

# The Cunning of Multiculturalism

## *A Perspective from the Caribbean*

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### CARIBBEAN MULTICULTURALISM AS EXCEPTION

When Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, a Trinidadian of Indian descent, announced in her Indian Arrival Day speech in 2010 that the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago's Ministry of Arts and Culture was being renamed the Ministry of Arts and *Multiculturalism*, she triggered a heated public debate about the formal adoption of multiculturalism as policy. This was, in many ways, a predictable response for Trinidadians, who are acutely aware of the mutual entanglement between politics and culture and ever vigilant of instances of it.<sup>1</sup> The Indo-Trinidadian<sup>2</sup> journalist Kris Rampersad, chair of UNESCO's T&T National Commission, had this to say:

While we reel at the emphatic denouncement of multiculturalism [by leaders in Germany and the U.K] in Germany . . . , the local Ministry of Multiculturalism hosted a conference "Towards a Multiculturalism Policy for Trinidad and Tobago." Its keynote . . . speakers were foreign academics and technocrats from . . . Canada and the United Kingdom, who admitted that they had no answers for us on our efforts. . . .

Apart from the few . . . voices . . . from the Caribbean . . . trying to represent what this region can bring to the debate [on multiculturalism and cultural policy] . . . Caribbean Governments and States have been largely inaudible, invisible and relatively inactive in the international discussion.

Compared to our societies, which are already multicultural, the multicultural conversation in the international arena . . . has largely been a reaction to "globalisation" and directed at immigrants, who are seen to be potentially disruptive of the "mainstream." . . .

. . . We have largely evolved a unique brand of multiculturalism from many migration streams.<sup>3</sup>

Despite both the critical interventions of postcolonial theory and empirical evidence to the contrary, identification of the North Atlantic as the originary site of events and ideas of global (universal) significance—industrialization, modernity, human freedom, liberal democracy, and the nation, to name a few—remains widely accepted.<sup>4</sup> Rampersad's remarks reference this temporality, which distinguishes between those who set the pace and those fated to follow, and highlight the paradox contained in this distinction for Caribbean countries like Trinidad, which have long been presumed to be multicultural. Rampersad captures, in measured language, an array of concerns expressed by Afro- and Indo-Trinidadian scholars, public intellectuals, politicians, and concerned citizens in their critical assessment of formalizing multiculturalism as policy.<sup>5</sup> The rallying concern driving Trinidadian protests was alarm at introducing a policy that leaders of the developed world, where it was first implemented, were already declaring a failure and a threat to national integration.<sup>6</sup> The general anxiety haunting the debate over multicultural policy was the possibility that state intervention directed at fostering diversity would compromise the hard-won common ground, or national cohesion, that had organically developed in Trinidad in spite of its legacy of colonial racialization.

The varied claims and positions informing the debate on multiculturalism may seem at odds with normative understandings of diversity (heterogeneity; impurity) and unity (homogeneity; purity) conditioned as they are by nation-building trajectories of former metropolitan and settler societies where the initial goal of homogeneity through assimilation was later, in the face of radical alterity, redirected to managing diversity through multiculturalism (non-Anglo/Euro immigrants). I flatten the experiences of former metropolitan and settler societies, not because I think the differences between them are insignificant, but because these nation-builders had access to a viable, if tenuous, native subject who could signify the cultural core of their respective nations.<sup>7</sup> When multiculturalism came to these societies, the dominant race and class, through nation-building projects of homogenization, had already fixed the cultural coordinates of civil society as the symbolic core of the nation.<sup>8</sup> Given the early decimation of Native American populations first by Spanish and later by English colonizers, no such option was available to Caribbean nation-builders, who faced the formidable task of making Old World ancestries native to the New World. This "symbolic lack" is fundamental to understanding how nation-building in Trinidad simultaneously incorporated both heterogeneous and homogeneous principles.

The temporal sequence of homogeneity giving way to heterogeneity is undone by Trinidadians' simultaneous claim to an a priori multiculturalism ("natural multiculturalism") and common ground for Trinidad. Furthermore, given that the two are asserted to coexist, fears that formal adoption of multiculturalism might fragment this common ground are puzzling. This chapter analyzes these seeming

contradictions by attending to the empirical particulars directing Trinidad’s passage from extractive colony to “a United Nations in miniature,” a postcolonial nation reputed for its cosmopolitan excess even by Caribbean standards.<sup>9</sup> In so doing it adds another layer of complexity to the tenuous claim of multicultural inclusion from the vantage point of Caribbean exceptionalism.

Given the trend toward multiculturalism based on liberal aspirations to inclusiveness, nations are now expected simultaneously to straddle unity and diversity, and the demand that they do so is commonplace. Yet despite multicultural “inclusion,” specific ancestral groups continue to argue that they suffer symbolic marginalization, and this chapter addresses how such exclusion operates in the postcolonial context of Trinidad despite—or through formal—inclusion. The Trinidadian example suggests that classical nationalism—which is to say, the impulse to homogenize and to create “purity” out of “impurity”—has hardly been crushed by multiculturalism. Although the putatively hybrid and cosmopolitan subjectivities of this age of late capitalism are widely celebrated, Trinidad shows that even multicultural nations constituted on the basis of cultural/racial difference may mask the homogenizing narratives of nationhood often relegated to the safety of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century models of nationhood.

#### REVISITING CARIBBEAN MULTICULTURALISM

The formal emergence of multiculturalism, understood as a strategy for ensuring national cohesion by incorporating minority and immigrant groups as full participating members of society, without their losing their cultural distinctiveness, is seen as having occurred first in Canada in 1971, followed by Australia in 1973.<sup>10</sup> As the term “multiculturalism” spread to metropolitan centers and postcolonial nations the meanings invested in it varied.<sup>11</sup> Despite critical assessments of multiculturalism informed by postcolonial theory and ethnic and cultural studies, liberal theorizations of multiculturalism remain for the most part in thrall of its association with non-Anglo/European minorities and immigrants, beginning in the 1970s, as a term to describe, analyze, and manage what might be called “new” diversity, the Third Worlding of the First World.<sup>12</sup> The dominant theorizations of cultural difference thus remain confined to the register of cultural Other without referencing the mutual entanglements that make all identities, dominant and subordinate, open and vulnerable to one another.<sup>13</sup> As a consequence, theorizations of multiculturalism that preserve the symbolic core of the nation reproduce the fiction of equivalence of the different cultural units implied by the term itself. The multicultural discourse in Trinidad provides an intriguing contrast to such familiar multicultural formulations because the issue of which ethnic group can more legitimately represent the nation remains unsettled. Indeed, in the case of Trinidad, it is precisely the lack of a legitimate culture-history referent for the nation, or an

undisputed symbolic core to it, that drives the multicultural struggle between different ethnic groups over, and on behalf of, that nation.

Nation-builders and scholars with liberal leanings debate whether liberal democracies should recognize cultural groups in politics, and if so, how best to do this without compromising fundamental liberal values. Meanwhile, critical analyses of the politics of recognition foreground the moral and cultural constitution of liberalism's subject, the "abstract universal citizen," against which the particularity of other citizens is measured and evaluated.<sup>14</sup> The disclosure of particularity does not necessarily undermine liberal claims to the universal provided the cultural and moral foundations of liberalism are still assumed to possess a singular capacity to generate that universal. This allows for a conceptualization that locates the very generative conditions of the demand for recognition in the contradictory workings of late modern democracy, and, more specifically, in the compromise between two cherished liberal principles, individual freedom and social equality.<sup>15</sup> This is a significant analytical departure from prevailing liberal formulations of the politics of recognition that view the politics of difference as an external and potential obstacle to liberal values underpinning democratic nation-states. Contrary to the anxieties expressed by defenders of the liberal order, subjects' demands for recognition of their difference based on memories of historical injury tend to reinscribe—rather than threaten—liberal values and institutions, in part because the injured seek recompense that aligns their identification with liberal bureaucratic desires.<sup>16</sup>

Liberalism's subject, the "abstract universal citizen," leaves open the possibility of including previously excluded groups, yet the privileges of "equal citizenship" have been found to be highly unequal.<sup>17</sup> "For racialized subjects [in the United States] the fiction of 'equal citizenship' can mean denying the continuing effects of racial exclusion through the government's failure to protect civil, political and social rights of people of color," according to Leti Volpp.<sup>18</sup> Parsing four registers of citizenship—as status, rights, politics, and identity—Volpp argues that for Asian Americans in the United States, citizenship as identity is not derived from political and legal rights, and that their cultural identity can hinder their access to these rights. Writing of "the general failure to identify Asian Americans as constituting American national identity," Volpp claimed in 2001 that "to be Asian American suggests in the American imagination the idea that one acts according to cultural dictates somehow fundamentally different from those known in the United States. One's Asianness seems to be the difference one must suppress in order to be a full citizen."<sup>19</sup>

By foregrounding the relation between culture and citizenship (citizenship as identity), Volpp draws attention to the moral and cultural limits of multicultural inclusion through political and legal rights.<sup>20</sup> The privileges and costs attached to cultural citizenship are in turn determined by the extent of overlap or dissonance between a particular culture indexing diversity and the culture-history referent

for the nation. The power to fix the cultural coordinates of civil society, which set the terms for incorporating diverse Others, is thus highly privileged, and not always transparent and open to contestation, as with the multicultural discourse in Europe and Anglo/European settler colonies. But, in the New World context of Trinidad the debate over multicultural policy addresses precisely this struggle over the symbolic definition of the nation.

*Trinidadian Multiculturalism*

Multiculturalism as official policy, with its liberal promise of realizing equality through recognition of cultural difference, came to Trinidad relatively late (in May 2010) compared to Canada and Australia, which are credited with implementing it in the early 1970s. The hesitance of earlier Trinidadian political leaders to adopt it is puzzling, because in this region of the oldest colonies of the West the imprint of racialization is pervasive, from Trinidad’s celebrated cosmopolitanism to Trinidadians’ reputation for “racial voting.” From the period leading up to and since independence in 1962, the pivotal challenge for nation-builders has been to define *the* common ground (distinct from liberal common good) of the nation (a culture-history referent) in relation to the ancestral groups comprising Trinidad. At a formal level, the challenge of nation-building in Trinidad—forging the relation between the particular (different ancestral groups) and the universal (common ground)—is similar to the challenge of recognizing multicultural distinctions (particular) in relation to the foundational principles of a liberal-democratic nation (universal). The critical question for the latter is how to incorporate diverse individuals or groups so as to enable their full participation in the nation without loss of their cultural distinctiveness or threat to fundamental liberal values of the nation embodied by the universal rights-bearing citizen.<sup>21</sup> Substantively, however, there are fundamental differences between how “multiculturalism” operates in Trinidad’s national project, which is democratic and liberal in spirit, and the normative script for multiculturalism in liberal-democratic nations. Trinidadian specificity can be understood only through a reading of its colonial history, founded on operations of racialization peculiar to extractive colonies in the New World.

Contrary to received wisdom that relegates the problem of heterogeneity to new states, Robert Young and Wolfram Schmidgen among others have questioned the cultural homogeneity attributed to the old states of Europe.<sup>22</sup> Academic disclosures of “impurities” aside, the fact remains that “historic” nations are deemed such precisely because they have been, for the most part, successful in their claim to homogeneity. The New World context of the Caribbean, however, resists the sentiment of a single kind of belonging, because as descendants of immigrants, slaves, and bonded labor, nation-builders of these societies have no option but to acknowledge the diversity of their Old World ancestors in staking a claim in the New World. Historical memory of Old World origins runs counter to claims of autochthony, a pivotal moral criterion for establishing belonging to the nation.

The challenge for nation-builders in the Caribbean was to transform Old World distinctions into New World purities.

First ruled by Spain (beginning in 1498), then Britain (from 1796 until independence in 1962), Trinidad's population also has a significant French component—a result of an agreement between Spain and France in 1783—“the Cedula [schedule] of population”—that saw the influx of a number of French Catholics and their African slaves into the island.<sup>23</sup> Between 1845 and 1917, almost 143,000 indentured laborers from India also came to Trinidad to work in the sugar plantations to replace the labor of African slaves after emancipation in 1834. In addition, some Trinidadians also trace their ancestry to China, Madeira, Syria, Lebanon, Venezuela, and the smaller Caribbean islands. Shaped by a historical legacy of plantation slavery and its attendant racial hierarchy, the significance of ancestral diversity was amplified by the rigid correspondence between occupation and ancestral origin—Europeans as masters, Africans as slaves, and East Indians as indentured laborers.<sup>24</sup> This history of voluntary and forced immigration from diverse areas of the Old World, and the life experiences imposed by the hierarchical relations structuring the plantation-slavery complex, significantly inform Trinidadians' understanding of their society as composed of people with diverse ancestries.<sup>25</sup>

This colonial history posed specific challenges for nation-building in Trinidad. Unlike in settler societies where Anglo/European immigrants were able to transform Old World ancestral diversities into New World purities, in Caribbean extractive colonies independence called for the transfer of state power from European colonizers to formerly subordinate groups.<sup>26</sup> And, unlike in Asia and Africa, where nation-builders could fashion indigenous native subjects to justify nationhood, the contenders for inheriting the state in Caribbean societies could not claim ancestral cultures that were either indigenous or had the capacity to transcend their particularisms, imprisoned as they were by a heritage of colonial racialization. The problem of reconciling the sociological fact of difference with the national imperative of unity—a general Caribbean predicament—was heightened in Trinidad, because the racial hierarchy encompassing the European and African mix typifying Caribbean societies was complicated by the significant presence of East Indians. As such, Trinidad could not even count on the tenuous unity based on a shared African ancestry claimed by other anglophone Caribbean societies. Much has changed since independence, but the current debate over formal multiculturalism and the anxiety that it will erode the existing common ground, reinscribes a tension fundamental to Trinidad, which has historically resisted attempts to resolve heterogeneity (multiculturalism) and homogeneity (national unity; common ground).

This tension is powerfully illustrated by the tendency of Trinidadians to use either “callaloo” (a stew made with the leaves of the dasheen bush, and flavored with okra and coconut milk) or “tossed salad” as metaphors for the nation. Trinidadians, mostly of African descent, see callaloo as a fitting metaphor, because

this stew made of local ingredients conveys both native origins (in the New World) and the containment of *diverse* elements within a *single* unit. In the “callaloo” metaphor homogeneity trumps heterogeneity and thereby attests to a common ground legitimizing the nation, thereby creating a single New World purity through a homogenizing narrative. Alongside callaloo, however, is the metaphor of “tossed salad,” which is not as ubiquitous as callaloo, but references an equally significant different model for Trinidadian society. This metaphor is primarily used by Trinidadians of Indian ancestry, who take exception to the callaloo metaphor, because the diverse ingredients in a callaloo are boiled down to an indistinguishable “mush,” which erases the specific (taste) identities of the original ingredients, flattening them all into a homogeneous taste. Many Indo-Trinidadians thus find this metaphor inappropriate. Instead, they opt for the metaphor of “tossed salad,” which also permits the containment of diversity within a single unit, but here, unlike in the callaloo, each diverse ingredient maintains its original unique identity. This subtle but significant distinction attests to a complex dialectical relationship informing Trinidadian national narratives, which were founded on colonial racializations that presented African and Indian as radically different, leaving the privilege of representing the nation open to contestation.

The “projected” incapacity of African and Indian cultures to transcend their particularities (and effectively symbolize the nation) can only be understood in relation to Anglo/Euro cultural claims to a monopoly of universals, which may be academically challenged, but remain formidable in setting the political and cultural agenda for “the rest.” In Trinidad, the question of which group’s culture is suitably equipped to represent the nation remains open, thereby rendering visible the cultural claims backing power that have been neutralized in more normative contexts of multiculturalism, such as in former Anglo/European settler colonies and metropolises. In short, the multicultural debate in Trinidad unsettles the claims of North Atlantic liberal multiculturalism to monopolize universals, and foregrounds the issue of culture in politics.

Examining a variety of texts that depict a positive vision of the Trinidadian nation for the benefit of tourists, foreign investors, and foreign scholars, Daniel Segal has argued that the projected “cosmopolitanism” of Trinidadian society—the image of a “United Nations in miniature”—suggests a nationalist narrative that emphasizes the continuity of ancestral diversities into the present.<sup>27</sup> The plurality or heterogeneity embodied by the various immigrant groups on their arrival in Trinidad is said to continue into the present. According to Segal, the Trinidadian nationalist narrative celebrates “not the creation of unity from heterogeneity—not the capacity to invent a new identity out of many old identities—but the coexistence of diverse ancestral kinds in ‘harmony.’”<sup>28</sup> The original ancestral types reproduce themselves as discrete elements, preserving purity at the level of each and every group. This *cosmopolitan* narrative of Trinidad, which emphasizes the continuity of original ancestral types, resembles a *multiculturalist* narrative that

corresponds to the metaphor of “tossed salad.” Mixture here is nominal, a mere juxtaposition of different types (or purities).

The Trinidadian nationalist narrative of the continuity of pure ancestral types, however, exists in dialectical tension with another, equally visible Trinidadian (or anglophone Caribbean) nationalist narrative that pivots around the notion of mixture as symbolized by local understandings of their identities and societies as creole. A conception of Trinidadian national identity as oscillating between the polarities of mixture and purity is necessary for understanding how certain groups deemed pure (like East Indians) are symbolically positioned outside an imagined national community that ironically purports to celebrate precisely such ancestral purities. Such a dialectical reading complicates the very notion of purity, forcing one to recognize that not all purities represented in the cosmopolitan narrative of Trinidad are accorded the symbolic privilege of nativeness.

Creole understood as signifying the synthesis of new cultural and racial identities indigenous to the New World, provided a powerful counternarrative to the depiction of Caribbean societies as “a patchwork of not-yet-sewn together fragments.”<sup>29</sup> This latter view was epitomized by M. G. Smith’s “plural society” model, which posited the absence of a consensus of cultural values between Europeans and Africans in the anglophone Caribbean.<sup>30</sup> Smith argued that West Indian (or anglophone Caribbean) societies consisted of culturally distinct social segments—“Whites,” “Coloreds,” and “Blacks”—who practiced different forms of the same institution, and that these societies were held together by the political power exercised by a dominant demographic minority. “The connection between culture and nationalism was highly problematic in the West Indies,” Smith asserted. “The common culture, without which West Indian nationalism cannot develop the dynamic to create a West Indian nation, may by its very nature and composition preclude the nationalism that invokes it. This is merely another way of saying that the Creole culture which West Indians share is the basis of their division.”<sup>31</sup>

This projected lack of a common, unifying culture dovetailed with the widely held image of Caribbean societies as excessively dependent on the metropole—hence, V. S. Naipaul’s caricature of Caribbean peoples as “mimic men.”<sup>32</sup> To counter the idea that cultural identity was somehow problematic for West Indian peoples, West Indian scholars advanced the “creole society thesis,” which emphasized the role of a distinctive common culture as a basis for national unity. Although the “creole thesis” was, in fact, the ideology of a middle-class intelligentsia seeking a leading role in an integrated, newly independent society, it nevertheless enhanced the emerging Caribbean nationalism of the third quarter of the twentieth century, forming a significant element in the Caribbean decolonization process.<sup>33</sup>

The term “creole” refers in common Caribbean usage to “a local product which is the result of a mixture or blending of various ingredients that originated in the Old World, suggesting an appropriate site of unity. Nationalists and local and foreign scholars alike saw creolization as a process of cultural interaction, synthesis,

and change, whereby diverse Old World forms combined to create novel forms indigenous to the New World. This not only supplied the basis of common cultural identity for Caribbean people, it was also a narrative of indigenization. Anything and anybody native to the New World as a consequence of mixing was "creole." In Bolland's words "'Creole' refers to people who are *culturally distinct* from the Old World populations of their origin [emphasis in original]."<sup>34</sup> The principle of the creole narrative is in tension with the Trinidadian cosmopolitan narrative—creole signifying *distinctions* from Old World origins and the cosmopolitan narrative signifying *continuity* of Old World ancestries. In contrast to the cosmopolitan narrative, creolization was all about the creation of new (World) identities out of the many old (World) identities. In Trinidad, the colored and black middle-class intelligentsia's efforts to elevate calypso, steelband, and carnival (formerly the culture of the urban black lower-classes, whom the local elites despised) as *the* national symbols of the nation during the period leading up to independence rested on the premise that such cultural forms, while influenced by Old World strains, *originated* in the New World.<sup>35</sup> In this sense, one could argue that all things Creole—people, cultural forms, and languages—constitute core symbols of native-ness or indigeneity in Trinidad.

Trinidad's popular national narrative of cosmopolitanism, in which pure ancestral identities continue to the present, echoes M. G. Smith's analytical model of pluralism. The nationalist narrative of mixture (or creolization), on the other hand, as embodied in the term "creole," corresponds to the creole society thesis. These correspondences are somewhat jarring in that they juxtapose lay and analytic models, which seem in principle to be at odds. On the one hand, the analytic model of pluralism, which characterized these societies as deeply divisive and held together only by the power wielded by the white minority, is positioned in a paradigmatic relation to the lay model of the cosmopolitan, multicultural society with its promise of inclusion to all citizens. On the other hand, the creole society model, which emerged as an anti-imperialist discourse that emphasized the creative capacity of Caribbean peoples, is annexed to lay understandings of Creole, which excludes some Trinidadians from native status.<sup>36</sup> In order to understand how the various pure ancestral types represented in the cosmopolitan/multicultural narrative are differentially privileged in their claims to native status, the second narrative of mixture must be considered.

The ideology of mixing, variously conceived, was integral to defining native status in the Americas. But not all ancestries were privileged with the capacity to mix. In his analysis of Trinidad's colonial racial order, Segal illustrates how East Indians were excluded from the mixed category.<sup>37</sup> Trinidad's colonial racial order was built on the premise that pure races (representing different parts of the Old World) came to Trinidad, and subsequent mixing of these pure races was a feature peculiar to Trinidad and the Caribbean in general. This colonial rule of racialization located pure races outside of Trinidad, and those that embodied race mixture

as indigenous to Trinidad. This legacy of racialization constituted a major ideological axiom through which East Indians later came to be defined outside the nation of Trinidad.

The idea that East Indians were “unmixables” was premised on Orientalist caricatures of Indians as persons saturated with an ancient (albeit inferior) culture that militated against mixing: as such, Indians remained of the “East” regardless of their ties to Trinidad.<sup>38</sup> Africans, in contrast, were seen as lacking an ancestral civilization, and their imputed status of “cultural nakedness” permitted the African, through mixing, to incorporate new elements and thereby become West Indian, or native.<sup>39</sup>

Mixing, which defined nativeness, was represented in the color spectrum defined by the end point values of black and white. All persons with some European and African ancestry were considered colored, and in this way both a pragmatic and ideological connection was established between the two groups: a connection thought to be particular to Trinidad yet reminiscent of the entire Caribbean. Even though blackness was devalued, the fact that the category black constituted a crucial axis in this pervasive system of social classification indicated recognition of the black or colored person’s place in Trinidad. In contrast, East Indians were excluded from accountability within this system or any other that would have represented their ties to other groups and by extension to Trinidad. As such, there is a conspicuous lexical absence for East Indian mixing, an absence all the more telling when contrasted to the plethora of terms—both pseudo-scientific historical terms such as mulatto, quadroon, octoroon, and others and more popular contemporary terms such as black, black black, red, light black, brown, colored, French Creole, white, so-called white, and Trini white, among others—to account for different proportions of black and white mixing. Despite the ample empirical evidence that pointed to East Indians mixing with other groups, what is significant to my argument is the absence of *social* recognition of such mixing.

East Indians were also excluded from the term Creole, which applied to all persons of white and black extraction (those represented in the color spectrum). Excluded from accountability within the color spectrum, East Indians were not considered an ingredient in this resulting mixture. If mixing was the principle through which nativeness was defined, then to be native or local was also to be Creole. Denied the capacity to mix and denied social recognition of their local connections to other ancestral groups, East Indians never became Creoles. Accordingly, even today East Indians are not designated by the term Creole. The exclusion of East Indians from Creole status had significant implications for this group’s positioning vis-à-vis the incipient nation of Trinidad during the decolonization period when Creole came to metonymize Trinidadian national identity.<sup>40</sup>

The narrative that to be Trinidadian is somehow also to be racially mixed is as prevalent as the narrative of the continuity of ancestral purities. Paradoxical as it may seem, these two nationalist narratives—emphasizing purity and impurity—are

not mutually exclusive. Many Trinidadians “know of six or more racial . . . strains in their ancestry,” Daniel Crowley observed. “Such people are proud of their mixed origins, and boast that they are ‘a real mix-up,’ or ‘a West Indian callallu.’”<sup>41</sup> Even whites, whom one might assume to have a vested interest in claims to purity, readily acknowledge the illicit mixings in their genealogies. A member of a respectable upper-class French Creole family in his early fifties recounted his Portuguese, English, Scottish, and East Indian ancestry to me with amusement, adding that the term “French Creole” designates “so-called whites”—“so-called” because in fact they are all mixed. “Perhaps the epitome of a Trinidadian is the child . . . with a dark skin and crinkly plaits who looks at you out of decidedly Chinese eyes and announces herself as Jacqueline Maharaj,” the Trinidadian novelist Merle Hodge observed.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, Trinidadians continuously dissect or calibrate different proportions of mixture by resorting to the original ancestral categories, thereby insisting on defining persons or behavior on the basis of pure types—hence, even in Crowley’s example, people display their mixedness by breaking it up into its constituent pure parts. Similarly, each feature of Hodge’s Trinidadian child is isolated and attached to different ancestral types. Even in this instance when East Indian elements are recognized in the mix, the name “Maharaj,” as an isolated trait, denotes culture not phenotype.<sup>43</sup> In a speech at a forum on the subject “What Is the Culture of Trinidad and Tobago?” the renowned carnival bandleader and designer Peter Minshall eloquently summed up Trinidadians’ penchant for specifying the diverse purities that make up their native selves:

I created several years ago a character called Callaloo. He was in everyman, with particular reference to these islands, in that who ever you were if you look at him it was your own self you would see. If you were black and you looked at he it was your own black self you going to see. White, brown or anything . . . it was your self you going to see in. *He was all of us in one.* Callaloo had a speech and in the course of the speech he said to de people and dem, “de differences is here to delight not divide and destroy.”<sup>44</sup>

Insistence on racial accounting on the basis of pure ancestral types subverts the coherence and integrity of narratives of homogenization. That is, when a Trinidadian accounts for a person’s racial makeup by saying “he half white and half black,” mixture is acknowledged, but the insistence on accounting on the basis of pure types subverts complete flattening of heterogeneity to homogeneity. This narrative of mixture, which insists on racial calibration posits two stages. The first signifies the mixing of the originally pure types—Africans, various European groups, Chinese, and Amerindians—and the second signifies the calibration of the resulting mixtures on the basis of the pure types. In this national representation, East Indians who circumvented the cauldron of mixture (and hence the first stage)—at least in terms of social recognition of their mixture—enter into the second unalgalgated stage as yet another pure type like all other pure groups representing

cosmopolitan Trinidad. The implication is that East Indians can be considered just as Trinidadian as those groups represented in the color spectrum that were subject to miscegenation. But such a reading is misleading, eclipsing more subtle principles of exclusion. Given that mixture embodied in the term Creole remains a defining principle for nativeness in Trinidad, pure ancestral types represented in the cosmopolitan or multicultural narrative of the nation are not symbolically equivalent. Trinidadian nationalist narratives distinguish between two types of purity that are differentially positioned in relation to national identity—the *purity of ancestral types that never passed through the cauldron of mixture and the purities that constitute parts of a mixture*. The latter type of purity never represents a whole in and of itself; it is the purity that is created through the calibration of mixed instances. In contrast, the purity supposedly embodied by ethnic groups who never mixed, like the East Indians, does constitute wholes, and as such they were placed at a considerable ideological disadvantage with respect to claiming native status in the New World.

The Trinidadian example complicates cosmopolitan or multicultural narratives that posit equivalence between racially subordinate groups. Colonial racialization combined with national imperatives to indigenize and mediate diversity through mixing, so as to fix African ancestry as the nation's ideological culture-history referent, making Afro-Creoles the legitimate inheritors of the state and the nation. Afro-Trinidadian claims on the postcolonial state were legitimized by the narrative of creolization for almost three decades. Creolization, however, was a narrative of homogenization that also allowed for the recognition of ancestral diversity, or heterogeneity. Claiming both indigeneity and ancestral diversity, Afro-Creoles were able to harness this tension better than any other group. Ironically, however, their political and cultural hegemony was buttressed by the representation of cosmopolitan/multicultural difference—which is to say, all ancestral differences in Trinidad—as fundamental to Trinidadian nativeness. Yet, as I have illustrated, creole difference and cosmopolitan difference are not equals in relation to native privilege. Such multicultural inclusion is nominal when they draw sustenance from homogenizing national narratives that invest only some groups in the multicultural nation with native privilege.

Elsewhere I have analyzed how, from a position of considerable disadvantage, Indo-Trinidadians gradually secured economic and political power.<sup>45</sup> Beginning in the 1980s, Indo-Trinidadians challenged Creole definitions of the nation and battled for national inclusion on the basis of their Indian ancestry. Indo-Trinidadians sought to displace the privileged creole narrative of mixture by redefining the nation's culture-history referent to include “purities” that were not mixed. It was this struggle around the symbolic definition of the nation that polarized the national narratives invoking callaloo and tossed salad. Indo-Trinidadians, intent on preserving their projected ancestral purity as Indians and also asserting their claims as authentic Trinidadians, sought to displace the callaloo/creole narrative

(which they perceived to be an ideology of homogenization and assimilation) with that of tossed salad.

The political landscape has transformed dramatically since the struggles in the 1980s and 1990s over the symbolic definition of the nation. Since independence, political parties have largely relied on ethnic constituencies, with Afro-Trinidadians dominating politics and Indo-Trinidadians in opposition. Indo-Trinidadians were never seen as legitimate contenders for the postcolonial state because of the cultural particularities defining them and their “sectional” interests. Even in the early 1990s, the sentiment that an Indo-Trinidadian could not legitimately be prime minister prevailed. The elections of 1995 changed the political trajectory of the country, however, when an Indo-Trinidadian party and its leader, Basdeo Panday, came to power.

The political landscape has been significantly transformed, so that the state is no longer the preserve of Afro-Trinidadians, and Indo-Trinidadians are no longer perennial outsiders. Nevertheless, in negotiating the balance between common ground and cultural diversity, the former is aligned with Afro-Trinidadian and the latter with Indo-Trinidadian interests. The debate around multiculturalism thus remains animated by differing narratives of ancestral purity that contrast those who are mixed (calibrated purities), with those who never mixed (whole purities). Indeed, the official rationale for the adoption of multiculturalism as policy addresses Indo-Trinidadian pleas for such a policy. In 2011, the renamed Ministry of the Arts and Multiculturalism noted:

Local Calls for a platform for Multiculturalism have traditionally revolved around perceived inequity in distribution of state resources amongst disparate ethnic groups in Trinidad and Tobago. This call has been most popular amongst the Hindu artistic and cultural fraternity as evidenced by the [Hindu charitable organization] Maha Sabha’s request that the Ministry of Culture be labelled the Ministry of Multiculturalism. . . . The Honourable Prime Minister has clearly demarcated the focus of Multiculturalism on greater equity in the distribution of state resources in the Cultural Sector.<sup>46</sup>

The justification for multiculturalism in Trinidad as a corrective for previous state bias that cultivated Afro-Creole forms foregrounds the particularity attributed to those of both African and Indian ancestries. While Afro-Creole culture symbolized the Trinidadian nation until as recently as the 1980s, it was nevertheless always open to contestation. The elevation of Afro-Creole culture to national culture did not render invisible its particularities. Ironically, it was the particularity assigned to Indo-Trinidadians, even though subordinate, which continually interrupted narratives of homogenization that would exhaust the symbolic space of the nation. Even when East Indians were situated as outsiders, Afro-Trinidadian nation-builders were compelled to acknowledge East Indian difference and thereby admit to their own difference—if only to qualify their culture and history as the most

suitably referent for the nation. The retrospective Indo-Trinidadian charge of state bias in sponsorship of Afro-Trinidadian culture is possible because homogenizing national narratives of creolization did not or could not establish an uncontested new purity. The significance of this Caribbean exception is borne out if we reflect on the absurdity of directing the same accusation at Anglo/Euro purities defining English, American, Canadian, or Australian native subjects. The doxa of these purities making up the symbolic core of each nation may be tweaked to accommodate multicultural difference, but this difference always remains the difference of the Other, rarely challenging Anglo/European symbolic ownership of the nation. In Trinidad, the dialectical play between homogenizing and cosmopolitan narratives, founded on colonial race hierarchies, continues to resist consolidation of either African or Indian ancestry as the nation's symbolic core. And the relentless proclivity of Trinidadians to read Indian or Creole interests into any instance that mixes culture and politics reveals the stakes tied to cultural citizenship, which transcend the Caribbean exception. The Trinidadian case, where the work of culture in politics is for the most part transparent and legible, provides a unique angle from which to critically engage privileges of liberal citizenship attached to other, more familiar formulations of liberal multiculturalism.

#### NOTES

1. The ethnic composition of the two islands comprising the nation-state of Trinidad and Tobago is significantly different. People claiming African descent largely populate Tobago. Since this paper is on the dynamics between Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians, I focus on Trinidad. Between 1834 and 1917, 426,623 indentured laborers were brought from India to labor in the sugar plantations of the Caribbean (see Walton Look Lai, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar: Chinese and Indian Migrants to the British West Indies, 1838–1918* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993], 19). They were essentially brought to compete with the labor of the newly freed former slave population—this is especially true of colonies such as Trinidad and Guyana. Many of the indentures did not return, as was the initial plan, and in some countries today, like Trinidad, Guyana, and Surinam, their descendants constitute a substantial part of the population. The ethnic breakdown of Trinidad and Tobago's population of 1.3 million according to the 2011 census was East Indian 35.43 percent, African 34.22 percent, mixed 22.8 percent (of which 7.7 percent are “Douglas” of African and East Indian mix, and 15.16 percent classified as “mixed other”), other ethnic group 1.4 percent, and not stated 6.2 percent. Trinidad and Tobago, Ministry of Planning, *Housing and Population Census Demographic Report* (Port of Spain: Central Statistical Office, 2011).

2. Ethnic terminologies are complex, and an array of terms specific to each ethnic group are often used interchangeably by Trinidadians. The choice of terminology, rarely consciously articulated, signify nuanced understandings of each group's capacity to embody the nation. For example, the terms “Indian,” “Indo-Caribbean,” “East Indian,” and “Indo-Trinidadian” all refer to those claiming Indian ancestry in the New World and in particular Trinidad. The term “East Indian,” the historically familiar referent for those of Indian ancestry, now competes with terminologies considered more progressive, like “Indo-Trinidadian,” because of the symbolic exclusions invested in the “East Indian.” Similarly, of the range of terms signifying those of African ancestry, “African,” “negro,” “black,” “Creole” (as a noun), and “Afro-Trinidadian,” pejorative racializations such as “negro,” while fairly common in lay discourse, are consciously avoided in local academic and political discourse. I opt for “Indo-Trinidadian” and

"Afro-Trinidadian," which are not popular terms but those considered most politically correct. My use of terminologies differs from that of most Trinidadians because I wish to emphasize *projected* differences as opposed to claimed *natural* ones. I use "Indo-Trinidadian" and "Afro-Trinidadian" as analytical terms to refer to the projected dichotomy between Trinidadians claiming Indian and African descent except in contexts where the issue is the symbolic status attributed to Indo-Trinidadians. There, I opt to use "East Indian" for reasons of local historical and contextual consistency and also to connote a degree of marginality not conveyed by "Indo-Trinidadian."

3. Kris Rampersad, "Multikulti Is Dead! Long Live Multiculturalism!" October 18, 2010, accessed December 4, 2018, <http://kris-rampersad.blogspot.com/2010/10/multikulti-is-dead-long-live.html>.

4. I use "North Atlantic" here as a generic (as opposed to a geographic) term to encompass areas and societies variously identified as "Western," "Northern" "Global North" "First World," and "developed," which include metropolitan centers (UK, France, Germany) and former settler colonies (the United States, Canada, Australia), and in particular those nations that have implemented some form of multicultural policy.

5. Rampersad's critique contrasts markedly with those that polarize the debate by identifying multiculturalism as a strategy to consolidate Indo-Trinidadian and, more pointedly, Hindu interests. See, e.g., Selwyn Cudjoe, "Multiculturalism and Its Challenges in Trinidad and Tobago," *Global Society* 48 (2011): 330–41. Given the proclivity of people in creole societies to "operate with understandings and expectations concerning fundamental *differences* that set apart persons in their society" (Lee Drummond, "The Cultural Continuum: A Theory of Intersystems," *Man* 15 [1980]: 353), the default even when indexing intercultural situations is difference, which carries the potential for polarization.

6. Germany's Merkel and England's Cameron are the figures most often cited. See Richard Ashcroft and Mark Bevir's chapter 2 in this volume, "British Multiculturalism after Empire: Immigration, Nationality, and Citizenship," which addresses the retreat from multiculturalism in the United Kingdom.

7. For a lucid discussion of these differences, see Sneja Gunew, *Haunted Nations: The Colonial Dimensions of Multiculturalism* (London: Routledge, 2004).

8. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot remarks, "the nation is the culture and history of a class-divided civil society, as they relate to issues of state power. It is that part of the historically derived cultural repertoire that is translated in political terms." Trouillot, *Haiti: State against Nation: The Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990), 25.

9. Caribbean colonies are called "extractive" because, unlike settler colonies in America and Australasia and colonies in Asia and Africa, they were established solely for the benefit of the metropole.

10. Christine Inglis, *Multiculturalism: New Policy Responses to Diversity* (Paris: UNESCO, 1996), cited in Kenwyn Taylor, "Multiculturalism and the Political Process in Trinidad: A Case Study," *Journal of the Department of Behavioural Sciences* [University of the West Indies, St Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago] 1, no. 1 (2012): 100.

11. Gunew, *Haunted Nations*.

12. *Ibid.*; Elizabeth Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Leti Volpp, "'Obnoxious to Their Very Nature': Asian Americans and Constitutional Citizenship," *Citizenship Studies* 5, no. 1 (2001): 57–71; and Daniel Goh, "From Colonial Pluralism to Postcolonial Multiculturalism: Race, State Formation and the Question of Cultural Diversity in Malaysia and Singapore," *Sociology Compass* 2, no. 1 (2008): 232–52.

13. See, e.g., Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition" in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994). Even in those moments when Taylor concedes that human identities are dialogically constituted, as in his use of Gadamer's "fusion of horizons," the comparative engagement with "our" background of evaluation with those of formerly unfamiliar cultures, the onus lies on the latter to prove compatibility with "our" liberal values. "The 'fusion of horizons' operates through our developing new vocabularies of comparison,

by means of which we can articulate these contrasts. *So that if and when we ultimately find substantive support for our initial presumption* [emphasis added], it is on the basis of an understanding of what constitutes worth that we couldn't possibly have had at the beginning. We have reached the judgment partly through transforming our standards" (ibid., 67).

14. Amy Gutman, "Introduction," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), and Taylor, "Politics of Recognition."

15. Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

16. Ibid.

17. A feature amply documented and analyzed in the voluminous literature on indigenous, minority, and ethnic groups in all parts of the world.

18. Volpp, "Obnoxious to Their Very Nature," 61.

19. Ibid., 67.

20. The title of Volpp's essay, "'Obnoxious to Their Very Nature': Asian Americans and Constitutional Citizenship," is indeed revealing.

21. See Kenwyn Taylor, "Multiculturalism and the Political Process in Trinidad," 100. I am not concerned here with critiquing the liberal distinction between private and public or the idea that public institutions should not be influenced by particulars of identity to ensure they remain neutral. However, it is worth noting that, from this perspective, it is the private/public distinction that allows for the neutrality of the public sphere, which protects citizens' freedoms and equality. Those characteristics common to all "our universal needs, regardless of our particular cultural identities, for 'primary goods' such as income, health care, education, religious freedom, freedom of conscience, speech, press . . . the right to vote, and the right to hold office" (Gutmann, "Introduction," in *Multiculturalism*, ed. id., 4).

22. Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), and Wolfram Schmidgen, *Exquisite Mixture: The Virtues of Impurity in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

23. James Millette, *Society and Politics in Colonial Trinidad* (Trinidad: Zed Books, 1985).

24. Daniel Segal, "Living Ancestors: Nationalism and the Past in Postcolonial Trinidad and Tobago," in *Trinidad Ethnicity* ed. Kevin Yelvington, 221–39 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994).

25. See Drummond, "Cultural Continuum, 353. The ethos captured by Drummond for Guyana prevails also in Trinidad: "Members of a creole society . . . operate with understandings and expectations concerning fundamental *differences* [emphasis in original] that set apart persons in their society. . . . Diversity and divisiveness are fundamental to the system. Differences can operate as representations because they take their significance from a pool of shared myth and experience."

26. Munasinghe "Narrating a Nation through Mixed Bloods," *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 49, no. 2 (2005): 155–63.

27. Segal, "Living Ancestors."

28. Ibid., 226.

29. Helen Safa, "Popular Culture, National Identity, and Race in the Caribbean," *New West Indian Guide* 61, nos. 3–4 (1987): 115–26.

30. Smith's "plural society" model was borrowed from John Furnivall, who used the term to describe colonial societies in British Burma and the Dutch East Indies, where diverse groups existing side by side without mixing were held together by the power of the colonizer. See Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948).

31. See M. G. Smith (1965) quoted in Nigel Bolland, "Creolization and Creole Societies: A Cultural Nationalist View of Caribbean Social History," in *Intellectuals in the Twentieth-Century Caribbean*, vol. 1: *Spectre of the New Class: The Commonwealth Caribbean*, ed. Alistair Hennessy (London: Macmillan, 1992), 51.

32. V.S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men: A Novel* (London: André Deutsch, 1967).

33. Bolland, *Creolization and Creole Societies*, 53.
34. *Ibid.*, 50. Given the diverse meanings conveyed by the terms “creole” and its derivatives in various parts of the Americas, the discussion here is limited to the anglophone Caribbean. “Creole” operates in various registers: as theory; as dynamic process of cultural creation (creolization), and as a noun signifying persons of mixed African and European ancestry. “Creole” is capitalized when used as a noun to signify a person, or adjectivally in the terms “French Creole” and “Afro-Creole”; other adjectival uses are lowercased (e.g., “creole culture”), as are abstract nouns derived from “creole” (e.g., “creolization”).
35. See Lloyd Braithwaite, “The Problem of Cultural Integration in Trinidad,” *Social and Economic Studies* 3, no. 1 (1954): 82–96; Stephen Stuempfle, *The Steelband Movement: The Forging of National Art in Trinidad and Tobago* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), and Peter van Koningsbruggen, *Trinidad Carnival: A Quest for National Identity* (London: Macmillan Education, 1997).
36. Viranjini Munasinghe, “Creating Impurity Out of Purity: Nationalism in Hybrid Spaces,” *American Ethnologist* 29, no. 3 (2002): 663–92.
37. Segal, “Living Ancestors.”
38. See *ibid.*; and Viranjini Munasinghe, “Culture Creators and Culture Bearers: The Interface between Race and Ethnicity in Trinidad,” *Transforming Anthropology* 6 no. 1–2 (1997): 72–86.
39. Segal, “Living Ancestors.”
40. See Viranjini Munasinghe, *Callaloo or Tossed Salad? East Indians and the Cultural Politics of Identity in Trinidad* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), and Munasinghe, “Creating Impurity Out of Purity.”
41. Daniel Crowley, “Plural and Differential Acculturation in Trinidad,” *American Anthropologist* 59, no. 5 (1957): 819–20.
42. Merle Hodge, “The Peoples of Trinidad and Tobago,” in *David Frost Introduces Trinidad and Tobago*, ed. Michael Anthony and Andrew Carr (London: André Deutsch, 1975), 1.
43. The author thanks Richard Ashcroft for this acute observation.
44. Recorded by the author, City Hall, Port of Spain, Trinidad, May 3, 1990.
45. Munasinghe, *Callaloo or Tossed Salad?*
46. Trinidad and Tobago, Ministry of the Arts and Multiculturalism, “Rationale for Policy Framework for Multiculturalism” (2011), accessed November 28, 2018, [www.culture.gov.tt/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/2012-02-National-Multiculturalism-Policy-Framework-Rationale.pdf](http://www.culture.gov.tt/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/2012-02-National-Multiculturalism-Policy-Framework-Rationale.pdf).