

# RELIGION AND THE ALTER-NATIONALIST POLITICS OF DIASPORA IN AN ERA OF POSTCOLONIAL MULTICULTURALISM

(chapter six)

“There can be no Mother India ... no Mother Africa ... no Mother England ... no Mother China ... and no Mother Syria or Mother Lebanon. A nation, like an individual, can have only one Mother. The only Mother we recognize is Mother Trinidad and Tobago, and Mother cannot discriminate between her children. All must be equal in her eyes. And no possible interference can be tolerated by any country outside in our family relations and domestic quarrels, no matter what it has contributed and when to the population that is today the people of Trinidad and Tobago.”

- Dr. Eric Williams (1962), in his Conclusion to *The History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago*, published in conjunction with National Independence in 1962

“Many in the society, fearful of taking the logical step of seeking to create a culture out of the best of our ancestral cultures, have advocated rather that we forget that ancestral root and create something entirely new. But that is impossible since we all came here firmly rooted in the cultures from which we derive. And to simply say that there must be no Mother India or no Mother Africa is to show a sad lack of understanding of what cultural evolution is all about.” - Dr. Brinsley Samaroo (*Express Newspaper*, 18 October 1987), in the wake of victory of the National Alliance for Reconstruction in December 1986, after thirty years of governance by the People’s National Movement of Eric Williams

Having documented and analyzed the maritime colonial transfer and “glocal” transculturation of subaltern African and Hindu spiritisms in the southern Caribbean (see Robertson 1995 on “glocalization”), this chapter now turns to the question of why each tradition has undergone an inverse political trajectory in the postcolonial era. On the one hand, Shango has become highly politicized by a vocal vanguard of Afrocentrists as a vehicle for reclaiming and rehabilitating blackness in response to the legacy of colonial racism and of the hegemony of Christianity within the Afro-Trinbagonian experience. Shakti Puja, on the other hand, has not been politicized, though Indian nationalists have nonetheless embraced Hinduism for the revitalization of Indian ethnicity and articulation of Indocentric politics.

The central question here concerns why each has experienced such a different political fate in the postcolonial period: Afrocentric celebration of Shango accompanied by the rise of the Orisha Movement versus a blind Indocentric eye toward Shakti Worship? In light of their structurally convergent resonances at the popular level, it is important to consider the very different political fates of each tradition in national political culture around the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I account for this divergence by extending the analysis of differing colonial ideologies of racial subordination regarding Africans versus Indians in the articulation of hierarchy and religion in the southern Caribbean. Each case reflects the continued spell of these ideologies within the national imagination, albeit in tellingly recontextualized forms in an era of postcolonial multiculturalism.

Colonial imagery of the “culturally naked African” prefigured a vision in which West Indian Blacks were compelled to hybridize their religious beliefs and practices with Christianity. Anti-syncretic trends among “Orisha Movement” reformers – who favor a camouflage view of syncretism and seek to exorcize all Christianisms from the practice – reflect the obliquely reiterated dominance of colonial racial ideology by contesting it through an inversion of its original hierarchical scale pitting Christianity as superior to Africanity. In addition to contesting colonial-era legislation that has continued to stigmatize and haunt popular Afro-creole religious praxis, in other words, postcolonial “Africanizing” reformism also tacitly accepts certain colonial

terms of the debate even while ostensibly subverting them. Such reforms, ironically, therefore adopt Eurocentric models of what makes for a “legitimate” and “pure” religion along the way.

The colonial ideology of the “culturally saturated Indian” – by contrast – framed Indo-Trinidadian culture as static and essentially unable to become creolized. In this view, Hinduism is considered forever and always “East,” rather than “West,” Indian. The emergence of Indian nationalism has therefore not made recourse to rehabilitating heretofore-marginalized religious practices such as spiritism as the “Other Within,” since Indians have been ideologically positioned as outsiders to the nation and Hinduism the quintessentially “Oriental” religion, always already essentially diasporic. The recuperation of Hinduism has a deeper local history than that of African religiosity and has proceeded through the self-conscious construction of a Sanatanist orthodoxy concerned with “respectability” and critical of ritual practices smacking too overtly of the more “primitive” Indian past.

TT’s population is conventionally understood as consisting of demographically equivalent groups of people of African and Indian descent – approximately 40% each – along with a significant minority of mixed-descent persons as well as small groupings of people of Chinese, Portuguese, Syrian, and European origin. As with many New World nationalisms, that of Trinidad and Tobago embraces ancestral diversity and signs of polygenesis as central to the nation’s body politic. Its national anthem proclaims a country “Where Every Creed and Race Finds an Equal Place” and a popular national motto espouses that “All o’ We is One.” Yet Williams was a “Racial Messiah” (Oxaal 1982) primarily for the Afro-creole sector.

Conceptualizing ideology as a regulating discourse that organizes social relations as well as disciplines understanding of them, Segal (1989, 1993) demonstrates the enduring significance of differing colonial mythologies of racial subordination regarding the “culturally naked African” and “culturally saturated Indian” in the structuring of social relations from colonial times into the postcolonial period. Through an analysis of the dialectics of positive and negative visions of nationalism in politics and public culture, Segal (1994) also shows how both perspectives take the nation to be populated by ancestral kinds that remain as distinct racial archetypes, *notwithstanding* their social and biological.

Building on my historical anthropology of capitalism and religion in the southern Caribbean, I show here how subaltern African and Hindu spiritisms have undergone contrasting postcolonial trajectories of politicization – in the case of Afro-Trinbagonian Orisha Worship – versus *non*-politicization – in the case of Indo-Trinidadian Shakti Puja – under the reiterating influence of entrenched racial ideologies of the colonial and early nationalist periods. Extending Segal’s seminal work on these racial ideologies, I explore their continued legacy in relation to the politics of religion in the era of postcolonial multiculturalism. My aim is akin to the historiography called for by Pierre Bourdieu: “a form of structural history which finds in each successive state of the structure both the product of previous struggles to maintain or to transform this structure and the principle, via the contradictions, the tensions, and the relations of force which constitute it, of subsequent transformations” (quoted in Wacquant 1989:37).

Put otherwise, the postcolonial politicization versus non-politicization of lower-status religious traditions may each be accounted for in terms of differing interlocking dynamics of racial and class stratification. Donald Donham reminds us that the productive inequalities of capitalism such as gender, sexuality, race, and nationalism are *not* limited or determined simply by those of class relations alone, even as class “provides the dominant inequality, the low note that anchors the chord” (1990:204). The point is not to overly essentialize racial ideologies but

consider their repeatedly privileged logic and the ways they have been reproduced over time in the midst of ongoing sociocultural change, conflict, and transformation.

I focus on religion within this mix. Examining the complex nexus of race-class-religion is important not only for understanding the long-term transculturation of the two grassroots traditions – as illustrated in previous chapters – but also their differential politicization in the postcolonial era, which I take up here. I show how late modern diasporic political projects – understood as alter-nationalist postures vis-à-vis the politics of postcolonial statecraft – recruit religions in new ways, with variable local implications for the politics of culture.

The two traditions at the center of this study have experienced resonant sociohistorical trajectories from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries in the southern Caribbean due to lateral colonial experiences of domination and adaptation, even as these trajectories have unfolded under the influence of differing ideological frameworks regarding race and religion. Yet the advent of nationalist independence in 1962, the emergence of a Black Power movement in the early 1970s, and the subsequent oil boom-and-bust cycle of the mid-70s to early-80s set in motion dynamics that have transformed the locally intertwined fields of religion and politics in a range of revealing ways that further implicate Orisha Worship and Shakti Puja.

### *Religion and the Maze of Color in an Era of Postcolonial Multiculturalism*

Robert Hefner (1998) clarifies that all religions confront similar predicaments and structural dilemmas in the late modern period, but their patterns of response and transformation reflect the resources and experiences each brings to its encounter with modernity along with struggles for influence among its interpreters and subjects. He shows the so-called “Clash of Civilizations” to be not so much between the West and its Other(s), but among rival carriers of tradition within nations and civilizations (p. 92). The globalization of religion is characterized by dilemmas overdetermined by a world of nation-states, mass urbanization, capitalist differentiation, migration and displacement, as well as proliferating technologies that render social borders permeable to transcultural flows and interconnections. Contemporary religious refigurations thrive by drawing themselves into mass society, generating an intensified and contested dialectic between homogenization and heterogenization.

A useful entrée to my analysis here is Selwyn Ryan’s *The Jhandi and the Cross: the Clash of Cultures in Post-Creole Trinidad and Tobago* (1999), by one of the country’s leading political scientists, demographers, and cultural critics. “Jhandis” are ceremonial flags – often highly visible – planted in the course of Hindu rituals of various sorts. Ryan considers the reconfigured and polarizing intensification of conflict among Hindus and Christians following demise of the PNM’s monopolistic hold on power in the 1980s, a conflict energized by currents of fundamentalism and ethnic revitalization across society as a whole. Christianity has become an increasingly visible interlocutor in relation to local Indian culture and especially Hinduism, as compared with the earlier colonial scenario.

Demographic data from a 1998 survey by Ryan’s research group suggest that religious affiliation is as significant a factor as race in determining people’s political attitudes and voting patterns (1999:113-23). Ryan’s discourse concerning the “Clash of Cultures” therefore operates polysemically, referring to Christian-Hindu as well as African-Indian axes of ideological terrain to some degree throughout. He argues that schismogenesis between “Hindu” and “Christian” in postcolonial cultural politics may only be understood in relation to the intensified and changing field of contestation over political power in the post-independence period. Ryan emphasizes the fertilizing effects of the petroleum-driven economic boom that prevailed from the mid-1970s to

early-80s with regard to social mobility, ethnic revitalization, and socio-religious involution (p. 54). It is the emergence and triumph of the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) over the PNM in the wake of the oil boom's crash that for Ryan signaled the end of the "Creole" Nationalist period and ushered in a precarious new era of Multiculturalism in "Post-Creole" Trinidad and Tobago.

Yet what does "Creole" – and therefore "Post-Creole" – mean here? *Creole* terminology was first used historically to refer to people born in the New World: of European or African descent, for example. Then, through extension, the term came to encompass the Afro-Euro "color" continuum of racial mixture in the West Indies. The earlier semantic layer evolved under conditions of plantation slavery in the first instance and then, in the aftermath of emancipation, the development of the creole "color" scale added an entirely new layer of meaning. Nonetheless, "creole" connotes locality and rootedness without autochthony and has therefore been subject to a range of charged meanings and contested politics.

Conceptualizing people of African- and mixed-African descent as "Creoles" – hence more readily as authentic West Indians – loaded the ideological bases in their direction throughout the nationalist period of decolonization and independence. This identity was premised on colonial imagery of the "culturally naked African," an ideology depicting ostensibly civilizationless Blacks as having been further deracinated by the Middle Passage and ensuing American experience. "Creole" was applied to the continuum of racial mixture between Europeans and Africans that transpired in all kinds of complex ways in the southern Caribbean, and which produced a continuum of skin "color" whose ends were defined by the ideal-types of "black" and "white." As Segal writes, "the 'African' and 'European' were placed within a system of 'color' which imaged them as physiological opposites and, at the same time, as the defining endpoints of a continuum of locally produced 'mixing.' Thus the idiom of 'color' affirmed the 'natural' difference of these kinds, even while expressing their shared 'localness'" (1993:100).

Ideologically speaking, culturally naked Africans became civilized to the extent that they intermixed with whiteness and were culturally "lifted" and "educated" by contact with European civilization. This sociosymbolic space of "creole" was therefore deeply intertwined with Christianity, given the paramount status of this religion for Whites and its increasingly central role in the lives and identifications of Blacks during emancipation and after. Indeed, the significance of this Christian-Creole nexus helps account for why persons of Portuguese, Spanish, French, Syrian, and even Chinese descent have all come within the emically *creole* orbit – as in "Portuguese Creole," "Chinese Creole," and so on. Arriving already Christian or becoming Christianized locally, as with the Chinese, served to fold these groups into the "creole" matrix. Even though they hailed from another Oriental civilization (than Indians), the fact that Chinese soon intermixed with Afro-creoles, became Christianized, and entered "creole" social space reflects the sociohistorical contingency of racial ideologies.

By contrast, those of South Asian descent have been conceptualized within the dominant framework as "East" – not "West" – Indians, thus they have been historically excluded from national culture in a range of ways. The reigning imagery in this regard has been that of the "culturally saturated Indian." In marked contrast to the elaborate distinctions of "color" among Afro-creoles, there was no colonial terminology produced for persons of mixed Indian and European ancestry, a lexical absence – Segal (1993:93-4) notes – that was not mimetic of actuality, but generative of classificatory erasure. "Immigrants from South Asia and their descendants were neither part of a locally-created 'white-Indian' continuum nor part of a locally-

created ‘black-Indian’ continuum. In the socially constructed absence of local connections, ‘East Indians’ never became ‘Creoles,’ and had no place on the creole scale of color: they were emphatically ‘East’ and not ‘West Indians’” (p. 97).

This contrasting ideological imagery of the deracinated African versus the unassimilable Indian rationalized varying patterns of labor exploitation and was taken for granted by most as a result of political domination and colonial subjugation, even among those who rejected claims of European superiority (p. 95). Such ideological presuppositions were assumed not only under colonialism but also within the nationalist contestation of colonial power and political sovereignty that emerged after WWI and gathered definitive force in the aftermath of WWII.

The passing of Creole Nationalism into Post-Creole Multiculturalism is therefore a multi-faceted process conditioned by many factors: the political – if not wholly economic or cultural – denouement of whiteness with the rise of nationalism and decolonization; the emergence of Black Power in the wake of independence as a form of internal critique, yet connected with wider hemispheric currents; the rise and fall of an oil boom, which wrought unforeseen transformations in economic differentiation, social mobility, and ethnic and religious revitalization across the society as a whole; the death of Eric Williams and subsequent fall of the PNM in the wake of the boom; the rise of the NAR, a coalition of Africans and Indians headed by A. N. R. Robinson, a black Tobagonian, that obtained a plurality of support under a banner of “One Love” from all racial groups, religious denominations, and social classes, but which soon fractured due to internal racial politics as well as fierce debate regarding “culture” and the state; then, after a one-term return of the PNM in the early 1990s, the ascent of a more forthrightly Indian-based political party – the United National Congress (UNC) – in 1995.

In other words, the symbolic European head of the “Creole” color continuum was decapitated and whiteness de-idealized with the advent of nationalism, decolonization, and independence, developments which ultimately led Indians to challenge their position as ideological “outsiders” to the nation (Vertovec 1992; Munasinghe 2001a, b; Khan 2001, 2004). If the victory of the NAR was hailed as a triumph of democratic pluralism, then its rapid and contentious subsequent demise suggests that an equally precarious “Post-Creole Multiculturalism” has replaced the paradigm of “Creole Nationalism.” Yet capitalist interests have remained paramount in the course of all these changes and transformations. The NAR pursued an unambiguously neoliberal economic agenda of “structural adjustment” spurred by the end of the oil boom, for example, a context in which TT fell victim to statistical malpractice by the International Monetary Fund that exacerbated its financial crisis and economic vulnerability (see Klein 2007:259-62 on the latter).

Ironically in light of the local “creole” ideology, yet unsurprising given the persisting combined virulence of racism and classism, the first real challenge to PNM dominance came toward the end of TT’s first decade of independence as a result of the Black Power Movement (Oxaal 1982; Sutton 1983, 1984; Bennett 1989; Ryan 1995a). By the late 1960s, inadequacies of industrialization-by-invitation and import-substitution “development” models had become increasingly apparent, reflected in under-employment, labor unrest, intensified inequality, public debt, escalating inflation, and enduring foreign dependence. The National Joint Action Committee launched a high-profile critique of these conditions, including discrimination in state and private sector employment, which they attributed to continued multinational domination of the national economy chaperoned by local elites. Colonialism, in other words, had led to neocolonialism. The nationalist project had been hijacked by “Afro-Saxons.” NJAC staged

high-profile marches and controversial demonstrations in 1970, including at the Roman Catholic Cathedral in downtown Port-of-Spain, where they draped its saintly icons with black cloth.

However, the movement alienated Indians by referring to the underprivileged as “black” and embracing “African” symbolism; because its leadership was primarily Afro-creole; and since its efforts were concentrated in urban, predominantly black areas. Contrary to popular perception, NJAC’s vision was quite explicitly *not* a Marxist one, but anti-imperialist fused with ethnic nationalism (Bennett 1989). By declaring a temporary state of national emergency, the government of Williams was ultimately able to co-opt the movement’s critical energies by conceding some of its demands while stealing some of its thunder, in addition to quelling a mutiny within the National Regiment. Still, NJAC succeeded in pushing the PNM into a redistributive stance, enhanced by the rising tide of oil in the early 1970s.

Thus the demise of Black Power became the PNM’s gain, leading to a program of “National Reconstruction,” a (later aborted) move toward constitutional reform, revision of the third national Five-Year-Plan for development, and a revived nationalism leading to full sovereignty as a Republic in 1976. NJAC was able to raise political consciousness among the poor – especially black urban youth – and generate some public support, but it ultimately frightened away many at-large with its radicalizing agenda. Paul Sutton (1983) argues that the events culminating in 1970 were indeed less than the “Revolution” claimed at the time. Yet, as Ryan observes, “NJAC was a ‘midwife’ to the new society” (1995b:703). These events are important not only for understanding the development of cultural politics in the emergent era of postcolonial multiculturalism, but also because Black Power exerted time-released effects on the subsequent efforts of black activists and socially mobile spiritual seekers to transform grassroots Shango into the self-consciously politicized “Orisha Movement” examined below.

Twenty years after Black Power, the government and state media were taken over in what has often been called a “coup” staged by a predominantly black Islamist sect: another attempt to right old wrongs in the name of the dispossessed. Indeed, the links between 1970 and 1990 may be seen in the reappearance of activists from 1970 as well as the ideas informing the protests of 1990. Formulated within the idiom of Islamism, the critique of black inequality and powerlessness was nonetheless clearly articulated (see Ryan 1991; Forte 1995). Led by Imam Abu Bakr, the *Jamaat-al-Muslimeen* sought to overturn stultifying neoliberal policies of the NAR by forcing new elections. A car bomb was driven into Police Headquarters while insurgents stormed Parliament, taking Cabinet Ministers, Parliamentarians, and Prime Minister Robinson (who suffered a gun-shot wound to the ankle) as well as a number of journalists and civil servants hostage. A national state of emergency with curfew was put into effect. Despite looting and destruction in Port-of-Spain and along the east-west corridor, the public did not rise in support of the Muslimeen. Unlike 1970’s Black Power demonstrations, the army remained firmly on the government’s side in 1990. Hostages were eventually released. Robinson emerged from Parliament several days later after having negotiated an agreement in which the Muslimeen would lay down arms in exchange for capitulation to six demands, including amnesty. Further spurring the politicization of religion in an era of intensifying multiculturalism, the Muslimeen insurrection served to seal the fate of the NAR in the 1991 elections.

Yet the rise of the NAR was already an index of Indians having come into something of their own politically, thus the fracturing of the coalition served to further energize Indo-creole critique of ethnic prejudice in society and political hypocrisies of governance, as well as fuel patterns of revitalization that have come to be seen by many as an “Indian Renaissance” of sorts. While these trends have much deeper taproots in cultural history, it is still the case that the

waning of colonialism and succeeding crises of nationalism have continued to stimulate refigurations and retrenchments in public and political culture. The rise to power of the UNC in 1995-6 spurred many of these social dynamics and cultural politics even further.

The effort to revitalize Hinduism has therefore been stimulated by many factors. Significant among them is a rising concern with the advancing front of Pentecostal conversion across all racial lines. Pentecostalism is the fastest growing religion in TT and Ryan goes so far as to characterize central Trinidad – an area historically emblematic of Indians – as the country’s new “Bible Belt” (1999:92-3). Trinidad and Tobago country constantly receives visits from North American mission groups, in relation to which local church communities have developed considerable interlinkages. Ethnomusicologist Timothy Rommen’s (2007) study of the development and differentiation of popular gospel musics and their “ethics of style” discloses the extent to which Pentecostalism in the country is characterized by internal dialogue and lively debate concerning orthodoxy, race, nationalism, and generation. Looking outside themselves, however, evangelicals have also been the most vocal critics of Hindu “idolatry” and “paganism,” spurring rebuttal and counter-critique.

Indo-Trinidadians hold contested polylogues within their own respective religious communities as well, preoccupied by the meaning of beliefs and practices not only in light of a late modern, ever globalizing world, but also in response to unforeseen socioeconomic changes in mobility and class identification connected with the oil boom. Hinduism in particular has been embraced in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century as an expression of Indian prosperity and ethnic assertion. New wealth earned by Indo-Trinidadians facilitated the construction and maintenance of temples, the sponsoring of all manner of ceremonial and organizational activities, the pursuit of deeper doctrinal or religious knowledge, the proliferation of Bollywood films and Indian radio stations, and more active interest in connecting with and traveling to Mother India. Morton Klass’s (1991) study of the neo-Hindu Sai Baba devotional movement, for example, suggests that it represents a respectably revitalizing alternative within the Hindu fold: an elite, ethnically exclusive spiritual movement mediating between tradition and modernity.

Meanwhile, some Presbyterian Indians have become re-Hinduized. As Premdas and Sitahal write: “The capture of power by the PNM and its perceived discriminatory policies against Indians released a powerful motivation for Indian unity. After thirty years of such a regime, Presbyterians found solace and security not with their Christian Creole and mixed-race confessional compatriots but with other Indians. Many seek their roots within ancient Indian culture in reaction to Creole assertion of a rediscovered African identity and the subsidies and biases of the state for calypso” (1991:347-8). Hinduism – in other words – has become the privileged vehicle of diasporic identification for a revivifying glocal Indian ethnicity.

Ryan (1996, 1999) observes that UNC defeat of the PNM in the mid-90s was brought about more by political action in mandirs and mosques than in the public square. At the forefront of these efforts has been the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha, the largest and most assertive Hindu organization in the country. The SDMS sees itself as the representative of orthodoxy: “the vanguard of the movement to ‘answer back’ all those whom they believed gratuitously denigrated the Hindu religion” (1999:58). It has sought to bolster local support as well as internationalize its linkages in the globalization of Indian ethnicity as well as with Hindu Nationalism in India as represented by the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It took up the mantle anew regarding the politics of the state on a range of issues, arguing the need for public culture to be de-Christianized – echoing Black Power in 1970 as well as the Muslimeen in 1990 – in order to more adequately reflect Trinidad and Tobago’s multiethnic reality. Yet the

resurgence of Hinduism and further development of Indocentric politics by the 1990s was hardly unified, and the UNC Government and SDMS fell out with each other in more ways than one. Indeed, the SDMS hardly speaks for all Hindus – much less all Indians. Some even believe things had been better under the PNM.

The larger point in all of this is that the transition from colonialism to independence and from creole nationalism to postcolonial multiculturalism have transpired not only in terms of ethnoracial politics but also along complexly interwoven and contested religious lines as well. These developments have spurred dialogue and debate within and between “racial” and “religious” groupings that ebb and flow (Khan 2004). Some Blacks have responded through the popular medium of calypso and Ryan even argues that calypsonians were, in fact, a more effective opposition to the UNC than the PNM while in office (1999:164-5). Yet responses to the rise of Indian cultural and political assertion have taken many other forms ranging from Christian fundamentalism to the emergence of black Islamism and from retrenched nationalism to pro-douglan cultural activism and aesthetics.

It is within the context of black response to Indian revitalization that Ryan notes the postcolonial politicization of historically marginalized Afro-creole traditions such as Shango and Spiritual Baptism. “As a parallel development,” in his words, “there was also evidence of an Afrocentric religious awakening” (p. 216). Yet while there is no reason to dispute the influence of intensified Indo-Afro cultural politics especially in the wake of social, economic, and political developments of the late 1980s and early 90s, Ryan’s analysis of late 20<sup>th</sup>-century Afrocentric trends in religion underestimates deeper sociohistorical currents, especially the time-released impact of Black Power, which represented the surfacing of deeper racial tensions, economic conflicts, and ideological contradictions.

#### *Black Power and the Transformation of Shango into Orisha*

Orisha Worship has experienced a range of “anti-syncretic” (Shaw & Stewart 1994) developments since the 1970s in counterpoint to the kinds of flexibility that enabled the Afro-creole tradition of Shango to adapt to and change with its colonial New World context. These transformations cannot be underestimated. A decade into independence, national perceptions began to change dramatically in relation to black spirituality, leading to what Frances Henry (1983) has referred to as the “resurgence” of Shango after having earlier predicted the religion’s demise. This period catalyzed a shift in nomenclature from *Shango* to *Orisha* among new practitioners which ramified throughout public culture more broadly – a change that has by no means been complete or systematic. It is Shango’s association with blackness and African religiosity that not only made it an object of scorn and derision for so many in the colonial period, but which has also now brought it into focus in the postcolonial era as a legitimizing institution for Afrocentric revitalization, an arena for the recuperation of blackness.

Black Power responded to racial bias and class prejudice in the political-economic culture of the newly independent nation-state, drawing its most ardent followers from among the younger and more university-educated elements of society. Turning to the religion as much for political as religious motives, they began seeking out shrines and feasts as a means of reclaiming black selfhood. As one of the movement’s most eloquent spokespeople – Pearl Eintou Springer – has written: “Any people that does not possess, for whatever reason, the ability to conceptualize God, the giver of life and therefore the ultimate life force, in its own image, must clearly suffer seriously from a crisis of self” (1994:86). Tobagonian folklorist Jacob D. Elder writes: “Considering the crucial status of religion in African politics there seems to be nothing



illogical in our prediction that in time the Shango cult will be embraced by young black radicals in their drive for the creation of a politics whose base is truly African in culture in Trinidad and Tobago” (1996:36). In what amounts to a sort of neo-Herskovitsean spirit, Shango is seen as the subjugated, yet premier local repository of African culture.

Yet interfacing with the complex Afro-creole grassroots reality of Shango is no straightforward endeavor. The movement has responded to this quandary by seeking to “Africanize” the practice by exorcizing the popular tradition of its Christian “impurities” while simultaneously “Yorubanizing” its spectrum of praxis. The trend toward African-styled clothing reflects this sentiment. These and other changes discussed below are taken to be the logical methodology for “returning” to what they see as more traditional, ostensibly “pure” West African ritual habits and structures of devotion.

I offer a synoptic overview of sociopolitical developments in what has come to be known as the “Orisha Movement” in the wake of the Black Power Revolution here. I consider several trends encountered on the ground throughout fieldwork, as well as discuss my experience with the Sixth World Congress of Orisa Tradition and Culture in August of 1999, hosted by the government of Trinidad and Tobago, which most dramatically concretized for me the class divisions and differential interests of Shango at the popular level versus Orisha as a politicized movement.<sup>1</sup> Finally, I analyze these developments in terms of the politics of religion in TT’s era of postcolonial multiculturalism, clarifying some of the ironies and tensions embodied by the movement to “Africanize” a problematically “African” tradition.

The Black Power “Revolution” had a number of immediate consequences discussed above, as well as important time-released effects. Regarding the latter, Segal notes the relative recency of the phraseology “black middle class” in Trinbagonian discourse: “I have never found this phrase in a document from the pre-independence period, and its identification of ‘black’ with a status other than ‘lower’ fits with the politics of meaning of the post-independence period, and in particular, of the period following the Black Power movement of 1970” (1993:112).

Likewise, annual Emancipation Day celebrations have become more Afrocentric. Segal observes that the centenary of emancipation in 1934 in fact explicitly commemorated the “enlightened” and “benevolent” Emancipation Act of British Parliament in 1834, as opposed to highlighting the agency of Africans and Afro-creoles who hastened the end of the transitional “apprenticeship” period by two years, in 1838 (pp. 104-5). Fast-forward to my first Emancipation Day celebration in 1997, in which the year’s theme was “Renewing the Vision of African Redemption.” In 2005, the official Emancipation Day theme was “Discarding Broken Chains, Discovering Unbroken Connections.” Each year there is a week’s worth of galas, processions, presentations, concerts, lectures, performances and the like along with materialization of the *Lidj Yasu Omowale* Emancipation Village, featuring African cuisine for sale and a market of African clothing, jewelry, pottery, accessories, etc.

The ideology of Black Power also exerted a powerful effect throughout the arts and popular culture. Though Africanist imagery was not entirely uncommon in Carnival band productions before the 1970s, it hinged on tropes of exotica and fantasy; since that time, however, masquerade themes reflect the postcolonial Afrocentric moment in myriad ways. More

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<sup>1</sup> The spelling of “Orisa” here without the ‘sh’ is not in error, since many of the more intellectual activists and socially-mobile recruits have adopted their own orthography in which the pronunciation of ‘sh’ is understood as implied by the letter ‘s’ in Orisa, an invisible sort of diacritical practice indexing involvement by a more privileged, intellectualized, textually oriented, Afrocentric vanguard.

positive images of both Shango and Spiritual Baptism have emerged in calypso, accompanied by open identifications with these religions by some artists (Henry 2003:166-182). This has been accompanied by increased historical consciousness of African and Afro-creole influences in the local history of Carnival, Calypso, and Steelband, which had been apotheosized as sacred nationalist iconography of the independent postcolonial state.

Similarly, Black Power stimulated government to capitalize on pride in the African past by encouraging other cultural manifestations, such as creation of the annual “Better Village” Program and its competitions for best plays, poems, dances, and so forth. The finals were telecast nationally and winning villages received cash prizes. Many productions were based upon Afro-creole folkloric materials such as Shango subculture, aspects of whose liturgy were incorporated and sometimes featured prominently in competitions (Henry 1991). This added to the growing legitimacy of Shango-Orisha in mainstream public culture.

Nationally televised local series such as “The African Presence in Trinidad and Tobago” (1983) have ramified these developments, along with programming on the independent *Gayelle* series in the mid-1980s focusing, among their varied features, on local black cultural traditions. One of Banyan, Ltd.’s (the producers of *Gayelle*) documentaries – “Crossing Over” (1988) – brought together Ghanaian musician Koo Nimo and the formerly high-profile southern Trinidadian shrine of Isaac “Sheppy” and “Queen” Pearlie Lindsay (known as the United Brotherhood of Time Spiritual School, where Spiritual Baptist, Orisha, and Kabba ritual work were all practiced) for experimental music-making and cultural exchange. It was Sheppy’s sister’s feast, on land just adjacent to the UBOTSS, which I first attended back in 1997 and had my first fateful meeting with Erile described in the prologue.

As an expression of their cultural nationalism, many of those influenced by or growing up in the wake of Black Power have turned either to Orisha, or else Rastafari, as part of racially self-conscious spiritual quests. Perhaps not surprisingly – in retrospect – Rastafari and Orisha have even begun to interrelate distally with one another. Many drummers on the orisha circuit are Rastafarians and some of them see the orisha Dada-St. Anthony as a “Ras,” for example. A shrine in Santa Cruz is patronized predominantly by Rastas or ex-Rastas amenable to the main (black) priestess’s Sai Baba-influenced Hinduism, yet another twist in the many-tentacled evolution of popular religious pluralism and spiritual coexistence at the grassroots level.

*Transforming Shango into Orisha.* Establishing official recognition in the eyes of government as well as combating the pervasive popular stigma surrounding Shango has been spearheaded by a small coalition of activists and spiritual leaders. Indeed, one outcome of Afrocentrically-oriented revitalization has been the reifying effort to formally legitimate “Orisha Religion,” which has in turned spurred bureaucratization.

The first major step toward erecting a national movement upon the shoulders of grassroots Shango came in the early 1980s with the official incorporation of the *Orisha Movement* in 1981 under the leadership of Iyalorisha Melvina Rodney, whose shrine in southern Trinidad came to be known as *Egbe Orisa Ile Wa* (see previous footnote). According to Tracey Hucks (2006:33-4), this was the first legal enactment to legitimate the status of an African-derived religion in the black diasporic world. Soon thereafter, the Orisa Youth’s Cultural Organization came into being in 1985 (Houk 1995:159-61, 189), which circulated a printed collection of Yoruba prayers with English translations, an effort to standardize and disseminate Africanized knowledge about liturgy that has been followed by many others.

Also pivotal was a government-sponsored visit by the fiftieth *Ooni of Ife* – Oba Okunade Sijuwade Olubuse II – as a guest of the Confederation of African Associations (COATT) for

Emancipation Day Celebrations in August of 1988.<sup>2</sup> Greeted by government officials upon his arrival, the Ooni traveled the country, during which time he visited the historical slave burial site at Lopinot Junction, off the Eastern Main Road, where he laid a commemorative stone honoring the late Isaac “Sheppy” Lindsay. He also visited the shrine of Iyalorisha Rodney in Marabella, which he reconsecrated, then anointed her the Spiritual Head of Orisha in Trinidad and Tobago. A spectacular celebration was also staged at the Jean Pierre Sports Arena Complex in metropolitan Port-of-Spain, attended by the Prime Minister and the President of the Republic, as well as a host of other officials. Prime Minister A. N. R. Robinson was even bestowed the title of Chief Olokun Igbaro during the Yoruba King’s sojourn.

The Ooni declared himself pleased with TT, claiming local tradition might in fact be *more* authentic than that contemporaneously practiced in Nigeria (Henry, pers. comm., 1999). He urged local religionists to organize a centralized apparatus for administering various affairs, also advocating that a National Council of Orisha Elders be formed with representation from major local shrines, which was accomplished a decade later in 1998. Perhaps not surprisingly, the visit also exacerbated local factionalisms, especially since the Ooni aligned himself with one group in particular.

Soon thereafter, Babalorisha Clarence Forde and Iyalorisha Molly Ahye of *Opa Orisa Shango* – who had organized the Ooni’s event at the Jean Pierre Complex – launched the first Oshun Festival at Salybia in 1990, on the northeast coast of Trinidad (nationally televised on the *Gayelle* Series, Program 20, 30 August, 1990). This is a spot where a fresh river meets the ocean in a somewhat out-of-the-way yet nevertheless accessible location. Drawing practitioners from multiple shrines in the bright light of day, the Oshun Festival established a new local tradition of offering a federated public “table” for the feminine orisha of beauty, fertility, and water, including cakes, fruits, olive oil, flowers, and so on, to be washed out to sea at high tide. Leadership of the festival has been slowly in flux over the 90s and some micro-political tensions have been evident, but the festival has gained momentum all the same and – unlike traditional feasts held annually at local shrines – takes place publicly, out in the open. Iyalorisha Ahye is no longer involved.

I attended the festival in 1999 and 2000 and observed a similar pattern, including the gathering together of varying shrine community groups, which is *not* an especially common occurrence in local orisha circles; an invocational and divination ceremony at the top of the road leading to Salybia Beach by the most prominent elders and leaders, followed by a procession down to the sea; the planting of a pink flag for Oshun at a designated spot on the beach after more rituals conducted at the seaside; the laying out of a large set of offerings on the sand around the flag, which (ideally) get carried out to sea with the rising tide; and singing, celebration, and general fellowshiping more generally. There was but one ecstatic manifestation of Oshun each year, which took to the sea and was attended by several ritual experts for most of its duration.

Though it had been formed in the 1980s as an umbrella organization inclusive of Sheppy Lindsay’s “Shango Belief System,” Opa Orisa Shango (OOS) was not officially incorporated until 1991, with Baba Forde and Iya Ahye in charge. That year Molly Ahye was publicly

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<sup>2</sup> The title of Ooni refers to the living representative of *Oduduwa*, the cosmic progenitor of the Yoruba peoples and first king of ancient Ife, the archaic locus of creation where Oduduwa descended to the land and proclaimed himself the first Ooni. The Ooni is *primus inter pares* among Yoruba Kings, his crown the most ancient and therefore most sacred. According to the Nigerian High Commission in Port-of-Spain, the Ooni of Ife is “the ultimate authority of the Yoruba race in both spiritual and political matters,” “the head custodian of all that is traditional and cultural in Yoruba Land” (information provided in 1999).

enthroned in a government-supported, nationally televised ceremony as the official head of OOS, though the event was not especially popular at the grassroots level (Henry 2003:81-2). When I would tell people about my research while circulating in middle-class networks, I repeatedly heard the refrain, “You have to talk to Molly Ahye! You have to talk to Molly Ahye!” The fact that her case becomes better known the further one moves up the local class ladder is significant.

Ahye earned a PhD from New York University and is an expert on Afro-Caribbean dance (Ahye 1978, 1983). Born to an urban middle-class family, she was nonetheless exposed to Shango while young. She established connections with the Puerto Rican cultural activist Marta Vega and the Caribbean Cultural Center in New York City in the late 70s and early 80s, where an international group with regular meetings was first hatched. Ahye attended the first World Congress of Orisa Tradition and Culture in Ile-Ife, Nigeria, in 1981, cultivating transnational spiritual contact with specialists in Nigeria, then Brazil. Indeed, her initiation took place abroad, not in Trinidad. In addition to spearheading OOS, facilitating the Ooni’s visit (though she subsequently criticized him for having “created confusion”), and launching the annual Oshun Festival at Salybia, Ahye’s organizational efforts were also directed toward the first concerted attempt at pressing for official Orisha Marriage legislation in the early 90s.

A resident of metropolitan Port-of-Spain, Iya Ahye neither has a shrine nor does she move widely about on the circuit. Indeed, she is relatively inaccessible, as compared with most Iyalorishas and Babalorishas. In an interview granted to Hucks (2006:35), Ahye comments: “I was looking for structure, looking for [Orisha] to have a voice and the only way we could have a voice [was] for us to go to Parliament.” These efforts paid off. In 1992, representatives from OOS were invited for the first time by the government to attend the opening of the new Parliament (Houk 1995:126). Further efforts at unifying the various shrines into a federated movement as well as clarifying a national agenda continued throughout the 1990s.

In 1995, *Egbe Onisin Eledumare* (EOS) – another contemporary, intellectualized, back-to-roots activist shrine group led by Black Power offspring, Oludari Massetungi, and based in Petit Valley, greater Port-of-Spain, which has its own combined print-and-online forum called “Ifa Speaks” and patronized primarily by urban, middle-class devotees – held a week-long conference at the Royal Palms Suite Hotel in Maraval, entitled “Orisha: Towards a Common Theology.” The conference featured plenary sessions, workshops, various presentations and special performances, featuring native social scientists J. D. Elder and Maureen Warner-Lewis, Iyalorisha Molly Ahye, a Ghanaian researcher, a Cuban Babalawo, and an academic from the University of South Florida. Addresses were given by the Secretary of the Nigerian High Commission as well as the mayor of Port-of-Spain, Ethelbert Paul, who stressed the importance of Orisha Religion reaching out to the black youth of TT in order to not only make them “better citizens,” but also “very conscious of their color” (quotations from Banyan, Ltd. archival video footage). The conference concluded with a call for the Ministry of Education to incorporate Africanist pedagogy into their curricula, as well as for the government to establish an Institute of African Studies at the University of the West Indies at St. Augustine in Trinidad. Several religious events were staged at the Little Carib Theatre in Port-of-Spain.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Little Carib Theatre was founded by Trinidadian dancer and folkloric researcher, Beryl McBurnie, in the middle-class Port-of-Spain suburb of Woodbrook in 1948. McBurnie was among the vanguard of artists and intellectuals whose work and creativity contributed to a remarkable cultural renaissance accompanying the Afro-creole nationalist awakening associated with political decolonization after WWII. According to Brereton (1981:223), “she organized and presented folk dances based on Trinidad and Tobago’s rich multi-cultural heritage, jeopardizing her standing in the city’s colored middle class (to which she belonged by birth) by her active

EOS also launched an annual *Shango Day* celebration in 1996, for which they spend the day praying, drumming, and celebrating in a designated public location. Some activists have even lobbied the government that Shango Day be made into an official national holiday. In 1999, EOS held a formal press release in one of the meeting halls at the Queen's Park Savannah – the largest park in the country, located in central Port-of-Spain – that I attended. They outlined their rationale for and itinerary of Shango Day that year, passing out informational literature about their community and its practice of “African Sacred Science,” as well as complimentary copies of their publication, “Ifa Speaks.” That year the event was held at a highly visible spot in the Savannah just across from the National Zoo and President's House. It was attended by a critical mass of perhaps fifty people or so affiliated with the shrine for the better part of the day.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout Shango Day 1999 there were numerous periods of drumming and chanting, yet there was only one, relatively mild ecstatic manifestation among devotees gathered for the celebration. Oludari framed the observance in service to the nation, beseeching Shango to bestow his blessing upon the twin-island Republic. At one point the police approached and asked for a public meeting permit, which had not been arranged beforehand, so the group's leader and several of his assistants piled into the used car I was using and we left the celebration for more than an hour to visit the St. Clair Police Station in order to take care of the necessary paperwork. The authorities were respectful, but this turn of events dramatized the long arm of the law. Indeed, that colonial legislation requiring a permit for religious activities involving drumming and other related aspects of African religion have been on the books throughout the postcolonial period is a particular bone of contention of the recently-politicized Orisha Movement and serious efforts have been made in order to have these statutes permanently excised from the national legal code. A number of meliorating legislative advances have come about in this regard, while others are currently pending or being sought.

Most memorable that day for me was my conversation with an eighty-year-old woman who described herself as “African conscious, not racist.” In 1979, she started a nursery called “Kilimanjaro” and then a kindergarten in metropolitan Port-of-Spain. The Creator made all sorts of animals and flowers to beautify the Earth, she commented. Yet she also repeatedly invoked the notion of “choosing sides,” emphasizing that she had embraced the “African side.” Pointing out the light, “red” skin of the shrine's leader, she observed that he is “mixed” and yet nonetheless has “also chosen a side.” Eventually revealing that she too has some “white ancestry,” she observed she would be “rejected in Scotland.” Her embrace of Orisha Religion has helped her to dispense with the stigma of her “Negro” blood.

Shango Day 1999 ended with a well advertised, pay ticket-based concert featuring various local performers either directly associated with, or supportive of, the Orisha Movement. A number of percussion bands performed at Port-of-Spain City Hall. Abbi and Shanaqua sang an Afrocentric calypso. Baba Forde's Tunapuna group took a turn chanting and drumming. Judging by audience response, the highlight of the evening was the final performance by Ella

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participation in African dances and her cooperation with young dancers of all ethnic backgrounds. For this was a time when most middle-class blacks were still ashamed of African-derived cultural forms and the music and dance of working-class West Indians” (see Ahye 1983 on the life of McBurnie, including her formative years in NYC).

<sup>4</sup> EOS has additionally launched an annual ceremony for a locally little-known orisha, *Olokun*, held “down the islands” – that is, at a relatively inaccessible seaside cave on one of the small islands stretching westward from one tip of Trinidad toward Venezuela, islands most often frequented by middle- and upper-class people from Port-of-Spain as a weekend getaway. Olokun is not commonly encountered within the sphere of grassroots orisha praxis, but was learned about and focused upon by the group's well-educated leader.

Andall, a prominent orisha devotee of Grenadian background well known in the local arts and musical scene. She had a recent smash hit entitled “Say My Name, I’m an African” and she has released several compact discs of her liturgical orisha song-chanting accompanied by a specially assembled youth choir. The same mildly trancing woman from earlier in the day at the Savannah began to manifest near the front of the auditorium, but she was soon ushered out of the concert hall. I was unable to clarify whether this was because the event was being held at such a high-profile venue. It is notable that the concert was the only time during Shango Day in which shrines in addition to the hosting EOS were present.

Meanwhile, other efforts relevant for the national status of African Religions were coming to fruition. Spiritual Baptists had long been agitating for a National Holiday on 30 March, the date in 1951 on which the colonial “Shouters Prohibition Ordinance” (originally legislated in 1917) was repealed, under the interim ministerial government of Albert Gomes, a decade before independence. According to Senator Barbara Gray-Burke – the first Spiritual Baptist appointed to that post, by Basdeo Panday in the early 1990s, as part of the Parliamentary opposition to the PNM under Patrick Manning – Spiritual Baptists had repeatedly suffered broken promises from the PNM under Williams and his successor, George Chambers, as well as NAR Prime Minister Robinson (Henry 2003:66-7). The final straw came when Manning also reneged once attaining power in 1991.

Parliamentary debate was intensified by similar efforts of Indian cultural activists for the establishment of a national “Indian Arrival Day” on 30 May, commemorating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the first wave of indentured South Asian laborers in 1845. Indeed, the matter of public holidays was quickly swept up into the country’s racially polarizing politics and into national headlines. It is within this context that Opposition Leader Panday appointed Burke to the Senate. Manning’s government eventually established a Parliamentary committee to consider the question of public holidays and report back by the end of March 1995.

Manning’s view was that there were already too many national holidays and that granting African Religions a less official “Festival” day would sufficiently recognize them. He opposed removing a holiday associated with Christianity – the most likely candidate for the chopping-block – in order to make room for what many saw as an ambiguously Christian holiday at best. Manning also advocated official sanctioning of a generic “Arrival Day,” rather than specifically “*Indian* Arrival Day,” claiming it was too racially divisive even though everyone knew an Arrival Day celebrated on 30 May made it an ethnic holiday.

The joint, bi-partisan committee finally reported after some delay, yet reached no consensus. The majority report reflected the view of Manning’s PNM government, whereas a minority report called for the granting of national holiday status to Spiritual Baptists and the Orisha Religion, as well as an “Indian Arrival Day” on behalf of Indo-Trinidadians. However, no legislative action was taken. As a compromise, Arrival Day was declared a one-day public holiday only on 30 May 1995 by presidential order, in order to commemorate one hundred and fifty years of local Indian domicile. The celebrations were well attended by all groups throughout the country, but especially significant in Indian areas and communities.

By the end of 1995, the tables had again turned. The PNM was defeated and the United National Congress – a predominantly Indian-based political party led by former Opposition Leader Panday – elected into power. In one of his earliest moves, Panday called for establishment of a public holiday for Spiritual Baptists to be held on 30 March and the granting of land to Baptist groups for celebrations and the building of a school and other facilities. Subsequent legislation in February of 1996 formally institutionalized “Spiritual Baptist Shouters

Liberation Day” as an official national holiday, removing Whit Monday in order to do so. At the same time, Indian Arrival Day was made into a permanent holiday. Granting an Afro-creole religious group a national day enabled the UNC to restore the “Indian” in Arrival Day.

Building upon precursor efforts at incorporation and legitimation, a high-profile conference of Spiritual Baptist groups was held later in 1996 at the Central Bank auditorium in Port-of-Spain, calling for institutional development of the land granted for an “African Religions Spiritual Park” at Maloney – along the east-west corridor – and resulting in the formation of a National Council of Spiritual Baptist Elders. Deeds for title of ownership of the dedicated twenty-five acres of land at Maloney were not handed over until July of 2000; however, three five-acre parcels of which went to Spiritual Baptist organizations, while the other two were bestowed upon the Orisha Movement.

With these developments, the holiday calendar had taken the shape I encountered when beginning preliminary fieldwork in 1997, a hotly contested national liturgical cycle embodying what I am calling Trinidad and Tobago’s field of *postcolonial multiculturalism*: New Year’s Day (secular); Spiritual Baptist Shouters Liberation Day (Afro-Christian); Good Friday (Christian); Good Friday and Easter Monday (Christian); Indian Arrival Day (Indo-secular); Corpus Christi (Christian); Labour Day (secular); Emancipation Day (Afro-secular); Independence Day (secular); Eid al Fitr (Muslim); Republic Day (secular); Diwali (Hindu); Christmas and Boxing Day (Christian). Though Carnival Monday and Tuesday are not official holidays, they are treated as such by many.

As indicated above, efforts to establish a National Council of Orisha Elders were first catalyzed by the Ooni’s visit in the late 1980s, then reprised in 1994, but it was not until 1998 that a formally incorporated Council was officially brought into being under the Companies Act. Its formation partly grew out of the experience of several Trinbagonians having attended the 1997 World Orisha Congress held in San Francisco, as well as in anticipation of Trinidad and Tobago’s hosting of the next round of the Congress the following year in 1999. The purpose of the Council is to bring unity and direction to the Orisha Movement. It aspires to make decisions affecting the religion at-large. The Council is composed of an Executive Committee consisting of six Elders also known as “Directors,” one of whom acts as Chair; various regional District Coordinators, including Tobago; a General Secretary; a Public Relations Officer; and an Administrator. Membership in the Council is open to all shrines, but participation thus far seems to stem largely from those belonging to Egbe Orisa Ile Wa, Opa Orisa Shango, or Egbe Onisin Eledumare. During my fieldwork between 1999 and 2005, two of the Council’s six Elders were also Spiritual Baptist leaders.

One of the first and most important achievements of the Council of Elders was the creation of an annual “Orisha Family Day” (OFD) in 1998, which puts yet another, relatively high-profile event on the local calendar for public attendance and media consumption. It raises consciousness about the religion, fosters solidarity among shrines and practitioners, and seeks to reinforce the value of family. The event is held at Lopinot, an historical slave burial site that had been consecrated by the Ooni of Ife during his visit in 1988, and brings together several hundred people – most decked out in lavish African garb – for a day of invocation and prayers, addresses and updates, music and performance, as well as food and fellowship.

The first two years of OFD saw the attendance of Chief Patricia Oluwole from Nigeria as an emissary on behalf of the Ooni himself. The second year’s observance in 1999 brought even greater national recognition due to the participation of UNC Prime Minister Basdeo Panday, who honored the commemorative stone laid at Lopinot – which has come to be known as an “African

Heritage Site” – with libations and affirmed his support for the Orisha Movement. In 2000, OFD was attended by then President of the Republic, A. N. R. Robinson, who had been bestowed the Yoruba title of Chief Olokun Igbaro by the Ooni more than a decade before. The event continues to grow and has become one of the most important days of solidarity and public recognition for the movement throughout the year.

During the first year of its existence, the Council of Orisha Elders also held its inaugural annual convention in conjunction with the launching of OFD. I attended its second annual convention in late June of 1999, held in the community hall of a secondary school in southern Trinidad, after the convention date had been disentangled from the observance of Family Day. After preliminary incantations and invocation, then-Chair at the time – the late Sam “Baja” Phillips – offered praise for past elders and invoked a deep genealogy of Orisha Worship stemming to Ile-Ife and the “Golden Age in Africa.” He claimed the religion must be proud and not “ahow” (embarrassed), that “being ashamed of who and what you are makes you subservient.” He called for recognition, the convention’s theme. Orisha Worship has had to deal with stigma for too long, but it is now working to “take our rightful place in society.” Baja concluded, “We want arrival, like Indian Arrival Day.”

One of the district coordinators spoke next, reaffirming the foregoing commentary, and reminding people that “We are our own best solution!” She put forward the question of the degree to which the Orisha Movement wants – or not – to have an authority structure like that of Catholicism. There was little conversation or debate about this, however. Other activities such as an historical introduction to the Council, various progress reports, and lively discussions ensued. Shrines were informed about the Squatter’s Land Act, which would enable shrines on state lands to apply for deeds under the shrine’s name. One speaker made a plea for rising above “bickering about leadership” and related problems of factionalism. An economic report was also given, considering various “assets” and “liabilities” within the overall community, and a brainstorming session was held regarding revenue for the Council’s work. Ideas floated were to produce “anthropologically relevant” cds or videos (such as of Family Day held at Lopinot), a shareholder scheme, and the encouragement of entrepreneurship accompanied by a campaign to persuade practitioners to avoid prestige spending.<sup>5</sup>

Then another speaker from Port-of-Spain took a turn, shifting from the logistics of raising revenue to a critical analysis of the glocal scene. He argued that devotees suffer worldwide from the same oppression everywhere: “Whatever affects our brothers elsewhere affects us.” He emphasized that steelband and calypso “came out of the orisha yard” and that there needs to be direct contact between the Caribbean and West Africa. “Why do we have to fly to London to get to Nigeria?” He extended this commentary claiming that Yoruba – not English – is “your own language.” In tune with others, he also spoke of the need for more, and better, media coverage, advocating that the Orisha Movement apply for its own radio station. The proliferating number of new Indian radio stations was cited in stark contrast with the lack of “African” ones. A year later, in 2000, the Council oversaw the development of a systematic registry of all local shrines. A “Certificate of Registration” was created and issued to each shrine registered with the

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<sup>5</sup> It is relevant to note that I was not the only anthropologist in the audience that day. In fact, there was another anthropological graduate student present. One cannot help wondering to what degree our presence may have influenced the proposal to generate documentary items of scholarly interest. It is also important to note – however – that one southern shrine leader strongly contested the idea, speaking critically of Houk’s (1995) ethnography for having published diagrams of various shrine layouts.



Council. I began seeing Certificates crop up in shrine complexes throughout Trinidad. This development represents an unprecedented level of bureaucratization for the tradition.



An example of a certificate hanging prominently on the palais wall of a well-known Orisha Shrine in northern Trinidad.

Coextensive with these efforts has been a push by some toward Yorubacentric language learning and activism. For example, the Traditional Afrikan National Association of Tunapuna circulated a statement in 1999 criticizing capitalist under-development of Africa as well as oppression of Orisha Worship throughout the diaspora. It demanded an “Era of Reparation,” as well as representation on the National Inter-Religious Organization, claiming that Orisha “predates Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam.” The group’s anti-syncretic position was explicit:

The Africans were forced to camouflage and synchronize their form of worship with that of Christianity in order to cling to their only hope of survival. Against this background, this religion persisted, deeply entrenching itself throughout T&T and creating in the process a spiritual hybrid, “Shango-Baptist.” Today this most ancient belief system is being practiced throughout the year at different points of our society and a natural instinctive gradual transition signals the return of this great religion to its former glory, free of all Christian encumbrances.

The statement concluded not only by advocating formal legitimation of “the Orisha Faith as a religion of T&T,” but also official recognition of the Yoruba Language as “the most vital means of communication between African people of T&T.” In a similar spirit, “An Introductory Course on Yoruba Culture and Language” was slated to be offered in July of 1999 through the National Institute of Higher Research and Technology (NIHERST) for the cost of TT\$300. However, it was cancelled due to lack of sufficient enrollment.

Yet the high points of 1999 were undoubtedly the passing of the Orisha Marriage Bill in Parliament and the government-supported hosting of the Sixth World Congress of Orisha Tradition and Culture in Trinidad and Tobago. Agitation for marriage legislation had been active since the early 1990s. Prime Minister Panday signaled his intention upon taking office of honoring African Religions through the establishment of officially recognized marriages performed with their own rites of passage. This development came to pass in 1999 with passing of the “Orisha Marriage Act” by Parliament. Advance drafting of the legislation was circulated at the World Orisha Congress Secretariat in July just before debate on the bill in the House of Representatives. Several representatives of the Orisha Movement met with the Ministry of Legal Affairs in order to engage in final rounds of feedback and fine-tuning.

The bill was quickly passed into legislation, but its operationalization in the form of accompanying regulations was not as swift. Debate emerged within the movement as to what constitutes requirements for being named an official Orisha Marriage Officer, accompanied by sideline controversy over the view of several (male) practitioners who wanted polygamous marriage to be included. These issues took some time to hammer out. Guidelines for candidacy as a marriage officer were finalized and marriages were restricted to monogamous (heterosexual) unions. The first Orisha Marriage license was granted in 2001 to Babalorisha Songodele Adeleke Kunle and was reported in the major news media. Several others have since received licenses and some marriages have been performed, but the number of such unions has thus far been small. The symbolic and political significance of the Orisha Marriage Act far outweighs the limited demographics of such newly minted “African” marriages.

A concurrent and equally significant development to marriage legislation was Trinidad and Tobago’s hosting of the Sixth World Congress of Orisha Tradition and Culture on 15 - 22 August, 1999. The first Congress was held in 1981 in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. An International Steering Committee is made up largely of representatives from Nigeria, Brazil, the U. S., Cuba, and TT. TT’s election as host of the Sixth Congress resulted from deliberations at the Fifth in San Francisco, California, in 1997. The theme for 1999 was “The Orisa, The Ancestors, Family, and Community in the New Millennium – Strategies for Survival.” Several hundred, mostly international delegates attended the meetings. Local participation was apparent, but not by the majority of grassroots leaders and devotees. TT’s presence at the Congress stemmed from those associated with the local Secretariat, Orisha Movement leaders and activists, some practitioners from shrines most directly associated with the Movement, and local intellectuals, artists, and professionals interested in or identified with Shango-Orisha.

Glocal disjunctures and class tensions surfaced in the context of the Congress. The relatively prohibitive cost of attendance accounts for low local popular attendance at the meetings, but this is only part of the story. Some grassroots practitioners I know were not even aware of the Congress until I told them about it. Some were uninterested in the machinations of talks and politics in any case, whereas others were critical of the “elite” nature of the event, saying they would not go on principle even if they were able to scrape together the money needed to register. “How can they hold such an event right here in TT and all of us not be able to attend?” another woman queried rhetorically. In the end, attendance was relatively low and the government as well as local hosts incurred a debt.

The local Secretariat was mobilized in the offices of a high-profile local businessman, I. T. McCleod, some of whose family members are devotees associated with the Orisha Movement. These offices are located in the elite neighborhood of St. Clair in Port-of-Spain. Wealthy locals and expatriates have historically inhabited the luxurious homes of this area, some of which have now been converted into offices or establishments of other sorts. The Secretariat was staffed by volunteers, most of whom were connected with the McCleod family and associated with the Kenny Cyrus Alkebulan Ile Ijuba shrine in Enterprise, Chaguanas. Local factionalism bubbled beneath the surface of things among the most prominent shrine communities, yet never became overt. Internecine local conflict became encompassed by the internationalist convergence and was, in a sense, temporarily repressed for the purposes of successfully staging the event.

I volunteered part-time at the Secretariat for several months in order to help out with preparations as well as gain some perspective on the Congress from inside its local epicenter. Much preparation had already been done, but work was required in keeping on top of paperwork and a seemingly never-ending series of organizational and logistical matters. Given the fact that

I was a graduate student at the time, sporting competence with computers, word-processing and the like, it was not long before I was asked to oversee the effort to organize, edit, and publish the varied contributions and addresses of participants in an official “Congress Proceedings.” I was interested in the submissions that had started arriving and jumped at any opportunity to be helpful. The experience proved to be a revealing one.

Papers – or sometimes only Abstracts of Papers – arrived representing quite a diverse array of spiritual, historical, political, theological, and practical interests. Foreign contributions ranged from Formal Addresses by titled Yoruba leaders and Nigerian ruminations on the challenges to Ogun Worship in contemporary West Africa, for example, to literary expressions of the tradition in Latin American literature and the relationship of Ogun to modern digital technologies. A well-respected African-American Babalorisha from the U. S. presented on therapeutic dimensions of Ifa, for which I was asked to publicly respond during the panel on which it was offered. There were contributions of a scholarly sort from home and abroad.

Trinbagonian contributions to the Congress as reflected in the Proceedings included a historical reflection on the late Babalorisha Isaac “Sheppy” and “Queen Mother” Pearlie Lindsay’s United Brotherhood of Time Spiritual School; a country report given by one of the leading Yoruba revivalists of the local Orisha Movement, who laced her commentary with anti-syncretic polemic; an essay criticizing the deleterious effects of cultural imperialism, especially American media; a synopsis of collaborative sociohistorical research carried out by a Trinidadian artist-intellectual and a Nigerian scholar of literature based at the local campus of the University of the West Indies (UWI); and a reflection upon educational pedagogy and curricular issues by an expat now living in the United Kingdom.

Congress Proceedings were published by the Government Printery of Trinidad and Tobago and cost an extra TT\$100 over the cost of registration. Leftover copies were later made available for sale through the UWI bookstore.

Less overt, but equally revealing of class differentiation was the fact that an extraordinarily complex set of formatting instructions had been developed for submission to and publication in the Proceedings. Not only did these guidelines require competence that would challenge even the most accomplished of computer-users, but they also presupposed access to computers in the first place. Even I found them daunting as someone who regularly engages in computer-based textual work. And as organizing editor of the Proceedings, I experienced considerable difficulty attempting to communicate and trouble-shoot these formatting stipulations with contributors. In the end, almost none of the contributions were submitted as requested and we decided to publish them just as they were sent to the Secretariat, which made for an extremely varied set of genres and texts within the publication.

The Congress involved meetings, workshops, plenary sessions, and roundtable discussions in addition to several formal ceremonies held at the up-market Holiday Inn hotel in downtown Port-of-Spain. A special cultural performance was held off-site at the conclusion of the conference. There was also a nighttime field-trip late one evening during the week to the Cyrus shrine in Enterprise, where a visiting Haitian-American *Mambo* – Vodun priestess – from Philadelphia underwent a prolonged and intense ecstatic manifestation of Ogun. Though elaborate plans had been drawn up in anticipation of the Ooni of Ife’s second visit after a decade, at the last minute he was unable to attend. Sent as his emissary instead was Chief Omotoso Eluyemi – the Apena of Ife – a close ritual and political associate of the Ooni.

The official Opening Ceremony on Monday morning of the conference week was by far the most attended event and received considerable publicity in the news media. It included

musical performances accompanied by drumming and was opened by invocation and prayer offered by the leader of Egbe Onisin Eledumare. Nigerian Professor Wande Abimbola offered an opening speech on behalf of the International Steering Committee and Iyalorisha Joan Cyrus of TT offered a local welcome to foreign delegates. The Apena of Ife read an address on behalf of the Ooni, not only emphasizing the “common culture” of the Yoruba diaspora, but also the need for returning to the Nigerian “source” in our stormy era of globalization.

Official representation included then President A. N. R. Robinson of the Republic – who had been bestowed a Yoruba chiefly title by the Ooni in 1988 – as well as Indo-Trinidadian Prime Minister Basdeo Panday. Panday’s comments reiterated his commitment to advancing the cause of African Religions and he summarized his proactive efforts since the first days of his administration. Indeed, he took the occasion to formally announce that the Orisha Marriage Act had, in fact, just been passed and that President Robinson had signed the bill into law that very morning, which was met with thunderous applause. The Prime Minister touted TT as “a global village within a global village,” “a laboratory of diversity in which we have had remarkable success in creating a note of harmony.” He corrected Microsoft’s Encarta Encyclopedia’s depiction of him as improving the conditions of Indians at the expense of Blacks. Reminding the audience of his early move to establish Spiritual Baptist Shouters Liberation Day as well as grant land for an African Religions Spiritual Park, he noted: “What is not recorded is the widespread criticism that I have been favoring Afro-Trinidadians at the expense of Indo-Trinidadians!”

Overall, the Opening Ceremony privileged the Nigerian delegation and a chronotope of “Africa.” No mention was made about hybridity with other religious traditions. As Henry (2003:151) observes, while the inaugural opening event embodied the Afrocentric vision of the Movement’s transatlantic leaders and activists, it stood in peculiar relation to some of the most prominent and heated interchanges in the panels, as well as the hallways of the conference hotel, regarding the problem and politics of syncretism within the religion.

Most vocal in their criticisms and assumption of superiority were representatives from the neo-Yoruba revivalist Oyotunji Village in South Carolina (see Clarke 2004, 2007 on Oyotunji). Many of these North American delegates claim lineage with Yorubaland through pilgrimages and initiations in Nigeria. On more than one occasion did members of the Oyotunji contingent directly attack Caribbean practitioners for continued patterns of Afro-Christian and others forms of spiritual bricolage and their ostensible lack of having fully dealt with the corrupting legacy of slavery and colonialism. The American critique was delivered with offers to help show locals the “real way” and the “true path,” which were not especially well received locally, though some nonetheless respected the learning and experiences of the North Americans. On one occasion, a local Iyalorisha had given a video-based report on the new tradition of Egungun ancestral masquerade her *ile* – literally “house” in Yoruba, i.e., shrine – had established in southern Trinidad. One of the Oyotunji priests publicly challenged her, reminding everyone that only men were traditionally members of Egungun Secret Societies in Yorubaland. Thus he doubted its local bona fides. Ironically, the recent local invention of Egungun was in fact an Afrocentric innovation itself geared to counter syncretic patterns, however.

Yet the critical ire of the North Americans was not reserved solely for the “taint” of Trinbagonian practices. In an especially dramatic confrontation after a panel in one of the main conference reception areas, a heated debate arose between the Oyotunji practitioners and a group associated with Gro Mambo Angela Novanyon Idizol, the Philadelphia-based Vodun priestess mentioned above. Her panel presentation criticized petty politics and divisiveness. She also supported the sociosymbolic evolution of black Atlantic traditions – including incorporation of

Christian elements and the like – indeed, even appealed *Afrocentrically* to the authority of the ancestors who came before and whose actions had taken them down such hybrid historical paths. But the Americans would have none of it, saying after the panel that the real problem was people like her who “confuse” the religion with “outside,” “impure” elements. For me, this hour-long exchange was one of the most memorable occurrences of the entire week.

Such dynamics put local “purists” between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, they agreed ideologically with sentiments such as those of the Oyotunji delegates, which look down upon syncretisms – especially with Christianity – and espouse returning to African sources. On the other hand, locals were also dismayed by the patronizing arrogance of the Americans, as well as defensive about the unique historical challenges of Caribbeans. All in all, the Congress was an important event, but one that dramatized as many tensions and differences as it did to establish international alliances and local solidarity.

That year, it also just so happened that the Oshun Festival was held at the end of the Congress week. So, though it was not officially part of their congressional itinerary, a significant number of visiting delegates traveled to the northeast coast of Trinidad to attend the annual seaside offering for Oshun. That day the crowd was larger, more fancily dressed, and awash with more cameras and video-recorders than usual. Some North American visitors told me they were especially glad to be participating in the “real” local scene beyond the confined sphere of the conference. They were unaware of the festival’s recency as well as its unrepresentative ceremonial character vis-à-vis the popular local orisha circuit.

The following year, in 2000, Iyalorisha Melvina Rodney was awarded an Independence Day Award by the government in response to a nomination from the National Council of Orisha Elders. The award ceremony was covered on national television and was a very special honor for Iya Rodney, who attended in formal African-style attire complete with a headwrap. An op-ed published in the *Trinidad Guardian* on 12 September by Frances Henry and myself in response to Iya Rodney’s treatment pinpoints both the significance and shortcomings of the event:

We are very gratified the Government has recognized the contribution of Iyalorisha Melvina Rodney, Spiritual Leader of the Orisha Religion in Trinidad and Tobago, by granting her a Chaconia Silver Medal. In a formal and dignified ceremony, each award recipient’s name was called out as the person made their way to shake hands with the President, Prime Minister, and their wives and receive their awards. As this was happening, the television announcer read out their positions and a list of their accomplishments which, although brief, was very informative. However, this procedure was not followed in the presentation made to Iya Rodney. In the first place, her name, followed by the stereotyped designation, “High Priestess,” was read out but the religion that she is “High Priestess” of was not identified, much less described. Secondly, there was no mention of any biographical information about her, nor were any of her spiritual achievements presented. This was particularly surprising since Iya Rodney acknowledged the President as a Yoruba chief – Chief Olokun Igbaro – by clasping both his hands and touching foreheads. Because of these omissions, the public, some of whom are not aware of the achievements of this gracious woman, might wonder why she even deserved an award. Moreover, we are led to wonder if the failure to properly identify and recognize Iya Rodney has something to do with the fact that she represents an African-derived religion in a country that is, in some ways, still trying to deny aspects of its past.

- Frances Henry, Professor of Anthropology, York University, Toronto  
& Keith McNeal, Anthropologist, Emory University, Georgia.

This editorial was published several months before the end of my longest period of fieldwork.

That evening we received an email with the subject line “Orisha Priestess” from an expat living in Houston, Texas, saying: “I am writing to commend you for addressing the Trinidad

Guardian about the award to Mrs. Rodney. Not being of the Orisha faith, I do not know the appropriate to address you in reference to her. I too am from Trini and am daily pained by the ignorance African Caribbean people have about themselves, and the members of the media are part of that ignorant group. Keep at it. Enlightenment will come.” Then, when I happened to run into one of the country’s well-known masquerade artists with whom I am acquainted the following day, he looked at me – chuckling – and commented, “I see you’ve joined the fray!”

*“Africanizing” a Problematically “African” Religion.* In order to grasp the dynamics of these postcolonial developments in fuller perspective, we must return to racial ideologies of the colonial period. Because “achievements” were symbolically “white” in the colonial order, and rationalized by racist mythology of the “culturally naked African,” their accomplishment by “dark” people may have provisionally contested viewing the “Negro” as inherently inferior, but nonetheless also precluded affirming blackness. Any celebration of achievements by “black” Afro-creoles was not an affirmation of their “African” ancestry, but a valorization of the European “Culture” which “Civilized” them. “Achievements” did not make “East Indians” anything other than Indians – by contrast – under the reigning imagery of the “culturally saturated East Indian.” “Because ‘achievements’ did not alter ‘Indian identity,’ it could possess ‘achievements’ – which was precisely what the idiom of ‘respectability’ and the referential shifting of color terms denied ‘Africans’” (Segal 1993:103).

These racial ideologies prefigured divergent sociosymbolic pathways for the organization of inequality throughout the colonial era, positioning socially-mobile “Blacks” and “Indians” differently – yet not unrelatedly – in time and space. We may think not only about how these contrasting colonial ideologies of racial subordination influenced the social differentiation and cultural evolution of religious institutions and ritual practices throughout the course of the colonial period, as addressed earlier, but also better account for trends in the multiculturalist politics of religion precipitated by decolonization and the experience of independence.

Given prevailing colonial logic, it has made sense to contest ideological inferiority of “Negro” and celebrate the achievements of Afro-creoles in the postcolonial period by affirming their Africanness and blackness. As a corollary, the idealization of whiteness and cultural influence of Christianity as dominating (neo)colonial institutions must be reversed and undone: in with “Africa” and out with “Europe.” If colonialism was perverted by imagery of the “culturally naked African,” whose betterment was premised upon Euro-Christian acculturation, then decolonizing the nation as well as the Afro-creole self requires exorcism of the subjugating “taint” and “false consciousness” of such identifications and institutions.

Much to their frustration and dismay, however, Black Power activists discovered just how difficult it is to truly bring about decolonization and a liberating transformation of interpenetrating racial and class hierarchies within an ever-globalizing world of international capitalism. TT originated as an overseas colonial project and capitalism – in a series of transmuting iterations – has made itself the only game in town. Playing its cards well, Eric Williams’s PNM was able to coopt much of the critical edge of 1970’s radicalism.

Yet this is not to say that the so-called Black Power Revolution was inconsequential. I argued against such a view above. Indeed, Black Power stimulated substantial changes in public culture. I see it as the first of four main chapters in the development of TT’s postcolonial multiculturalism, the others being the rise and fall of the NAR in the latter half of 1980s; the Islamist uprising of 1990; and the Indian Cultural Renaissance as well as rise of the UNC in the 90s. Each has challenged the postcolonial state, driving its own nail into the coffin of Afro-creole nationalism.

Building a national Orisha Movement upon the grassroots shoulders of Shango has been anything but straightforward. Whereas Shango embodies the persisting subaltern significance of African cultural behavior, it also embodies hybridity with Christianity as well as other forms of creolization. Framing these as contradictory, the strategy of the Orisha Movement has been twofold: firstly, raise consciousness about and contest discrimination against African religiosity in politics and national culture; secondly, reform and revitalize popular ritual praxis through dual processes of de-Christianization and re-Africanization. A camouflage perspective on the “problem” of syncretism serves to acknowledge the sociohistorical reality of Afro-Christianisms while celebrating the cunning of black culture, underwriting an anti-syncretic agenda trained on the multiculturalist politics of the postcolonial state. This trend is driven by desire to “purify” and “re-Africanize” the local tradition of all ostensibly *non*-“African” elements: “to reorient religious standards to reflect that of Nigerian Yoruba” (Hucks 2001:342), or more precisely, a particular understanding of what is taken to be the idealized, precolonial “Yoruba.” This perspective frames syncretism as a “problem” and puts underprivileged, less overtly Afrocentric practitioners on the defensive for their “impurities” of practice. Class differentiation is evident here in ways that become clearer upon closer inspection.

For Houk (1993, 1995), this so-called “Africanization” of Orisha Religion is partly a reverberating sociopolitical development resulting from the consciousness-raising of Black Power, but also especially a response to the influx of Indians and the incorporation of Hindu elements into the practice in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Afrocentric dynamic is a “grassroots” phenomenon in his view (1993:175), but I think it is precisely at this level in which the overtly politicized, Afrocentrically “purifying,” anti-syncretic trend is in fact *least* salient, especially as compared with the younger, professionally minded, activist-oriented, middle-class recruits at the forefront of the national Orisha Movement.

Henry (1983, 1991, 2003) offers a more detailed overall account of the postcolonial transformation of Shango into Orisha. In the 1960s, older leaders were dying off and she herself even predicted Shango’s rapid demise. At that time, the Catholic Church was still denying known practitioners confession, baptism, and the like. Yet by the 1970s, Henry encountered an “astonishing resurgence” (1983:63). Membership and the number of shrines had increased. Moreover, there was greater society-wide acceptance of the practice accompanied by increasing public appreciation for its significance as an African cultural retention. These developments may be broken down into several interrelated causes.

Firstly, critical new forms of political consciousness resulting from the Black Power Movement were especially attractive to younger people and led to increased interest in Shango as the live African cultural past within the nation. Many recruits were drawn for political as much as religious reasons. These developments within the contested and evolving postcolonial context led to “de-Christianizing” efforts in prayer, praxis, and symbolism, as well as a corollary emphasis upon increased “Africanization” in language, liturgy, clothing, and so forth.

Secondly, a change in class composition has been evident, not only involving an increase in middle-class worshippers and supporters, but they have also become much more public and vocal than ever before. As Henry observed in 1983: “It has become almost a mark of prestige particularly among younger university educated persons to not simply admit to, but brag about, having consulted a Shango healer or attended a feast” (p. 66). Henry estimated approximately ten percent of practitioners as hailing from the middle classes by the 1970s, and that recruitment up the class ladder was on the rise. She sees the growth of such “new” members – professionals, entrepreneurs, artists, intellectuals, and students – as the single most important force at work

transforming the religion in the postcolonial era, reflected especially in the arts and popular culture, as well as politics. Though few have commented upon it, we must also appreciate the significance of the economic oil boom from the mid-70s through the early 80s for having energized and differentially empowered cultural life throughout the social ladder, spurring new patterns of mobility and intensifying consumption habits in ways relevant to this story.<sup>6</sup>

Thirdly, Shango cultism has received a relatively recent influx of Indians into the practice, in some cases even to leadership positions of significant influence. In the early 1980s, for example, an Indo-Trinidadian – Ralph Frank of Couva – was commonly said to give the largest, best feast in the country. During the time of my fieldwork, there was a prominent Indian shrine leader involved with the National Council of Orisha Elders. While increasing Indian involvement in the tradition may reflect postcolonial recuperation of Shango attracting adherents from all ethnic quarters, however, this development stands in an awkward relationship with the ascendant Afrocentrizing paradigm.

Finally, there are the changing attitudes of the established denominational religions. Catholicism and Anglicanism have changed their tune considerably in the wake of decolonization, confronting the counter-productivity of their historical anti-Africanist bias in the era of independence. This is related to the indigenization of church leadership and pedagogy as well. Henry even notes some token inclusion of orisha song-chanting in the services of several progressive urban church congregations in the late 70s (1983:68).

Put up against her earlier observation (1957:7) that the majority of Orisha Worshipers in her field experience had relatively little African knowledge of the powers, these are changes of utmost significance indeed. Postcolonial Afrocentrists now advocate the exorcism of “Christianisms” (Hucks & Stewart 2003) from the tradition. In the anti-syncretic view of these reformists, popular hybridity and creolizing innovation – known colloquially as the “full circle approach” – are seen as “local” developments privileging variation and flexibility over “purity.”

However, I would argue that such “purifying” Afrocentric revitalization must also be seen as a form of innovation as well, albeit of a culturally and historically specific sort (akin with Brown 2003 on Santería). The assumption that hybrid variability is “local” mystifies the dynamic character of West African religiosity, to some extent reproducing colonial imagery of the culturally naked African in subterfuge. Hybridity is not just diasporic, in other words, and purity not just African. Indeed, preoccupation with “purity” and the effort to standardize and bureaucratize Orisha Worship reflects historically Eurocentric models of what a legitimate “Religion” is within the contested political context of postcolonial multiculturalism vis-à-vis the state and its resources. In a certain ironic, non-trivial sense, then, the process so many – including scholarly commentators – refer to as “re-Africanization” may also be viewed quite otherwise as a sort of *de*-Africanization, in fact.

This is evident in the relative decline of trance performance as focal ritual activity as one ascends structurally from Shango ceremonialism of the grassroots classes to the bourgeois spheres of the Orisha Movement and its new spectrum of ritual forms. While I witnessed this to be the case, the phenomenon has also been commented upon by Henry (1983:60-2; 2003:9, 13-4,

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<sup>6</sup> Indeed, this is the same globally distributed oil boom experienced by the independent Nigerian state that spawned a nationalistic upsurge in state capitalism and underwrote Nigeria’s hosting of the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in 1977, a pan-Africanist extravaganza that heralded the country’s spectacular rebirth as a rapidly developing petro-state (see Apter 2005). Though it is difficult to document or substantiate, I think it likely that reverberations of FESTAC’s Nigerian pan-African Nationalism found their way across the Atlantic in the late 1970s and only served to synergize with what was happening in Trinidad and Tobago.



118, 140-1). This is not unrelated, at an even further level of remove, to the sentiment of “Auntie Joyce” – a local dancer interviewed on the newly independent television station, *Gayelle*, during August of 2005 – who noted that she uses material from saraka and nation dances in her choreographic work, but shied away from that of trance dance, since “catching power” is so “frightening.” Bourgeois sensibility is threatened by the conspicuous “loss of control” involved in ecstasy. Related, as well, is a contemporary trend toward initiations without first having undergone the onset of trance (Babalorisha C. Forde, pers. comm., 2000).

Moreover, the entrance of more middle-class devotees has brought about less active participation on the feast circuit among them. They turn more toward textual study of various sorts and espouse a more overtly “philosophical” orientation. Not surprisingly, these are the same practitioners who have taken up interest in the practice and wisdom of Ifa Divination, esoteric knowledge of which must largely be accessed through printed materials. In order to spread knowledge of Ifa as well as Yoruba liturgy, they sponsor educational classes designed to “restore” and “purify.” Some are fortunate enough to have made trips abroad to Brazil, North America, or especially Nigeria in order to receive initiations and cultivate relations with foreign mentors. In this regard, they are more similar to the Oyotunji Congress delegates above.

These processes are clearly neither simple and cut-and-dried, nor are they without their revealing ironies and contradictions. Even some of the explicitly Afrocentric shrines have not completely dispensed with all non-“African” elements. To take another example, the head of Egbe Onisin Eledumare – one of the leading Afrocentric innovators – is affiliated with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. He has adopted the view that all religions – including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – ultimately derive from “African Sacred Science,” therefore any Christianisms within local practice may be reinterpreted within an Africanist framework. Meanwhile, some of the more politically minded among grassroots devotees I came to know see the Orisha Movement folks as “Johnny-Come-Latelies,” as one Iyalorisha in central Trinidad put it, revealing class friction from the bottom up.

A complex combination of transgenerational and class tensions surfaced in the Carnival controversies of 2001-2, during both of which seasons two of the leading Afrocentric shrines brought out Carnival bands with orisha-based themes (also see Henry 2003:185-91; Hucks & Stewart 2003). Egbe Onisin Eledumare titled its band, “401 Meets 2001,” referring to the number of deities in the traditional Yoruba pantheon, according to one influential count. Then, Iyalorisha Patricia “Sangowunmi” McCleod’s shrine put on a band called “Faces of Oshun” the following year, in 2002. These developments stimulated opposition by the Council of Orisha Elders, who – as local, popular-level traditionalists that “came up” during the colonial era and weathered its many challenges – see Carnival as a profane sphere of secular revelry (“bacchanal” is the colloquial term) in which representations or invocations of the orishas do not belong. For them, bringing out orisha masquerade transgresses orthopraxy in a most serious way.

The Afrocentric activists, by contrast, see orisha mas as a fresh and timely contribution to national culture and public revitalization of the tradition. They not only look to their foreign connections and sources of inspiration, but also privilege the significance of Ifa as the final arbiter on the matter. This rarefied oracle was personally consulted in one case and, in the other, sought via long-distance personal connection with a Nigerian Babalawo. These early 21<sup>st</sup>-century Carnival controversies were never reconciled, leaving the activist shrines to carry out their individual endeavors and the Council of Elders in a state of official disapproval.

Yet this is not the only way conflict overdetermined by ideology and anachronism bubbles up within the contemporary scene. For example, members of the Orisha Movement

have gone to some lengths to rehabilitate local history in order to raise consciousness about African cultural influences and local subaltern resistance. The mid-20<sup>th</sup> century “Shango King,” Samuel Ebenezer Eliot, affectionately known as Pa Neezer has been appropriately lionized as one of the local greats, who kept the tradition alive and well under inhospitable circumstances. Yet Neezer was not only an avid Shangoist, but also a died-in-the-wool London Baptist (Henry 1981, 2003:202-10). His healing repertoire consisted of “bush” (herbal remedies), obi divinatory seeds, and the Bible. Warner-Lewis (1996:67) reports that, in addition to possessing copies of two Yoruba grammar books – one published by the Christian Missionary Society in 1948 – Eliot also acquired a Yoruba Bible in the early 1960s, earmarked on the page of the Lord’s Prayer. Commemoration of Pa Neezer by the postcolonial Orisha Movement turns out to be somewhat tricky business, given his explicitly Christian identification and scriptural involvements.

Indeed, the case of Pa Neezer shows that it was possible for Afro-creoles in the post-WWI colonial period to become racially self-conscious and even incipiently oriented toward Yoruba revivalism in ways not well understood within, or translated into, the cultural politics of the postcolonial period. One of Warner-Lewis’s (1991:125-40) informants learned explicit Yoruba religious beliefs from her grandfather, which she practiced until her dying day. She was also influenced by early currents of black nationalism connected with the Garvey Movement of the 1920s, espousing a “race conscious” worldview.<sup>7</sup> Yet this third-generation Yoruba-creole was also a Catholic who experienced light trance manifestations in her youth during elevation of the Host in Mass, and who saw the orishas and saints as different sides of the same spiritual coin. For her, the Old and New Testaments were scriptures of African religious history and Jesus, Mary, and the Apostles were all black people. She posited deep interconnections between Yoruba and Hebrew cultures. These are views that do not easily translate into the dominant cultural politics of the postcolonial era.

Warner-Lewis’s research on the history of Yoruba culture and language offers us several other valuable cases. One Yoruba-identified woman kept notebooks of transliterated Christian prayers she remembered hearing her grandfather use (pp. 67-8). Motivated by fierce racial consciousness, another man conducted evening language classes on Yoruba twice a week in the late 1920s at the old Diego Martin Catholic School, just outside of Port-of-Spain (pp. 68-71). He complained of ridicule by other Afro-creoles on the streets for his efforts, and the class was eventually terminated, presumably due to the Church’s resistance to his Garveyism. The class only drew a small number of students and most instruction – premised upon a colonial primary school methodology developed for English – focused upon rote learning and repetition of phrases and texts, such as the Lord’s Prayer and the Creed of the Apostles. Indeed, this fellow even composed several Christian hymns in Yoruba (pp. 83-4).

A further case involves another Garveyite who in fact first turned to Spiritual Baptism as a non-establishment religion (pp. 71-2). He sought assistance from the North American branch of Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association and – through their referral – obtained Yoruba grammar books and probably a Bible from contacts in Nigeria. He spearheaded the teaching of Yoruba language classes in several venues throughout Trinidad during the latter half

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<sup>7</sup> Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) was born in Jamaica and emigrated to the United States. His Universal Negro Improvement Association peaked in the 1920s. Garveyism espoused black self-reliance and African decolonization. Colonial authorities took repressive measures against Garveyism in Trinidad, though they eventually allowed him entry to the island in 1937. Many of the working-class activists and labor union leaders during the unrest throughout the West Indies in 1937-8 were Garveyites (see Martin 1994).

of the 1940s. Warner-Lewis found that the best-remembered tribute among his students was recall of the Lord's Prayer, which they learned through repetitive chanting. At one point, their teacher also teamed up with several other locals to found the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Trinidad, leading him to launch classes in Amharic and Geez in addition to Yoruba for a time.

Indeed, it is important to remember that a different African nation – *Ethiopia* – captured the early black nationalist imagination among Garveyites of the 1920s and then especially with hemispheric Afro-American outrage to the Italo-Ethiopian War of 1935-6. This upsurge of “Ethiopianism” was not only characterized by an energized black consciousness, but also by a movement to identify events and figures in the Bible as “African” (Yelvington 1999:196-7). The 1930 coronation of Ras Tafari Makonnen, who traced his lineage to David, Solomon, and Queen Sheba of the Old Testament and became known as Haile Selassie I, was taken by many as biblical prophecy having come to fruition. A catechism of the UNIA cited the 31<sup>st</sup> Verse of the 68<sup>th</sup> Psalm in order to substantiate Ethiopia's sacred status as well as Haile Selassie's significance. The important point here is that “Ethiopia” served as the primary metonym for blackness within this earlier Afrocentric consciousness of the late colonial era, one that was *not* anti-Christian. The ascent of “Yoruba” as the premier chronotopic sign of Africa is therefore significant, especially since postcolonial Afrocentrism has taken up an explicitly anti-syncretic position vis-à-vis Christianity, in contrast with the earlier Ethiopianism.

These examples demonstrate complexities of past experience and political consciousness that have gotten lost within the postcolonial dispensation. Such cases dramatize some of the ironies and tensions associated with a conceptualization of “Africanization” specifically as “Yorubanization” (see Falola & Childs 2004 on polysemy of “Yoruba” and “Africa” throughout the black Atlantic). We must recall that Trinidad's African heritage is neither exclusively, nor overwhelmingly Yoruba, though this West African stream has been undeniably influential and important. Moreover, Yoruba-speaking peoples of West Africa never constituted a single political entity, nor did they refer to one another by a common name. It was colonial 19<sup>th</sup>-century European missionaries who adopted the term “Yoruba” as an overarching moniker, based on a double loan translation: originally a Muslim Hausa xenonym referring specifically to peoples of the Oyo State, it was then adopted by those same peoples as a term of self-reference. Application of the term Yoruba by indigenous converts and European colonials to designate a broad ethnolinguistic group inhabiting what is today southwest Nigeria therefore represents a further instance of semantic transposition (Peel 2000). It must also be remembered that the cult of Shango was an integral feature of imperial Oyo, an avid slaving state that sent thousands upon thousands of war captives into the Middle Passage. These are historical realities that sit rather uncomfortably in relation to the politics of postcolonial Afrocentrism; hence it is not surprising that they are sidelined by a selectively idealized view of precolonial “Yoruba” tradition.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> An “Africanizing” impulse conceived as “Yorubanization” has also emerged in relation to Spiritual Baptism (e.g., Thomas 1987, Glazier 2001), but this is even dicier given the religion's decidedly Christian orientation as well as its relative lack of Yoruba conceptualization as compared with Orisha Worship (see Shemer 2006). Despite the reality of their complexly overlapping populations, Shango and Spiritual Baptism seem to make even less comfortable bedfellows in recent times, given the shifting and contested ambiguities of “Africanity” in relation to each. For example, one usually hears little about the struggle of Spiritual Baptists during events sponsored by the Orisha Movement, even though the earlier Baptist struggle paved the way for what came later in a most crucial sense. Contrariwise, there was no Orisha presence at the celebrations of Spiritual Baptist Shouter Liberation Day at the African Religions Spiritual Park in 1999 and 2000. The 1999 event was attended by then Prime Minister Panday, who presented a “Memorandum of Understanding” pursuant to transferring legal deed for the land to each of the

Anti-syncretic “Africanizing” trends and the politics of the Orisha Movement must be understood in terms of the racial ideology they seek to contest and overturn. Yet there is a profound way in which subverting colonial ideology means allowing it to continue to indirectly frame the debate and terms of engagement. An anti-syncretic politics espousing a camouflage interpretation of syncretic incorporations at the level of popular practice may invert, yet also subliminally reinscribe colonial imagery of the “culturally naked African.” It also therefore pits itself against the persisting subaltern Africanity of the grassroots tradition not only in terms of the latter’s transculturating dynamism, but also its less bourgeois orientation. Ironically, then, Afrocentric preoccupation with “purity” owes something to Eurocentric consciousness and Western models of what makes for a legitimate “Religion.”

The evolution from Shango into Orisha has entailed the reification of the latter as a “Religion” or “Movement” in a way that stands in rather marked contrast to the relatively apolitical and dispersed nature of grassroots practice. Most traditional devotees are not involved in these higher-level developments or politics. Indeed, some are quite removed from what has been happening at the nation-wide political level. When a devotee friend accompanied me in 2000 to several feast nights at the shrine of Iyalorisha Rodney – e.g. – he commented he did not know that much about her. In fact, he was much more concerned with the micro-details of ritual praxis at her feast than with her top-down stature. I doubt he would have ever visited her yard had I not invited him to join me on several of my nightly trips down south for her feast.

Moreover, the development of more overtly Afrocentric approaches to the tradition has entailed the relative decline of feasts as a center of ceremonial gravity for practitioners of this persuasion, partly because their forms of worship are being refocused upon other kinds of devotion – including in the form of politics itself – and partly because feasts are too much an expression of the grassroots scene for newer recruits hailing from upwardly-mobile backgrounds. This is reflected in the diminished emphasis upon trance performance in the more recently introduced kinds of events and, more generally, as one moves up in socioeconomic status. In addition, the more “Africanized” feasts appeal less to grassroots devotees, since they are less familiar and reflect an identity politics that does not as much preoccupy them. To return to the case of Iyalorisha Rodney’s feast mentioned just above: I was surprised by the low attendance throughout the week despite her national stature. Several of those I discussed this matter with seemed to concur that it was probably due to her shrine having come under the influence of the more activist-oriented and politically-minded within the fold.

Thus it seems that the more one moves from “Shango” to “Orisha,” the more the religious field in a sense becomes gentrified, something not altogether surprising given that it must take on increasingly bureaucratized features and bourgeois inflections in its development as a sociopolitical entity and as a vehicle of postcolonial cultural politics vis-à-vis the state.

A recent development will suffice here in bringing this discussion to a close, for it embodies some of the same trends and ironies explored here. It involves Iyalorisha Valerie

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Baptist and Orisha organizations involved (though the final transfer of title was not granted by the government until 2002). By this point, and despite the fact that the holiday had been established only several years before in 1996, the celebration held in honor of the day had fractionated from a single, unified one in 1996 to two the following year, and then three by 1999, the year I first began attending. Glazier also documents a telling shift in interrelations between Shango and Spiritual Baptist after a deeper trajectory in which they had begun to overlap and coexist. Rituals that were “once practiced in close proximity,” he writes, “are now carried out in different buildings, and whenever possible, in different communities” (1983:8).

“Amoye” Stephenson Lee Chee, Trinidad and Tobago’s current country representative for the World Orisha Congress. Her shrine in Princes Town has been the sole innovator in bringing recontextualized Egungun and Gelede masquerade into local being for the very first time. Iya Amoye was invited to deliver the annual Sermon for the Ceremonial Opening of the Law Courts of TT in December of 2004, the first time any representative of Orisha Religion had ever been granted the honor.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to remember that only some fifteen years before, as part of the fierce debates over multiculturalism and state policies catalyzed by victory of the NAR in 1986, Hindu activists criticized the historically dominant Christocentricity of the judicial system’s annual Ceremonial Opening. Calling for authentic ecumenicism, they pointed out that even though the “inter-faith” services marking the formal opening of the law term included a Hindu *Pandit* chanting mantras and a Muslim *Imam* offering a prayer, the sermon had always been based on Christian scripture and taken place in a Christian Church (Ryan 1999:40).

The 2004 Sermon by Iyalorisha Amoye included Yoruba prayers at the beginning and end (along with English translations), reflected upon the spiritually and materially intertwined nature of human existence, and extolled the emphasis in Yoruba tradition upon *iwa pele*: the development of good and noble character. Moreover, Iya Amoye spoke of the orishas in order to reframe the symbolism of law. Most important in this regard is *Obatala*, characterized as the Divinity of Justice in the Yoruba Pantheon, who rules the inner head upon which humans depend for wisdom, judgment, and discretion. To quote an excerpt from her address:

The symbol of Obatala is the Scale or the Instrument of Balance, which we notice is also the symbol of the Judiciary. Obatala’s number is 8 – the symbol of infinity and perfect balance – and Obatala is also described as “the Chief of the White Cloth,” a color that symbolizes purity of thought and action. All matters relating to Law and the Courts come under his purview. Obatala’s positive attributes are equality, fairness, wisdom, patience, serenity, tranquility, calmness, gentleness, temperance, and sobriety, indeed all the qualities that are supposed to come with old age. In all indigenous traditions, white hair is respected and revered. The Judge’s wig is symbolic of white hair – the wisdom of the aged – the *ashé* (spiritual energy) of Obatala.

The sociohistorical significance of the sermon in this context is clear, emblematic of the social transformations and political accomplishments incrementally wrought by those in the vanguard of the Orisha Movement over the preceding three decades.

Yet what I want to close with here concerns the cross-weaving of symbolism – dare one call it syncretism? – at work in Iya Amoye’s oratory. Not only are Yoruba prayers given in English in order to clarify their meaning, but the sacred symbolism of Obatala is also intertwined with that of the West Indian Judiciary. The orisha’s color white and the wig of the wise judge are poetically explicated in relation to one another. Though it comes from the mouth of an Afrocentric reformer, the address shows just how subtle are the analogical processes that generate “hybrids” and “bricolage.” Their effectiveness depends upon being able to chart paths through formerly unrealized frontiers of social experience and thresholds of cultural space. This example also demonstrates the ways in which independent sources of symbolism may become layered and intertwined without being contradictory or losing their original referents. As Mintz observes, “the culture of a people is like a living fabric, and for those who weave it, origins matter less than the creative acts their behavior involves” (1974:326).

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<sup>9</sup> This sermon is available online at [www.trinidadandtobagonews.com/webbbs\\_config.pl/noframes/read/2690](http://www.trinidadandtobagonews.com/webbbs_config.pl/noframes/read/2690).

### *Hindu Renaissance and the Failure of the National Maha Kali Shakti Temple Association*

Having considered the legacy of Black Power for the evolution of the Orisha Movement, we turn now to the case of Shakti Puja in order to query why Hindu revivalists have not similarly taken it up. The fact this has not happened is revealing. We may understand the contrasting case of the *non*-politicization of Shakti Worship also in relation to the colonial ideology of racial subordination regarding the “culturally saturated Indian,” focusing on the ways it continues to influence the postcolonial politics of Indian revitalization.

This is an admittedly peculiar discussion since I am analyzing something that did not happen. The question arose for me as an ethnographer over time as I began to contemplate the drastically different political fates each had undergone in the postcolonial era, despite their lateral subaltern histories of transculturation and structurally convergent patterns of practice at the popular level. Why did Indocentrists turn a blind eye toward Shakti Puja while Afrocentrists had so earnestly taken up the popular subaltern spiritism of Shango as cause célèbre?

Put succinctly, some dimension of the internally subjugated local past was not taken up by postcolonial Indocentrists because Indians had been positioned as Oriental Outsiders in the colonial period – “East,” not “West,” Indians – and since Hinduism had, accordingly, long been celebrated as representing the quintessentially “Indian.” Southern Caribbean Hinduism, as we have seen, had already been consolidated and standardized in counterpoint to sociopolitical threats from Christian evangelization, neo-Hindu missionaries, and the colonial state. Thus it operated as a recuperating vehicle of Indian identity *before* the independence period and ensuing onset of postcolonial multiculturalism. It entered this period already carrying considerable ideological weight and did not now need to claim some subaltern aspect in order to recuperate itself from within. Indeed, mainstream West Indian Hinduism has become deeply invested in its own alternative “respectability” vis-à-vis Christianity and the state. Championing a heterodox, “lower” practice would compromise this well-entrenched political posture.

Put otherwise, the figure of the “culturally saturated Indian” meant that creolization of Hinduism in the West Indies was culturally hypocognized, despite the fact that the construction of a gentrifying form of Sanatanist Hindu orthodoxy pitched in a conservative, “traditional” direction poignantly reflected its New World experience. Because colonial imagery framed Indo-Trinidadians as a sectarian minority within-but-outside the emergent nation, their social mobility and political recuperation has largely been constructed as a collective ethnic achievement, not the result of intermixture with Europeans. Meeting the colonial challenge meant carving out a socially “respectable” form of Hinduism that has progressively gutted itself of “backward” popular practices contravening its “proper” modern paradigm. In this regard, though Hinduism and African Religions have historically suffered from colonial subjugation and Christian critique, they have nevertheless both experienced quite different trajectories as diasporic streams adapting to the constraints and affordances of life in the West Indies.

Of course, this hardly means the machinations of Hinduism in the colonial and postcolonial periods are reducible to one another. Yet, the important point is that Hinduism had already taken shape as the essentially diasporic vehicle for “overseas” Indians in the colonial era. The politics of maintaining its viability meant establishing a “respectable” local orthodoxy, which translated into the progressive marginalization of more heterodox, ostensibly “primitive” forms of ritual devotion such as firewalking, animal sacrifice, and trance performance. Though the advent of postcolonial multiculturalism has brought new twists and turns to this story, it has

changed neither the class-inflected nature of cultural politics, nor the dominating local weight of neo-traditional Hindu orthodoxy and associated developments.

In other words, a small, formally educated, professionally oriented, Christian identified group emerged in the years after indentureship that became the vanguard of “modernization” in the Indian sector. Not far behind, however, was the development of what Kelvin Singh (1996) calls an Indo-Trinidadian “traditional elite” led by Hindu and Muslim leaders. Under the influence of educated emissaries of Indian Nationalism, as well as responding to encroachment by foreign Arya Samaj missionaries, a new sense of diasporic ethnic consciousness emerged after the 1920s, interestingly – and not unrelatedly – paralleling corollary developments among Blacks and Coloreds. This motivated battles for the formal legitimation of Muslim and Hindu marriages, which were won, respectively, in the 1930s and 40s, for example.

Throughout the period from WWI to the debut of the PNM in 1956, both of Singh’s so-called “modernizing” and “traditionalizing” elite groups focused almost exclusively upon matters of primarily Indian concern. Indeed, overcoming intense racial stigma and status deprivation in colonial society prompted cooperation between these groups. In the mid-1940s, the issue of an English-only language test for the exercise of the franchise especially galvanized Indo-Trinidadians at-large, intensifying a sense of ethnicity and related political struggle. Geographer Colin Clarke’s (1986) study of Indians in San Fernando – Trinidad’s “Second City” and the Capital of “South” – during the period 1930 to 1970 points to the complexity of mid-century developments. Representing approximately one-quarter of the population of San Fernando, Indians of this era maintained various forms of what Clarke calls “social distance” from other groups despite their low incidence of urban residential segregation.

Singh’s traditional elite began coming into its own from the 1930s and became ascendant in local political culture after WWII. The revitalization of Hinduism has been a central front in their overall efforts, culminating in a series of political and cultural developments by the 1950s, such as the establishment of the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha and an intense wave of school- and temple-building efforts. Thus the vicissitudes of Hinduism have been anything but static, especially with decolonization and the nationalist struggle.

In fact, Vertovec (1992) observes that Hinduism languished throughout the independence era, during which time Pentecostal and Evangelical Christian missionaries began to make significant in-roads among Indians. Then came the national soul-searching brought about by the turmoil of Black Power, which alarmed many Hindus and catalyzed an equally confrontational approach by Bhadase Sagan Maraj’s Maha Sabha. His death in late 1971 intensified internal power struggles within the organization, as well as stimulated factionalism among orthodox groups. On the eve of the oil boom of 1974-1983, TT faced dire economic circumstances that took a severe toll on rural Indians, the majority of whom are Hindus.

The onset of the oil boom therefore introduced far-reaching changes. Most important is the fact that – relative to other groups – Indians experienced the most significant degree of overall mobility, spurring further class differentiation as well as heightening racial consciousness and political assertiveness, especially in the time-released wake of Black Power. Among the effects of newfound wealth generated by the oil boom were a revitalization of Indian ethnicity and an interrelated “Hindu Renaissance.” Vertovec ethnographic study of postcolonial Hinduism in Trinidad surveys multifarious institutional and ritual changes and transformations wrought since the 1970s, from consolidation of the multi-purpose *yagna*, diversification of the common *puja*, and elaboration of more intimate *satsang* devotions to the increasing national prominence of Hindu holidays such as Divali, Nava Ratri, Holi (Phagwa), Shiv Ratri, and Kartik-ke-Nahan.

A number of more recent groups have also emerged and now compete such as the Divine Life Society, Raja Yoga Movement, Sai Baba Satsang, and the Hindu Prachar Kendra, as well as a differentiating spectrum of activist Hindu Youth Groups. The dramatically greater availability of Indian mass media such as Hindi popular music and Bollywood cinema, as well as chromolithographic imagery, have provided mass-mediated avenues of diasporic identification with the motherland, facilitating further revitalization. And though Hindu temple activities and ritual observances have maintained their communal symbolism and political significance, a trend toward individualism in devotions and ritual sponsorship has also emerged.

While the oil boom created new forms of wealth throughout society that facilitated increasing Indian social mobility as well as bolstered political and cultural confidence, it was not until the aftermath of the coalition that brought the National Alliance for Reconstruction to power in the mid-1980s that Indo-Trinidadians resolved to seek control of Parliament and the reins of state governance through their own United National Congress, led by former labor activist Basdeo Panday. After a reprise of the PNM in 1991, Panday led the UNC into the most important of political offices in late 1995, as the country's first Indian Prime Minister. One of his first moves – we have seen – was to establish “Indian Arrival Day” as a national holiday along with “Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day.”

The 1990s also brought a wave of cultural and religious developments in conjunction with the rise of forthrightly Indo-Trinidadian political power, such as the proliferation of explicitly “Indian” radio stations, the introduction of novel Hindu ritual forms such as *pichakaree* music and song competitions associated with religious observance of Phagwa (Holi), and establishment of the new Hindu pilgrimage of *Ganga Dashara* held in the northern mountain range Blanchisseuse River, which for the duration of the festival becomes ritually transformed into the sacred Ganges River of India.

Particularly emblematic of this Hindu Renaissance during my longest period of fieldwork was the holding of “Pooja 2000” – also known as “Millennium Pooja” – in the southern town of Debe, in late January of 2000, honoring the dawning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It was staged by the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha and attracted the attendance of Prime Minister Panday, President Robinson, and other important political and religious personages, as well as considerable news and media coverage. Debe is located in the Oropouche political constituency, which – it was noted by Agriculture Minister Trevor Sudama, its parliamentary representative – is home to the largest number of Hindu Temples in all of Trinidad. I noticed the predominance of female devotees under the puja tents, involved in activities on the main stage, and throughout the recreation grounds more generally in terms of organizational and logistical matters.

One hundred and eight Hanuman Pujas were simultaneously conducted by various temple and school groups, led by one main puja on center stage, which was broadcast over loudspeakers in order for everyone to follow along. Doing Hanuman Pujas with red jhandis – the color of victory – was a way of starting off the new year and millennium “victoriously.” The event foregrounded a decidedly orthodox deity in an entirely non-ecstatic fashion, with each puja group seated around its respective *bedi* altar, and with mainstream pandits at the helm.

Hanuman has experienced renewed prominence in India as well, in association with the rise of Hindu Nationalism, thus his centrality in Pooja 2000 is significant. At one point during the proceedings, the entire mass of people were led in the collective singing of the *Shri Hanuman Chalisa*, the standard Hindi devotional song associated with the deity, which is also sung during pujas for him in heterodox Kali Temples throughout the island. As we saw in chapter four, Hanuman has in fact recently been charismatically apotheosized as a deota that manifests



ecstatically during Shakti Puja services. Hanuman's contemporary importance therefore spans the orthodox to the heterodox within the local West Indian Hindu imagination.

A fellow passing out brochures – with whom I spoke – made reference to the “Hindu Resurgence” taking place. “We are not ashamed of ourselves in a plural society anymore like twenty years ago,” he observed. The booklets – entitled “Hinduism: 100 Questions & Answers” – had been drawn up and printed by the *Shakti Sangha*, the “Women’s Arm of the Maha Sabha.” The booklet’s Foreword authored by Secretary-General of the Maha Sabha, Satnarayan Maharaj, emphasized the “revival of Dharma” currently at work in Trinidad and Tobago.

Pooja 2000 began on-stage with a prayer from the now former *Dharmachari* – “the Spiritual Head of the Hindu Community” – Pandit Krishna Maharaj, also a noteworthy oil and building contractor. President-General of the Maha Sabha, Thirbhawan Seegobin, then noted the national auspiciousness of the day’s event being held contemporaneously with *Khumba Mela* in India. Debe that day was a *tirtha* – spiritual threshold – connected with a “resurgence of divine spirituality.” Sat Maharaj’s ensuing oratory offered more exegesis of the event.

After the round of collective Hanuman Pujas was completed, jhandis from all of the respective group ceremonies were brought forward to the main stage and together hailed before being taken across the road to the Maha Sabha-affiliated school grounds to be planted. Sat Maharaj observed that they could not be planted on public property – Pooja 2000 was carried out at the civic Debe Recreation Grounds – noting however that, “I wish we could plant them here!” He then introduced the President, Prime Minister, and Leader of the Opposition, commenting that their presence there together “demonstrated ancient civilities in modern Trinidad.”

It is important to note that, as non-Indians, both Robinson and Manning adopted a more secular stance, emphasizing how the event represented one gorgeous tile in TT’s efflorescing mosaic constitution; whereas Panday and Sudama each focused upon the day’s religious content, and drawing upon this symbolism in order to also then speak of multiculturalism and strength in diversity. For example, Panday’s Millennium Message concluded: “Let us take a pledge for greater clarity and understanding for one another. Our nation needs loyalty more than ever. We must look to Hanuman’s example. Let us think of the nation as Lord Rama and we the citizens as Hanuman, as devotees of the nation.” He ended by chanting the Hanuman Chalisa.

My main point in narrating this occurrence is to show how Hinduism has been taken up as a political vehicle in public culture. Sponsored by the Maha Sabha, Pooja 2000 foregrounded the most respectable local form of Hinduism, in which any hint of subaltern heterodox Hindu practice was decidedly absent. The significance of this pattern is thrown into relief when we consider that any analogously high-profile celebration of African Religion would necessarily make recourse to the commemoration and recuperation of the subaltern ecstatic spiritism of Shango. It would be unthinkable not to do so.

This point about the non-politicization of ecstatic Shakti Puja by Indocentrists and Hindu Revivalists may be differently grasped by considering the failed attempt at forging a “National Maha Kali Shakti Temple Association” in the mid-1990s on the inaugural occasion of Indian Arrival Day. With the Hindu Renaissance at the forefront of rising Indian consciousness and political power into the 90s, the establishment of Indian Arrival Day in 1995-6 represented a sort of climax in terms of the politics of national culture. The holiday stimulated widespread enthusiasm and solidarity among Indo-Trinidadians, as well as considerable support with the nation at-large. These sentiments were clearly alive and well in Shakti Temple communities.

Indeed, one Senior Pujari on the scene – Krishna Angad of Chase Village in Chaguanas – even tried to establish a coalition of mandirs into one unified National Maha Kali Temple

Association of Trinidad and Tobago. His efforts were prompted by the fervor around Indian Arrival Day, but strove beyond it toward an enduring organization representing the interests of Shakti Worshipers at large. One of the earliest memories I have of his temple comes from the first day I visited, when on the initial approach I stumbled upon a big, old, four-door Oldsmobile parked outside and painted in the red, white, and yellow colors prominent in local Shakti Puja. It had been painted thusly for the inaugural Arrival Day parade. A scattered contingent of folks from several temples associated with Angad materialized in order to support the event. They also carried a large sign with light-bulb festooned scaffolding spelling out the letters U N C.

However, this move to confederate as one institutional body was short-lived. For one thing, there is considerable competition and factionalism among Shakti Temples, thus acting together through collective representation is already challenging. However, it is equally important to appreciate the lack of national appetite among Hindus more broadly for an open and explicit Shakti Temple Association. Pujari Angad and others noted their reception within the Hindu community in this regard has hardly been warm. Their approach challenges the boundaries of “respectable” Sanatanist orthodoxy and other, similarly spirited neo-Hindu approaches, all of which look askance from the “lower,” more “primitive” practices connected with ecstatic Shakti Puja. Hinduism does the ideological work it does within the politics of national culture – in other words – because it has been wrought in a way that takes Christianity as moral barometer, even while contesting it.

Further illustrating the trends we are dealing with here, while showing they are also neither simple nor linear, I turn to the only orthodox local Hindu Temple that houses a prominent murti of Kali. It represents an important exception to the characterization developed earlier about Kali Puja being primarily a grassroots phenomenon, since *Paschim Kaschi* (literally, “West of Kaschi,” the sacred city of Varanasi, in India) – located in St. James, Port-of-Spain – is not only orthodox, but also an elite temple. It is therefore an “exception” that does not simply prove the rule, but that might better be seen as manifesting the rule with a twist.

The St. James Hindu Mandir did not originate as a Kali Temple, though it now conducts an annual, resolutely anti-ecstatic Kali Puja at the end of each calendar year. The impressive, black marble murti of Mother Kali was imported from Jaipur, India, and installed in its own private sanctuary in 1991, all of which was made possible by the benefaction of Simboonath and Indradai Capildeo. Although Mr. Capildeo passed away just before the arrival of the murti and its subsequent installation, Mrs. Capildeo – family matriarch and a long-time celibate *yogin*, as she refers to herself – had an intense visionary experience at the temple in 1996, in which she fell unconscious for a short time one night during a service being given by a visiting Indian Swami and saw Lord Shiva and Mother Kali, her “parents.” The experience was considered miraculous and received notable attention in public news media at the time.



Inside the shrine room during the annual Kali Puja at the Port-of-Spain Hindu Mandir (Nov. 2000).

This clear “exception” to the general profile of contemporary Kali Worship is significant not only because it concerns the observance of Shakti Puja at a more “respectable” temple patronized by Hindus of a much higher social echelon. It is also important because it reflects a reiterated dialectic of transgression and conformity that animates the more popular form of Shakti Worship. Kali Puja at this temple is decidedly *non-ecstatic* – aside, that is, from Mrs. Capildeo’s own initial, idiosyncratic visionary experience – and Kali’s murti is housed in its own separate, typically locked mandir structure. Moreover, Mrs. Capildeo and others (pers. comm.) have observed a relative decline in attendance at temple services as well as in the number of marriages conducted at the temple since the time that Kali’s icon was installed. Thus an ostensibly wayward Hindu deity has become lionized in an orthodox temple, worshipped in a “respectable way” and yet still remains off the more beaten elite path.

The Capildeos took up Kali in a relatively unsympathetic environment for complex reasons. Yet it is clear that it did not arise through any association with popular local traditions of temple-based ecstatic Shakti Puja, but through their global connections with India supported by their wealth and resources. Kali’s reputation in India is not the same as the Caribbean. Indeed, she even became something of a counter-colonial symbol, especially among Bengali intellectuals and nationalists of yesteryear. Kali’s materialization at the St. James Hindu Mandir therefore shows how complex are the roots and routes of glocal divinities. Whether her two incarnations – one idiosyncratic elite temple iteration versus her role as grassroots dominatrix in ecstatic puja – will meet in any way is uncertain, but doubtful for the structural reasons elaborated here. Media coverage of one or the other is, revealingly, always separate.

As one final case that helps to flesh out the structural contours and patterns of practice at work, I want to relate the story of Krishna Singh (a pseudonym), since it encompasses the overarching class-inflected dynamic I am highlighting here. Singh was not raised within the practice, but hails from relatively modest roots and held something of a conventional orthodox view of Kali Worship before coming to it through marriage. His first wife was involved at the Moonsammy temple and he came to appreciate the enigmatic depth of ecstatic puja through her, then subsequently grew in his own personal devotions. He sometimes experienced baseline vibrations, but these never developed into serious shakti play, much less individuated mediumship for any of the deotas. This continued for some time. At some point, however, some dissonance at the temple as well as conflict with his wife emerged. They eventually split.

Years later – through circuitous research connections – I found myself across his desk at a business research firm associated with the University. He sported a business suit and acted

with confidence and grace. He explained how his time at the Moonsammy temple had to come to an end, since he was a “professional” and could not “spend hours and hours or even a whole day” doing puja and prayers in the popular local style. Now he can only afford *one* hour between 7.30 and 8.30 a.m. each Sunday morning for his Kali devotions, conducted at the St. James Hindu Mandir, where he is affiliated with Mrs. Capildeo. He no longer frequents heterodox temples “at all, at all, at all” (meaning not at all). Mr. Singh repeatedly emphasized that he and his then current fiancé are “professionals” and that he now seeks most information about Kali through the internet.

This story embodies several important dynamics. Singh was brought for a time into the popular local fold of ecstatic Shakti Puja through personal connections and was able to cultivate some degree of devotion within that context. Yet he is also socially mobile, with increasingly professional identifications. Thus it is not surprising he fell out with the mandir in which he first encountered Kali and then turned his sight upon the only locally available orthodox temple with a commitment to Kali Puja. That this latter practice is non-ecstatic and carried out by a pandit – not pujari – in an elite Hindu temple is not coincidental to Krishna’s life experience. Having a “respectable” temple such as Paschim Kaschi for his recalibrated devotions represents an important sort of compromise, since their recontextualized observance within the St. James Hindu Mandir allows him to pursue mobility and professionalism without giving up Kali Ma, whom he speaks about with touching affection and great respect.

My argument here is that the framing of Indians and Hinduism as always already “East,” rather than “West,” Indian – an ideology premised upon racialized colonial imagery – has meant that postcolonial assertion of Indo-creole power has not involved itself in the recuperation of lower-status “folk” ritual practices such as trance performance or firewalking. Since Hinduism has always been diasporic in the southern Caribbean, in other words, its revitalization has not looked to the periphery within itself for vehicles of authenticity and self-rediscovery.

Viranjini Munasinghe’s (2001a, b) historical ethnography of Indians in Trinidad explores the ways in which they have become creolized – understood in the analytical sense – while overtly rejecting the explicit identity of “Creole.” They have tended to reconcile themselves vis-à-vis the nation by redefining the notion of “Trinidadian” more than that of “Indian,” and in an important sense therefore tacitly reproduce colonial racial ideologies rather than transform or transcend them. Similarly, Aisha Khan exposes the postcolonial multiethnic state – in which the notion of “mixture” constitutes an ideological good – as a space in which “the boundaries of orthodoxy can safeguard a political constituency and yet veer dangerously close to being ‘racial’ (racist); on the other hand, the ambiguities of heterodoxy and syncretism ideologically resonate well with the callaloo nation, but ostensibly jeopardize group cohesion” (2004:13). Thus Trinbagonians of Indian descent continue to struggle with the colonial heritage of race as well as nationalist ideologies of creolization in the postcolonial era in ways that also continue to implicate the cultural politics of religion.

### *Religion and the Alter-Nationalist Politics of Diaspora*

I have considered why two subaltern traditions of popular ecstatic mysticism, which converged structurally at the grassroots level over the course of more than 150 years, have nonetheless been subject to such different political fates in TT’s postcolonial era. Both became progressively ensconced as lower-class ritual arts, marginalized down the variegated local ladder of social relations and castigated as “vulgar” or “primitive” as compared with “respectable” Christian and Eurocentric colonial institutions at-large. In the case of Shakti Puja, we are

dealing with two ritual streams – the northern Indian Hindu Kali and Di Puja complex in addition to Madrassi shakti devotionalism – that did not in fact merge with one another until the second decade of independence, and then only under the sway of Guyanese inputs.

For someone moving back and forth between them, it was striking that Kali Puja essentially received little political attention by Indocentric cultural activists and Hindu revivalists as compared with the Afrocentric embracing of Shango and formulation of an Orisha Movement as cause célèbre for recuperating blackness vis-à-vis the state and its resources, a vehicle for revitalizing the African self subjugated within the “creole” psyche. The time-released impact of Black Power has also brought similar developments within Spiritual Baptism, yet this case varies as a result of its explicitly Christian identification.

I took up the comparative analysis of colonial ideologies of racial subordination regarding Africans and Indians in chapter two, showing how they influenced the development of religious institutions and cultural politics over the *longue durée*. Here I have extended that analysis by considering how the logics of these racializing mythologies have not simply conditioned the postcolonial horizon of subsequent religious transformations in general, but differentially motivated the politicization of ecstatic religions in particular. Colonial imagery of the “culturally naked African” versus “culturally saturated Indian” continues to condition the field of cultural politics in the postcolonial era, even through contestation and critique.

These ideologies have been subject to major changes and crises, such as the rise of decolonization and political independence, as well as a succession of challenges to the formerly dominant Creole Nationalism of the People’s National Movement. Especially significant are the surfacing of contradictions and hypocrisies within the Afro-creole fold evidenced by the Black Power “Revolution” of 1970; the demise of the PNM and rise of the National Alliance for Reconstruction in the mid-1980s; an Islamist insurgency in 1990; and the Indian “Renaissance” of the 1990s. It is difficult to precisely date the onset of Trinidad and Tobago’s era of Postcolonial Multiculturalism, but it had certainly materialized by the 1980s.

On the African side, I showed how activists and leaders concerned with the historical oppression of popular Afro-creole ritual forms began to interface with Shango and take up its cause in relation to the state and national culture. This has not been a straightforward process, but characterized by class-inflected friction and ideological conflict. One may only understand why Afrocentrists building an Orisha Movement upon the grassroots shoulders of Shango adopted such a strong anti-syncretic position vis-à-vis Christianisms by clarifying the colonial ideology concerning the “culturally naked African” they were contesting.

This imagery postulated the civilizationless African further deracinated by the Middle Passage who became a sort of receptacle for Eurocentric acculturation. Blacks in this scheme were compelled to identify with Christianity and adopt “respectable” ways if they were to “uplift” themselves within the colonial order. Black achievement placed individual blackness under erasure through symbolic extension within the “creole” space of social respectability and economic mobility. That the majority of Afro-creoles were not able to attain positions of higher status was not taken as undermining the significance of colonial ideology, but as an ostensible sign of black under-achievement and undeveloped character. African religious forms such as Shango were seen as persisting “holdovers” or “survivals” that would eventually fade away with progressive black acculturation to colonial institutions and Christian civilization.

It is helpful to remember that, during the interwar period when Garveyism took hold throughout the hemisphere, black nationalists were *neither* especially critical of Christianity, *nor* did they adopt an anti-syncretic position on Afro-Christian bricolage. Colonial “Ethiopianism”

of the second quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century instead sought to blacken or Africanize Christianity. It was not until the postcolonial period – with the dawning of Black Power and the ascent of “Yoruba” as the privileged Afrocentric paradigm – that an anti-syncretic posture took hold. By that time, Creole Nationalism’s shortcomings had been exposed. The “Afro-Saxon” state was taken to task. European culture and the “false consciousness” it imposed upon colonial subjects was the problem. Only by dispensing with Christian identification and Eurocentric norms could a more authentic blackness be forged. For activists, this has meant the “de-Christianization” of Orisha Worship accompanied by a corollary “re-Africanization” of the practice.

Thus postcolonial contestation of the colonial legacy rebuts imagery of the “culturally naked African” through an effort to invert the hierarchical relationship of Christianity and African Religion posited by ideology, rather than see Christianisms and the incorporation of other “foreign” influences into the sphere of Orisha Worship as signs of how culturally African the practice may have in fact been, and continues to be. Espousing a strict camouflage view of Afro-Christian hybridity and adopting a corollary anti-syncretic posture has therefore meant that colonial ideology continues to condition politics – albeit indirectly – by framing the underlying debate. If racial mythology posited a “culturally naked African” who imbibed the dominant religion of Christianity, the postcolonial Afrocentric view inverts the equation by demoting Christianity and idealizing Africanity. Yet Afrocentrists have – ironically – adopted a rather Eurocentric, albeit tacit, model of what makes for a legitimate or authentic “Religion” altogether, preoccupied with “purity” and policing the new boundaries of heterodoxy.

By contrast, Indocentric cultural activists and revivalists on the Hindu side have taken up Shakti Puja not in the slightest. I argue that this different pattern of non-politicization of an ecstatic tradition within the evolving sphere of Indo-Caribbean culture must also be understood in relation to colonial ideology of the “culturally saturated East Indian” and its reiterating effects in the postcolonial era. Trinidadians of South Asian descent have been positioned as outsiders to the colony, as well as the subsequent nation, and Hinduism has long been taken to be the quintessential “Oriental Religion,” always already diasporic. Though it took awhile to reconstitute and legitimate itself within colonial society, Hinduism became an increasingly important vehicle of Indian ethnicity and Indocentric assertion throughout in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

So, even though it has come to see itself as a bulwark against Christian hegemony, the development of a “mainstream” Hindu orthodoxy has nonetheless involved maturation within a society conditioned by colonial ideology and Eurocentric institutions. It is unsurprising that West Indian Hinduism incorporated values and biases that take the colonial matrix of “respectability” as their implicit frame of reference. In order to authenticate and legitimate it, orthodox leaders and their constituencies have sought to “modernize” and “purify” Hinduism of the more ostensibly “primitive” aspects of the Indian past, especially practices such as animal sacrifice, firepass, and trance performance. This process developed considerable momentum by the late colonial period and continues to influence the field of Hindu cultural politics in the postcolonial period. Thus the advent of modern Shakti Temples stimulated neither enthusiasm, nor support within the national Hindu community. In fact, many find it inscrutable that such “backward” practices should flourish among the proletarian and lower classes.

Unlike the logic of the “culturally naked African” – which influences the postcolonial scene in a roundabout way via contested inversion by Afrocentrists – colonial mythology of the “culturally saturated Indian” continues to more straightforwardly condition the political culture of Hinduism from within as well as without. This has meant the ongoing reification of a “respectable” Indian ethnicity on par with Afro-creole Christians, one with no further need to

recuperate any subjugated Hindu practice from within as a vehicle of Indocentrism. While there has been a wave of revitalization precipitated by time-released effects of the country's oil boom, this has taken place not through any overweening contestation of the colonial imagery of Indians, but largely through intensified diasporic identification with Mother India.

Having come this far, we may now consider the notion of diaspora. I have invoked the concept of "diaspora" at various points throughout and want to now clarify two interrelated levels of discussion at work here.

Generally speaking, peoples and cultures of both Africans and Indians in the Caribbean are often seen as diasporic in the sense that they are not indigenous and understand themselves as having historical, cultural, or racial connections with respective "homelands" abroad. In this regard, I have characterized the subaltern ritual traditions at the center of this study as diasporic. They are each connected in intimate ways with African and Indian ethnicity and their spirits hail from sacred territories abroad. These traditions are therefore translocal in their histories as well as contemporary spiritual cartography. Additionally, however, the vicissitudes of "diasporic" consciousness must always be understood as fluctuating among globally dispersed populations depending on a host of dynamic factors. Thus – akin with "syncretism" and "creolization" (see appendix) – invoking "diaspora" is more of an analytical starting, than ending, point. One must clarify use of the term in whatever empirical context it is employed.

My analysis in earlier chapters treats popular Afro- and Indo-Trinbagonian culture in terms of diaspora in that they are non-indigenous populations who maintain variously conceived connections with homelands abroad and do not unproblematically embody the "national" identity that emerged with the movement toward decolonization and which was intimately tied to colonial notions of "creole." In this regard this study may be seen as a comparative historical ethnography of diasporic spirits and their transculturation in the southern Caribbean.

Yet, in the present chapter we are concerned with the differential politicization of each tradition in relation to colonial ideologies and their reiterating effects within the evolving matrix of postcolonial multiculturalism. Ideologies of the "culturally naked African" and "culturally saturated Indian" figure profoundly in the colonial and postcolonial politics of religion since the African and Indian diasporas have been racialized from the beginning and since religion not only constitutes a translocal source of imagination and identification, but has also been taken up in various ways as a vehicle of ethnic revitalization and political assertion. Thus I have been concerned here with ritual evolution and religious transformations within African and Indian diasporic populations at the grassroots level, as well as the ways African and Indian traditions gain differential attention as vehicles of politics in a more self-conscious and assertive way.

In a review of the relevant literature, Rogers Brubaker (2005) criticizes what he sees as the overblown popularity of the concept, arguing that scholars and activists alike have become mired in a counter-productive "'diaspora' diaspora." The term has become a gloss for almost any sort of experience involving translocal dispersion. He writes: "The problem with this latitudinarian, 'let-a-thousand-diasporas-bloom' approach is that the category becomes stretched to the point of uselessness. If everyone is diasporic, then no one is distinctively so. The term loses its discriminating power – its ability to pick out phenomena, to make distinctions. The universalization of diaspora, paradoxically, means the disappearance of diaspora" (p. 3).

Brubaker identifies three core elements: translocal dispersion; some sort of homeland orientation, however symbolic or imagined; and group boundary maintenance vis-à-vis the host context over time, though this is anything but straightforward and involves dynamic tension between boundary maintenance and erosion. He encourages scholars to treat diaspora in less

substantialist terms, and more as an idiom, stance, claim, or practice. “We can then study empirically the degree and form of support for a diasporic project among members of its putative constituency, just as we can do when studying a nationalist project. And we can explore to what extent, and in what circumstances, those claimed as members of putative diasporas actively adopt or at least passively sympathize with the diasporic stance, just as we can do with respect to those who are claimed as members of putative nations, or of any other putative collectivity” (p. 13). Khachig Tölölyan (1996:19) observes it is often only a small minority of a population that consistently adopts a forthrightly diasporic stance.

In the West Indian context, this means we cannot take for granted the identifications or politics of any diasporic population. Patterns and degrees of “diasporic” consciousness fluctuate through time and in relation to sociohistorical circumstances. Religion may or may not be taken up within the cultural politics of ethnicity and diaspora, but it does seem to be an especially potent vehicle for the articulation of diasporic identity since it postulates omnipotent powers and transcendent imaginaries. Here I have explored how African and Hindu religions have been differentially politicized over a considerable period of time in Trinidad and Tobago in ways that impact popular consciousness about the ecstatic traditions at the heart of this study. I find it revealing that religion has taken up some political slack in relation to the shortcomings and contradictions of “race” in the context of an ongoing crisis in the nationalist project.

It is crucial to further note that, as vehicles of diasporic identification and ethnic revitalization, Hinduism and African religion have participated in their own local dialogue that has reciprocally evolved over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the southern Caribbean. Hinduism led the way earlier on during the interwar period, as it became a consolidating matrix for the legitimation of Indian ethnic identity and progressive rebuttal of colonial critique. It became a locus for energizing diasporic identification with Indian culture in compensation for being ideologically positioned as outsiders to the emergent nation. Though it is difficult to pinpoint, surely the colonial Indocentric vanguard has had some influence upon the subsequent politicization of Spiritual Baptism and Shango in the postcolonial period.

And if Hindu activism and Indian revitalization may be seen as having at least partly prefigured the rise of Black Power in the postcolonial period by providing a diasporic model of identity politics, we have seen – in turn – how Black Power and its time-released Afrocentrism in politics and public culture also stimulated further retrenchment by Indians and the eventual emergence of a forthrightly Indian Renaissance in the 1990s in the wake of the country’s first major oil boom. I am not painting a simplistic causal picture here. Yet it is important to appreciate the complex polylogue of increasingly diasporized Indian and African ethnicities at work within national culture and the politics of statecraft.

One interesting outcome of this permutating dialectic of diasporic identifications and politics especially pertinent to this study is the fact that the initial wave of postcolonial Shakti Temples established in the late 1970s were conceived by their leaders as moments of Madrassi revitalization. A little reflection reveals that this development probably stems as much from the recent experience of Black Power – in which the subjugated, “darker” racial identity within was reclaimed and recuperated – as it did from the socioeconomic boost from oil revenue percolating throughout society which catalyzed the eventual Indian Renaissance and upsurge of Hindu revitalization. Indeed, it is probably not incidental that the area in which the two first modern Kali Mandirs were established is quite close to the University of the West Indies, where much of the fervor for Black Power and Afrocentrism arose and filtered out into society.



Madrassis had long been marginalized as racially inferior within the Indian community. Reclaiming this subaltern identity within the Indo-creole social field seems to have taken inspiration from the wider currents of Afrocentrism circulating at-large. Of course, as we have seen, the constellation of ritual practices that came to be known as “Kali Puja” were hardly Madrassi in any simple sense and the Madrassocentric posture progressively lost its local impetus within the practice, though the two original temples in the southern St. Augustine areas of Pasea and Streatham Lodge maintain a stronger degree of Madrassi identification than others. I know one assistant pujari active at the Pasea temple who has reinterpreted his own north Indian background in progressively Madrassocentric terms as a result of his intimate ongoing association with the Maha Kali Devi Mandir in Pasea.

These local diasporic dialectics continue to unfold in a non-linear sort of seesaw fashion. I noted above, for example, that the Chair of the Council of Orisha Elders claimed “We want arrival – like Indian Arrival Day” at the second annual convention of the Orisha Movement in 1999. This was several years after the official establishment of Indian Arrival Day by the newly elected United National Congress government headed by Prime Minister Basdeo Panday in the context of concurrent debate over the granting of Spiritual Baptist Shouters Liberation Day. The fact that the politics of the national liturgical cycle was fought out in relation to commemorations connected with both Indians and Africans evidences the degree to which the cultural politics of ethnicity and diaspora are recursively played out in tandem with one another.

These materials lead me to concur with James Clifford (1994), who argues that late modern diasporas increasingly offer resources for emergent postcolonialisms. While defined and constrained by global capitalism and the politics of nation-states, diasporic projects represent alternative counter-nationalisms in postcolonial contexts characterized by contradictions and crises of nationalism in the wake of decolonization. Similarly, Brubaker (2005) considers the nation-state to be diaspora’s other, though he argues it is unhelpful to see them as ideal-typically antithetical to one another. Indeed, though diasporas are seen as alternatives to nationalist essentializations of belonging, they may also represent a deterritorialized form of re-essentialized belonging characterized by similar politics of inclusion-exclusion and tensions between utopia and dystopia. Though intended to counter the privileged teleologies of nationalist projects, late modern diasporas have nonetheless increasingly developed the teleological language of “awakening,” echoing the nationalist ideologies they contest (p. 13). Diasporic cultures are conditioned by local politics and subject to the inequalities and tensions of class stratification.

To take one last example from the southern Caribbean scene, I turn to the heated controversy over membership of the Orisha Religious Movement in Trinidad and Tobago’s Inter-Religious Organization (IRO), which erupted into public consciousness toward the end of 2000. The IRO is a government-supported ecumenical coalition founded by leaders of the orthodox Catholic, Anglican, Hindu, and Muslim communities in the early 1970s. The group represents the interests of various religious bodies and institutions in relation to the state and its current government, as well as selects officiants who provide opening prayers in connection with the operation of state institutional functions, such as the beginning of each Parliamentary session or the opening of the national law courts. Various groups – including Spiritual Baptists – have been admitted to the IRO. Yet at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a representative of Orisha had not yet been integrated into the by then sixteen-member umbrella organization.

In September of 2000, during celebration of *Utsav* in honor of Lord Ganesha, the Maha Sabha invited leaders several other organizations in a demonstration of “non-Christian unity.” Secretary-General Satnarayan Maharaj used the occasion to play hardball, stating the Maha

Sabha would withdraw and form its own separate ecumenical organization if representatives from the Orisha and Ahmadiyya (heterodox Muslim) faiths were not promptly admitted into the IRO. Babalorisha Sam Phillips – then chair of the Council of Elders – and Pearl Eintou Springer were in attendance; they expressed their support and appreciation on behalf of the Orisha Movement. Soon thereafter, Sat Maharaj and Ms. Springer together appeared on one of the main local morning television programs, again making the case for more inclusive IRO Membership and rebutting the organization's excuses for delay. After subsequent negotiations, the Orisha Movement was finally accepted into the IRO in 2001, thereby paving the way for Iyalorisha Amoye's sermon for the Opening of the Law Courts in 2004 discussed above.

What I most want to emphasize here is the fact that the Maha Sabha and the Orisha Movement allied with one another in order to leverage their own power, reflecting the class-inflected postcolonial politics of diasporic religion I have been addressing throughout this chapter. Consider in this case that we find the Orisha Movement – which has championed the cause of a popular Afro-creole ecstatic ritual tradition – teaming up with the most orthodox national Hindu organization in the country, which has adopted a resolutely biased posture against any form of ecstatic Hinduism analogous to grassroots Shango. This alliance makes sense not only in terms of the increasingly convoluted and contested multiculturalist logic of postcolonial politics, but it also embodies the complex intertwining of racial and class stratification in relation to religious forms that has so profoundly influenced the historical trajectories and political fates of Orisha Worship and Shakti Puja, the combined focus of this comparative study.