of India

[Chorus]

The indentureship and the slavery
Bind together two races in unity
Achcha dosti [good friend]
There was no more Mother Africa
No more Mother India, just Mother Trini
Jananbhoomi.

My Bahut Ajah planted sugarcane
Down in the Caroni plain
So Ramlogan, Basdeo, Prakash and I
Is Jahaji Bhai
Jahaji Bhai
Jahaji Bhai
Community Building Processes
Multicultural modes of religious tolerance

Process of community building saw groups coming together against official domination and to help and support each other – build houses, schools, and churches.

Non-Hindu/AfroTrinidadian landowner offers land as seva (service) for school; Mosque accommodates Hindu students while school being refurbished; Mandir makes room for students of Presbyterian school when congested; AfroTrinidadian drummer boy excels at tabla-playing at Caroni Hindu school; Muslim school teacher emulates Hindu teacher’s decorative drawings of Christmas story on blackboard in Hindu School;
Hindu Principal with school of mainly non-Hindus, non-Indians expands cultural curriculum to include African drumming, limbo dancing, Christian hymns

MultipleChoice – Religion, Culture, Community & Education
In a Multicultural Place
Carnival - Agent of synthesis

Tension diffusing power replicated in sharing of social spaces
Traditional Carnival Characters

Roots in other lands

Moko Jumbie West African

Jab Malassie like Bulgarian Kukeri American Cowboy

Dame Lorraine French

Burrokeets Indian

American Native Indian

Cow Bands Venezuela/Spain Bullfighters Origin
(Multi) Cultural Expressions

Music: Steelband and hybridised song forms: Chutney, Calypso, Soca, Parang, Rapso, and further hybridised: Parang Soca, Chutkaipang, Soca-Chutney, Gospelpypo, Chutney Dancehall

Asian, African & Trini rhythms
Shared Religious Spaces

Religious = Cultural

Christmas, Easter
Hosay - Muslim Festival
Holi - Hindu Spring festival
Divali - Hindu festival of lights
Eid - Muslim prayer and fasting
(Multi) National Holidays

Baptist Liberation Day, Eid
Chinese Arrival Day, Divali
Indian Arrival Day, Easter
Emancipation, Christmas
Shared Cultural Spaces

Syncretic cuisine
Callaloo and Pelau (single dish, many ingredients) as metaphors of society as ‘potpourri’, ‘melting pot’

Language
Trinidad English - amalgam of lexicon, speech styles of all who have peopled it.
ROLE of the STATE


Government officials speak out against religious intolerance. Do not favor any one religion publicly. Public holidays for every religion with significant followings. Government supports the activities of the Inter-Religious Organization (IRO)

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor:

*International Religious Freedom Report for T&T*
Institutionalisation: IRO

Inter-Religious Organisation (IRO), formed about 40 years ago, brings together reps from most religions, provide prayer leader for official events, eg. opening of parliament and annual court term.

Tenuous role in balancing tensions and advocating religious tolerance when most required. Eg. Supported largely Hindu/Muslim position for revising name of highest National award from Trinity Cross (Christian symbol in a multicultural place) to The Order of Trinidad and Tobago.

Now asking for Order of Protocol/Table of Precedence be revised to be representative of population demographics.

Schools run by religious organisations attended, open to all. Preside over religious tensions that may arise.
...this fete with which you have come to identify yourself, did not originate as any kind of Catholic carnival at all. Quite to the contrary. Because it was not taken over by the Catholics of Corpus Christi until much later, as initially it was a Hindu and Shango fete: a festival of East Indian and African origin. [. . .] Furthermore: the original Corpus Christi Day did not take place on Corpus Christi Day at all. That is to say, it did not occur on Holy Thursday, but on Good Friday: the day of Christ’s death. The day when all the East Indians and Creoles and Warahoons went into the Catholic church to take up Magdalena, parading her joyous through the streets, resurrecting her up to take her place. It was a day known not as Corpus Christi, but as the Day of Suparee K Mai: the Day of Mother Kali, Black Hindu Goddess of Death and Destruction. (fictionalised Antoni, Robert, Davina Trace, 349)