SANKOFA

CAN THE PRINCIPLE OF “SANKOFA” BE APPLIED TO ADDRESS CARIBBEAN SOCIAL ISSUES?
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A study of history, religion and politics with a focus on
the possible role of traditional religions as positive
agents of societal renewal

A thesis presented in the context of the EUCLID
Doctoral program in Inter-religious Studies and Diplomacy
“If we ask ourselves how the structure of society and the cultural attitude of man should be changed, in order to make life as satisfying as possible, we should be constantly be conscious of the fact that there are certain conditions which we are unable to modify.

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and rapt in awe, is as good as dead; his eyes are closed.

People like us, who believe in physics, know that the distinction between past present and future is only an illusion.”

- Albert Einstein
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INTRODUCTORY SECTION

1) ABSTRACT

This doctoral study suggests that the social-economic and political problems facing the Caribbean must be attributed to the region's inability or unwillingness to redefine national success and embark on a course of recovery that utilizes its own cultural reservoir.

Positively, I also contend that the region’s religious and socio-cultural mosaic is replete with modalities for social reconstruction.

In the past, Caribbean nations have imported doctrines and socio-political theories that are alien to experiences of its people. We will see that experiments in socialism, communism, or Fabianism have had limited success. The region has ignored its own strengths, and in many cases it has marginalized and vilified its cultural roots – to its detriment. The many institutions of colonial rule, for instance those connected with the ‘importation’ of Christianity, have powerfully dismantled traditional religious expressions.

However, I shall make the case that the tenets and practices of traditional and indigenous cultures could be used to meet the challenges of the 21st century. I will in particular attempt to show that they are richly instructive in judicial, environmental, social, economic, and political matters.

My overall thesis is that contemporary concerns regarding environment, health, education, migration, personal and social responsibility, political leadership and sustainable development can all be addressed within the framework of what I have called ‘traditional religion.’
In this context, “Sankofa”1 must be viewed beyond its literal meaning and ethnic associations. Its origins are rooted in Africa and its Diaspora, but its significance to peoples of every geographic location, race and ethnicity must not be overlooked. The concept of Sankofa serves as an individual, familial, tribal and national voice of reason and caution. It is emblematic of the essentiality of tradition and culture. Its symbolic depiction of a bird flying with its head turned backwards is - as we shall see - very much played out today in Bolivia.

This study will offer practical solutions to today’s problems through a social and political proposal for effective governance based on inter-religious dialogue, cooperation and social participation.

In my view, there has never been a more propitious time to examine Sankofa as a model for social change.

2) ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my fellow journalists who have offered documents, shared their experiences in their respective countries. I was fortunate to have worked alongside such professionals at the US Department of State Foreign Press Center in New York. They, along with other professionals, took a keen interest in this voluminous undertaking:

Alfonso Diaz of NTN 24 in Colombia, Correa Andres of El Universal in Venezuela; Enrico Woolford of WRHM TV 7 and Capitol News in Guyana; Editor and News presenter Dale Enoch of Trinidad, journalist Anton Foek of Suriname; Gary Cozette of Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America; Julian Ticona Ramos, indigenous activist of Bolivia; the late Dr. Henry Frank, anthropologist; and Pearl Eintou Springer, Poet Laureate and cultural activist of Trinidad.

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1 An Akan term meaning “return and fetch it.” The word Sankofa is derived from the words SAN (return), Ko (GO), FA (look, seek and take.) This symbolizes the Akan's quest for knowledge with the implication that the quest is based on critical examination and intelligent and patient investigation. The symbol is based on a mythical bird that flies forwards with its head turned backwards. This reflects the Akan belief that the past serves as a guide for planning the future, or the wisdom in learning from the past in building the future. The Akan believe that there must be movement with times but as the forward march proceeds, the gems must be picked from behind and carried on the march. In the Akan military, this system, this symbol signified the rear guard, the section on which the survival of the society and the defense of the heritage depended. (cf. http://www.africawithin.com/studies/sankofa.htm.)
Their socio-political diagnoses of the region were surgical and reflected their detailed understanding of the forces that have and will likely shape the region in the years to come.

3) OVERVIEW AND THEMATIC CONSTRUCTION

The overriding theme is the importance and relevance of traditional religious teachings and concepts in meeting contemporary political, economic and socially challenges.

This study explores five principal aspects:

1. This distinct Caribbean DNA, whether it relates to culture or to its “followership” syndrome is a bi-product of centuries of psychological and economic servitude. Despite its onerous beginnings the region has fought back - actively and passively. The first half of this paper will chronicle these struggles, their successes and failures. It will examine the trade union movements, the back to Africa movement, the black power uprisings, the Grenadian revolution, the Cuban revolution, liberal theological movements, an Islamic coup, and the Rastafarianism movements.

2. The examination of traditional religions of the region and their particular attributes. The concept of culture and subculture will be herein discussed. What are the differences between traditional or sub-cultural religions, and mainstream religions such as Roman Catholicism?

3. A review of the internal and external factors behind the resurgence and growing acceptability of traditional religions. Here the struggle and victory of the once marginalized Quechua and Aymara peoples will be highlighted as watersheds moments in the region’s history. Elements such as the new thrust in US Foreign policy and cultural diplomacy will be explored; the use of global information technology and greater international awareness in the struggles for human rights.
Venezuela’s political, if not economic influence in the region is pivotal. In bankrolling cultural, political movements, and even economic institutions, Hugo Chavez has been able to relieve the financial constraints that hitherto thwarted the past efforts of small indigenous and grass roots movements to mobilize.

4. Identification of the problems plaguing the region and the role that traditional religions can play in mitigating if not eradicating them. Beyond environmental concerns, the paper reviews alternative medical care, leadership, and ways of combating crime as essential to defining success.

5. Redefining “Success.” This is an ongoing debate and is the crux of the paper’s final phase. Success cannot be defined in terms of dollars and cents. The new paradigm proposed, will be applicable at the local and national levels, mindful of the unique problems that are characteristic of plural societies.

The conclusion expounds that the acceptance and implementation of traditional values and practices is the final stage in an evolutionary process - from servitude and abrogation of the traditions, to the acknowledgment that the survival of the Caribbean people is grounded in them.

4) CLARIFICATION: DEFINING TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS

Initially, the most important undertaking was applying meaning to the term “traditional religion.” The word (tradition) is derived from the Latin tradionem which means “handing over, and may be used synonymously with “beliefs,” “practice,” and “customs.” “Tradition,” as a body of precepts about religion or secular practice, is passed down to posterity via oral methods as in the case of African societies; or in written form.

Tradition is clothed with history and timelessness that lends it authenticity and legitimacy. This literal meaning invites the inclusion of all forms of mainstream

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2 The Trinidad Guardian on August 18, 2009 reported that the Venezuelan president had extended aid to Antigua-Barbuda after a massive fraud allegedly perpetrated by Texas billionaire Allen Stanford had destabilized the island’s financial sector. Prime minister, Baldwin Spencer stated: “Today, I am pleased to advise the nation that at one o’clock this morning President Hugo Chavez signed the necessary paperwork to approve the immediate transfer of the full amount of US$50 million to the government’s call account at the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank.” Mr. Spencer, it should be noted, had joined Chavez’s ALBA Alliance of Latin America only two months earlier.
religions. For example, the Holy Scripture and Holy sacraments are upheld by the Church as its traditions. Deviation or reinterpretations of such traditions in recent years have led to movements to return to orthodoxy, referred to as traditionalism or fundamentalism by some. "Back to tradition" movements are not uncommon in most religions.

From a more practical perspective, the definition of tradition is open to so many meanings and interpretations. It can be argued that 1) every mainstream religion adheres to a particular tradition. 2) That all mainstream religions at any given time in history were persecuted and suppressed and struggled to preserve their traditions for posterity.

In the English speaking Caribbean, traditional religions evoke images of slaves and indentured servants who were brought from the continents of Indian and Africa. In Spanish speaking areas of the region, “traditional” signifies the cultures of the Indian populations. Here the terms “traditional” and “indigenous” are used interchangeably, and are characterized by the following: 1) stigma and misinformation about the religious practice 2) historical suppression of religious expression; 3) spiritism or esotericism 4) ubiquity of God in mundane affairs.

“Indigenous” is defined as “having originated in and being produced, growing, living or occurring naturally in a particular region or environment.” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

The traditional religion in the Caribbean is sub-cultural, meaning that it does not enjoy the status accorded to mainstream religions.

In fact, traditional religious values have been a powerful political tool of independence in the Caribbean.

That is why Voodoo as a theology of liberation will be explored by presenting the historical and current data from historians and journalists, and photo-journalists.

The most popular slave uprising occurred in Haiti with the ‘Boukman Rebellion’ in 1791 which led to the eventual liberation and independence of the Haitian people from France.
The Haitian revolution proved the catalyst for resistance in Spanish colonies as exemplified by Francisco de Miranda and Simon Bolivar - the latter “receiving help from the Haitian government under Aleixandre Petion for his military campaigns.” Bolivar was said to have returned to Haiti in 1816 for more supplies after initial losses, this time liberating Venezuela, Columbia, Bolivia, Ecuador, and finally Peru in 1823.

The paper’s phenomenology and ethno-methodological thrust will compare Voodoo with Kali Mai worship in Trinidad and Guyana, and that of the indigenous peoples in the Andes. This is important as we study the influence of religion in the ascendance of Evo Morales in Bolivia.

Each country or island in the region is distinct with unique problems and deserving of unique prescriptions. Undoubtedly, the culture of the indigenous peoples is different to the peoples that were forcibly brought. In the past, the involvement of the former in national politics was marginal if at all existent. Many indigenous peoples in Brazil and Panama for example oversee autonomous regions and do prefer that status. However, the rise and re-integration of the Quechua people in Bolivia in particular is one of the key developments in the region and deserves particular attention.

Admittedly, the Caribbean and Latin America have been torn by ideology. In 2008, the schism of the Cold War reared its ugly head when the saber-rattling of Ecuador and Columbia threatened to plunge the region into war. In the 1930’s Bolivia fought Chile. Ecuador and Peru fought successive wars in 1941 and 1942. In 1983, some Caribbean islands supported, if not invited US troops to invade and topple the socialist government of Maurice Bishop in Grenada.

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3 Days after the territorial dispute, I spoke Consul General Juan Lopez of Ecuador. Visibly upset at the Colombia’s incursion into his country in its battle against The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, (FARC), he leveled charges of incompetence and duplicity at his neighbor. He held strong suspicions of US geo-political meddling in the region. He stated: “The government of Colombia has been engaging in fabrications and cover-ups. We have concrete evidence that Colombian soldiers were very much inside our territory, at least two kilometers when they killed the rebels. And I stress that I call them rebels. This is totally different to “narco-terrorists” that their government and the US use to describe them. We have over 400,000 refugees from Colombia who are living in our country because of the war. We have never refused them entry. We have never ordered them out and lectured to the Colombian government on its incompetence in handling this war. Further, there are areas in Colombia that are totally under FARC’s control, why then are they not attacked there? The government is well aware where those areas are. It seems that the Colombian government is willfully pushing the rebels toward our shared borders so that it does not have to deal with the problem. (Filed for the Diplomatic Monitor on March 10, 2008).
In 1956, attempts at a West Indian Federation failed when Jamaica unceremoniously withdrew. A dozen more incidents can further attest to the divisiveness of the region. In addition to inter-state rivalry, intra-state conflicts due to race and class continue to pose serious attempts at unity.

With the exception of Columbia, a new socialist movement has surfaced in nearly every corner of Latin America. It is a people’s movement stripped of its militant veneer, and wrapped in a form of Theo-centrism that is steadily emerging in Latin America. Rooted in Venezuela, the Bolivarian philosophy has captivated the interests of English speaking Caribbean islands.

The inauguration of Evo Morales with all the trappings of the “god-king” ceremony of yore, symbolizes the end of the “generalismo” leadership of 20th century Latin America. Indeed, this may augur well for the new leader of the region, one willing to forge a national identity based on equal participation; and regional and global cooperation, based on like historical experiences, and common ideals.

The preservation, promotion, and adaptation of traditional religion are vital to a Caribbean identity. Any discussion of international affairs and diplomacy in respect to the Caribbean region cannot marginalize the role of traditional religion. The history of the region, scarred by slavery and indentureship is marked by the survival of religious tradition. These traditions have been the reservoir of spiritual, social, political, and economic strength. True independence and sovereignty are threatened when attempts are made to sever the cultural links of the Caribbean people to their tradition. The Caribbean has proven its ability to help effect political change as demonstrated in the role it played in the dismantling of the Apartheid regime. The diacritical elements of race, racism, oppression and culture in South Africa resonated in the Caribbean and its response was united and effective.4

Throughout the paper, religion is projected as a political phenomenon. Whether used as a practical or psychological weapon in the resistance to the status quo, or as a

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4 The English speaking Caribbean adopted a number of measures such as banning cricketers form playing in South Africa and preventing members of the South African sporting teams from entering the region. During this period, rallies were frequently organized to protest conditions in South Africa, and the social commentaries through the medium of song and music kept the on-going struggle at the forefront of the people’s consciousness.
means to of preserving that status quo, the paper will explore the rites, oral traditions, legends, and political struggles of a people that are poised to open a new chapter in its illustrious history. Indeed, the proliferation of a new radical thought, grounded in religion and tradition is key to Caribbean stability and homogeneity. The Caribbean has historically embraced a number of imported “isms,” to its own detriment. The new shift toward self-reliance and appreciation for the indigenous policies of yesterday are the cornerstone to a new beginning. In essence, this is the “Sanfoka” in action.

Particular attention is given to African cultural traditions in the region. The role of Hinduism is also emphasized inasmuch as the Indian community form the largest ethnic group in places like Trinidad and Guyana. In terms of the impact of traditional religions on Caribbean society, Hinduism (more than any other religious expression) must be noted. However religious expressions such as Santeria in Cuba, and Candumble in Brazil, and Orisha in Trinidad and Tobago can trace their origins to West Africa. This explains the emphasis of the African experience and the Caribbean throughout the paper.

5) OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Within the cauldron of the Caribbean experience, the likes of Rastafarianism and Liberation Theology have emerged. That the former is a traditional religious experience worthy as a legitimate political weapon against oppression will be examined later. As for Liberation theology the same question has to be addressed.

The most painstaking task was the formation of a new paradigm or prism through which Caribbean leaders can surmount challenges and implement new policies for the betterment of their people. The concept of religion takes on a different meaning when seen through the lens of the traditionalist. Within a western context, it is an indulgence and expression seemingly divorced from everyday experiences. From the perspective of the traditionalists, whether of African or Asian roots, religion is life.

The worth of Caribbean traditions remains untapped. Governments must embrace the new culture in Washington that promotes multilateral engagement and cultural diplomacy. The Caribbean basin, a fulcrum for the major cultures of the world must
position itself for this new era. Its traditions must be used to effectively meet today’s challenges in the areas of health, sustainable development, economics, and politics.

The diverse political views and experiences of the Caribbean region were evident during the 5th annual Summit of the Americas that took place in Port of Spain, Trinidad in 2009. The leading story in one of that nation’s leading newspapers reflected that much. The headline read: A Summit in Shambles. However, the region is urged to establish and build upon the philosophy of diplomatic engagement and respect that the new US administration has alluded to during the two day meeting. This signifies a potentially new chapter in US-Caribbean relations that is based on trust, cultural recognition, and just partnerships.

6) METHODOLOGY

I will employ multi-dimensional qualitative methodologies in identifying, and evaluating social and political trends in the Caribbean and Latin America. A series of interviews, oral testimonies, historical and contemporary sources to determine political and cultural trends will be featured. Traditional religious expressions in Trinidad, Bolivia, Haiti, and other islands will be examined through the viewpoint of existentialism. The purpose here is aimed at analyzing group dynamics and its translation into the wider society. Historical and other causative factors will be presented as the principal means of understanding current and future trends. The paper will draw on the expertise of historians, diplomats, journalists, anthropologists and cultural activists in the region.

I will draw on my decades of studies and involvement in the Orisha tradition, and other sub-cultural religious expressions, such as Kali worship. This is essential to understanding their complexities and how best their practices can meet present day

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5 The newspaper article criticized the lack of unanimity on key areas affecting the region. It opened: “The Fifth Summit of the Americas has come and gone, after all the pomp and ceremony, delegates and foreign journalists have come to one conclusion: it has been a mess. After going to five Latin American countries earlier in the month to whip up support, Prime Minister Patrick Manning was the only leader to sign yesterday the document, the Declaration of Port of Spain. At the end of the Summit retreat at the Diplomatic Center yesterday, Manning described it as a “compromised” document that met the approbation of some of the delegates.” (Monday April 20, 2009).
demands. This can only be gauged through direct experience. The nature of this undertaking must transcend a purely academic approach. It is only through this experience that one can devise a stratagem for social reconstruction.

An existentialist phenomenological approach is best employed in such a study. Conclusions are drawn from a complex mosaic of human behaviors, historical events, causalities and social trends. In retrospect, this was a lifetime of research, inclusive of objective and participant observation; and “direct” involvement with a myriad of religio-cultural expressions. It is a journey that began in Trinidad and Tobago, neighboring Venezuela and Grenada, Costa Rica, and finally ended in the United States.

The validity of this undertaking rests in its comparative element. The thesis statement is presented after comparing various cultural scenarios and focusing on commonalities.

As an existential phenomenologist, I ventured beyond the parameters prescribed for the understanding social and political events. The hidden, the incomprehensible, the unseen are too vying for attention. The study is as much esoteric as mundane.

Social and psycho-dynamism enquiry is not quantifiable. The realm of ontological enquiry renders quantitative methodologies baseless and useless.

The data is both historical and contemporary. It is presented through the lens of interviewees, who themselves have been at the center of cultural and political movements. Interviewing techniques were loosely applied. The rule of thumb was based on extracting the passion and experiences of the interviewee through open-ended questions and an informal approach, where topics were discussed, and inner feelings revealed. It is from this position that data was compared, trends outlines and solutions presented. Of the existentialist approach, C.R Rogers writes:

It means entering the private world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it. It involves being sensitive, moment to moment, to the changing felt meaning which flow in this other person. It means temporarily living in his/her life, moving about in it delicately without making judgments… as you look with fresh and unfrightened eyes.⁶

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⁶ Emphatic: An Unappreciated Way of Being, p. 3
The crux of this paradigm rests in the identification of the political, economic and social worth of our unique traditions. Particular emphasis is given to the establishment of a new inter-religious organization. This body will comprise a number of committees and sub-committees, coordinating with officials at the ministerial and local levels and will play an active role in problem solving and conflict resolution at all levels of society.

7) INTERVIEWEES

The interviewees were carefully selected because they in effect represent the pulse, expressions and aspirations of the Caribbean society.

The views of journalists in particular, are important for they are objective and serve as conduits through which the feelings of a people are channeled. Theirs is a panoramic view of the competing interest in every. It is only from this position that social trends are brought to the fore; that underlying tensions are discerned and political solutions are sought.

The importance of the historian and particularly the anthropologist to such a study cannot be overstated. The latter in particular is charged with identifying the process of cultural evolution; the depiction of culture and understanding the relation of indigenous elements to the rest of the society. A substantive portion of this undertaking traces the evolution, suppression, and reemergence of traditional or indigenous religious culture into the fabric of Caribbean society. Dr. Henry Frank identified, defined, detailed and compared traditional religions in Africa and the Diaspora in a lucid and comprehensive manner, and was an invaluable contributor to this work.

Traditional religious leaders, more than anyone can, explain the precepts of their faith and how best they can be applied to modern society. Through their credibility, their adherents have shared the most intimate of their experiences with them. As such, they offer a treasure trove of information and are well positioned to discuss the existentialist experience of religion and culture.

Dialogue with officials of the political and diplomatic sectors was necessary, especially in devising a new mode of governance for the region. It provided a better
understanding of the existing treaties that exist between nations, how efforts of integration have been fractured in the past and the lingering issues - nationally and regionally - that have thwarted social, economic, and political progress.

Cultural activists, especially in the Caribbean can be viewed as the sword of the resistance. They persevered despite having their religious expression misrepresented, suppressed, ridiculed and systematically impugned by colonial and post colonial powers. This thesis serves as one of the mediums through which they tell their story.

8) PRINCIPAL MODE OF DATA COLLECTION

From the field of diplomats, political and cultural activists; religious leaders and journalists, five basic questions were asked: What are some of the pressing problems facing the region? 2) How can these problems be addressed? 3) Have you seen a shift in social and political consciousness in the region? 4) What are some of the steps one can take toward national and regional integration? 5) If you were in position of political authority today, what areas would you immediately address, specifying ways to initiate change?

Care was taken not to reveal the crux of the study or thesis for fear of prejudicing or coloring the response. While the answers and recommendations of cultural activists were predictable, the responses of interviewees in the field of politics and governance were surprisingly in favor of implementing “ancestral and traditional values.”

9) MAKING A CASE FOR TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS

The preponderance of African religious expression and the systemic malady that has plagued Haitian society are irreconcilable. How should we also explain the lot of a debt ridden nation such as Benin that is staunchly preserved its traditions?

Far more difficult is explaining the discord and disunity among peoples in plural society where the values of traditionalism are supposedly rooted.
The strong presence of Hinduism and African based religious systems in places like Trinidad and Guyana have not eased social unease. In fact, one might argue that it is the presence and allegiance of seemingly divergent cultures that have threatened homogeneity. In respect to Haiti’s problems, Bob Corbett (1990), attempted to explain the skewed perception of Voodoo held by other mainstream religions and the unreasonableness of such an approach. In “A Defense of Voodoo From Three Common Criticisms,” he writes:

Voodoo is often charged with being fatalistic, superstitious and being devil worship. I believe that each of these criticisms is grossly unfair to Voodoo religion. The criticisms of Voodoo as being fatalistic and the criticism of it as being superstitious are generally couched in terms of Voodoo’s impracticality as a form of life in modern Haiti. It is claimed that in the attacks of Voodoo as fatalistic and superstitious, that Voodoo supports practices and forms of life which make development unlikely to occur.

He later argues:

Alfred Metraux says one person’s superstitions are another person’s religion. Modern Christianity for example still has a large number of people who believe in spirit possession and visions of transcendent beings. Many who are inside these theologies find these beliefs every bit as real as flowers in their gardens.” He debunks the misrepresentation of Voodoo as a form of devil worship, arguing black magic or Petro voodoo “is not a serious factor in the religion.”

Undoubtedly, steep indulgence in traditionalism at the expense of utilizing new trends in modernity is doomed to failure. It is the ability of leaders at every level to adapt and devise innovative ways of governance through a marriage of traditionalism and modernity that will determine a nation’s success.
PART 1: THE SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND CULTURAL ROOTS OF CARIBBEAN DISUNITY

1) REVOLUTIONS IN THE CARIBBEAN

A revolution means a new situation. A revolution implies a fracture. It implies a break with the past. It implies disruption of a temporary character. Revolution means that the abuses and excesses of the violent, reactionary, and disruptive minority have to be crushed so that the majority’s interests can prevail. No revolution that does not have a dislocation can be called a revolution. It is an impossible. (Maurice Bishop).

Introduction

The fertility and endurance of any social revolution is subject to a myriad of factors - distinct, yet interwoven into a complex mosaic that is difficult to define. The following may well characterize a revolution: 1) Systemic change 2) A policy overhaul 3) A foreign policy that serves as an extension of domestic politics. 4) Personnel and Administration change. 5) A lucid political and economic policy that accompanies practical change. 6) The emergence of inter-state or intrastate polarization. 7) A strong or burgeoning military aimed at defending the birth and fruition of the revolution.

Of the above, systemic change is all encompassing and is the hallmark of a real revolution. It denotes fundamental revisions in public administration. It may also include sweeping constitutional reforms and the introduction of new governmental bodies. For example Hugo Chavez’s controversial ‘Constitutional Assembly’ that worked outside of the Legislature, formed the judicial emergency committee which was empowered to unilaterally removed judges.
The Caribbean has been provided the most fertile of soils for revolutions - passive or active (armed). In fact, conditions such as cultural marginalization, poverty, racism, and classism have spawned socio-political theories that have traversed geography and culture.

**Political Structure**

The criticism leveled against the Westminster model of governance in the Caribbean is its apparent exclusion of ‘genuine people’s participation. Noted for its bicameral, two party state model, its proponents have been criticized for advancing the politics of race and class. Further, politicians are said to only emerge on the eve elections every five years.

In a speech delivered at Hunter College in New York, just months before his assassination, Grenadian Prime Minister Maurice Bishop stated:

> Democracy is much, much more than just an election. To us, democracy is a great deal more than just the right to put an “X” next to Tweedledum or Tweedledee every five years. The second principle of democracy for us is responsibilities. So the elected officials must at all times ensure that the mandate they are carrying out, is the mandate these people want. And part of the responsibility means that the right to recall those we elect must be entrenched.” He later stated, “Westminster parliamentary democracy, let us say, may well be acceptable to the people of England. I cannot speak to that. But I know that for the people of Grenada, at this stage in our history, Westminster parliamentary democracy is really parliamentary hypocrisy. We believe that it is important for the people to have a voice in running their affairs. One way is the creation of mass organizations of our people, the farmers’ union, the National Youth Organization, and of course the labor unions.7

**Absence of Economic and Social Equanimity**

Racial and class distinctions were enjoined by colonial institutions, and a clearly demarcated social hierarchy was grudgingly tolerated by the disenfranchised. The progeny of the plantation class, all of European ancestry, was at the highest echelon of the economic totem pole. Skin color emerged as one determinant of social mobility. Centuries after the arrival of Europeans, the Caribbean and Latin

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7 June 5, 1983
America were characterized by linguistic diversity and peoples defined by their skin color. Aside from the more obvious ‘white’ and ‘black’ races, there emerged, mestizos, mulatto, octoroon, quadroon, mestee, and hexadecaroon. In societies like Trinidad, Guyana, and to a lesser degree Jamaica, indentureship saw the introduction of Indians and Chinese workers. Copulation among Indians and blacks in these island colonies produced a distinct group termed, ‘douga.’

**Widespread Resentment**

The growing resentment of elected officials has been a persistent theme in the region. Many a political promise has evaporated, creating apathy and even a sense of fatalism among many. In “Starbroek News,” David Jessop, Executive Director of the Caribbean Council for Europe wrote:

> Spontaneous demonstrations (in Europe) over hard-to-handle issues such as migrant workers at a time of rising unemployment are leading to new forms of xenophobia. There is growing resentment among both employed and unemployed workers in the private sector over the pension’s provisions and secure salaries of those in the public sector. There is also a feeling of anger at the near monopoly position of privatized utilities; a sense of decade of growth may have been illusory and based on debt driven by ever more obscure financial instruments...While these factors together are doing is to create a kind of suppressed anger. Whether this find its outlet in the rejection of mainstream political parties or in unpredictable events on the streets is hard to determine, but governments in the developed world are hoping that the huge social security safety net they are providing will assuage to the anger.

> “While the manner in which the economic crisis unfolds will be different in every nation, it is clear that the Caribbean is far from immune from similar reactions, as recent events in Martinique and Guadeloupe attest. What appears most likely is a slow burn with the full impact not reaching the region until sometime this summer as the full force of the downturn in remittances, tourist arrivals, falling exports of goods and services, declining investment, and the contraction of the construction industry become apparent.”

Here, Jessop is specifically referring to the collapse of Colonial Life Financial Group in Trinidad and Tobago and the Sanford Group in Antigua on the regional economy. Its

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8 A daily news paper in Guyana. Article dated, Wednesday, August 26, 2009.
impact on the region is undoubted. Further, that the region is economically interlocked with the goings on in the rest of the world creates a sense of vulnerability for small nations. An effective response is needed beyond the injection of loans and bailout packages to rescue fragile institutions. This approach must be holistic, cognizant of the many variables at play when the Caribbean is discussed.

In the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, the region was bereft with civil strife and wars defined by race ethnicity and political ideology. Today, revolution is realizable through a new medium inclusive of information technology; and the reclamation and implementation of a system of values associated with the religious and cultural traditions.

2) NEW APPROACHES TO LIBERATION

The Marriage of culture to traditional religion

At the Fifth Summit of the Americas, President Barack Obama remarked:

I believe, as some of our previous speakers have stated, that we must learn from history, but we cannot be trapped by it. As neighbors we have a responsibility to each other to our citizens. And by working together we can make important steps to advance prosperity and security and liberty. That is the 21st century agenda that we come together to enact. That is the new direction that we can pursue. I think it’s important to recognize historic suspicions, that the United States’ policy should not be interference in other countries, but it also means that we can’t blame the United States for every problem that arises in the hemisphere. That is part of the bargain. That is part of the change that has to take place. That’s the old way. Now we need a new way.

The President’s words reflected the exigency of the Caribbean economic problems. Clearly, past policies have proven to be futile and counterproductive. The change that we demand may lie in the cultural diversity that the President went on to “celebrate.”

Here, the term Caribbean does not only define the English, Dutch, and French speaking countries of the region. The Caribbean region comprises an archipelago that bound the Caribbean Sea on the north and the south. The larger group of islands are called the Greater Antilles and includes Cuba, Jamaica, Santo Domingo (Haiti and the Dominican Republic), and Puerto Rico. The Lesser Antilles make up the smaller islands – the Virgin Islands, the Windward and Leeward islands
The “Caribbean” and “Latin America” though interchangeably used are linguistically and culturally apart. Nevertheless, this entire region is bound by the Caribbean Sea to the south and the west. The coasts of the South American countries such as Venezuela and Colombia; the North and Central American countries of Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Belize and Mexico; and the Greater and Lesser Antilles are all bound by the Caribbean Sea. This giant swath is sometimes called the Caribbean and explains its interchangeable use with “Latin America.” It is within this vast region that the influence of Europe, Africa, and India abound. Native and traditional religious culture has breathed life into the national mosaic. It is this marriage that makes the Caribbean unique.

Caribbean Traditions and Cultural Diplomacy

Over the years, the cultural ambassadors of the Caribbean in the areas of music, dance and sports have served as an extension of the region’s Foreign Affairs
department. The rhythms of the steel drums have been heard and adopted as far away as Japan. So too was the West Indies cricket team the panorama of excellence as it dominated the world in the 1980s. Interestingly, cricket was more than a sport in that era as the politics of South African liberation meandered into every social, political, and economic undertaking in the region.

The West Indies cricket team, even when on the losing end has been able to succeed where politician have embarrassingly failed. The sporting team of eleven players, selected from countries within the English speaking bloc, is one example of Caribbean integration. The team had also comprised players of different racial and religious backgrounds, and if only for a few days, has served to harmonize relations among competing interests in the wider society.

During his stay in Trinidad to mark the 5th Annual, President Obama paid homage to Trinidad born cricketer Brian Charles Lara who the president dubbed “The Michael Jordan of Cricket.” As more West Indians make the US their home the game of cricket will increase in popularity in the way that soccer had done two decades ago.

The blend of Hindu and Calypso rhythms, parang, and the emergence of Soca music, Chutney, Dancehall music have all created a unique amalgamation of musical expression in the Caribbean. Trinidad Carnival popularly referred to as “The Greatest Show on Earth,” attracts thousands of foreigners to the islands’ shores. In this age of information technology, the culture of the Caribbean has reached millions of people. Musical artistes such as Wyclef Jean of Haiti has earned multiple Grammy awards, and has used his celebrity to highlight the suffering and political chaos of his native land. Trinidad born David Rudder has also sung about Haiti’s suffering. Indeed, the history of calypso music is one of social commentary. Further, extemporaneous renditions with its glib expressions and incisive political jabs predated American rap. It marked the birth of calypso, an ingenious art form.

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9 Companies selling the steel drum, a musical instrument invented in Trinidad, now boast of worldwide sales. One such company is Hopetown Music Company in California. According to its website the steel drums are now played by musicians in Japan, Italy, England, Canada, and the United States. It further states the company’s instruments and services are used by “school bands across the US.”

10 A game of cricket can lasts from a single day match to a 5 day Test match
The preservation of these celebrated forms of Caribbean culture is important. Cultural diplomacy has always been used to promote goodwill among nations, increase understanding and facilitate better political, social, and economic ties.\textsuperscript{11}

In July of 2009, Culture Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Marlene Mc Donald delivered the feature address on the opening of the Mas\textsuperscript{12} Academy. She stated:

The Mas Academy is a timely intervention in the struggle to identify and preserve the positive elements of the carnival art form ad to prepare and equip our mas producers, craftsperson and associated artistes with the knowledge and the skills to adapt to new demands, new technology and new mode of operation.”

Vice president of the National Carnival Band Association, David Lopez stated “that the academy has long been a vision of the fraternity and will be a means of protecting indigenous people, local culture and mas.\textsuperscript{13} He said that the establishment of the academy will go a long way in developing the industry.\textsuperscript{14}

**The Spirit and Soul of the Caribbean**

While music, sports and national festivities serve to harmonize a nation and region, and cannot be trivialized, there is much more to Caribbean culture that needs to be promoted and used for the betterment of the region.

Unfortunately, traditional religious expressions, and traditional political and social structures usually associated with Indian and African cultures have been relegated to academic lessons at school and universities.

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\textsuperscript{11} The natural resources of Latin America and the Caribbean have made the region attractive for growing economic powers such as China. In "Beijing Interests in Latin America Worries the US," Bert Wilkinson reported that Cuban government has signed off on 800 million in deals with China to improve the islands' nickel and gas industries. He further stated that China "has accelerated its diplomatic overtures (in the region)..." sending diplomats to explore business opportunities and construction projects such as sports stadiums. The article also reported that “China’s trade with the region, and much of it imports from larger Caribbean countries such as Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Trinidad, and Guyana, hit $4 billion last year and is climbing. Figures for South and Central America countries are higher.” ("Caribbean Life," June 10, 2009. pp.1 and 13).

\textsuperscript{12} ‘Mas’ is an abbreviation of masquerade and is connotes revelry or carnival.

\textsuperscript{13} Abbreviated form of ‘masquerade.’ Used synonymously with “Carnival.”

\textsuperscript{14} The article “Mas Academy Opens” was written by Leiselle Maraj and appeared in the Trinidad and Tobago’s Newsday on July 25, 2009.
The political and economic failures of Caribbean countries compel us to examine alternative methods of governance. The failures of the 1959 West Indies Federation, the 1970 Black Power Revolution in Trinidad, the 1979 Grenada Revolution, the 1990 Muslim coup in Trinidad, race riots in Guyana, and civil wars in Latin America are testament to failed policies. The region’s economic insecurities and political immaturities served as fodder to outside forces as exemplified during the Cold War. There is no better time than now for the region to reexamine their history and adopt new strategies.

Many nations in the hemisphere enjoy “developing” status. Others, such as Haiti are “undeveloped.” Yet, human and nature resource abound. How then can Caribbean nations form effective economic and political blocs, rid themselves from the mode of psychological, economic and cultural dependency? The answer is found in a new approach to understanding culture and tradition, and how they can be adapted to meet the changing demands of modern day society.

**Significant regional actors: Trinidad, Venezuela, Haiti, Bolivia, and Grenada**

There are four principal reasons why these four countries are so important for the transformation of Caribbean society.

1) As the first black nation to forcibly remove the yoke of European occupation, Haiti remains the political ideal for many black activists. The blend of Voodoo and revolutionary politics to incite resistance to the French expeditionary force is immortalized in lectures and writings of Haitian writers and scholars including Dr. Henry Frank.

2) Trinidad offers the perfect social landscape where plural interests compete. It is the rendezvous for major ethnic groups, religions, and races. The implementation of a successful model for social transformation in Trinidad may be usable in other regions with a similar cultural and political mosaic.

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15 The mass import of American culture may have led to low level culture wars. Many believe that local artistes are still not afforded the exposure and recognition that are seemingly reserved for foreign stars.
3) Venezuela’s present regime is poised to effect change in the region. Its leader’s aggressive philosophy has a regional and global appeal. He is also afforded the opportunity to advance this agenda with an economy that has been bankrolled by petrodollars.

4) The ascendency of Evo Morales and the emergence of the indigenous peoples of Bolivia as an indomitable political force have forever changed the face of politics in the region. Millions of the historically dispossessed are clamoring for social, political and economic justice. More than any Caribbean nation, Bolivia is poised to transform its society using its indigenous culture as its foundation. The Bolivian model for social change is founded on the principle of replacing the educational curricula with one that emphasizes the spirit of communalism, the sanctity of the environment, and the affinity of man to the cosmos. It promotes the oneness of humanity amid its perceived diversity. In a lengthy interview with Julian Ramos at the Inter-Religious Council\(^\text{16}\) in La Paz, I was reminded that Bolivia was marking its new year - 5517. Today, that nation is projecting its past to the present, and the future. The English speaking Caribbean, especially those where traditional religions flourish may well learn from the social innovations upon which Bolivia is about to embark.

5) The brief revolutionary rule on the tiny island of Grenada captured the interest and goodwill of Caribbean people. Many believed that its popularity, the flawless demeanor, intelligence, and oratorical magic of its leader, Maurice Bishop, posed a threat to the Westminster model of governance in the region. Its agenda for true democracy and economic revitalization through people’s participation comes eerily close to the concept behind the newly formed Ministry of the People in Trinidad and Tobago.

**Politics, Society and the Religious factor**

**Trinidad**

Trinidad and Tobago is a twin island state. For purposes of political and geographic identification, reference is made uniformly to the larger island of Trinidad.

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\(^{16}\) The IRC is located in the national office of the Methodist Church of Bolivia and headed by Aymara Bishop Carlos Poma. It focuses on engaging indigenous leaders on a whole range of topics affecting the society. It uses TV programming as its main source of communication.
The delicate marriage of race, class, and politics has been played out in Trinidad for over a century. What constitutes the national cultural ethos is an amalgam of sub-cultural expressions that have morphed into a distinctive identity. Yet, political, cultural and economic polarization have, on several occasions erupted as evidenced by the ‘Black Power Revolution’ in 1970; a guerilla movement a year later; a coup in 1990, and a series of strikes and demonstrations that pitted trade unions against the government.. Trinidad’s potpourri of hues and tones of races have perplexed and fascinated the layperson and social scientist alike. Like Latin America, race played the pivotal role in social dynamics for centuries. Trinidad offers an unprecedented insight into race, class, and politics. One may argue that the complexity of race in Trinidad is not found in other English speaking islands, and as such should only be used as a paradigm in measuring countries of like composition. For sure, British Guyana politics have been riddled with racial strife. With large Indian and African sectors, Guyana has experienced two racial riots, and recent crime sprees have raised the specter of racial antagonism. In this regard, Guyana may be likened to Trinidad with its racially political overtones.

Conceivably, Trinidad can be compared with the rest of the Caribbean region. Its historical class and racial struggles with their sharp underpinnings of religious elements are evident in every English, French, Dutch and Spanish speaking country. In more ways than one, exploring the politics of Trinidad, serves as a point of reference for other Caribbean nations.

Undoubtedly, the struggles in Trinidad during the colonial years and later during the ‘Black Power Movement’ arose out of the same struggles against an unjust authority. The yearning for dismantling colonialism and imperialism was not exclusive to blacks or Indians.

**Venezuela and Bolivia**

Contemporary Venezuelan politics also cannot be ignored and must be examined against the political transformation that has taken place in the South American nation.

In devising and establishing ALBA (The Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas) along with the Cuban administration, Chavez has challenged the dominance of the US in the region. Further, as the fourth largest exporter of petroleum to the US, the
Venezuelan president has hedged his political fortunes on his vast oil reserves, and the demand of the large economies like China, India, and the US on this commodity.

Chavez has also wooed other cash strapped heads of states such as Evo Morales, and Rafael Correjas of Ecuador. Rafael Quiroz, an oil industry analyst in Caracas argues that Chavez may be displaying a political astuteness that many choose to ignore. He writes:

I think he (Chavez) is correct to try and speed up that kind of confrontation because the developing world where 85% of world reserves stand, will be in a better place after that. Every day, it is more apparent that oil is fundamental for Venezuela in its international relations, and it is the main ingredient Chavez uses to form strategic alliances.

Today, Venezuela is the cradle of Latin American socialism. The Chavez administration has been at the forefront of forging an economic alliance against US economic policies. Chavez has also openly supported governments outside of the Latin American orbit that have resisted US imperialism.

Venezuela is the fuel of the Cuban economy, supplying energy at prices below market value in exchange for the latter’s medical expertise. The Venezuelan leader has shepherded Evo Morales, the indigenous leader of Bolivia, promising material support in exchange for developing its vast natural gas fields.

More importantly, for the purpose of the paper’s thematic approach, Venezuela it seems, has taken the lead in recognizing the importance in preserving the heritage of its indigenous peoples.

In The Indigenous Peoples and the Bolivarian Vision in Venezuela, pre-Chavez administrations are chided for their neglect of the native people. It states that “previous administrations consistently neglected the needs of Indigenous communities in Venezuela. A case in point is the failure of the government to provide proper medical services to Warao Indigenous people in the Delta Region who suffered an outbreak of cholera in the early 1990’s. Under President Carlos Andres Perez, not only were the
Warao denied access to healthcare, and thus not treated as full citizens, they were blamed by the government for the spread of cholera.\textsuperscript{17}

While Bolivia, Brazil, and Ecuador struggle to amend their constitutions - a move that would allow greater empowerment to their indigenous population, Venezuela’s constitutional reform proposal in August 15, 2007 recognizes its heritage; defends indigenous cultures, and invites their participation in the legislative process.

Community councils provide a model for local government that is energizing citizen participation in Venezuela. These organizations allow members to identify and solve problems in their own communities and get financial support from the government to do so. In indigenous areas, the communal councils provide a new format for organization around the principles of democratic citizenship.\textsuperscript{18}

As Venezuela goes, so does Bolivia. Cash strapped, land locked and replete with natural resources, Bolivia’s social and political struggles are reminiscent of 1980s South Africa, where a historically powerless ethnic majority assumed political power over a small but entrenched and powerful ruling elite. Constitutional changes and the empowerment of the Quechua people, though still under the global radar, resonate in the Caribbean and represent the precursor to the resuscitation of traditional religions in the entire hemisphere.

\textit{Haiti}

While Haiti continues to struggle economically and politically and has been set back dramatically by a devastating earthquake in 2010, its preeminence in traditional religious remains immortal and will continue to inspire and ignite the spirit of independence for Third World nations.

\textbf{3) TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND CARIBBEAN IDENTITY}

The source of traditional religions in the Caribbean is found on the west coast of the African continent. As early as the mid 16\textsuperscript{th} century to as late as 1838, millions of people were capture and bound - en route to the West Indies via the infamous Middle

\textsuperscript{17} Cf. www.rethinkvenezuela.com/indigenous.htm
\textsuperscript{18} See “How Chavez changed the Life in the Tribal Territories” by Maurice Lemoine
Passage. Their homes were in Dahomey which is present day Benin, and other areas known today as Nigeria and Niger. In a detailed account of the tribal makeup of slaves, the following excerpt was transcribed by Terri England:

The African slaves in greatest demand came from the Gold Coast. There the warlike Ashanti Negroes in the eighteenth century conquered neighboring tribes; thousands of prisoners of war were sold by that tribe to native traders at the great slave market at Mansu. Gold Coast Negroes were Coromantines or Koromantees. They were distinguished above all other slaves by their superior physique, courage, firmness and impatience of control. So menacing were they at one period in Jamaica that the legislature considered laying an extra duty on the importation of “Fantin, Akin, and Ashanti Negroes, and all other commonly called Koromantees.” Papaws were regarded as perhaps the next best slaves of the planters. The Royal African Company’s agent in Barbados on one occasion even reports Papaws as more valuable than Gold Coast slaves selling at about 3 Pounds Sterling higher. Eboes and slaves from Sierra Leone and Gambia were among the worst for the planters. The latter were said to be fit only for house-work and tending cattle; they were so well fed in their native country that they could not rough it like other Negroes. Slaves from Guinea and Angola were also regarded as inferior and were hard to sell. As time went on distinctions of breeding became well marked among slaves. The Creole slaves - that is those born in the West Indies, were the aristocrats of the Negro World. The Creole slave on Monk Lewis’s Jamaica estate hated the Eboes and on one occasion the proprietor overheard a cook declare “that massa ought to sell all the Eboes and buy Creoles instead.”

The Creole

Understanding the diversity of traditional religions in the Caribbean is an exercise befitting the best anthropological minds. In a June 2009 interview, Dr. Henry Frank offered a glimpse of the complex world of tribes, regions, and cultures, and the creole identity. According to Dr. Frank, the Eboes were notorious for their aggressiveness.

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This was reflected in their robust dancing. This assessment differs to the transcription I have just outlined by England.

Dr. Frank goes a step further. He states: Voodoo is Haitian. It is not found in Trinidad or Jamaica. The only similarity is that the vodu gods, Ogun and Shango are worshipped in most of the islands.” The Caribbean people he stated “came from Yoruba land” which is present day Nigeria. He continued, “The Ashanti from Ghana were taken to Jamaica, whereas the Congolese were brought to part of Cuba and Haiti.” Voodoo, he stated, is an amalgam of all the gods that were honored along the African coast.

He also made mentioned of the creolization of these gods, meaning that the slaves began worshipping gods that were purely Caribbean in essence. This occurred particularly in Haiti. They were “petro” spirits.

Despite the differences and theological reinventions, Dr Frank emphasizes that traditional African religions were identifiable by their affinity and veneration to the ancestor spirits. Ancestral worship, coupled with the proximity and governance of spirits in the affairs of the world have characterized this form of traditional expression. One is also drawn to the similarity in which communication with the spirit world takes place. The use of “intoxicants,” music, particularly drumming, singing, and mediums, also called “horses” are worth mentioning.

The value of ancestral worship or reverence to the reconstruction of family life and values is pervasive in traditional African thought and is still relevant to today’s society, knowingly or unknowingly.

Any discussion of the traditions must highlight the underlying meaning of ancestral philosophy, which is the importance and inextricability of every member to family unit. In the Caribbean, the extended family unit has been fractured by multiple
social factors which have caught the attention of many regional sociologists and parents. Many view the prevalent crime rate on some islands as a direct result of this development. This will be further examined when the new paradigm for social reformation is presented.

It should be noted here that the terms “indigenous” and “traditional” are also used interchangeably when describing or identifying the region’s non-western religious expressions. Admittedly there are differences, but common elements abound. These include the credence given to ancestors, belief in a world and cosmos governed by gods, the appeasement of these gods for the welfare of society, and the sanctity of the environment. There are also marked similarities in the mode of worship, for example, the use of dance, music and codes to invoke the presence of these gods. Direct spiritual communication with the spirit is also made possible through a medium that is selected by the gods.

**The African Religious Experience**

Traditional religions cannot be divorced from the past, present, or future of the Caribbean. Their political, social and economic importance remains significant to the region, despite efforts to suppress and marginalize them. The “traditional religion” as it pertains to the Caribbean, is complex and inclusive of multiple expressions. For example, the term “voodoo” is used extensively to represent any traditional religion that originated in Africa. It is also interchangeably used with Santeria when the paper examines traditional expression in the Spanish speaking Caribbean.

That traditional religions such as voodoo or Kali Mai worship are anachronistic in a technological world is arguably untenable. Reverend Benjamin S. Keya, of the African Institute for Contemporary Mission and Research echoed similar sentiments in respect to the African question. He argued that Western political ideals have failed to produce meaningful results on the continent, and viewed the effacing of traditional African values as the principal cause of the predicament facing countries there. He writes:

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family was more defined by its matrilineal setting and relied on close and distant family members to lend stability to the unit.
The so called democratic ideals find no basis within African traditional value systems. The utter confusion in most governments ought to have made the propagators of these ideals stop and think but it has not. Why? The confusion serves foreign interests.

On the role of traditional religions in Africa’s recovery, Reverend Keya is detailed and unwavering: “In my opinion the greatest value in Africa, which has great implication on the African value system, is the African religious disposition. Religion was not a profession like teaching or nursing. To live was to be religious. Religion was at hand to answer life threatening and mind boggling experiences of everyday life. It brought order in the lives of individuals and communities. Foreign religions are yet to fill the vacuum left by African people’s shift from their traditional religious understanding. The spiritual mix-up can be witnessed in many who claim to be Christians or Muslims but visit traditional healers or abasayi when faced with sickness or other misfortunes. They are Christians on Christmas day and Muslims during the holy month of Ramadan but Africans the rest of the year in their dreams and distress.22

Rediscovering, customizing, adapting and implementing many of these traditional values hold the key to a revitalized Caribbean society.

**The Importance of Religion to the Region as a whole**

They (Africans) are a truly religious people of whom it can be said as it had been said of the Hindus that they eat religiously, bath religiously, dress religiously, sin religiously…the religion of these natives is their existence and their existence is their religion. (Arthur Leonard)

Religious belief is the lifeline of the everyday existence in the Caribbean. Atheism as a movement has found little traction in the region. From mainstream religion to the customary practices which border on superstition, the world of spirit intersects with that of the mundane. The result is an eclectic array of religious practices - some elaborate, others executed with a mere word.

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To better understand religion in the Caribbean one must recognize that beliefs—whether supported by evidence or faith and quite apart from their ultimate truth—serve a pragmatic function in dealing with human needs.”

The religious nature of the Caribbean is embedded in the culture of the peoples brought to the region either as slaves or indentured servants. It is well known that the religious belief and practice of the slave were suppressed and replaced by the Roman Catholicism. The slave was able to preserve his tradition by adroitly discerning the corresponding attributes of Catholic saints with those of his gods. This allowed him to exoterically practice the religion that was thrust upon him while his inner devotion centered on his traditions.

Religion was also used by the European authorities as one of the most efficacious tools in quieting potential ‘trouble makers.’ In emphasizing obedience to authority as a virtue; and heaven and the hereafter as the balm to assuage one’s lot in life, religion was arguably an opiate of the enslaved.

By the late 17th century the institutions of slavery was an integral part of many societies worldwide. The Roman Catholic Church only placed two restrictions on the purchase and owning of slaves, 1) They had to be non-Christians 2) They had to be captured during “just” warfare, i.e. in wars involving Christian armies fighting an honorable cause.

Although many landowners resisted the conversion of slaves to Christianity for fear of having to treat them with more equanimity, the Christian faith was cleverly used to maintain the status quo. Dennis Hidalgo once stated that the “most abominable aspect of the slave trade, was fueled by the idea that African, even children, were better off Christianized under a system of European slavery than left in Africa amid tribal wars, famine and paganism.”

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24 Dennis Hidalgo is a researcher and historian who have reviewed several texts on religion and its impact on oppressed peoples, including most recently, “Awash in a Sea of Faith – Christianizing the American People” by Jon Butler
This kind of misinformation, distortion of facts, and brainwashing soon found its way into the slave community, into historical texts, into Churches, and into the psyche of many slaves. Many embraced their new religion and their new identity. Others actively or passively fought to preserve the vestiges of their tradition. This created intra-group schisms that weakened the resistance to colonial rule.

The open denunciation and denial of involvement in sub-cultural religions such as Voodoo, Condumble, Santeria, Shango Baptists and Orisha were attempts by the “negro” to dissociate himself from his uncivilized past and thereby facilitate his upper mobility in his new society.

It was this clash of religious systems – traditionalism and mainstream Christianity - one serving as an unbridled liberating tool; and the other as the facilitator of social acceptance, which shaped social politics for centuries to come.

Steadily growing out of this ambivalence were two developments.

A rising black intellectual class began to challenge the myths of the African and Africa perpetuated by colonial authorities.25

African beliefs and culture as a whole were so embedded in the people (even after emancipation) that in times of difficulties the help of their gods was sought, albeit discreetly. The acceptance and open celebration of sub-cultural religions today prove that for centuries they remained inseparable from the consciousness of the people.

*In Traditional Religion In Africa: The Vodun Phenomenon in Benin,* Barthelemy Zinzindohue writes:

Vodun designates a venerated and adored divinity. It also defines the whole social, psychological and supernatural surrounding this popular sort of religiosity. Indeed, Vodun

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25 In his seminal work, “How Europe Underdeveloped Africa,” Guyanese historian Walter Rodney (1982) meticulously details how African human and natural resources were raped and how organizational skills in commerce and governance were destroyed, especially the empires of Mali and Songhay in West Africa at the onset of the Trans-Atlantic Trade Slave. Dr. Rodney wrote: “Colonial Africa fell within that part of the international capitalist economy from which surplus was drawn to feed the metropolitan sector. Colonialism was not merely a system of exploitation, but one whose essential purpose was to repatriate the profits to the so-called mother country. From an African viewpoint, that amounted to consistent expatriation of surplus produced by African labor out of African resources. It meant the development of Europe as part of the same dialectical process in which Africa was undeveloped.”
permeates everything. Before Christianity, one could see how all the social fabric, starting with the family was imbued by it. This reality justifies the fact that the first missionaries in our religion were not dealing with ‘areligious’ human beings. The difficulties they encountered, conversions made without deep cultural roots and their tendency to throw local culture and cults into the same dustbin of deviltry, leads us today to reflect anew on the Vodun phenomenon which contains and constitutes challenge to the New Evangelization.26

This struggle for identity, social acceptance and justice also marked the experience of indentured servants, particularly the East Indians who flowed into the Caribbean after the manumission of slaves.

4) THE HINDU EXPERIENCE

The Emancipation of slaves fractured a once fluidly operated economy of mass production and cheap labor. Indentured servitude was not a new experiment in the region. As early as the 16th century, “redemptioners”27 were brought to the New World from Britain, promised meager wages for their labor and parcels of land, after the terms of the contract were honored. Islands such as Jamaica and Trinidad experienced severe labor shortages with the former having a population of 350,000 while it could support 4,000,000.28 In “The Effects of Indentured Servitude on the British West Indies During Post Emancipation,” Bielawski notes:

26 Zinzindohue argues in his paper that Vodun permeates the very fabric of the devotee. He decries it many excesses based on superstition but notes its promotion of solidarity, communion, fraternity, and religious fidelity – cross cultural values, that are laudable. The writer believes that the visit by Pope John Paul II in 1993, “is not a sign of dialogue, but an indication that the Church at last recognizes that the Vodun cult has its place.” (http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/zinzindohoue.htm).

27 George Novak’s “Negro Slavery in North America,” describes this period: “At first the landed proprietors relied upon the importation of white bondsmen from the mother country. England and the continent were combed for servants to be sent to America. Some of the indentured servants came of their own accord, voluntarily agreeing to serve their masters for a certain term of years, usually four to seven years in return for their passage. The Cromwellian conquest of Ireland in the middle of the seventh century made slaves as well as subjects of the Irish people. Over one hundred thousand men, women, and children were seized by the English troops and shipped over to the West Indies where they were sold into slavery upon the tobacco plantation.” Interestingly, the West Indian island of Monster is the only nation outside of Ireland where St. Patrick’s Day is a nationally observed.

28 See http://scholar.library.miami.edu/emancipation/trade2.htm
The first Indians arrived on the sub-continent in the Caribbean in 1845. The labor shortage was dire as emancipated slaves psychologically extricated themselves from their numbing past by leaving the plantations in droves and sought residence in towns. Many demanded wages and conditions that plantations owners refused to pay.

The lasting impact of the Indian indentured servant had begun. Shipped from Madras and Calcutta, the mode and conditions of migration sharply differed to those of the Middle Passage. Initially only a few hundred Indians were brought over at any given time, indicating that some care and control by the government was in force.

Indentured servants worked nine hours daily except on Sundays, holidays and if stricken with illness. Of their treatment which differed markedly from that of former slaves, Bielawski states:

The government assigned a superintendent to serve as “protector” for the Coolies. He made sure that they were not separated from the families and could end their indenture if their masters mistreated them. Despite the cost, the planters overwhelmingly chose the latter. In 1852 on the island of Trinidad there were 80 applications made to the office responsible for Collie immigration for an aggregate of 2,000 Coolies, averaging about 25 for each estate applying. By 1857 the corresponding demand rose to 7,000 for 179 properties averaging about 40 to each applicant. The planter claim about the good treatment of the Coolies was questionable. They stated that the Coolie could buy himself out of indenture after three years by paying 10 pounds for every month left in his term…..However by purchasing the rest of the indenture, the Coolie was either bound to his ten-year term or forced to work three years for virtually nothing.

Hinduism to the indentured servants and modern day ‘Indian’ communities in the Caribbean goes beyond the parameters of religion. In the same way that Voodoo is associated with a particular racial and ethnic group, Hinduism and ‘Indian’ cultural identity are synonymous. Indian assimilation into ‘Trinidad’ culture was initially resisted by its leaders. Hinduism cemented Indian unity. Religious rituals and ceremonies, conducted in Hindi, were aimed at recreating India on the soil of Trinidad,

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29 “The idea that the Negro would become a grateful and cheerful free laborer on the soil which had been watered in his tears in slavery, proved fallacious.” Quote taken from “The Speeches of Mr. Barrette and of Mr. Burge at a General Meeting of Planters, Merchants, and Others Interested in the West-India Colonies: Assembled at the Thatched –House Tavern on the 18th of May, 1833, (London, 1833).

Guyana, and other islands. In the face of discrimination, real or perceived, Hindu or Indian resolve hardened – the religion was not to be sacrificed at the altar of assimilation.

**From the ashes of obscurity**

However, the advancement of any ethnic interest had to be organized within the context of a national ideal. No one group sought the marginalization of another, but demanded recognition, access to resources, and justice. No group in the Caribbean was able to accomplish this better than the Hindu community.

By and large, the adjustment and integration of every ethnic group in Trinidad was sought through political and economic means.

The refrain “*Africans and Indians Unite*” during the 1970 Black Power Revolution, exemplifies that amid the call for justice from one ethnic group, the hand of solidarity was extended to another who shared like experiences.

Slavery had culturally emaciated the African. Indentureship it seemed initially isolated the Hindu and Indian Muslim communities, but the majority did not convert to Christianity.

In Guyana, Hindu immigrants were not afforded the luxury of practicing their religion, except on Sundays. Sunday temple worship throughout the Caribbean is said to be a legacy of this restriction. In other countries, like Suriname, we learn that “Hindus were more at liberty to practice their religion. There were no forced conversions. The Dutch separated the various groups from one another and allowed them to live in their

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31 The “African – Indian Unite” refrain in Trinidad was not new to the region. As early as 1926 in British Guyana, the two groups formed alliances as they tried to wrestle more control for the hands of the planter class. In “Caribbean Visionary,” Professor Selwyn Cudjoe writes: “The year 1926 also saw the articulation of a greater sense of class and racial consciousness as the labor unions and the nationalist organizations, such as the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), The African Communities League, the Negro progress Convention (NPC), and the British Guiana East Indian Association (BGEAI), became more organized. Until the 1920s, Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese worked collectively against the planter class, whom they saw as the common enemy. (P. 64).

32 The Presbyterian Missionary School of Canada operated in the southern part of Trinidad from 1871. Under Kenneth Grant, its main role was to proselytize Indian workers.
own villages. That is why today you have Black, Indian and Javanese villages. Even the Bush Negroes are set apart."33

Later, many Indians delved into Trinidad national politics in order to promote the interest of the Hindu or Indian community.

Notably, Rudranath and Simbhoonath Capildeo, sons of an immigrant from Uttar Pradesh in India excelled in the political sphere. The later was a founding member of the Democratic Labor Party, and Parliamentarian from 1956-66. He was credited with founding the very vocal and influential Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha.

Many Trinidad nationals have, and continue to promote Indian interests by adherence to strict Hindu principles.

In Guyana, the rights of the Hindu were also promoted by such luminaries as Dr. J.B. Singh and Swami Purnananda who founded the Guyana Sevashram Sangha that trains its own religious leaders and offers medical and other social services.

**Hindu Resistance and the Difference in Strategy**

East Indians lived on the sugar estates within a framework that could very well be referred to as a total institution. It is remarkable that the East Indian way of life was not significantly impacted by a total institutional framework that invariably produces re-socialization intended to eliminate a person's culture. This 'total institution' lifestyle experienced by East Indians during indentureship, induced a forced type of ethnic cleavage whereby there was minimum social interaction between the groups.34

The Indian community has been more or less invisible during militant uprisings to seize governmental control. The Indian involvement in the Black Power uprising, or lack thereof, remains contentious. The community was also absent in the guerilla movement in 1973 and the 1991 coup, again in Trinidad. In *East Indians and the Black Power Revolution*, Dr Kumar Mahabir writes:

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33 [www.guyanaundersiege.com/Cultural/Hindus%20South%20America.htm](http://www.guyanaundersiege.com/Cultural/Hindus%20South%20America.htm)
Many Indians did not actively participate in the Black Power Movement because of the violence that was involved. An Indian owned factory was burnt in San Juan and four children died in the fire. Although the National Joint Action Committee (NJAC) led a procession of 20,000 demonstrators to San Juan, and later to Caroni as an apology, and to signal Afro-Indian unity, the damage was already done to the psyche of the Indian. Indians were generally apprehensive, and they feared a “black backlash: after the smoke had cleared against whites and their establishments.

In *East Indians and Black Power in the Caribbean* (1986) sociologist Mahine Gosine concludes that the Indian community cared very little for the overall message of African-Indian unity in the overthrow of the PNM government. Despite Dr. Mahabir purported explanation that Indians were dissuaded by the violence, the real reason was that the Indian community was not fully assimilated and would have used militancy only to advance their interests. Their estrangement and suspicion of the black population only dampened the hopes of members of the African leadership and some Indians for a united front.

Although incomparable to the brutality on the African during slavery, the psychological wounds of servitude was evident and was explored by Albert Webber in “Those That Be in Bondage.” Of this novel, Selwyn Cudjoe, Professor of African Studies at Wellesley College, Massachusetts, writes:

“Drawing heavily on plantation life in British Guiana, the novel probes the question of how Englishness came into conflict with the lives and practices of the indentures, how it subverted their lives and distorted their psyches. In tackling the great tragedy that grew out of indentureship, Webber challenges obvious injustices and demonstrates perspicacity in the understanding the deleterious effects of the mental or physical bondage that inherent in the colonial-capitalist system It raises troubling philosophical questions about the nature of existence and the need for men and women to struggle against conditions that keep them in bondage.”

That the Indian community was engrossed or participative in nationalist uprising against colonial rule is disputable. Indian trade union leaders promoted better working conditions and wages sugar cane and rice workers (in Trinidad and Guyana

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35 Caribbean Visionary, 22-23
respectively), employing sit-ins, strikes, and abbreviated work schedules. The overwhelming majority of workers were East Indian and Hindus.

It can be argued that worker confrontation with authorities was self serving and exclusively “Indian.” Such an assertion does not negate alliances between the two main ethnic groups and the effort by intellectuals like Walter Rodney (1982) who stated:

My contention is that the case for the dominant role of racial division in the historical sphere has been overstated, and that scholarship on the subject has accepted without due scrutiny the proposition that Indians and Africans existed in mutually exclusive compartments. The problems of interpretation lie not only in the marshalling of the evidence, but, more fundamentally in the historical methodology that is applied.

Ethnic alliances for the sake of mutually exclusive gains have failed to mitigate racial underpinnings that beset the region. Centuries of deep seated generational mistrust, historical revisionism, and political disingenuousness have polluted and rendered ineffective the socialist flirtations of Caribbean trade unions.

In the early history of the Caribbean, political leaders of the Indian community sought sectarian interests above national, inclusive concerns.

By the 1960s Hindu professionals, and organizations, ostensibly religious, gradually exerted more and more political influence. By the 1980s the racial landscape of political parties in the Trinidad and Guyana changed, fielding candidates more reflective of the nation’s diversity, and broadening their appeal to the general electorate.

In fact, it was the United National Congress under the leadership of Basdeo Panday that enacted “Shouter Baptist Liberation Day.” In a speech that commemorated this national holiday, Mr. Panday stated:

It is indeed a tremendous achievement of your community (Afro-Trinidadian) after more than 400 years of institutionalized oppression. The struggle is by no means over yet but I am proud and happy for whatever little I was able to do towards advancing your cause….When people want to control you the first thing they do is try to make you forget who you are…your identity.

He continued:
By erasing the Mother Tongue, the slave masters hoped to make the enslaved humans forget about freedom. That is the tactic of oppression. Again the singing of native songs was forbidden. Traditional activities such as beating of drums and dancing were also punished by severe flogging. There is no reason why one should be treated as a slave or face the sanctions that were imposed like outlawing religious freedom and beliefs... (or) singing and dancing like their forefathers. That kind of treatment was unacceptable and wrong then and has no place in modern society. The injustice has gone on for too long.36

This speech centered primarily on the plight and struggles and accomplishments of the African community. That day the cause of the Afro-Trinidad was advanced by an Indo-Trinidadian. Finally, the site of the speech – Couva, was and continues to be an Indian political stronghold.

Nevertheless, inter-group rivalry, race baiting and distrust still retard Caribbean progress. In her study “Retention and Transculturation of Hinduism in the Caribbean,” Janet Naidu commented on the political hurdles of the Indian population in the Caribbean, and the widespread discrimination of which they were victim:

The arrival of Indians brought a completely new culture where religion, language and social customs marked their unique identity. From the inception they were considered different from the cultural groups already associated with western orientation (Like the Africans), many restrictions were placed on the Indians due to the atrocious conditions under which they lived and worked on the sugar plantations. Like the brutality of slavery which provoked African rebellion, the hardships that Indian endured also provoked resistance to oppression. To a large extent the local inhabitants viewed the Indians as outsiders.37 (Guyana Journal, March 2007).

And again in 2007, at the 4th Mahant Ramdass Award at Maha Sabha Headquarters –St. Augustine, Professor Naraynsingh railed against the overt racism (against Hindus) in every quarter of Trinidad society. (See appendix 1 for excerpts of speech. Note Professor Naraynsingh’s overarching into the realm of national politics at this religious event).

Mr. Naraynsingh’s remarks were debunked by Marion O’Callaghan who, writing for Trinidad and Tobago Newsday poignantly argued:

36 (Excerpt of Speech at Rienzi Complex, Exchange Village, Southern Main Road, Couva, Sunday, March 17, 2007).
37 www.guyanajournal.com/hinduismcaribbean.html
Prof. Vijay Naraynsingh’s analysis of Hindus and politics comes to the conclusion that, after following a leader “for some 40 years the Hindus are now Caroni-less. Landless, jobless, penniless, and almost hopeless. We are dragged through the courts, dismissed from strategic positions and denied opportunities using State resources.” Now this kind of language is familiar – it’s the kind of race–populism which has led to disaster in the lifetime of many of us. What then does Professor Naraynsingh propose? Every Hindu leader, every pundit, every temple group must come together and make firm decisions about the political future of Hindus. It is the end of democracy, of a secular state and a Republic. Luckily for us there is no way that this race –populism can win an election in spite of our dangerous predilection of communalism. It won’t even get the vote of all Hindus. Thanks be to God. All that it does is divert our attention from what we are and what we can be.38

5) TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS AND STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION

The promotion of every traditional religion was deliberate and calculative. It was a hard-fought battle for recognition and acceptance. Three methods were used to realize this objective.

Education 2) Legislation and 3) Interfaith dialogue

In the area of education, History and Social Studies curricula devote substantial attention to the Transatlantic Slave Trade, Slavery, Emancipation, and Indentureship. This has provided students with the rudiments of cultural awareness. Through group participation that mark key moments in the history of an ethnic group within the society, students become keenly aware and erudite on a wide range of cultural undertakings.

At a tertiary level, students can pursue cultural studies or affiliate in groups that educate and promote their respective religion and culture. This trend is furthered in the various religious and cultural associations that exist.

The inculcation of religious and cultural values is the crux in the formulation of a national identity. Over the years, groups like the National Joint Action Committee

38 Hindu Oppression: Reply to Vijat Naraynsingh. Monday, August 27, 2007
(NJAC), National Association for the Empowerment of African Peoples (NAEAP), the Indo-Caribbean Heritage; the National Council of Indian Culture, the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha, and The Idakeda Group Ltd, have proved invaluable to the procurement of culture and tradition.

In Barbados, the Israel Lovell Foundation was founded in 1990 and named after the well known Pan Africanist. Mr. Lovell was at the forefront of the activist movement to effect social and economic change in the 1930s. The foundation states as its objective, “betterment of the quality of life of people in the immediate community and the surrounding areas, through educational, cultural, entrepreneurial, physical and self-development programs.”

Under its cultural department, training is offered in the following: Dance - Afro Caribbean and Modern; Drumming; Stiltwalking; Folk and Negro Singing; Steelpan; and Community Theatre.

The safekeeping and continuity of culture is also enhanced through legislative protection. This is only realizable when key positions in law, politics, business, and education are held by those who share these ideals. Traditionally Africans have dominated positions in the public sector while Indians, rurally based were backbone of the sugar industry. But such demographics have changed markedly.

Education and assimilation have seen greater representation of the Indian community in the professions. It is also commonly held belief that Indians have had a strangle hold on business sector, a claim that has been a source of tension between the ethnic groups in the region. Social mobility of Indians has signified the emergence of Hinduism as a mainstream religion with substantive political influence.

In a study on Guyanese Indians by Prem Misir the following statistics were presented of a community well positioned to advance its agenda. East Indians predominate in the senior positions of School Heads and Deputy School Heads only in Regions 2 and 3. Most school heads in Regions 2, 3 and 6 are East Indians, while the

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39 Taken from Barbados Photo Gallery – “Israel Lovell Foundation – Background.”
40 This government sponsored study, “East Indians: A Call For Pluralist Unity,” was released by the Government Information Agency (GINA) in 2001
majority of school heads in Regions 4, 5, and 10 are Africans. Paradoxically, education once covertly denied to East Indians, subsequently became the instrument of social mobility for them on a large scale, especially in the medical and legal professions. For instance, today Guyana has 295 medical practitioners, 50.2% are East Indians. The study goes on to compare the marked strides that the Indian community has made in the paramedical, legal and judicial fields. The Indian experience in Guyana can be likened to that in Trinidad.

6) SOCIAL HEALING AND RELIGIOUS HEALING

The 2009 Emancipation Day celebration in Trinidad and Tobago saw efforts at interfaith dialogue. Radhica Sookraj at the Trinidad Guardian South Bureau, reported on such overtures:

Indo-Trinidadians from Oropouche East came together to celebrate and award Afro-Trinidadians in the spirit of Emancipation, for the contribution of Inter-racial unity. The awards function took place at the constituency office of Oropouche MP Dr Roodal Moonilal …Among the awardees was Maureen Collins of Ragoo Village who is the founder and president of Wellington Women’s Group. Moonilal said Collins, who is a nurse by profession, had excelled in Best Village competition and folk festivities, demonstrating a hybrid of Indo and Afro culture. In the field of culture, the late Cecil Fonrose, who contributed to the rise of chutney music during the time of Sundar Popo, was also awarded.41

Despite the advocates for communalism, Hinduism and the Indian population have undergone a marked transformation. Modernization, education, social mobility, and assimilation, have transformed the Hindu presence in Trinidad. The assimilation of the Indian in Trinidad has created a new cultural mosaic. From the popularity of Chutney, a blend of Soca and traditional Indian rhythms, to Indian foods cooked and enjoyed by every strata of the community; from the national appeal of Divali and Phagwa, to the political candidacy of Hindus in the traditionally black dominated PNM, Hinduism and

41 “Indians celebrate Africans in Oropouche East,” Section B12, Tuesday, August 4, 2009.
Indian culture can no longer be viewed as a subculture. Its national representation and appeal are due to persistent and skillful political activism at the very grass roots level.

**Kali worship and tolerance**

Kali worship in Trinidad falls under the purview of Hinduism. However, its early suppression, the dark skin of its devotees, their income level, and unsophisticated manner of worship, drew parallels to that of the Orisha and Spiritual Baptist movement in Trinidad. They were the Sudras or “untouchables.”

“Kali is the goddess of the darkest night – deep bluish black. As the limitless Void, Kali has swallowed up everything without a trace, hence she is black.” Mother Kali is Dravidian in origin, and was heavily celebrated in the Indus Valley at a period that predates the Aryan invasion. Legend speaks of the battles fought by Kali and her worshippers against the white interlopers which led to a religion (Hinduism) known for its color or caste stratification.

The attachment of a value to color was inextricably tied to European superiority complex. Social and judicial imprudence, were sanctioned by collaborative religious laws and edicts. In an age when the sacerdotal class reigned supreme, any willful or inadvertent degradation of indigenous practices was cemented in the minds of generations.

While Kali worshippers in the Caribbean have not invoked the Mother to spearhead political resistance against the status quo, Patricia Lawrence’s article in “Encountering Kali in the Margins, at the Center, in the West (2003), chronicles this unique marriage of politics and religion, especially among the now defeated Tamil rebels in Sri Lanka.

She noted that Kali has been appropriated in some militant movements in south Asia, and has provided counsel for combatants and non-combatants alike.

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42 Kali is usually depicted as naked, blood-thirsty, and wild haired. Records of Kali’s worship date back to less than 2000 years and it is widely assumed by scholars that she represents a survival of a Dravidian pre-Aryan goddess. Her dark skin evidences the fact that she predated the lighter skinned Aryan invasion of the dark skinned inhabitants on the Indian sub-continent. She (Kali) was probably an aboriginal deity of vegetation and agriculture, but evidence of animal and human sacrifices suggest that she became a fertility deity. On her feast in the fall, goats and buffalos are the usual victims. (Taken from the Article: “Kali the Goddess: Gentle Mother …Fierce Warrior.”)
“Ritual meals is said to be vital for the protection and well being of the Ur (immediate area/village under the protection of the local goddess),” she writes, and argues that there was a strong correlation between repression and religiosity.

Some of Ms. Lawrence’s observations in Sri Lanka are not universal. However the “cross caste participation” in ceremonies she mentions, is found in Trinidad and Guyana.

The struggle for recognition by the Orishas and the Shouter movements in Trinidad has shed light on Kali worship, thus helping to dispel commonly held perceptions. Kali worshippers, like adherents of Orisha and the Spiritual Baptist faith can recall a history of prejudice and marginalization. The political ramifications of this mutual empathy are far reaching

Of the complementary elements and collaboration among Orisha and Kali devotees, the article *Merging Hinduism and Orisha Worship in Trinidad* emphasizes the distinction between mainstream Hinduism and its sub-cultural expression or sect:

In addition to “mainstream” Hinduism, there is another form of Hindu worship in Trinidad which resembles Orisha worship: the Kali–Mai (“black mother”) sect also practices ritual possession and animal sacrifice. The Kali-Mai sect tends to be associated with the dark-skinned Madras people and mainstream Hindus consider such worship “primitive” and “uncivilized.” Through time the sect gradually lost its appeal but has begun to make something of a comeback.

The article further states:

It is interesting to note that although African participation in mainstream Hinduism is virtually nil, some 7 or 8 percent of those attending Kali Mai services are African…It appeared to me that the Indian worshipper welcomed the African worshippers with an openness that is apparently uncommon at the ceremonies of mainstream Hinduism.43

This eclectic composition of the curious; devotees, and first time supplicants, has made this form of worship a veritable medium for ethnic integration, if only for the period of the religious festivity.

43 This article is based on research conducted by James Houk (1995). His book “The Orisha Religion in Trinidad,” was published by Philadelphia Temple University Press. Also see: www.indopaganproject.tripod.com/id24.html
**Islamic influence in Caribbean politics**

Pan Africanists and scholars in the Caribbean have challenged the Islamic apologists’ view that Islam offers a viable path to sovereignty and liberation. It is this challenge that has posed a problem for the fruition of Islam as an anti-colonial and anti-imperialist tool. The growing Arabization of Islam among Africans (and West Indians) has eroded centuries of coexistence between that faith and traditional African religions. While Islam boasts of addressing every aspect of human existence through the Quran and Sharia, it is still perceived through a religious prism. African traditional religion on the other hand “encompasses every situation and governs the whole society. It is closely linked to ancestral soil and places each African both in the succession of the generations (the ancestors), in his relationship with his fellow creatures and his productive activities. Everything is religious!”

Many continue to uphold that Islam, unlike Western religions is essentially African. In “Islam in Sub-Saharan African,” the writer argues:

Islam was brought to Sub-Saharan Africa in the first place via the trade routes from the Arab countries and North Africa. The African Muslims have always maintained quite close links with the Arab world, from which a number of reformers came. But Islamization was carried out by Africans themselves. There is no doubt that for African Muslims, “Africanicity and Islam are in no way opposed. For them Islam is not an imported religion. For many, abandoning the Muslim religion is equivalent to the rejection of all their family and tribal traditions, so inter-mingled are the two socio-religious universes. One must conclude that Islam, in its traditional African form, is entirely a part of the African heritage and thus an African reality.”

The history of race relations has also complicated Islam’s role in the Caribbean. Undoubtedly, race has and will continue to thwart a Caribbean identity. Islam has been historically viewed as an Indian religion in the region. As more non-Indians embrace the faith, Islam must now contend with other perceptions – 1) militancy and ties to

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44 Stamer’s, “Islam and African Tradition – A 1000 year cohabitation and the Resulting Compromises.” See www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/islam-afritradition.htm

45 Estella, 1995,pp.121 125
radical political activity and 2) oppression of black Africans by Muslims, as showcased in Darfur.

In respect to the Darfur crisis which has drawn worldwide attention, college educator Fred Stopsky condemns The Organization of Islamic Conference for failing to play an active role in the death of tens of thousands of black non-Muslims at the hand of a Muslim government.46

In “Darfur, Beyond the Crossroads; Struggles of African Nationalism,” Kwesi Kwaa Prah47 is even more acerbic:

It is possible to read into this firstly, the indecisive and guarded complicity of the Arab league position on the tragedy of Darfur. Genocide is something which can be given time to be reversed. The slaughter and butchery of 30,000 Furs (not Darfuris) is a matter which needs to be brought to a close immediately. In any part of the world today any extension beyond immediacy in terminating genocide would hardly be countenanced. In the present Sudanese conflict in Darfur with the Sudanese army plus the Janjaweed on one side and the African nationalist rebels on the other, who are oppressor and oppressed? Secondly, if you compare the stance of the Arab league to that of the United Nations you will notice an enormous gap in perception of the magnitude, dimension and perception of the crisis. While some of us recognize in the crisis genocide and ethnic cleansing others see a question of disarming armed bandits and rebels at the heart of the matter. I am not aware of what the OIC (Organization of Islamic Conference) has or has not said, but I agree with Fred Omar that they appear to be strangely silent. If that is the case, then that certainly amounts to implicit complicity.48

Such perceptions of Arabic Islam will continue to frustrate efforts of Islamic leaders in the Caribbean to represent the vast cross section of peoples that make up the region. The lingering belief of historical antagonism between African traditionalists and Muslims, only to be played out in the Darfur conflict may alienate black West Indians from Islamic goodwill in the region.

47 Mr. Prah is Director of the Centre for the Advanced Studies of African Societies.
48 See: http:www.pambazuka.org/en/category/comment/24374, p.2
Conversely, the universal appeal of Islam, makes it as African, as it is Arabic or Persian. Within the context of Islam’s centuries old roots in Africa (predating Christianity), and its political struggles with the West, it has forged a strong affinity to Caribbean traditional expressions. The challenge that faces the contemporary Caribbean constructionist, centers on how best to utilize Islamic precepts in a new paradigm of governance.

Muslims comprise 10% of the Trinidad and Tobago population, and is one of the main religions on the island along with Hinduism, Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, and Pentecostalism. The spread of Islam to West Africa meant that many brought as chattel to work on the sugar plantation of the West Indies were Muslims. The influx of indentured servants primarily from India marked the establishment of Hinduism and Islam on the island. Muslims were referred to as ‘Indians.’ Black Muslims were mainly followers of the US based ‘Nation of Islam’ and were associated with the Black Liberation Movement of the 1960s and 70s.

In the post Independence era, the Indian Muslim population has been politically active within the legitimately defined political boundaries. The Trinidad Muslim League, the Anjuman Sunnat-ul-Jamaat Association (ASJA), and the Muslim Credit Union have promoted the educational, religious and political goals of Muslims. Until 1991(with a Muslim led coup), Muslims in Trinidad and the rest of the Caribbean seemed disconnected from Middle East politics and the wider struggle of Islam with the Western world.

The global jihad movement and the radicalization and embrace of Islam by black youth in the Caribbean have thwarted racial homogeneity in the Caribbean, especially in Trinidad and Tobago.

There is also interreligious acculturation involved. The sore history of race relations and the oppression of blacks in the Caribbean have created a peculiar brand of black Muslims which will politically tolerate, if not accommodate traditional religions such as Voodoo – only because it is symbolic of anti-colonialism and foreign domination.
Munchen (1984) raises issues that are relevant to the Caribbean, although focusing on the interaction of Islam with traditional African religious practiced in *Islam in Modern Nigeria*:49

As a universal religion, Islam has confronted indigenous religious systems whose “solution” to problems of explanation, social structure, and fertility have often appeared more effective to the local community. The relevance and immediacy of masked cults and the figurative art of shrines, which at least in theory Islam rejects, have clearly not diminished under the impact of Muslim practice. Indigenous religious systems, embedded in particular social formations and economic activities, have therefore rarely been eliminated in contact with Islam.

Islam does not, of course reject as false, every aspect belief and practice found in indigenous religion. It accepts a spirit world and the Quran sanctions the belief in mystical powers. In consequence, it has been able to accommodate itself to many of the spirit forces found within the primal religions of West Africa. Moreover a number of other important traditional practices like divination, or magic accepted as Shir, are with qualification and modification recognized by Islam as legitimate. Practitioners of divination and experts on traditional spiritual categories bridge the gap between Islam and primal religions blurring the edges of Muslim orthopraxis to create a form of popular religion. In this huge penumbra, malams50 and teachers are able to define popular understanding of Islam in a progressive process of Islamization.

The complexity of this process and the capacity of individuals to practice a type of personal religious pluralism are inevitably denied in Muslim discourse which tends towards normative assertions. Thus, most Nigerians Muslims would want to stress that they have a right and duty to convert pagans from primal religions to the universal religion.

While there are common elements to Islam’s interaction with traditional religions in Nigeria and the West Indies, the differences are paramount. Unlike Nigeria, Muslims in the Trinidad and Guyana were historically of Indian origin, lived in rural areas and had little contact with the Afro-Caribbean population. The latter made nominal differentiation between Hindi and Muslims since they were both labeled “Indians.”

49 Pp 188-149
50 Term can be used interchangeably with “obeahman,” witchdoctor, voodoo priest or priestess.
Consequently, no effort was made to “Islamize” the black population.

The birth and growth of black Muslims in the Caribbean was the result of disenfranchised young men and women, many of whom dabbled in black liberation philosophies. As a political response to neo-colonialism, racial tension and class wars, black Muslims will continue to identify with the black masses and seek their support.

7) FOREIGN IDEOLOGIES

**Crippling of Caribbean Progress: (The Problem with Marxism)**

At this juncture, it is essential that the influence of Marxism in the region be reviewed because of its association with sub-cultural religious resistance.

That the Trade Union movement in the Caribbean was shaped and marshaled by the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 leaves little room for argument. The promotion of workers’ rights on plantation and industrial plants rattled the nerves of the ruling elite. The proletariat uprising theoretically a non-racial and class based issue seemed to have followed the prophetic script of Karl Marx and Trotsky. But this was the Caribbean, a region where the reality of race was inescapable.

Professor Selwyn Cudjoe (2009) writes:

“Just as the economic situation in British Guiana was influenced by what was happening in Great Britain and other parts of the world, the same thing was happening with the British Guiana Labor Union (BGLU), which deepened its links with the international trade union movement as its leaders came into contact with progressive trade leaders attached to the labor party. The economic depression (1920s and 30s) in Europe and the United States also affected the workers in Guyana. Therefore, this led labor leaders to draw on the tactics and strategies that their counterparts in the advanced capitalist countries were using to deal with the problems.”

On the Bolshevik influence on the Caribbean circa 1930, Cheddi Jagan and Moses Nagamootoo state:

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51 Caribbean Visionary, 179
In the pre- and post independence period, the struggle for emancipation was influenced by various ideological currents – nationalism, Fabianism, democratic socialism, and Marxism-Leninism. Until the late 1940s, these currents played a positive anti-colonial and anti-imperialist role. However, with the advent of the Cold War, negative aspects developed. The nationalistic People National Movement (PNM) in Trinidad and Tobago aligned itself politically on the western side and embraced the reformist planning strategy: “Neither Puerto Rican nor Cuban,” which objectively put it in line with the ‘partnership’ economic model of imperialism. Right wing reformist Fabianism and democratic socialism also led objectively to an alignment to imperialism. And on the left – a result of the division in the world communist movement ideological differences led to confusion and disunity in the rank of the working class.

The universality of Marxism is questionable especially in societies where the principal determinants have at one time in history been race, color, ethnicity, and religion. In “Karl Marx and Contingency,” writer Timothy Sexton, discusses this point.

And this is why Karl Mark’s seemingly hopelessly naïve and optimistic view that a proletarian revolution would genuinely result in a fair, equitable and classless society is not quite as universal as it might appear. In fact it is a deeply contingent theory, though one that is admittedly based on another separate universality. Marx is betting on the universality of human beings. Despite the definite sense of overarching optimism, who can deny that this bet is a good one?

Analyzing the economic frailty of developing nations through the matrix of goods, services, labor, and exploitation is simplistic at best. Yet, Marxism is appealing and inviting.

Marxist terms such as “oppression” and “labor” resonates in divergent scenarios. Whether labor confrontations are racially, gender, or religious based, the principles of Marxism are at work.

52 A reformist group with socialist leanings. The movement was popular in the later part of the 19th century England and advocated gradual social change, and distancing itself from radical and revolutionary social transformation. The group supported international reform and lobbied for a socialized health care system and a minimum wage.

53 “Race, Class, and Nationhood – The Afro Guyanese Experience.” This article was written in 1988 to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the ending of Apprenticeship and the start of Indian indentureship. It is included in “Articles by Cheddi Jagan 1964-1992.” (See Jagan.org/articles5b.htm).

The history of the Caribbean and Latin America demanded that the proletariat struggle be clothed by sub-cultural religious elements for it to be successful. The failure of the Caribbean experiment with Marxism is multi-fold.

Caribbean progress is definable by the ability of every ethnic group to realize its interest while advancing the collective national goal.

The reclamation of African consciousness is no longer an expression of militancy or counter-culture. Africans in Trinidad and Tobago are no longer taught to decry their heritage. The same is true in Jamaica and other islands.

Like the Indian community, Africans are embracing traditional religious expression, have sought its recognition through legislation, and are applying its tenets to realize socio-political, economic and personal goals.

For decades, the lack of cultural and religious identity by disenfranchised groups in the Caribbean led to importation and adoption of foreign political doctrines.

However, ‘progressive’ movements in the Caribbean have had marginal success politically. Here, success is defined as the ‘coagulation of all disparate ideologies into a homogeneous front that promotes an independent identity and sovereignty against the encroachment of neo-colonial disguises.’

Success is achieved when the culture of a people is used to create its own unique response. The adventures of Marxism and Leninism are antithetical to the fabric of the Caribbean people. The 1970 revolution in Trinidad was doomed to fail because of its appeal to tradition was only cosmetic. Further, in classical Marxist and Maoist fashion, it vilified every religion as the opiate of the people, thus rendering the revolution vacuous of any ‘spirit.’

The most successful uprisings in the Caribbean have been those backed by “the gods.”

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55 In defense of the black revolutionaries at the time, the Orisha movement and other ‘garments’ of traditionalism were uncommon, misunderstood, and hardly recognized for its cultural richness
The importance of religion to the psyche of the Caribbean individual cannot be over emphasized. The European effort to stamp out traditional religions in the Caribbean was cleverly defeated.

The eventual syncretization of Christian saints with the Orishas, and the Christian make up of the Caribbean indicate the sheer determination to safeguard the traditions amid the stiffest of opposition.

8) TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS AND INSURGENCIES

(From the Haitian Revolution to the Black Power Uprising in 1970 Trinidad)

The Role of Religion in Resistance Movements

Under colonial and post colonial rule, the veneration of African gods and traditions was forcibly suppressed. However, the West Indian who has battled against political elements while invoking his traditional gods and ancestors has proven successful. History bears this out. Of one of the first slave uprisings in Haiti (1751-1757) we read:

Violent conflicts between white colonists and black slaves were common in Saint-Domingue (Haiti). This guerilla warfare however, lacked centralized organization and leadership. The most famous maroon leader was Francois Macandal, whose six-year rebellion left an estimated 6,000 dead. Reportedly a boko or voodoo sorcerer, Macandal drew from African traditions and religions to motivate his followers. The French burned him at the stake in Cap Francais in 1758.
Popular accounts of his execution that say the stake snapped during his execution have enhanced his legendary stature.” We later read:

A slave rebellion of 1791 finally toppled the colony. Among the rebellion leaders was Boukman, a maroon and voodoo hougan (priest); George Biassou, who later made Toussaint\textsuperscript{56} his aide; Jean-Francois who subsequently commanded forces, along with Biassou and Toussaint; and Jeannot, the blood-thirstiest of them all. These leaders sealed their pact with a voodoo ceremony, conducted by Boukman in the Bois-Cayman (Alligator Woods) in early August.\textsuperscript{57}

The infusion of voodoo in the slave uprising in 1791 has been explored by many a historian, including anthropologist Dr. Henry Frank, who at a Voodoo Conference at Casa Frela Museum in Harlem, (December 2008), wooed the audience with the tales of invading French troops being repelled by a seemingly spirit possessed movement. General Rochambeau, leader of the French expeditionary force was said to have sent his congratulations to Capos La Mort\textsuperscript{58} on having incredulously defeated his army.

Dr Frank, in a later interview spoke extensively about the role that insurrectionists played in the overall liberation of the colony. “Macandal was an insurrectionist, not a revolutionary. The later description is reserved for Toussaint L’Ouverture who is widely viewed as the father of the Haitian Revolution. Boukman who was a ‘hougan’ or voodoo

\textsuperscript{56} Toussaint L’Ouverture was born a slave but was educated and worked as carriage driver and horse trainer. He was granted his freedom at 33 and rose to the rank of commander-in-chief in 1797 when the winds of the French Revolution swept the island. He won a series of battles against the Spanish who fought with France to control the island of Santo Domingo, and later with France itself.

\textsuperscript{57} “History of Haiti - Haitian Slave Rebellion of 1791.” (www.travelinghaiti.com/history_of_history/slave_rebellion.asp)

\textsuperscript{58} Francois Capos ‘LA Mort’ was one of the signatories of the Haitian Act of Independence in 1804 after decisively defeating Napoleon troops in the Battle of Vertieres a year earlier.
priest; Macandal was a sorcerer.”

Dr. Henry Frank at event at Casa Frela Cultural Museum in Harlem, NY

Here the difference is stark: the hougan is more principled, more methodical, and rational. He used voodoo to ossify the 1791 slave uprising. Somewhat dissimilar to the insurrectionist who resorted to any means, to gain and maintain freedom. They employed unorthodox methods such as, poisoning and arson in they battled the colonizers.

In many ways they were similar to today’s anarchists or what the Western media has controversially referred to as ‘Islamists.’ They are Marx’s ‘lack lumpen-proletariat’ - those who, amid a well planned revolution, are bent on creating mayhem without a foreseeable denouement. Interestingly, the Haitian insurrectionists were first generation Congolese who, unlike the architects of the Haitian Independence were not rooted in the traditions of the island. They were indeed the foreign fighters in Haiti, the Al Qaeda element of that period.

What is even more compelling is the belief that the voodoo gods, led by Ogun ensured the historic victory over the French by their direct involvement in the battle.
The Grenadian Revolution

Any discussion of Caribbean self determination and resistance to capital imperialism is incomplete without mention of the Grenadian Revolution. Unfortunately, it was a resistance movement divorced from traditional religion and culture. Two years into the 1979 Grenadian Revolution, the rest of the Caribbean was transfixed by the articulate young and handsome Prime Minister Maurice Bishop. It appeared that after decades in the shadow of its larger neighbors, Grenada had emerged as a political tour de force – militant, militarized, progressive, and exuding a confidence unbeknownst in the English speaking Caribbean. A tiny, nondescript and largely black populace usually at the receiving end of misplaced satire was admired and lionized. While the government propaganda machine worked overtime in touting the accomplishments of the island in education, medical care, and economic growth, the new political swagger of the new Grenadian was undeniable and struck fear in the hearts of some Caribbean leaders. The message: *It was no longer business as usual. The people demanded a new type of democracy and governance.*

The tone, language, and content the movement’s manifesto was unlike anything the British speaking Caribbean had seen. But in November of 1983, the revolutionary experiment collapse under the weight of deadly political infighting and the salvos from US fighter jets and gunships off the Caribbean coast.

Beyond the political, geo-political and economic reasons offered for the demise of the Grenadian Revolution, one factor is overtly omitted – the irrelevance of Marxism to

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59 A decade before the walls of the revolution cascaded, the New Jewel Movement Manifesto, written by Maurice Bishop and his deputy Bernard Coard was published. Many believed it was strongly influenced by the TAPIA political movement in Trinidad, the Tanzanian Christian Socialism, and the philosophy of Trinidad intellectual, CLR James. The following are some of its main points, verbatim: 1) The first priority must be the complete nationalization of all foreign-owned hotels as well as foreign-owned housing settlements, such as Westerhall. 2) Also, in our discussion with the British on the question of independence, we could have demanded from them an independence payment of a least one hundred million dollars as partial reparation to make up for some of the misery - the exploitation, human misery, suffering and degradation we have endured at their hands over the last 400 years. 3) Leadership should be regarded as the servant of the people, and must aim at destroying the relationship of master and slave, employer and employee, and of destroying the whole class relationship in society. 4) We must stress the policy of “Self-Reliance” and “Self Sufficiency,” undertaken co-operatively, and reject the easy approaches offered by aid and foreign assistance. We will have to recognize that our most important resource is our people. 5) Create the new life for the new man in society. It is necessary that we reject the present economic and political system which we live under. (Source: The Grenada Revolution Online). See http://www.thegrenadarevolutiononline.com/manifesto.html.
a people fundamentally schooled in culture where the “seen” and “unseen” come together. Here, political activism, coupled with traditional lore should have lent stability and formed a distinct identity.

Interestingly, the Grenadian Revolution in 1979 though deemed ‘Marxist’, was sharply influenced by the black liberation movement, and drew inspiration for its “peoples participation” political motto from African nationalists such as Kwame Nkrumah and Patrice Lumumba. In an interview with Pablo Rodriguez in the Cuban “Bohemia” newspaper, Maurice Bishop emphasized the importance of socialist thought and revolution in removing the yolk of British colonialism:

In Grenada’s case the ideas of ‘Black Power’ that developed in the United States and the freedom struggle of the African peoples in such places as Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau powerfully contributed to providing an understanding that the problems of the Caribbean man were different from those in the British mother country or the United States and Canada.

He continued:

But unquestionably, through the Cuban experience we got to see scientific socialism close up. This, together with the process that has taken place in recent years in Guyana and Jamaica, has been teaching us, on the practical level of the day-to-day political struggle, the relevance of socialism as the only solution to our problems.

Although Bishop seemed to downplay the role of the ‘black Consciousness movement’, the initial success of Grenada could not be separated from Afro-centric pride. However, it is here that the slain Grenadian leader could be faulted for downplaying the role of black history and culture in his revolution. After all, the interview took place in Cuba, a socialist country to which Grenadians were indebted.60

In the end, the fall of the New Jewel Movement was the result of nothing more than

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60 “In Politics and Development in The Caribbean,” Jean Grugel (1995) wrote: “Cuba provided the most steadily support regionally and otherwise to the Grenadian Revolution. Aid from Cuba increased steadily during 1979-83. It included technical assistance in agriculture, education, healthcare, and military support. The planned new airport in Port Salinas was only possible because of an agreement with Cuba to contribute $40million to the project. Cuban advisers played an important role on the island with 800 present at the onset of the US invasion. Not surprisingly, Cuba came to be seen by PRG (Peoples Revolutionary Government) as its life line.”
surreptitious political ploys usually associated with secretive states laden with intelligence and counter intelligence groups.\textsuperscript{61}

\textbf{Castro and the Religious Element}

In the most meaningful of ways the Grenadian Revolution mirrored the failure\textsuperscript{62} of the Black Power revolution in 1970 Trinidad. Both relied on imported political theories that failed to reflect the traditions of their respective people. While Dave Dabreau and Geddes Granger\textsuperscript{63} sported Afros and Dashikis, and bellowed “Black Power,” theirs was a philosophy with strong socialist underpinnings.

Conversely, Grenada’s New Jewel Movement, though having its roots in the “African Consciousness” movement rapidly wore the trappings of quintessential Marxism.

In romanticizing and perceiving Cuba as solely the bastion of Marxist-Leninist Thought ruined many political movements in the English speaking Caribbean. The involvement of the “Santeros” in the Cuban revolution in 1959 and their continued presence in government policy has been unfortunately downplayed. It is no tale of the

\textsuperscript{61} The following is an excerpt of an account of the events leading up to the house arrest, mass demonstrations, and execution of Maurice Bishop: On October 12th, Errol George, Deputy Chief of Security to the Prime Minister, was asked by Cletus St. Paul to attend a meeting with Maurice Bishop. At the meeting Bishop indicated that we have a rumor to spread. St Paul told Errol George, in the presence of the Prime Minister, that we were to go and advise several people that Bernard and Phyllis Coard (Bernard Coard, the highest ranking official), were planning to kill Maurice Bishop. Maurice specified that they should specify that they should say Phyllis first, and then Bernard, and gave them a list of persons to whom he wanted the rumor to be communicated to....Maurice then left with St. Paul for a meeting of the Central Committee......On hearing the rumor, Bernard Coard indicated that his life was now threatened and he refused to attend meetings convened by the Central Committee. By the afternoon of October 12, reports from the Interior Ministry that the rumor had reached significant section of the population and was causing confusion and potential for chaos......Maurice Bishop at the Central Committee meeting had denied the rumor and agreed to go on radio to dissociate himself from it. At a meeting the next day, the security forces placed Maurice Bishop under house arrest. A couple days later the situation had deteriorated and Bernard Coard and his wife were taken to safety. (See http://www.pipeline.com/~rougeforum/grenadapamplet/Chapter3.htm

The report went on to relate the events of that fateful day when Bishop was freed by thousands of supporters, taken to Fort Rupert supposedly to wrestle control from the military High Command, only to be executed. His body was never found. Although the version of events may only be corroborated by the anti-Bishop faction within the party, the point of fact is that the structure and philosophy of the movement was tailored along Marxism, and its demise mirrored like experiments in the region.

\textsuperscript{62} The 1970 uprising undoubtedly highlighted the social and economic inequities in Trinidad and Tobago society. However, the inability of the movement to capitalize on popular support and seize political power was a hallmark of immaturity and political ineptitude.

\textsuperscript{63} Dabreau and Granger changed their names and are now known as Kafra Kambon and Makanda Dagga respectively.
yesteryear that “santeros” cleared the path\textsuperscript{64} of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara as they made their way from Santa Clara to Havana. The point of fact is that the injection of traditional religion into so called progressive and modern political agenda is by no means anachronistic.

And therein laid the political miscalculation of Maurice Bishop and other self proclaimed revolutionaries whose denouement was predictable.

In “Santeria in Contemporary Cuba: the Individual life and condition of the Priesthood,”\textsuperscript{65} Oba Ernesto Pichardo details the indelible role that the Santeria faith has played in the political life of the State. He writes:

From 1959 to present day Cuba much can be said in comparison to previous history. It would not be just attempting to present the complexity of this period in these limited pages. There are some basic foundational features that should be addressed in hopes that it simulates analysis, debate and objective documentation.

The first decade of the Cuban revolution marked a new turning point that cosmically changed public perception of the Ayoba\textsuperscript{66} religion. A systematic governmental process began to identify and recruit members of the Ayoba community. The purpose was to form part of the Conjunto Folklorico Nacional de Cuba.

In the 1980s and 90s Pichardo wrote that the government commercialization of traditional religion practice took effect. This was the birth of what he called, “the diplo-babalawos:”

Chosen priests specialized in Ayoba divination worked in concert with government interests. Our religion becomes commercialized attracting tourism from around the world as an attractive feature. Intimate matters of confession were no longer protected. State security could now demand to know what was said in a religious counseling session. The “diplo-babalawos” rejected by the vast majority of the orthodoxy reaped part of the profits shared with the government. This government commercialization has led to the belief that

\textsuperscript{64} The use of spiritual rituals to remove perceived obstacles.
\textsuperscript{65} This paper was presented at the Third Annual South Florida Symposium on Cuba in 1998
\textsuperscript{66} This term can be used interchangeably with “Yoruba,” “Santeria” “Voodoo” or “Orisha”
the Ayoba in Cuba are part of or at least sponsored by the government. While this false
impression persists in Cuba, the true condition of the priesthood remains hidden.67

Pichardo’s work underscores the interconnectedness of tradition to political
survival in the region. The success of any revolutionary movement is beholden to its
traditional lore and practices. The leaders of the Cuban revolution from 1959 to present
have effectively employed this principle.

While the commercialization of tradition religion (Santeria or Ayoba) has been
raised by Pichardo, it is a cultural and political reality in Cuba that the traditions were
part of the cultural ethos, not to be dismissed by the state’s self styled communist
identity.

**A Failed Revolution**

Again, the demise of the Grenadian revolution can be understood through various
perspectives. What is certain is that military defeat at the hands of a military
superpower was unavoidable. However, the level of resistance and the inability to
garner sympathy among fellow West Indians must be examined.

The speed with which the revolution folded and the absence of any guerilla activity
indicate that the movement was void of existential “spirit.” Further, despite sharing
historical experiences, racial identity, and mainstream religions with other West
Indians, a united Caribbean front was non-existent.

Perhaps, some argued, many in the Caribbean were horrified at the deadly
ideological infighting and welcomed the US intention to restore order.

This view fails to address the fundamental problems of the Grenadian Revolution -
that being - its adoption of a foreign doctrine, and its inability to harness and appeal to
tradition and heritage when faced with extinction.

The “Revo” as the experiment was affectionately called, promoted calypso and
poetry as cultural art forms for the sole purpose of advancing the a political agenda:

The People’s Revolutionary Government’s (PRGs) efforts to fertilize popular
involvement in calypso and oral poetry, and simultaneously to draw the art forms closer

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67 Ibid
into the state structure, represent techniques to nurture a new consciousness in the minds of the masses and to develop a creative confidence that had previously withered.68

Yet the efforts of the Grenadian state ironically promoted a culture that debunked the worth of African traditions from whom the majority of Grenadians were racially connected. Grenada’s “backwardness,” long a source for cruel jokes among fellow West Indians, provoked a re-education” program that was erroneously promoted as a scientific model that neighboring Cuba has already mastered.

While Santeria remained alive and the “babalawo” was courted by the Cuban government, Bishop was in full throttle as he ridiculed this particular area of Caribbean “Africanness.” Morris and Quinn recalled one of Bishop’s speeches where he attempted to de-mystify obeah. “The rumor that I had been bitten by a bee, and was no longer able to see (is baseless).”69

9) THE REVOLUTION AND THE RELIGIOUS FACTOR: A FIRST-HAND ACCOUNT

In June, 2009, Martrya Thomas70 offered this captivating account of the final day of the socialist experiment on this Caribbean island:

**Question:** What was the last day of the Revolution like?

**Answer:** I was around 14 years when the Maurice Bishop was assassinated. I distinctly remembered my father returning home from Fort Rupert where Bishop’s supporters had taken him after he was freed. My father was all bruised from crawling on the ground to escape the gun fire that erupted. Later in the day were learned that Bishop was killed along with several members of government. It was very tense and I believe that most Grenadians felt a sense of betrayal because our hope for success was taken by people who everyone trusted as also part of the government.

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68 “The Development of Revolutionary Consciousness in Maurice Bishop’s Grenada.” Sec.3.3 (September 2007)

69 Searle’s “Struggle Against Destabilization,’ 79

70 Ms. Thomas, who now resides in the US, was granted a scholarship to study Economics at La Universidad Central de Santa Clara in Cuba. It was awarded by the *Maurice Bishop Patriotic Movement* in Grenada in conjunction with UNESCO. The interview was conducted on June 4, 2009 in New York City.
You can understand why no one was eager to fight when the Americans started landing at the airport. In fact, I was able to see US soldiers parachuting from the vantage point of our house. I remember the frantic calls by the authorities for men, women, and even children to report to the nearest barracks to fight the invading forces. They were practically begging the people to fight. But very, very few responded. I saw frustrated and frightened Grenadian soldiers scurrying around. The Cubans here fought though. Some met the US at the airport, while others took to the hills to start a guerilla campaign. There were only a few of them and it was not even their country. Grenadians did not want to fight because Bishop was killed. May be…I am sure that if he was alive and had asked the people to help repel the invasion, people would have fought to the death. I also believe that given a year or so more, for people to really see what was being accomplished, the US would not have had it so easy.

**Question:** Did the Revolution improve the lives of Grenadians?

**Answer:** Definitely! As far the empowerment of women is concerned, the Revolution was able to find work and instill pride. As a person from the Caribbean you know that those were the days when women were mainly housewives. Bishop changed all that. The agro-industry flourished. People were planting and finding viable markets to sell their produce. Women were learning different skills. Many became designers and seamstresses, and craftswomen.

**Question:** What do you remember about “Peoples Participation”?

**Answer:** There were community centers everywhere. I mean everywhere. There were weekly village meetings attended by the members of the government including the Central Committee. What I found striking was that you could log complaints and voice your opinion at the village level on a daily basis. The centers were opened and manned all the time. It was part of our lives. My family was really involved. My brothers were both members of the People’s Revolutionary Army. In fact my brother left school and joined the militia against our father’s objections.

**Question:** Was everyone overwhelmingly supportive of the Revolution?

**Answer:** I would say yes. Of course there were some opposition voices, but not very many. They were silenced though. Some were imprisoned. In fact, when the Americans captured St.George’s, some of these political prisoners were found and freed. But by and large the entire country was really supportive. When Gairy was removed and Bishop became the Prime Minister, there were days and days of partying. I remember that schools
were allowed to close early when Bishop was having a rally. As a young lady at the time it was exciting going to Queens Park. It was wild. There was a lot of drumming and so on. It was crazy listening to Bishop talking.

**Question:** How then do you explain the sudden collapse of these ideals? The Bishop era seems to be a distant memory in Grenada today.

**Answer:** Well, many are scared to be branded a communist. Do you know that during the Revolution that word was never used? It is only after the US invasion that we told that we were communists. Some were surprised and angry having been convinced by the US propaganda campaigned that our government had taken us on that path. I guess our people are too gullible.

**Question:** What role, if any did traditional religions such as Shango and Orisha played in the Revolution? You mentioned drumming, so I am curious.

**Answer:** Many were weary of the Shango religion. I believe that the government deliberately kept it quiet because of the horrible experience we had with Eric Gairy who was a tyrant that openly flaunted his so called occult abilities. The revolution moved away from that kind of thinking. The revolution changed the way people perceived a lot of things and changed expectations. I say this because I remember my mother returning home from her Baptist and Orisha meeting with her headwear and spiritual garb removed.

This compelling exchange captured the hope and expectations of a people derailed by political misfortunes and selfish ambitions. The Grenadian revolution had all the ingredients for a successful revolution – historical oppression, the young charismatic leader, a youthful population, a neighbor (Cuba), willing to offer resources and expertise. It committed though, a fatal error - When tested, the people were expected to defend a shakily construed movement that really revolved around a single man. Were that man alive during the nation’s most perilous hour, the Revolution was still doomed for it sacrificed the *spirit of traditions*, navigating the choppy waters of politics, while clinging to speculative theories of social reformation coupled with Marxist-Lenism.
10) CHARACTERISTICS OF SUBCULTURAL (TRADITIONAL) RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION

When the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said: “Let us pray.” We closed our eyes. When we opened them, we had the Bible and they had the land. (Bishop Desmond Tutu)

Sub-cultural religions

Traditional religions, sometimes referred to as “sub-cultural” are complex in composition. They share common characteristics despite its location and theology.

Pantheism

Sub-cultural religions in the New World are for the most part pantheistic. They recognize an absolute being like monotheistic traditions, but anthropomorphize the multiple and distinct manifestations of God.

Syncretization

Few sub-cultural religions have remained unaffected by outside influence. Santeria, as practiced in Venezuela can be called a syncretic religion because the attributes of its gods are likened to those of Roman Catholic Saints

Misinformation

There exists a paucity of information on sub-cultural religions. Veritable findings of anthropologists and historians are sacrificed at the altar of sensationalism.

Esotericism

They are shrouded in occultism and mysticism - part of this aura of sensationalism

Strong rural presence

Throughout Latin America, resistance movements have traditionally fomented in the rural region, although the effects of popular uprisings have reverberated in urban areas. This is understandable for therein reside the majority of the indigenous, poor, and disadvantaged peoples. The Zapatistas in Mexico, the Shining Path in Peru, and FARC in Colombia are such examples.
**Oppression**

Sub-cultural religions and their adherents are usually at the base of the social totem pole. They have been historically oppressed, marginalized, and their religion viewed as inferior, and disapproved by God. Hence, perennial attempts to proselytize adherents were part of ‘civilizing programs.’ Today, the sub-cultural heritage is usually acknowledged as part of the national cultural mosaic, but this is done to enhance the cultural appeal of a nation to attract visitors and advance its diplomatic standing.

**Cross ethnic participation in religious practice**

Interestingly, sensationalism has piqued the interest of the ‘uninitiated’ or non-members. Many from a wide spectrum of society seek advice and the alleviation of ailments and emotional problems by skilled practitioners of sub-cultural religions. Their reliance and solicitation on sub-cultural religions are kept secret lest they be deemed superstitious, and their austere place in society questioned.

**Inaccurate data on membership**

Official censuses on these groups have not been undertaken with the same rigor and expertise as mainstream populations. This is due to problems of accessibility, language barriers, and lack of training within these communities in collecting and collating data. Reluctance to admit membership or affiliation of any kind by outsiders, and even those who have had ethnic ties with their practices, have made it difficult to accurately cite data on the strength of these groups.

**Discrimination**

For decades, if not centuries, traditional religions have been decried and vilified by mainstream religious and political officials. In Latin America and the Caribbean; Santeria, Kali worship, Voodoo, Orisha, Candumble, and the like, have been associated with “spiritism” – an act contemptible by mainstream religious decree, and normative social standards.

**Theocratically motivated**

The political structure of traditional culture is steeped in religious lore. According to sub-cultural religious beliefs, spiritual forces ultimate the fate of individuals and even nations. Everything is determined by the gods.
The donning of traditional dress and headwear by Quechua peoples, as they demonstrated in support of Evo Morales in Bolivia, is just one example of how the traditions and socio-political activism routinely interplay.

**Highly structured**

The traditional society is well defined with a social hierarchy and established mores that sometimes contravene mainstream society.

**Charismatic leadership**

The image of a Boukman (see p.60) draped in ceremonial garb - “possessed” as he invoked the gods of War and Thunder-to assist in cataclysmic battle of survival, is indeed captivating. Coupled with the pulsating rhythm of the drums, and other musical instruments, members are ever so poised to accomplish Herculean feats. The response of General Rochambeau (p.60) are testament to the deadly mix of politics and sub-cultural religions.

**Survivability threatened**

The traditional purity of sub-cultural religions has been affected by acculturation. Young members, in migrating to the urban areas for employment has adopted new lifestyles and even belief systems. Inter-marriage is not uncommon, and racial purity is threatened.
PART 2:
THE FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WESTERN AND TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS, AND THEIR IMPACT ON SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE

1) TRADITIONALISM ESOTERICISM AND POLITICS

The Search for Meaning

The popular Puerto Rican adage: “Yo no creo en brujas, pero si existe, existe” is quite common throughout the Latin America and the Caribbean. It literally means: “I do not believe in witches but if it exists, so be it.” The unquestioned place of religion in every aspect of life is unchallenged.

Sub-cultural religions dazzle and intrigue. Their members are endowed with ‘tangible faith.’ Their proximity to the gods is palatable. Their leaders, in serving as a conduit to the “unseen,” relay messages for the group in areas relating to their spiritual, economic, and political well being. It is this reservoir of beliefs in the world of spirit – interacting with the corporeal self (vehicle for the gods), that drives successful military campaigns against larger imperial forces. Every nation has its own story of the ‘gods’, interceding to gain victory over the enemy.

Caribbean history is replete with stories of how the underdog resisted the ‘discoverers’ of the New World - with a tool they knew best – religion.

A CNN report brings life to this assertion as it recounted the harrowing experience that some Spaniards experienced in their confrontation with the Mexican Aztec:
About 550 victims had their hearts ripped out by Aztec priests in ritual offerings. They were dismembered, or had their bones boiled or scraped clean. The prisoners were kept in cages for months while Aztec priests from what is now Mexico City selected a few each day at dawn, held them down on a sacrificial slab, cut out their hearts and offered them up to various Aztec gods.71

b) The Leader: Religious and Political

We earlier learned that Boukman in Haiti invoked the Voodoo gods on the eve of battle against a larger, better trained and organized French army.

Much has been written about faith and political resistance, but few have explored how this resource has, and can be used in the Caribbean. In contemporary writings the word “jihad” is used to define Islamic resistance to the West. Many have also erroneously characterized Islam as a perplexing blend of political and eschatological beliefs.

This deliberate propagation of religious misinformation of Western writers and politicians can be likened to the bizarre beliefs held by West Indian plantation owners in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Voodoo was a much feared tool used by slaves. The “hougan” or “voodooman” was tantamount to today’s revolutionary leader. The use of “voodoo” to incite rebellion and offer impervious protection to the insurgent slave was acknowledged by the master who quickly moved to outlaw this religious practice.

In “Voodoos and Obeahs: Phases of West Indian Witchcraft,” Joseph Williams writes:

"A serious source of danger to the peace of the colony was recognized to be ever present in the assemblies of slaves, where the old religious tribal dances were openly accompanied by drumming, which aroused the fanaticism of Africans to such a degree as to endanger a general uprising.” Laws were passed as early as 1684 to restrict these ceremonies or practices, for fear of insurrection. A 1816 law further inscribed :“If there

shall be found in the possession of any slave any poisonous drugs, pounded glass, parrot’s
beak, dog’s teeth, alligator’s teeth, or other materials notoriously used in the practice of
Obeah or witchcraft, such slave upon conviction, shall be liable to suffer transportation
from the island.”

An earlier law of 1684 “recognized the tripartite association between obeah, slave
rebellion and poisonings.” This law read: Every master or mistress or overseer of a family in
this island (Jamaica) shall cause all slave houses to be diligently and effectively searched once
every fourteen days.” The death penalty was enacted for any overt or covert insurgent
activity.

Arguably, the “voodooman” wielded considerably more power than today’s
revolutionary leader. This is be explained by the perceived connection to the world of
spirit. The fate of any insurgency and indeed, all else, rested in the hands of the
voodooman - giving him the ultimate control. The totality of this power eliminated one
of the weaknesses of an insurgency – collaboration and spying.72 The omniscience of this
spiritual leader made this possible.

In contemporary Caribbean society, the “obeahman” (voodooman), continues to play
an influential role. In an age of technology, religious ceremonies are still common.
Whether for veneration of the gods, or to effect positive change in one personal
situation, spiritual practitioners are sought out.

In present day Caribbean society, these ceremonies are no longer held to incite the
crowds to confront or topple governments. Instead, the faithful seek assistance in areas
ranging from health to material acquisition. Yet, the powers of the “obeahman,” or
mambo (priestess), remain legendary, and under the right social and economic
conditions, his or her ability to summon the deities of war in times of political conflict is
not unimaginable.

72 Izzat Ibrahim Al-Douri, deputy of former Iraq leader Saddam Hussein, outlined fifteen tactics that the
Iraqi insurgency should adopt if they are to be ultimately victorious. The fifth rule stated: “The enemy is
blind without spies, so exert all efforts to disclose and liquidate them” And in the eleventh rule, he
exhorts, “take your time to deal with extreme accuracy with traitors and spies to avoid hurting
innocents.” The interview was conducted by Nocola Nasser who is based Birzeit, the West Bank. For the
full transcript of the interview See http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/print/2008/902/focus.htm)
c) Traditional Religions and Caribbean Politics

To the Christian, Buddhist, and the orthodox Muslim, the world of Voodoo may appear bizarre, ritualistically complex, and archaic, if not primitive. The fetishistic displays of the practitioner and his veneration to a pantheon of gods are misunderstood. This has led to its derision and trivialization of an ancient belief system.

In modern societies, voodoo provides more than a cultural and anthropological excursion. It was the life of the slave and remains so in the life of modern day Caribbean society, whether it is acknowledged or not.

The overriding argument here is that while the majority of people in the Caribbean may not refer to themselves as an adherent to Voodoo, the belief in the pervasiveness of spirits in their daily lives is shared with their ancestors and Africans.

In Benin, formerly Dahomey - the ancestral home of the black Caribbean peoples, Voodoo is openly practiced by over 75% of the population and is the national religion of this nation of 6.3 million people. Indeed, Africa through the holocaust that was the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade forged an indelible cultural bond with the Caribbean region that remains vibrant centuries later.

d) Voodoo and Politics in Haiti

The interplay of traditional religion and political activism is epitomized in the Haitian experience. The Caribbean, Latin America and the inclusion of Louisiana into the fold of the US government\textsuperscript{73} must be credited to the intrepidity of Haitian slaves who repelled attempts by France to consolidate control on the island.

From the 20\textsuperscript{th} century to this day, Haiti’s enduring status as a beacon for the disenfranchised is seriously threatened by its endless dance with poverty and bizarre occult practices erroneously associated with Voodoo.

\textsuperscript{73} The defeat of France by Haitian slaves signaled the weakening of its hegemony. The sale of Louisiana to the US at a bargain price was just one indicator of a foreign policy under strain.
Much has been written about Papa Doc Duvalier and his son ‘Baby Doc’ who ruled Haiti from 1957 to 1998. The former is known to have used the Voodo or traditional religious expression to exalt his status and reduce his people to submissiveness. He studied bush medicine, voodoo ceremonies, and wrote extensively on the subject. His famous refrain, “They cannot get me, I am immaterial,” struck fear into the heart of the Haitian and cemented his near god-like status. David Hawkes (1997) writes:

“Once elected as President, he appointed a well known voodoo “hougan” as head of the national militia, and used the religion as an integral part of his program of terror and repression. With his black clothes, top hat and other worldly aura, he aped the style of Baron Samedi, a particularly malevolent voodoo deity. It required only a small leap of the imagination of the populace to conceive the notion that Duvalier actually was Baron Samedi. Image became reality, as in fact that Papa Doc resembled this spirit, edged into the conviction that he was actually god in human form.”

Hawkes’ experience in Haiti is vexing and bewildering. “How can any country come to this,” he seems to ask himself. In this article, he presented his case:

I arrived in Port-au-Prince on a fine April morning with a suitcase full of tuna fish. My fellow passengers were loaded down with similar goodies. I’d been warned by the friend I was meeting there that food, especially protein was hard to come by. There was no working telephone system, and the electricity cuts regularly, even in the capital. There are no public transportation other than “taps taps” converted pick up trucks, usually open to the elements and standing room only. Visibly and severely over populated, the entire country is pervaded by an atmosphere of turmoil and chaos.” He continued: You don’t have to be in Haiti long to realize that it doesn’t run according to the rules of logic. Most Haitians believe and practice Voodoo, despite highly visible campaigns by American missionaries against it. One guy we met in Les Cayes had tried to get a job as cook for the U.N. garrison. They turned him down. He went by the local “hougan,” who instruct him to smear his face with a foul smelling green ointment and try again. They turned him down again. He could not understand why. In Gele, a man offered us beds in a single room with no running water. His asking price was six hundred dollars a night. We explained that this was excessive, and offered him ten. He thought about it for a while, and then offered us the room for five.

74 “Voodoo Politics: Tyranny and Enlightenment in Haiti and Britain.”
Hawkes then reasoned:

The attitude of the average Haitian is fatalistic. It involves the sense that the course of events is not within human control. The idea that the systemic application of reason and logic can influence and alter the objective world seems to be absent. Instead, there is the belief in magic – in determining power of the supernatural. In recent Haitian history, the belief has been closely associated with political tyranny, and has served as the means through which tyranny has justified and maintained itself.

For many, advocacy of Voodoo is an exercise in buffoonery. The political chaos and economic depression experienced by Haitians are for them enough evidence that pervasiveness of this traditional expression has led to the retardation of an entire nation.

This belief runs counter to the crux of the argument presented in this paper – that traditional religion is vital to the political and economic liberation of the Caribbean region. How then can the political and economic degradation of ‘voodooist’ Haiti be explained?

Endemic poverty in Haiti can be understood through the lens of the social scientist. A combination of exploitation by foreign companies and governments, facilitated by a corrupt and complicit government, managerial ineptitude, poor infrastructure, economic and social disparities can help us understood the plight of Haiti. Central to countries of like conditions is the “dictator megalomaniac” who holds on to the reins of power through an admixture of naked repression and a ghoulish compensatory system.

Despots have ingeniously employed various methods of controlling a people. Religion has oftentimes been that tool. The point of fact is that religion in itself is not culpable, but rather its manipulation by leaders.

The interpretation and re-interpretation of spiritual books to advance an agenda has been leveled against many a society and people for centuries. Voodoo, like any other religious expression can be used as a force of liberation or the catalyst of fear, superstition and oppression.

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75 A colony of France, Haiti was economically exploited for the benefit of France and the bourgeoisie class on the island. US was well known for using the island as another front in its geo-political and ideological battles with communism and the Soviet Union.
It appears that the march of material progress, political transparency and economic justice are accompanied by the reconfiguration of traditional religion. Counter-productive beliefs and practices that mire a people in cycles of poverty begin with a political culture of exploitation. Rampant poverty does not swirl around the practitioners of Voodoo (known as Orisha) in Trinidad and other parts of the world. Voodoo and its use are contingent on the economic, social and political framework of a nation. Voodoo inspires and liberates only as much as its practitioner will allow. Traditional religion has and will continue to effect social change. However, it can be polluted and used by self centered leaders on a national and local level to terrorize a people.

2) COUNTER-CULTURAL MOVEMENTS IN THE CARIBBEAN

**Rastafarianism**

Before examining the role that traditional or sub-cultural religions can play in meeting contemporary challenges, it is important that two important movements be characterized. While both remain popular and relevant they are strongly counter-cultural and should not be confused with the thematic projection of this paper: Traditional religions as catalyst of social change.

Rastafarianism is not associated with any structured religious practice. The onset and popularity of this movement coincided with the music ascendancy of Bob Marley and reggae music globally. The Rasta is characterized by shoulder length locks, vegetarianism, distinct colored clothes and predilection for smoking pot. At one point the Rastafarian movement was associated with violent crime and wanton disregard for the law. This form of criminal profiling led to large scale misconception on the true nature of the group.

The following presents an overview of this movement.

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76 Many beliefs are steeped in superstition and irrationality, and may retard efforts at modernity.

77 Gina Faustin, host of the weekly television program, *Gina Week*, has denounced the corruption of Voodoo by questionable spiritual practices. Dr. Henry Frank makes a distinction between a hougan or Voodoo priest, and a boko who practices sorcery.

78 Rastas are known for sporting the colors of the Ethiopian flag – red, gold, and green.
The movement claims over 700,000 members according to Leonard Barrett, author of “The Rastafarians: Sounds of Cultural Dissonance.”

It was heavily influenced by the “Back to Africa” mantra of Marcus Garvey in the 1920’s. Zion (Ethiopia) is considered the Rastas’ true home.

The crowning of Ras Tafari Makonnen (Haile Selassie) as the King of Ethiopia was welcomed as spiritually propitious to the movement. Haile Selassie was viewed as the movement’s messiah.

His visit to Jamaica on April 21 has become a “holy day” of sorts to the movement.

Leonard Howell, the group’s main spokesman in the 1930s had inscribed its six principles: (1) The Superiority of the Black Race; (2) hatred of the White race; (3) revenge of the White Race for their wickedness; (4) the negation, persecution, and humiliation of the government and legal bodies of Jamaica; (5) preparation to repatriate to Africa; (6) acknowledgement of Haile Selassie as God incarnate.79

Although the Rastafarian philosophy does raise some interesting and pertinent issues in respect to colonial resistant80, it has never sought to be actively involved in the politics of the region and has preferred to denounce the ruling elite and establishment through song. Its reference to the regional governments as “Babylon” and non- Rastas as “baldheads” has drawn a sharp line between the movement and the authority. Many Rastas have resisted by simply withdrawing from society and adopting an agrarian form of existence. The movement’s lack of uniformity and political leadership; its apathy and divergent philosophical views, render it more of a counter culture81 than a sub-culture. Rastafarianism, in fact, embodies every character of counterculture – originality,


80 The movement has raised Black awareness and pride at a time when centuries of colonial rule had diverted attention away from Africa and the worth of black culture and tradition.

81 This label is used to describe “groups and movements existing within any modern society, and in any country, which find themselves in opposition to governing and accepted mainstream ideology, values, and the approved and sanctioned forms of self expression. Counterculture is a culture of opposition and minorities. It can be highly political and/or purely artistic, but it inevitably finds itself in opposition to the mainstream political thinking, aesthetical perceptions, styles and forms and ways of self expression.” (Taken from the International Counterculture Archive; the Gelma Library of George Washington University).
aesthetical innovation, and bold ideological and philosophical beliefs. However, it is this radicalized mode of thought that has created a seemingly unbridgeable disconnect between the movement and the needs of contemporary Caribbean society.

Indeed, Reggae music in the 1970s was at the fore of cultural resistance in the region. However, its battle cry of “black power” cannot be likened to that of the Civil Rights movement that swept through the Caribbean and North America.

To the Rastafarian, black consciousness was the first step toward repatriation to Zion or Ethiopia. It offered little in the way of transforming the Caribbean society. Rather, it invoked a fantasy of going back to one’s roots – to Africa.

**Garveyism**

Any academician will be remiss without mentioning the role that Marcus Garvey played in the development of Black Thought. Born in Jamaica in the early 20th century, Garvey stormed to fame and infamy with oratorical flamboyance, and a bold and incisive agenda on resuscitating the black race from the asphyxiation of slavery and colonialism. Today, Garveyism remains a driving force in the Pan-African movement with its strong underpinnings of political and economic philosophies.

Dr. Julius Garvey, a reputable surgeon and son of this legendary historical personage summarized the key edicts of Garveyism in a letter to the editor of the Jamaica Observer, by citing verbatim, the words of his famous father.

- “History is the landmark by which we are directed into the true course of life.”

- “Man is the individual who is able to shape his own character, master his own will, direct his own life and shape his own ends. Man is therefore the architect of his own fate and master of his own destiny.

- “Nationhood is the only means by which modern civilizations can completely protect itself. Independence of Nationality, Independence of government, is the means of protecting not only the individual, but the group. Nationhood is the highest ideal of all people.”

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82 Ibid
“Every student of economics knows that the race can only be saved through solid industrial foundation. Take away industry from a race, take away political freedom from a race and you have a group of slaves.”

In respect to Garvey’s concept of God, his son stated that he (his father), wrestled God away from the white race and gave her to everybody.” In other words, all of mankind should use its own anthropomorphic lens to understand and worship God. He finally quotes the famous mantra of his father: One God! One Aim! One Destiny! One Love!

That one can inveigh against the august philosophies of Marcus Mosiah Garvey teachings is truly hard to fathom in black activist circles. One must further understand the global theatre in which Garvey was molded. That Negroes returning from serving the US in World War 2 were no less immune to lynching screams at the conscience of humanity.

Despite his success and the wide range of thinkers he influenced, Garveyism seemed devoid of traditional spiritual lore. Humanism, yes! but hardly the preponderance of African culture and spirituality. A bit surprising seeing that his thrust was Africa and the Diaspora.

Many scholars concur that Garvey’s vision placed him at the crosshairs of the establishment. It was an unfeasible and implausible movement in that epoch. It is safe to deduce that any injection of African religion values and practices would only have complicated matters for an already beleaguered organization.

3) FACTORS AFFECTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TRADITIONAL VALUES

THE FAILINGS OF TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS

The Impact of Modernity

The denunciation of voodoo, Santeria, Orisha, Kali Mai worship, and like religious expressions is due to their supposed association with the indigent the uneducated - the uncivilized. Further, traditional religions have also been denounced for their adventures
into the world of the occult, creating incomprehension and fear. This egregious condemnation is due to ignorance or a willful attempt to discourage indulgence in practice that can elevate a people’s moral, economic and social standing. Instead Caribbean traditional religions, though receiving greater respect and recognition, has not been able to effectively respond to today’s environment. That said, the conditions of the 18th century Caribbean are indeed non-existent today. Voodoo must therefore adapt.

The transition to accommodation, promotion, and embrace of traditional religions in the Caribbean is difficult. In decrying all “things” African as primitive, even evil, and thereby replacing them with modernity, civilization and even godliness, blacks shunned their past, and sought validation through assimilation.

It is this self deprecation and denial of one’s cultural composition that has rendered traditional religions, innocuous, and unable to adapt and effectively respond to contemporary demands.

Voodoo has emerged as a kind of spiritual aberration, relegated to the back burner of historical and anthropological inquiry. It has been commercialized by the Cuban government; legally accommodated by the Trinidad and Tobago government; used as an oppressive tool by past leaders (see pp 77, 78); and misrepresented by Hollywood. The adaptability, embrace and appreciation of the movement are contingent on the following socio-economic and political factors.

Education

Voodoo, like every traditional religion, has to be viewed as a comprehensive religion that addresses the nature of being, cosmology, and eschatology. Its hierarchy of gods must be presented as a viable effort to understand nature and its forces. Voodoo’ association with pins and dolls\(^{83}\) must be vigorously challenged. Voodoo does have its concepts of good and evil, and attempts to foster right living through obeisance to natural laws.

With right education, Voodoo can attract more than researchers, curiosity seekers, and those bent on some form of material gain. Fashioned after the occult revival in

\(^{83}\) This is a form of sympathetic magic that was popularized in 18th century Europe.
contemporary Russia, Voodoo needs intellectuals, authors, and scholars. The attributes and wisdom of the gods are immutable and must be presented through the lens of parapsychology. This is realizable when resources for research, libraries, museums, and laboratories are made available. Only then it can be used as an arm of Caribbean cultural diplomacy.

Today, the voodoo adherent is usually indigent, residing at the bottom of the social strata. It is within this paucity of choices that poor enclaves create their own system of control and rank. In Haiti, voodoo is manipulated to accomplish this. Economic opportunities have always been the doorway to mobility. But in a country that is named the poorest in the Western Hemisphere, political corruption runs deep, and security is barely maintained by an occupation force. A healthier indulgence and exposition of Voodoo\(^4\) is possible only when there is social and economic transformation.

**Democratic Principles**

One of the most important functions of any government is the facilitation of its people’s spiritual expression. We have already reviewed the importance that religion plays in society. The legal acceptance of sub-cultural and traditional religions is the first step in embracing it as a vital part of its cultural lifeline. Its adoption, enhancement, and procurement are indicative of a nation’s political maturity. It may also determine its standing in the community of nations and impact on bilateral and multilateral engagements.\(^5\)

Hence, it is incumbent that proponents of traditional religious and cultural practice in the Caribbean continue constructive talks with government officials. Such engagements

\(^4\) “Voodoo - Shango and Ogun Alive in New York,” Trinidad Guardian January 6, 2009, featured Dr. Henry Frank’s lecture at Casa Frela in Harlem, NY. One area discussed was the distinction between the “Hougan” or Voodoo priest, and a witch doctor. The latter uses the services of malevolent spirits.

Bob Corbett’s “*Introduction to Voodoo in Haiti*,” states: “There are two primary sorts of Voodoo. A) Rada - This is a family spirit of the relatively peculiar and happy Iwa. B) Petro - In some areas it is called Congo). This is black magic Voodoo, and the Voodoo of the angry, mean and nasty Iwa. Dangerous things happen in petro including death, curses, the making of zombie and wild sexual orgies. Petro is not the typical voodoo (See [http://www.webster.edu/~corbetre/haiti/voodoo/overview.htm](http://www.webster.edu/~corbetre/haiti/voodoo/overview.htm)).

\(^5\) For many countries inclusion into regional organizations have meant adopting new ways of accommodating minority communities. This has been played out in Turkey, where acceptance into the European Union meant that the Government recognized and accepted Kurdish identity. Other nations, such as the former members of the Soviet bloc were required to make sweeping political changes.
must not be seen as opportunities for political mileage but as essential for the advancement of the Caribbean nation, socially, culturally, and economically

**Myth, Superstition and Folklore**

*Onye na eweghi ihe arimama di ka onye nwuru anwu:* A person or a people with no identity is well as dead

The denunciation of traditional religions was a natural offshoot of colonialism. As earlier mentioned, Voodoo and occult paraphernalia were deemed a superstitious indulgence practiced by the uneducated, and the gullible. The supernatural powers that the 'hougan' possessed were part of a mythological appeal that was embraced out of ignorance and fear. In the quest for modernity, many relegated such beliefs to the relics of a bygone time.

Scholars such as Edgar Riley\(^{86}\) have gone a step further. A lecturer and psychotherapist, Mr. Riley identifies Africa’s preoccupation with religion and mythology as the principal cause of its economic, political, and social problems.

In a 2007 interview with Mr. Riley for the full list of questions), he lamented the adverse effects of religious and racial archetypes. Instead, he promoted ‘the Symptomatic Thought Process’ which he argued, will reconfigure our social and economic skills.

In “*The Golden Apple: Changing the Structure of Civilization,*” he writes:

If we symbolize or mythologize what we see and come in contact with, that creates a neurological misadventure. When man begins to mythologize the environment he became a symbolic behaving being. In other words, it can be stated that when man began to symbolize the stimuli which he received from his environment, he began to think mythically. …This has caused all the problems that we face in civilization today. He later added: What is extremely important for us to understand is the stimuli that we encounter are symptomatic of the events around us.

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\(^{86}\) Mr. Ridley is an expert on symbolic behavior and its impact on culture. He studied and conducted research at the Radiocarbon laboratory of I.F.A.N (Institut Fondamental d’Afrique Noire), also known as Cheikh Ante Diop University (formerly University of Dakar), in Senegal, West Africa. He worked under renowned nuclear physicist and Egyptologist, Cheikh Anta Diop. The research culminated in a thesis entitled “*The Neurological Misadventure of Primordial Man, a study of symbolism from antiquity to Modern man*”

Information was taken from Ridley Global Productivity Center. (See http://www.drtiger.com/ridley/aboutridley.php Accessed 4/29/2009)
Mr. Ridley then gives a poignant example using the African Kwanzaa ceremony to cement his thesis:

Although a Kwanzaa event is marked by a conglomeration of symbols that are evident in all rituals, the aromas (described) in both settings are truly symptomatic of the actual dynamics taking place. The experience of scent and aroma are symptomatic of a condition. When we follow the symptoms of our condition instead of the symbols, we have a reality that is existentially connected.

Ridley’s reasoning should be here challenged. Indisputably, the economic morass in which Caribbean nations find themselves must be expeditiously addressed. During my interview with Ridley he emphasized the success of his seminars and workshops that centered on dispelling the myths of race that symbols have promoted over the years. There was no way of determining the permanence of this change, or proving the reliability of such studies that measure social and cultural sentiments.

Further, in decrying the role of symbols Ridley raises a number of questions. For example: Are symbols not the natural reaction of man’s inability to understand himself, others, and the cosmos? If so, isn’t the world of symbols inextricably connected to man’s development? When I posed the question of presidential candidate winning the elections Ridley acknowledged that such a feat signified a victory over symbolism. Racism, sexism and other social dysfunctions may be attributed to the inculcation of a belief system that is characterized in symbols. While this may be so, symbolism is a time tested mechanism that has facilitated man’s cognitive development. Language is a form of symbols. Aristotle once taught that “spoken words are symbols of mental; experience, and written words are the symbols of spoken words.” Famed psychotherapist Carl Jung who devised the concept of the “archetype” differentiated

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87 Ridley’s works details the negative effects of symbolism and racism in the US and other parts of the world.
88 Jung views archetypes as influential symbols that act outside of man. They are also projections of man’s consciousness. Each archetype corresponds to a particular phase of man’s journey in life. One of the most poignant of archetypes is found in religious rites and rituals. It unites a people, solidifies a culture and forms a collective unconscious. It is a bridge to the unseen or the esoteric. It serves to answer universal questions such as the purpose of life and man’s place in the universe.

between “symbols” and “signs.” The former he associated with the unknown, something that cannot be precisely discerned.

The role of symbols in understanding and preserving culture cannot be overstated. The past present and future of any people are distinguishable by their symbols. This in itself does not promote xenophobia or racism as presupposed by Ridley’s theory. Political and economic factors have always created or exacerbated social strife. This theory is based on the questionable premise that race prejudice may be overcome by reforming people’s minds while leaving untouched the social and economic conditions that breed and feed prejudice.

Symbolism and mythology to the Caribbean experience are essential ingredients for reform. African religion survived in the Caribbean because slaves were able to understand the symbolism of Roman Catholic and thereby create their own. It was the attributes of Roman Catholic saints that they associated with those of their “gods.” Because religion to the African was life itself, understanding symbolism could be credited for his very survival amid the most brutal of living conditions.

In contemporary Africa, the importance of mythology to social cohesion, justice and the inculcation of group values are unquestionable. According to Alyward Shorter, the lessons of the past influence the present, and even the future.

In “Concepts of Social Justice in Traditional Africa he notes:

“Custom was the guide to present action. However, that did not mean that there was no possibility of change or adaption. On the contrary, there was considerable flexibility, even when the appeal to tradition was made in the form of myths and other forms of oral traditions. Students of mythology are acquainted with the idea of reversible time through which present shifts in needs and relationships are invested with an aura antiquity.

**SYMBOLISM AND TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS**

*The need for Symbolism and Identity*

The Negro people in the Caribbean are of the same stock as the men who played such a role in the history of their time. We are the product of the same historical past and the same type of life, and as long as we are not being educated by the Colonial Office, we shall be able to do whatever we have done. We have to remember that where slavery was abolished by law, the great mass of the Negro slaves had shown that they were ready to
take any steps necessary to free themselves. That was a very important step in the making of the Caribbean people. (CLR James: “The Making of the Caribbean People” Radical America 4, no 4, Special Issue (May 1970):46).

The emaciation of African culture was the result of slavery and its replacement with a foreign symbolism.

The role of ancient and traditional African culture in the resurgence of a proud and dignified African people on the continent and the Diaspora has never failed the pen of Caribbean thinker such as Marcus Garvey, Norman Cameron, Walter Rodney, and Josef Ben Jochannan.89

Andrew Ifeanyi Isiguzo once stated:

Like the Greek gods deserting Olympus, the African traditional deities are deserting the traditional shrines. But where have they gone and who has chased them away? The forces responsible for the apparent demise or progressive disappearances of our traditional gods, our deities and venerable ancestors, followed in the wake of our colonial conquest by Europeans, although it is arguable that without our colonial experience, the same process would have come about eventually."

He then makes a key observation that must be addressed:

Mankind’s intellectual, scientific and technological development is not monopoly of any race or culture. Sooner or later, the religious phase in mankind’s intellectual, scientific and technological development as August Comte observed was bound to yield to a dominant metaphysical and then scientific phase. Another way of putting it to say that the forces of modernity would have set it sooner or later…… This is the process of desacralization and secularization which Max Weber called the process of increasing rationalization of life.90

Traditions have suffered at the expense of modernity. The fate of Africa in this respect must be likened to that of the Caribbean. This battle for domination and survival

89 Dr. Jochannan was an Adjunct Professor at Cornell University Ithaca NY from 1976 -1987. He has written extensively on the universal impact of African culture and is known for his seminal literary undertakings “Black Man of the Nile” and “Africa –Mother of Major Western Religions.”

90 “African Culture and Symbolism: A Recovery of the Seam of a Fragmented Identity.”

characterized the past. Today there are signs that a people can embrace tradition while at the forefront of modernity.

On this point, Isiguzo elaborated:

As to whether traditional religion and its gods, the ancestors are surviving or reincarnating, we can only refer to the facts as they manifest themselves today, namely, that the forces of modernity, of Christianity, secularization, science and technology have not succeeded in rooting them out completely. This is because religion was not a separate and autonomous aspect of life it raised from the social and material conditions of his life. It was part of the meaning which life has taken. This is why such deep-seated beliefs embedded in the religious practices of the people... are still surviving in form or the other.

It is this aspect that has survived and continues to influence Caribbean life. Such are the elements that must be identified and used to our advantage in today’s society.
PART 3: CONTEMPORARY THREATS TO CARIBBEAN INTEGRATION AND SOCIETAL PROGRESS

1) TRADITIONAL POLITICS AND THE WESTMINSTER MODEL

The adoption of western style democracy is encapsulated in the Westminster model of governance. The British speaking Caribbean countries, formerly colonized by Britain adopted this system of checks and balances aimed at preventing totalitarian rule. The interplay of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government is still perceived as the epitome of democracy. So too is a supposed transparent electoral system that elects the Prime Minister,\(^{91}\) and other members of the executive branch. Similar models have been adopted by nations in the region once ruled by other colonial powers such as Spain and France and Holland (Netherlands).

To critics, the Westminster model does not reflect the will of the people. It is divorced from the participatory right that each individual has in determining his future. To them, holding an election every five years is a corruption of the democratic process, as expressed by supporters of the Grenadian revolution during its embryonic stage. In The Free West Indian, the following was collectively written by the newspapers staff writers:

In a real democracy, like the one being built in Grenada, the most important role rests with the people. In a real democracy, the people don’t sit back and wait for politicians to remember election promises because the people are the politicians. The Prime Minister of

\(^{91}\) In Latin America, the role of president is executive in nature. In countries such as Trinidad and Tobago, the president functions are ceremonial.
the Grenadian Revolution, Maurice Bishop, denounced Westminster style democracy, and of this new democracy stated, (1) It underscores the fundamental principle of our party and government: the involvement and presence of the people in all aspects of national development. (b) It replaces the old structures of privilege and elitism by new forms which allow the increasing participation of the people in the revolutionary process. (3) This involvement of the people call for more education. Popular democracy does not stand on the same ground as ignorance, myth and superstition. Genuine democracy, the ability to participate, and the exercise of that right imply the right to information and the critical mastery of knowledge.

2) RACISM CLASS AND NATIONALISM

Nationalism is extreme pride in the history or the culture or the successes of one nation, even if the successes that your country achieved caused the death of millions of people. This is nationalism. Nationalism is a disease. (Radical Review June 2008/Dhul-Rajah, 1429 – Volume 4).

The Caribbean and Latin America society is characterized by a complex marriage of class, ethnicity, and race. A product of colonialism, the nations have posed a challenge to social scientists who confront a matrix of social underpinnings that lend a unique character to the region. The indelibly provocative writings of Tony Martin,92 and Walter Rodney cemented the inextricable role that race has played in the Caribbean society. In fact, concomitant with any discussion of race is that of class. Race and class were interwoven, and for decades after colonial rule, a rigid social stratum was formed. Whiteness was tantamount to privilege, prestige, and affluence. In a society dominated by hues of color, phenotypology was the criterion of one’s socio-economic status. Seldom were there anomalies - the poor white, the rich black. This was prevalent in the English, French, Dutch colonies.

In Latin American, color also determined status and opportunity. The mestizo class, a product of miscegenation between Spanish colonials (the upper crust) and the indigenous population grew to in size and status, assuming positions that held political and economic sway. Conversely, prejudice prevailed, and natives were barred from the

92 Renowned historian and scholar on Marcus Garvey
levers of power. Many preferred to remain in rural settings divorced from the opportunities available many miles away.

On the impact of color in Trinidad society, and for that matter, all of the Caribbean, Khafra Kambon wrote:

Color is not incidental in this society, and the relationships between people based on color and race are not incidental. This society was consciously built on the way that people looked. It was not accident; people were not thrown here. Not only was society built that way; a system of beliefs, a value system was also developed to maintain the society that way. And certainly before 1970, I grew up in that value system that was meant to maintain the society that way.93

The interchangeable use of the terms, ‘race’ and ‘class’ was prevalent years after many colonies wrestled independence away from Europe - forcibly, as in the case of Haiti, or through political means, as did many of the English speaking islands.

In a different social context, these terms are distinct, having little common denominators. In the classical sense, ‘class’ can be defined as a large cross section of a population defined by common factors, such as: religious and political affinity, cultural upbringing, geographic location, and economic standing.

The term ‘race’ is clothed with ancestral and biological trappings that are immutable and unitary. Race cannot be socially or historically constructed or imposed, but with the injection of race on social bearing in the Caribbean, the term became indistinguishable from that of class. On the question of ‘race’, David Freund noted:

People commonly make these distinctions between race and ethnicity as being biological, or cultural, or based on national origins and things like that. But it’s really important to remember two things. First, both ethnic and racial identities have changed a lot throughout history. And second, there is very little evidence that people actually see great distinction between race and ethnicity culturally, politically, and in daily life. In fact, there is a history of racial self-identification in this country (the United States) that is similar to that of ethnic self-identification.94

Noteworthy here is Freund’s recognition of terms like ethnicity and racial composition are not eternally exacting, and during the course of time, assume different connotations.

For example, descendants of slaves in the English speaking Caribbean were referred to as ‘negro’, later, ‘colored’, (an expressions borrowed from the US lexicon) in the 1960’s, and within the last three decades, as ‘Afro-Trinidadian.’ Various expressions were also used to identify the Indian population. The same can be said for ethnic groups in other countries.

Due to the racial and economic divide that permeated the Caribbean and Latin American society, the constitution of a national identity posed legal and practical challenges. Many of the disenfranchised felt compelled to seek shelter under their own peculiar ethnic umbrella. Such groups, with marked affinity to their ancestral roots, decried vacuous nationalist slogans, for it was the very nation and its elite that were viewed as oppressors and exploiters. Anani Dzidzienyo, Associate Professor of Afro-American Studies and Portuguese Studies at Brown University, explored the ambiguous concept of race and class in contemporary Latin America. In “Afro-Latin Americans Today” he writes:

It is self-evident that specific historical, cultural, socio-economic and political conjunctions result in the emergence of different race relations patterns in the Americas. Brazil and the Caribbean countries, for example, differ significantly from Peru where people of African descent are in distinct minority and their positions can be properly understood only in relation to a numerically dominant ‘minority’ of indigenous peoples.

More importantly, he observes “that the much admired non-consciousness of race relations patterns in Latin America is beginning to seem rather less benign than it did, if only because of the relative silence of voices from “below.”

He continues:

This is not, of course to deny the presence of contrarian voices; (but) the present volume contribute greatly to our knowledge of those Afro-Latin Americans who, over time and in various ways, and contrary to hegemonic ideologies that assign overriding significance to nationality (not race), have defined themselves as black and chosen actively
to protest disadvantages directly attributed to their race, and to propose remedial measures.\textsuperscript{95}

Professor Dzidzienvo’s insight reaffirms the interplay of race, economics, and politics in the Caribbean – each country unique unto itself but all affected by similar social forces.

3) THE ROLE OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE CARIBBEAN

As a social, religious, if not political institution, the Roman Catholic Church had wielded marked influence in the region.

In Grenada, the Roman Catholic Church posed a threat to the revolution as it attempted to protect its elevated social status it enjoyed throughout history. The People’s Revolutionary Government attempted to curb the ecclesiastical reach of this body, especially after a so called “Priest’s Plot” was accused of promoting dissension as a way of combat the “Revo.”

In the Spanish speaking Caribbean, this power continues to dominate and has led to bitter differences with the burgeoning movement in places such as Venezuela and Bolivia.


The idea of separating church and state and army were inconceivable. They were so intertwined that they really functioned as one institution. The church began to exercise its social and religious control through its local missions called aldeias in Brazil, reducciones in the south and missions in the north. These missions consisted of a church built at the center of the village, a school, living quarters, and warehouses. They served as fortresses for the institutionalization of the Indians, helped control rebellion and free soldiers for other duties. Berroa who argued that the military is the most important institution in Latin

\textsuperscript{95} www.africanfilmny.org/network/news/aanani1.html
America (This thesis was advanced in 1986), continued: The caudillos (either generals or wealthy land owners) who rose to power during the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries always sought the support, not of the public, which for their purposes was not important, but of both church and the army. Without this support the caudillos could not have remained in power.

It is this triumvirate of Church, the military, and the wealthy landowners that formed the nucleus of power in Latin America.

The article “Chavez Lashes Out At Catholic Church Leaders,” by Christopher Toothaker examines this thorny relationship, and quotes the Venezuelan leader:

“The Catholic hierarchy never gets tired of attacking this government, this revolution.”

He (Chavez) uses the words ‘elitist’, and ‘out of touch with reality’ in speaking about the Church. For its part, the Venezuelan Episcopal Conference, the nation’s highest authority warned of increased polarization and the rescinding of the right to political dissent under the present administration.

Chavez has also been accused of attempting to divide the Church by promoting a radical liberation theology. Baltazar Porras, president of the Episcopal Conference elaborated:

This is a new program led by a group of theologians like the ones in the times of the Sandinistas rule in Nicaragua with the same arguments. This argument is fundamentally anti-Catholic, anti-hierarchy. One such clergyman is Father Jesus Gazo who stated, “Many think that the Church hierarchy has turned its back on the people, and the people are turning their back on the bishops.

In regards to the brewing intra-religious showdown, the online journal Venezuelananalysis.com reported that the Reformist Catholic Churches was established in 2008 by Enrique Albornoz, a former Lutheran minister. Albornoz was noted as saying,

We don’t side with any political banner, but we cannot fail to recognize and support the socialist achievements of this government. We back the social programs of the revolutionary government.

In responding to this burgeoning dissent, Venezuelan cardinal Jorge Urosa Sabino stated:
The apparent political goal of this association distances it from the true expression of Christian faith. Jesus Christ is spreading the word and the gift of Christ to the whole world, separately from political issues and party affiliation.

In the article “Hugo Chavez vs. the Catholic Church, Los Angeles Daily News columnist Bridget Johnson argues that the Church remains one of the principal opposition players that can curtail the dictatorial adventurism of the Venezuelan president. The article also highlighted the warnings of the late Cardinal Ignacio Velasco who in 2002, stated:

Everyday we turn another cheek. I have no cheeks left because every day there is a new insult. Chavez’s supporters are alleged to have thrown stones at the funeral, and taunted the aggrieved with pictures of the deceased donning horns. (See:http://www.signonsandiego.com/new/world/20050713-1944-Venezuela-Chavez-Church.html).

Later the Chavez controlled Assembly launched an investigation into Catholic schools for allegedly fomenting dissent against the administration.

In a concerted effort against further constitutional amendments, archbishop and bishops issued a statement on October 19 2007 condemning the government. It read:

The proposed reform violates the fundamental rights of the democratic system and the person, threatening freedom and social harmony. It is morally unacceptable in the light of the Social Doctrine of the Church.

As in the past, the Roman Catholic Church in the region is confronted by sweeping social reforms. The extent to which it will confront of traditional practices and lore is left to be seen.

The Church must also grapple with fractious movements from within, which historically have sided with society’s underclass. Liberation theology, popularized by Peruvian priest, Gustavo Gutierrez, may reemerge as another doctrine that champions the cause of the indigenous peoples and traditional religious practices in the hemisphere.
4) LIBERATION THEOLOGY AND ITS EFFECT ON CARIBBEAN SOCIETY

Old-style leftist politics is making a huge comeback in Latin America. In Brazil, an avowed socialist and anti-capitalist has taken power in a landslide vote. Luiz Lula da Silva first day as president ended with a dinner with Cuba’s Fidel Castro. Joining him was Venezuela president Hugo Chavez...In Ecuador, new president Lucio Guiterrez hold similar political sympathies. These political leaders’ platform are also fueled by a religious platform; a reversion to liberation theology which twists the gospel call to assist the poor into redistributionist political agenda that threatens violence and uses anti-American sentiment to secure political power. (Reverend Robert A. Sirico, president of Acton Institute).

A ‘Catholic’ Response to Radicalism

Many are less aware of how deeply Liberation Theology draws upon traditions of Catholic social teachings. Gutierrez was not only influenced by those teachings but his writings have in turn influenced what has been taught. Many official church documents have made the vast disparities of wealth important themes of church doctrines and argue that the rich should make more of an effort to help the most vulnerable in society. Gutierrez himself stated in his book “Power of the Poor in History,” that action aimed at redressing wrongs must have precedence over theological debates. He advanced a form of ‘sociological theology’ where social action served as the portal to spiritual redemption:

Liberation theology can be viewed as 1) an anomaly within the Church, and 2) a sub-cultural religious expression. In countries where it flourished, liberation theology threatened Church authority in the Americas sided with the ruling political body. This burgeoning schism was exacerbated with the assassination of clergy sympathetic to the peasant movement that battled government sponsored militias and death squads. Nuns too were allegedly raped. In 2000, a wrongful death suit was brought against former El Salvador Defense Minister and ex-National Guard strongman, General Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova for the rape and murder of 4 nuns at the height of the civil war.
Interestingly, Fidel Castro viewed liberation theology as an unpolluted form of Christianity. He did not concur with Karl and Mao Tse Dong that religion was the opiate of the masses. Rather, he viewed the Christian faith, as advocated by Jesus Christ as liberating - this from a man who systematically eliminated Catholic schools and expelled priests and bishops after the revolution.

On Liberation theology, Castro (1987) stated:

If someone were to ask, ‘When did you have a religious conviction?’ I’d say I never really had one. In school they weren’t able to inculcate me with those values.” And on liberation theology, the former Cuban leader remarked, “There are 10,000 more coincidences between Christianity and Communism than there could be with capitalism. Liberation theology is a re-encounter of Christianity with its roots, with its most beautiful, heroic and most glorious history….It is one of the most fundamental happenings that have occurred in our epoch.96

Liberation theology through the prism of Cuban and Bolivarian revolutions is the corner stone of Jesus’ teachings from which the Roman Catholic Church has drifted. The social theology of Castro and Chavez has now locked horns with that of the Roman See.

As liberation theology grew in prominence throughout the Americas at the height of the Cold War, the Vatican and regional ecclesiastical bodies reacted strongly.

The Vatican accused the movement of fomenting bloody confrontations between communist inspired movements and an entrenched ruling class. It curiously failed to mention that the latter was backed by US military support.

Austin Cline97 encapsulated the ambivalence, if not disingenuousness of the Vatican in an article: “Catholic Liberation Theology in Latin America. Fighting Poverty with Marxism and Catholic Social Teachings.”

Pope John Paul 11 in particular expressed strong opposition to “political priests” who became more involved with achieving social justice than ministering to their flocks - a curious criticism, given how much support he provided political dissidents in Poland while

96 “Fidel and Religion” - Talks with Frei Bretto.
97 Regional director of the Council for Secular Humanism
the communists still ruled. Over time, though, his position softened somewhat, possibly because of the implosion of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of the communist threat.

If true, one can surmise that the Vatican adopted a deliberate ‘wait and see’ approach as the fires of socialism waged, only to be equally extinguished by a military backed by the US. Liberation theologians therefore were conscientious objectors, not to Christian lore, but the political indulgence by the Church in that region.

Liberation Theology was not a widespread phenomenon. In fact, on this movement, the following is noted:

Liberation theology emerged in the late 1960s in Latin America, where Catholics began reading the Gospel as a call to free people from oppression and to challenge political systems. Scholars embraced this new theology with fervor. 2) Pope Benedict XVI (as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger) became one of liberation theology’s staunchest critics in the 1980s as head of the Catholic Church’s Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith. He silenced theologians associated with such scriptural interpretations and appointed traditional bishops. Some say that Ratzinger objected to the independence of base communities, which were small groups formed to study the bible and relate to their own experience of oppression. 3) Others believe that Ratzinger and others, successfully stifled a movement that was already headed for extinction because it addressed specific historical ad economic situations that have been altered by global capitalism and other factors. Some say that it was weakened because it relied on a method of scriptural interpretation that has been over taken by new developments in biblical criticism. 4) Some scholars say that it has taken new life in feminist, Latino, black, and Asian theologies throughout the world. The emphasis, having shifted from the poor to those marginalized, by race, ethnicity or gender. The focus is less on supporting socialist revolution than on critiquing mainstream civil society.98

Clearly, the Church remained an institution of power that failed to propagate the seeds of communalism and humility. Religious images also served to reinforce the ascendency of all things white, and the servitude and supplication of blacks. The alleged acts of sacrilege that marked the ‘sit-ins’ in the downtown Cathedral during the 1970

98 www.religionlink.org
revolution in Trinidad was a violent shredding of a questionable, even spurious theology that collaborated with political and economic and other secular

The iconoclastic acts against the Church during that period were stark examples of a people stepping beyond the boundaries of convention to establish a new order.

**Liberation Theology as a Sub-cultural religion**

Liberation Theology is not characterized by tradition, rituals, distinct ethnicities, and a long history of oppression. It is a material approach to fighting poverty that uses the teachings and similitude of a historical Jesus. It lacks a unique ontological and eschatological system. It does not embrace pantheism, and Christian lore remains central to its doctrine. The following are overriding elements of liberation theology:

- A belief that society is structured in a manner designed to perpetually feed of the poverty stricken.
- That the cycle of poverty can only be broken through revolutionary action that may involve armed resistance
- That the dominant religious system is steeped in politics and is complicit in the oppression of the poor.
- That Jesus was a friend of the poor and is automatically supportive of any action to alleviate their suffering.

The Diocesan ruling against the proponents of Liberation Theology, predicated by the denunciation by the Vatican, left them vulnerable to attacks by government forces. Priests and nuns who supported the uprising of peasants in places like Guatemala and El Salvador were targeted by government forces.99

Liberation theology cannot be viewed as a purely socialist or Marxist doctrine. It remains a Christ centered movement although it has been adopted by many with no affiliation to Christianity.

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99 As recent as 2007, McIlhany released a statement censuring one of the pioneers of liberation theology, Reverend Jon Sobrino of Brazil, using the word, “erroneous” and “dangerous” to describe his works. These comments were made prior to the Pope’s first pilgrimage to Latin America.
The acerbic criticism of Liberation theology is not uncommon. William McAllhany, a vocal proponent of political conservatism views it as another form of subversion aimed at western democracy. In an essay entitled “Liberation Theology on the Move in the United States,” he writes:

Liberation Theology owes much of success to its allies among American clergy. Unable to withstand contemporary currents of power, these liberal religious leaders are swept up in the race to trade theology for Marxist ideology.

He views it more as an attempt to secularize the Gospel, and nothing more than an extension of the “God-is Dead” theology of the sixties. He later cautions:

These religious liberationists seek to undercut respect for American values and institutions. They ignore that America already possesses the best working theology of freedom and equality in the world. Liberation theologians look at America and see a land of violence and oppression, gross poverty and neglect, a land whose basic structure and beliefs are morally questionable. Perhaps it is time they recognized that the cancer is within themselves.”

In “Christian Revolution in Latin America: The Changing Face of Liberation Theology,” Ron Rhodes supports this argument in a more sober and intellectual style. He writes:

“Marxism has also exerted a profound influence on liberation theologians. This should not be taken to mean that they have espoused Marxism as a holistic plan of political action, for they have not. Their interest has been limited to using Marxist categories for social analysis.”

He further asserts:

The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith – the Vatican’s watchdog for doctrinal orthodoxy – issued two important statements on liberation. The instruction on Certain Aspects of the “Theology of Liberation” (1984) warned that is impossible to invoke Marxist principles and terminology without ultimately embracing Marxist methods and goals. Marxism should therefore be avoided altogether.

The author has published similar works, such as “Klandestine: The ACLU on Trial,” and “Tax-Exempt Foundations.” He is also credited with researching two documentaries: “No Place to Hide and The Subversion Factor.”
Rhodes recognizes that social transformation in Latin America is complex and involves an assemblage of religious philosophies, including that of Evangelicals. The latter he argues, promotes change through individual responsibility, and not necessarily through social reconfiguration.

Liberation Theology is an outgrowth of Marxian dialectics that appeals to a region steeped in religiosity and political activism.

Although it lacks history and tradition, and one may be tempted to exclude it as a distinct sub-cultural religion, its philosophy is multitudinous, making its way in every revolutionary movement. It is cross-cultural in appeal, and adaptable to many variant social causes. The “poor” alluded to in the scriptures is generic and is easily representative of any group that is socially and politically marginalized. Finally, like classical sub-cultural religions such as Orisha, its politics is shaped and nurtured by the regional forces.

Nevertheless, it has surfaced as a generic philosophy rooted in the main strains of Christology and Marxism. Though pertinent in any discussion of social reform in the Caribbean, it should not be viewed within the parameters of traditional values and practices, the focus of this paper.
We have been in the hands of people who have read books and look at the mess the Earth is in. When I say we have to read the wrinkles in our grandfathers' brows, it's to recover the wisdom that our grandfathers still have. (David Choquehuanca, Foreign Minister of Bolivia).

1) INITIATION, TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND TODAY'S SOCIETY

The initiation rites of traditional religions are complex. They are meant to officially connect the uninitiated to the world of matter and spirit in a meaningful way. Every piece of clothing, word uttered, prayer, color used, and music intoned, paraphernalia and chanting are aimed at empowering and emboldening. It is a political and spiritual ceremony rolled into one homogeneous unit.

A case in point is the initiation welcoming the aspirant to the world of the Orishas. Before this ritual is undertaken, the hougan or babalawo must first determine the patron or guardian of the initiate. This is an unbreakable connection that was forged at the time of birth. This will also dictate the nature of the ritual and the animal sacrifice that must be offered.

The day of initiation is filled with expectation, communal participation in food preparation, and the ceremony itself. The initiate is given a set of instructions that must prepare him/her physically and mentally for the event. The ceremony attracts many belonging to the faith, well wishers and the curious. For the Afro-Trinidadians, this is
also viewed as a purely cultural event where the best of African songs and drumming can be heard.

"Nurses" are on standby by to help in the process of mourning. This is the final stage of the process that involves seven days of fasting and seclusion. During that time the initiate “travels” through the planes, encounters spiritual forces, some inimical that he is able to combat by the mantra or secret word that is whispered before being laid on the ground.

This rite is believed to be wrought with spiritual difficulties if the initiate is not properly prepared or the hougan is spiritually inept.

Such a ritual can engender the following life long attributes: Patience, Thoughtfulness, Intrepidity, Independence, Personal Responsibility Courage and Valor.

Initiates gain spiritual gifts that are beneficial to themselves and community at large. The gift of healing is one such gift bestowed as a reward by the orisha for the personal sacrifice undertaken.

As a traditional religious practice, initiations represent a transition, a right of passage to a spiritually mature life; an enlightenment and connection to powers that is larger than self. It humbles and unites one to the community and the cosmos; to destiny.

Maureen B. Roberts\textsuperscript{101} writes:

Initiation transforms large quantities of narcissism to a graceful form of altruism. Consumer societies today have forgotten how important it is to assist youth in the process of shifting form narcissistic to a soulful person. In youth, narcissism is natural since you are likely to be focused on yourself, anxious about being accepted or loved. No matter what your age, the initiatory events from ancient stories allow a re-examination of childhood issues from a different perspective.

For most today the most important ritual experience of transformation is the marriage ceremony, there is an unavoidable initiation as well when the alchemy that begins with ceremony becomes the daily giving of oneself to the unity of marriage and welfare of children. However, the rite of passage from youth to adulthood has been one of the most neglected of rituals here during expectant times on the cusp of the 21st century. The lack

\textsuperscript{101} Roberts is an Australian psychotherapist known for her work in mental illness. She promotes treating the whole person without the use of psychotropic medication. Her approach acknowledges the spiritual dimensions and their importance to understanding and treating mental problems. This form of therapy is also referred to as “transpersonal心理学.”
of sustained efforts, point to a failure of institutions and the need for a new shared vision of what is the necessary role for the village in raising the child.\textsuperscript{102}

Initiations are most known for inviting the ‘gods’ to be companions in the world of matter. They are also known for ushering the young to the world of adulthood.

Professor Manu Ampin\textsuperscript{103} cites other scenarios, such as the “rite of birth.” He writes:

Nearly all African cultures hold that the infant has come from the spirit world with important information from that world, and is bringing unique talents and gifts to offer to the community. The infant, in fact, is believed to have been commissioned to come to the world and accomplish a particular project and often has a message to deliver. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the family and community to discover the infant’s unique mission through consultation with a diviner and to have rituals and birth chart. This is done to clearly determine the new community member’s mission in order to guide him/her through their life. The infant’s name is given after determination of the mission and it is a reflection of the infant’s personality or the life mission itself.\textsuperscript{104}

Of the rite of marriage, Professor Ampin dismisses the Western concept of beauty and definition of love, preferring to view this union as an inextricable aspect of the community that cannot be trivialized.

He goes on to identify the significance of the elder in African societies, the wisdom they impart and the degree of reverence they are accorded. The “Elder” he stresses is not an “older” person.

Finally, he elaborates on the \textit{rite of ancestorship}. He states:

One of the most important distinctions is the difference between an older person who dies and who is seen as nothing more than a “dead” person, and a respected elder who passes on and is revered as an honored “ancestor.

The dead relative dies without honor and is someone who is not remembered as a great person or someone who should be followed or emulated. On the other hand, a

\textsuperscript{102} “The Rites of Passage: Initiation for the 21st Century.” See www.carnival.com/initiation.
\textsuperscript{103} Ampin is a historian and researcher in African and African American History. He has taught at San Francisco State University and Morgan State University
\textsuperscript{104} African Studies: 5 Major African Rites. See www.manuampin.com/African initiation.htm
respected elder who passes on becomes a respected ancestor and is given the highest honor. The group of ancestors wields great influence and is often called upon in matters of trouble or uncertainty to influence a favorable outcome. Thus ancestors are respected elders who have passed away and who continue to serve as an extension of the family and community.

The point of fact is that traditional religions have devised a system of strengthening the individual, the family, the community, and addressing social problems such as rising teen age pregnancies, single parent families, and juvenile delinquency.

Professor Ampin states that the (black communities), are struggling to find solid and lasting solutions to long standing problems, resulting from centuries of slavery and colonialism. The solution to these deep-rooted problems is to learn and apply the fundamental philosophies and principles that achieve created harmonious traditional African societies. This “leave it to chance” approach to adulthood development is the root of most teenage and youth “adult” confusion, chaos and uncertainty.”

2) MEDICINE - AN UNDERDEVELOPED RESOURCE OF TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS

In the Caribbean, some 60% of calls made to the hougan, mambo (orisha priestess), and pujaree are health related. The role of traditional healing amid the influx and marketing of pharmaceuticals has not been displaced. In an interview conducted with Dawn Stewart of The Community College of Philadelphia (CCP), the importance of bush medicine in the treatment of the AIDS virus was highlighted.105

Poverty and inaccessibility to healthcare facilities have prompted many to rely on the village medical traditionalist. On the other hand, many have travelled to the rural areas to locate alternative medical treatment when every other option has been exhausted. In other words, traditional healing has and will always play a role in the quest of well being. However, the value of this form of medical practice, so inextricably

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105 “Fighting Aids,” the Trinidad and Tobago Guardian, April 16, 2008 (Features Section). Mrs. Dawn Stewart advocated that if victims choose traditional medicine at any point in their treatment they must ensure that the practitioner is experienced and qualified.
bound to traditional religions in the Caribbean have not been fully utilized, and may still be at the receiving end of misplaced ridicule.

Traditional healing and the use of herbs, plants, unknown potions and even incantations to cure illnesses are worldwide practices. In rural Missouri for example, the use of traditional forms of medicine is ubiquitous.

Bonnie Thomas-Stevenson (1991) compares Haitian Folk medicine with that found in the Ozarks. In “Haiti: Ozarkian and Haitian Herbal Medicine,” she explores the use of herbs and reproductive problems and what he calls “female problems.” She also examines the use of a variety of herbs and plants in both areas that are used to treat infection in the liver and blood. Treatments for the nervous system are also detailed. Of the transference of traditional medicine to the Caribbean with the advent of slavery, Thomas-Stevenson acknowledges the influence of European medicine at that time:

The European slave owners were not without their healing knowledge too. Therefore medical syncretism of sorts must have occurred. Knowledge, like slaves, was traded back and forth from slave to owner, Haiti to America. Throw in the extra cultural factor of what the American Indians knew and imparted, and what emerges is a wide body of knowledge that serves a very useful, if not vital function. And it is precisely that useful function and the needs it fulfills that keep herbal healing alive and well in both Haiti and the Ozarks.

While Thomas-Stevenson’s work deals with medical prescriptions and their effectiveness, this chapter will explore ways that Governments in the Caribbean can best utilize the healing resources that traditionalists offer.

As mentioned earlier the “bush doctor” is maligned and derided, and is only sought when modern medicine is rendered futile. In some circles, this art is primitive and has not withstood the rigors of scientific study. “Miraculous” healings are attributed to the power of faith and positive thinking. Many countries have availed themselves of this knowledge and have constructed a health care system that is dynamic and adaptable to contemporary demands. The Caribbean thus far has failed to harness the human and natural resource in its very midst.

In the journal, The Futuristic, Mark Plotkin details the significance of tropical plants in contemporary medicine:
We now know that synthetics are not the only answers to our medical needs. European pharmaceutical firms are showing renewed interest in the potential of the tropical flora, and there is heightened awareness in the United States, as well. The National Cancer Institute recently awarded more than $2.5 million in contracts to the New York Botanical Garden, the Missouri Botanical Garden, and the University of Illinois to collect and test tropical-plant species for antitumor activity. With the moral and financial support of the U.S. medical community, the conservation movement can help protect and utilize tropical species for human welfare. We must also consider the importance of medicinal plants in the developing countries themselves. The World Health Organization has estimated that 80% of the people in the world rely on traditional medicine for primary healthcare needs. In many cases, developing countries simply cannot afford to spend millions of dollars on imported medicines that they could produce or extract from tropical-forest plants.  

Johnston (2004) has written extensively on the burgeoning of traditional medical care, or alternative medicine:

Over the past decades, alternative medical therapies have played an increasingly prominent role in American health care. In the nation’s grocery stores, homeopathic treatments and over-the-counter herbal remedies crowd aisles that were once largely devoted to analgesics, sore throat lozenges, and fruit-flavored, animal-shaped children’s vitamins. Eager to fill their beds and their coffers, hospitals advertise—even celebrate—the inclusion of nontraditional medical practices. Medical schools, too, embrace this development with curricular reforms aimed at teaching prospective physicians about alternative forms of healing. With attention turning toward a range of mind-body and holistic treatments, health care in the United States seems more full of variety than has been the case since the establishment of modern medical authority in the early 1900s. Indeed, the emergence in the medical lexicon of a well-recognized acronym, CAM (for “complementary and alternative medicine”), is suggestive of how these alternatives are becoming a visible, and increasingly significant, current within the medical mainstream.  


At the 2009 “Indian Arrival Day” commemoration interview at the Trinidad Consulate in New York, Pundit Rakesh Maharaj stated that the Vedas provided humankind with all the knowledge needed for health and disease-free living. He recalled how this knowledge was orally passed down from one generation to the next before it was inscribed in the sacred books. The shift from traditional to western medicine was part of gravitation to a western lifestyle. He stated:

The principles of the Vedas are timeless. It instructs man on a clean and healthy lifestyle, not only internally but also mentally. If these guidelines are followed, common health issues such as obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure can be prevented. But our people, even in the Indian communities in Trinidad have lost touch with their roots…they have lost faith in their own.

Pundit Maharaj then recalled the treasured art of the Indian herbalist who was readily sought by the villagers. Like others, he cautioned that the only one who is trained in the herbal art should be practice.

In Suriname, herbal medicine is becoming an integral part of contemporary medicine. An interview with Asha Burkhardt-Ramesar revealed how important traditional medicine has become in the eyes of the government. It is heavily promoted by the Ministry of Health and is attracting a stream of foreigners who are seeking alternative forms of medicine.

This movement or reassertion of traditional forms of healing was also expressed by Professor Miguel Huanca, an Aymaran, and professor at the University of Chicago.

In a telephone exchange on Saturday July 4, 2009, he stated, “the value of the curandero (herbalist, healer) is now being sought in the big cities.” And as an endorsement of preventative medicine, he proudly revealed that he was one of eight siblings in Bolivia, none of whom required the help of western medicine. “With the herbs we were given, we never got sick, and if we did, the curanderor or galliris (special group of herbal healers) were always there.”

108 Interview covered a wide range of topics related to the relevance of the indigenous teachings to the wider Surinamese society. The interview was conducted at the premises of the Diplomatic Mission of the Republic of Suriname to the UN.
3) PROTECTING INDIGENOUS TEACHINGS AND PRACTICES

This raises the issue of “indigenous knowledge” and intellectual property. Western scientists have been accused of “increasingly turning into the keepers of indigenous knowledge, realizing that their age old systems have preserved ecological balance or that their medicines might have tremendous potential for the development of modern drugs. This has increased distrust and suspicion in some quarters and rightly so, for pharmaceutics companies have demonstrated that they have no respect for the cultural and intellectual property of others, but cheerfully engage in acts of bio-piracy, stealing biological material as well as knowledge to take out patents that will benefit only themselves.”

Here it is essential that governments of the Caribbean region institute legislation that regulates partnerships and agreements between foreign pharmaceuticals companies and locals.

In “Complementary and Modern Medicine: Strange Bedfellows?” Satis Shroff studies the role that traditional medicine plays in the overall health and well being in Nepal. He writes:

The traditional healers of Nepal are not only versed in the nature of illness caused by demons, spirits, male and female witches, Gods and Goddesses, but also diseases which are in conformity with epidemiological studies and results.

After identifying a number of ailments treated by the shaman, the writer adds:

109 On this controversial area, Professor Daniel Gervais of the University of Ottawa states: “One must first build and then cross a cultural bridge to explain current forms of intellectual property to holders of traditional knowledge. It allows traditional knowledge holders to reap available benefits from extant forms of protection, including collective and certification marks, and where possible copyright protection. Tort and contract law may also offer some useful remedies. Second, one needs to reexamine the current forms of intellectual property. This is an indispensable first step before any new or sui generis form of protection is enshrined into a new international instrument. Then, if current intellectual property norms are found to be inappropriate, one may need to consider new avenues to explore how to better protect traditional knowledge holders within the parameters of the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property (TRIPS) agreement, bearing in mind that traditional knowledge and biodiversity are specifically mentioned in the Doha Ministerial Declaration. (Traditional Knowledge and Intellectual Property: A TRIPS-Compatible Approach.” Mich. St. L.R. Spring, 2005)

110 See www.sacredearth.com/ethnobotany/i.k.php
The shaman has become innovative in Nepal and makes himself or herself socially useful by ritualizing and selling anti-baby pills for a small financial commission. This way, he or she helps family planning, which is supported by the government. Most notable is the following: The Nepalese government has raised the status of the shaman by bestowing an official title upon him: “Practitioner of Traditional Medicine” with the condition that he or she takes part in medical and hygiene courses.\(^\text{111}\)

Shroff then offers an interesting sociological perspective on the role of the traditional healer.

The position of the shaman in the hamlets of Nepal is getting a certain amount of recognition and importance, because he or she gathers new experiences and acquires modern methods of healing and in this way, the shaman uses a combination of traditional and modern medicine…..From a sociological point of view, magico-religious healing plays a central and positive role……..In this way it possible to control one’s own environment and neighborhood and influence it.

The writer then adds:

The traditional healer not only cures with modern pharmaceuticals, but he or she imparts a cultural note to the therapy by blessing the medicine in a ritual through the recitation of prayers and mantras. Traditional medicine has come to stay. It was there all the time in different continents, and is an expression of care, humane treatment, softness (Sanftmedizin), dignity, respect and empathy for the ill person. These are values that have dwindled in modern medicine’s pursuit to rationalism.\(^\text{112}\)

In the United States, the terms “integrative” or “complementary” medicine connote the inclusion of traditional healing methods into a particular treatment modality. In the newsletter, “Place of Wellness,”\(^\text{113}\) a number of traditional healing methods are promoted. Of the Integrative Medicine Program it states:

We are studying the bio-behavioral effects of mind/body-based intervention such as stress management including Indian based yoga, Tibetan based yoga, Qigong, meditation, meditation, sound, and color therapy.

\(^\text{111}\) The shaman is sometimes defined by the efficacy of his healing. Disciplines such as psychiatry and psychotherapy are using “transpersonal” methods of healing, for example, breathing techniques, meditation, sound, and color therapy.

\(^\text{112}\) For a review of Satishroff’s article, see :http://www.boloji.com/health/articles/01059.htm

\(^\text{113}\) March/April 2009. Published by the University of Texas, MD Anderson Cancer Treatment, in Houston.
music therapy, expressive writing and other behavioral approaches; Examining the anti-cancer potential of natural animal or plant compounds such as dietary supplements, vitamins and herbal remedies; using acupuncture to treat some common cancer treatment related side effects, including pain, xerostomia, nausea, and others.

As the US and Europe embark on an ambitious program of integrating traditional medicine into a more holistic approach in the treatment of illnesses, the Caribbean region must recognize and take advantage of its incredible natural and human resource in this area.

4) TRADITIONAL HEALING AND THE HEALTH SYSTEM

Unlike Nepal and parts of Europe, the herbalist or “bush doctor” in the Caribbean is still waging a battle against negative publicity and perceptions that originated during colonialism. Chinese medicine is highly respected in the western world and so too are other spiritual practices that are used in conjunction with orthodox (modern) medicine to fight illness.

In “Alternative Medicine,” Pat Zukeran writes:

Alternative medicine has blazed its way into the mainstream of American culture while also making significant gains in the medical community. Nearly half of all US adults now participate in some kind of alternative therapy. A recent study showed that Americans spend almost $30 billion a year on alternative treatments.

He also argues that, “the sudden rise of alternative medicine can be attributed to a growing dissatisfaction with conventional medical practices,” and continues “that human beings are spiritual, social and emotional creatures as well, and that healing improvers when all these factors are considered in treatment.”

He (Zukeran), then cites the renowned Deepak Chopra114 who stated that his therapies can take the patient “to a place where the rules of everyday existence do not apply……where we can become pioneers in a land where youthful vigor, renewal, creativity, joy, fulfillment, and timelessness are the common experience of everyday life.

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where old age, senility, infirmity, and death do not exists and are not even entertained as a philosophy.”

Dr. Chopra’s comments may be viewed as pure hyperbole by positivists and skeptics, but such views are within the purview of the present discourse. Unfortunately, the African or traditional herbalist is still associated with some form of witchcraft, spirit possession and demonology.

The mystique of the traditional healer in Trinidad is covered by writer Vincent Goldberg who clearly misses the mark in his attempt to understand the island’s culture, traditional healing, and mental illness. Goldberg explores the Orisha religion and Spiritual Baptist movement and how they respond to mental illness. To this writer, Trinidad, a “modern” society blurs the definition of mental illness and spirit possession, and seems trapped in a time warp of modernity and traditionalism. He argues:

This idea (possession) is carried over into popular perceptions of madness and the equation of madness with certain forms of religious worship. My encounter here in Trinidad has highlighted the reticence among some in this society to accept such non-scientific ways of thinking as part of a “modern” society such as Trinidad and Tobago. A greater sense of recognition and respect for such beliefs when encountered and a greater recognition of the underlying meaning and value attached to such beliefs can only come through greater cooperation and understanding among psychiatrists, religious leaders, educators and the population they serve.

The failure of Goldberg to identify the possible reason for a Trinidad psychiatrist to vigorously repudiate the role of “spirits” in mental illness suggests that he is on unfamiliar territory. After relating a story of chicanery involving an “obeahman,” he

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115 See www.inplainsite.org. Section 128: Alternative Medicine
116 The paper “Spirits, Demons and Mental Illness in Trinidad and Tobago,” was written in relation to a presentation on mental illness at Mt. Hope Hospital Trinidad, June 2000.
117 Goldberg reported the following: “All the daily newspapers carried a story of a man, allegedly to be an Orisha high priest who persuaded a woman to believe she was in dire need of spiritual healing. He told her that, spiritually, he saw a veil around her waist and that if he did not remove it she would be paralyzed. After withdrawing some $620TT, the priest took her to his home where he proceeded to draw a cross on the woman’s back and abdomen and bless her with water from calabash. The woman became suspicious, however when she was ordered to remove her clothes so that the priest could give her a spiritual bath. She quickly fled and reported the matter to the police.”

Here, the writer fails to identify such as a duplicitous act, not peculiar solely to traditional religions in the Caribbean.
quickly refers to the then acting Chief of Staff of St. Ann’s Hospital who stated that claims of supernatural healing has taken the country back to the 15th century:

Demons are mental obsessions developed through patterns. Religion tends to attract the mentally unstable. And the whole question of mental instability is really a psychological problem.

While such statements may be genuine and based on a psychiatrist’s own version of empiricism, one cannot dismiss the fact that in the Caribbean the dissociation of science, from tradition, is a distinguishing mark of modernity and enlightenment. In other words, to be dismissive of traditional beliefs is emblematic of one’s “civilized” standing.

Ironically, while many mental health practitioners in the Caribbean slight the knowledge of the obeahman, his stock is rising in other parts of the world. While detractors\textsuperscript{118} coin terms such as “backward” to describe Caribbean traditional religions, western psychiatry is slowly embracing the phenomenon of “spirits” in its quest to combat mental health disorders.

5) TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY

The Adoption of Traditional Religious Principles in Health Care

Western psychologists and psychiatrist can borrow, adopt, and adapt traditional beliefs in their practice without being prejudged as Voodoo sympathizers and practitioners.

\textsuperscript{118} Detractors are mostly black or colored and are victims of a colonial history that, in addition to its economic and social exploitation foster deep psychological disorders. In Franz Fanon’s “Contribution to Psychiatry: The Psychology of Racism and Colonialism” (Journal of the National Medical Association, Vol. 71, No. 10, 1979, \textit{Black Skin White Mask}, one of his seminal works is reviewed. “Black Skin” revolved around two central themes: (1) the fact of blackness and the education to whiteness as expressed in language and the relationship between black and whites in the Caribbean and France, and (2) the analysis of the above phenomenon utilizing a psychoanalytical frame of reference and a view of racism equating it to pro-white, anti-black paranoia. Fanon began with language as a tool of assimilation or a barrier to entrance into the majority culture. “In Wretched of the Earth,” Fanon is said to explore the rage of the oppressed which is retroflexed or turn against self and each other.
Transpersonal Psychology, its promotion of altered states of consciousness, self-healing through knowledge, and its resistance to pharmacological treatments should be welcomed by healthcare practitioners in the Caribbean.

Of Transpersonal psychology, Dr. John Davis\(^\text{119}\) states:

It stands at the interface of psychology and spiritual experience. It is the field of psychology which integrates psychological concepts, theories and methods with subject matter and practices of the spiritual disciplines. Its interests include spiritual experiences, mystical states of consciousness, mindfulness and meditative practices, shamanic states, ritual, the overlap of spiritual experiences and disturbed states such as psychosis and depression, and the transpersonal dimensions of relationships, service, encounters with the natural world, and many topics.

He emphasizes the inclusiveness of the practice, and identifies indigenous traditions, along with mental health and suffering as some of the myriad of areas that are studied by the transpersonal psychologist.\(^\text{120}\)

### 6) LEADERSHIP

The Caribbean region has been criticized for not attracting effective leaders at a national level. Guyanese journalist, Enrico Wolford in an April 23, 2009 telephone interview, defines the political leaders of the region as infected with the “Nixon Syndrome,” which he describes as the obsession with self image, self promotion, narcissism and intoxication with power at the expense of people and country.

This view should be compared with the view expressed by John Ayotunde Isola Bewaji who of African and Caribbean leaders, writes:

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\(^{119}\) Dr. Davis is a professor in the Department of Psychology at the Metropolitan State College of Denver. He has also taught at Naropa Institute and is a certified teacher at A.H. Aimass’ Diamong Approach which integrates mysticism into the field of psychology.

\(^{120}\) The exploration of Caribbean religious mythology and spiritual expression is still not embraced by the region’s Institutes of Higher learning, nor is funding for research pursued by the Government. Meanwhile, Universities in the United States and the United Kingdom offer graduate degrees in Transpersonal psychology, and Consciousness and Integrative Studies toward training for the Mental Health field. These programs are offered at San Diego University for Integrative Studies, Pacifica Graduate Institute, The Graduate School of Humanistic Psychology, Naropa Institute, and the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. The Association for Transpersonal Psychology has been formed to standardize training.
Apart from their alienation from their indigenous communities, there were other problems with inheritors of leadership at independence. They were, in many cases a) unable to understand the concept of public life and public property b) unable to separate their private incomes from public funds, seeing opportunities to embezzle public funds with impunity c) unable to recognize the difference between tactics and stratagems d) unable to see that leadership is a call to service, hence operating with the same mentality of alienation and separatism of the “educated elite,” so that having attained public positions means being even more “special” and “alien,” and e) unable to understand that their countries are part of a big world in which it is survival of the fittest. Consequently they are not prepared for the task of leadership.”

He rails against African and Caribbean political leadership for fomenting a system of “Anansism,” “Ginnalship,” or “Bandolooism,” all term in Jamaican vernacular denoting corruption, nepotism, and malfeasance.

In the same article the author stokes the imagination of the reader with a vividly poignant scenario of leaders who have pilfered billions before officials of the IMF and other monetary organizations, begging for a fraction of their heist to “fix” their countries.

Mr. Bewajii explains this pernicious leadership flaw as having its roots in the “selection process.” A leader according to the author must be groomed beyond the confines of what he calls the “white schooling.”

This is where he introduces the importance of cultural and traditional values in the molding the ideal leader:

Competence in some profession or acquisition of skills or expertise is no indication of capacity to lead. Hence the better we conceive of leadership holistically as requiring wisdom. The leader would have attained this through proper upbringing, attendance of the school of life, knowledge of history and culture of his/her society, an awareness of international relations and forces of history, familiarity with the psychology and pathology of suffering or being downtrodden in an inclement international environment, capable of analysis of the sociology of poverty, the metaphysic, economics and politics of dependency and the historical interaction of races and ethnicities in the global village.

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122 Ibid.
The traditional religious leader is known for overall knowledge and competence in both secular and religious matters. He or she is community advisor, judicial counselor, legal scholar and spiritual counsel. The leader has incredible sway over all matters, is revered, and enjoys the highest status in the social totem pole. The ascendency to such an exalted position entails the acquisition of “holistic” knowledge or wisdom. The aspirant is thoroughly prepared not necessarily through the written word, but rather by oral tradition, and a series of tests that may be physically and mentally challenging. This ensures a candidate who is able to identify with every aspect of the human experience. In deed, the leader is believed to be elected or handpicked by the gods.

In every corner of the globe where the traditions of the indigenous peoples are kept alive, the characteristics and importance of leadership are similar. We have seen the growing integration of the Aymara and Quechua tribal leaders in Bolivian politics. Venezuela too has extended land rights and has encouraged representation in its Assembly. Other Latin American countries have adopted like measures. In Micronesia, tribal leaders are integrated within the overall governmental structure. In *Traditional Leaders and Their Leadership Role in Micronesia Today*, Liz Rechebei writes:

Perhaps a reconstruction of traditional leadership, while keeping a hands-off approach on the government functions of elected officials, may help revitalize traditional leadership. The dual authority system between traditional leadership and modern politics that exists today needs to be recognized formally. The specific roles to be assigned to traditional leaders at different levels (village, national etc.) should be carefully thought out and fully agreed by both systems from the start.

The academic and intellectual leader is not necessarily a wise leader. The foresight, empathy, selflessness and creativity are best explained in the following definition:

Good leaders are wise leaders. They use their creative, analytical and emotional/social/practical skills for a common good. They look out not only for their preferred group of stakeholders, or the stakeholders most like themselves, but for all stakeholders. They balance their own interests, other people’s interests and institutional interests, and they think for the long-term as well as the short-term.

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123 Discussion Forum, MicSem Forum Discussion Topic #1 May to August 1999.
While many writers have explored and promoted the integration of traditional leaders into mainstream politics, research on how best mainstream politicians can learn from their counterparts has only been marginally explored.

Leadership should be redefined to include its essential qualities - service, epistemological understanding of life’s purpose, humanism, equality and justice. The criterion of selecting a wise leader, taken from the handbook of traditional cultures will help sift the charlatan from the votary; the self serving individual from the selfless; and the arrogant from the humble servant.

7) URBAN PROBLEM: THE TRADITIONAL RESPONSE

The spiraling crime rate in countries such as Trinidad and Venezuela has been attributed to street gangs, drugs and illegal weapons. On a website dedicated solely to crime in Trinidad, one reads:

Trinidad and Tobago used to be a peaceful place where you could act without fear of the criminal element in society. Now, with murders, kidnappings, rape and other heinous crimes becoming so common place, Trinidad and Tobago has grown to become a “gangster paradise.” No matter where you go, whether it is business, liming with friends or visiting relatives, the topic of conversation is about the frightening level of crime activity within the country.125

In Venezuela it was reported in 2006 that crime had exploded, and according to human rights and a UNESCO study, the South American nation had surpassed Brazil in gun related deaths and was considered the most violent country in Latin America.126

If sociologists and educators in the region have determined that gang activity is partly responsible for the high crime rate, then tackling this problem from its embryonic stage is necessary. We have already explored the importance of religious beliefs in the cultural fabric of its people. Juvenile crime suggests a severance of a

particular value around which people coalesce. The dismantling of street gangs is an onerous task demanding the input of multiple agencies, including law enforcement and social services. The role of the community, the elders, and traditional laws and practices, where they exist, have not been explored.

The role of traditional religious leaders in diffusing individual and social conflicts is explored in “The Concepts of Social Justice in African Traditional Religion,” by Alyward Shorter:

Guilt was deemed to be collective and the obligation to punish or take revenge was strictly collectible. Most of these societies evolved a clan of priest-chiefs or prophets who exercised important reconciliatory functions between warring clans ad groups. The priest-chief exercised no permanent office and had no administrative powers, He was summoned ad hoc to deal with a given situation and to give expression to the will of disputing social groups to bury their differences….It appears therefore, that in these types of society decision-making took place ad hoc and at a reasonably low social level. However there were recognized norms of behavior to which people were expected to conform and to which appeal was made when conflict arose.127

As Gang violence and drugs continue to plague the youth of the Caribbean, many recoil at the alarming murder rate in islands such as Trinidad and Jamaica - mindful that in the past, such social problems were unfathomable. A sociological approach to understanding crime should center on the fractured family structure and the disconnectedness of the youth to established institutions. Dysfunctional institutions, coupled with the pervasiveness of greed and unchecked consumerism combine for a crime ridden scenario.

Alongside this commonly cited causation is a more esoteric response offered by leaders of the region’s traditional religions. According to Eintou Springer, poet laureate and authority on African traditional religions in the Caribbean, problems besetting our youth may originate from a source that cannot be empirically understood. In a July 12, 2009 interview, Dr Springer expressing incredulity at the inhumane and sensitive acts of violence committed by our youth, stated:

127 See http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/atr-socjustice.htm
Many of our people wander the earth after the Maafa, unburied or buried without proper rituals or in shallow graves. I firmly believe that we need to use rituals of the belief system to put these souls to rest as one way of achieving peace in our communities. Who knows how many of our troubled children are these tortured dead, or undead?

This approach to problem solving is holistic and defines the traditional approach. It examines the nature of being and the natural laws that govern the universe and human behavior. Whether offered by the elders of the Quechua, Hindu, or Orisha faiths, there is uniformity in their belief system – society cannot be rehabilitated without the injection, application and adherence to spiritual laws.

Like Eintou Springer, Pundit Rakesh Maharaj views this social problem from a purely spiritual perspective. He details the composition of man and his warped search for happiness through external acquisitions:

Man will do anything to better his existence in the world – from illegal to the illegal. Whether it is education, marriage, or involvement in illicit practices the aim is to achieve some form of comfort or happiness. But according to Hindu philosophy, this search for gratification through these means will only bring temporary happiness. Our traditions teach us that Satchitananda, or truth and existential bliss exists within us all - everything. Essentially man is unknowingly chasing God.

Pundit Maharaj believes that the inculcation of traditional values is the panacea for social ills. He concedes that change the behavior of our youth poses an uphill battle, but if we revert to our ancestral teachings, a positive social transformation is imminent.

Violence is not only a physical act. According to our holy books, non violence can only be realized when our thoughts are purified and purification is a process that is accomplished through meditation, and inspirational or scriptural reading.

The relevance of the community or the village in meeting the challenging posed by this social problem is expressed by the authors of “Reducing and Protecting Our Youth,”

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128 Swahili term denoting “calamity,” or 400 year old Holocaust that Africans experienced from the time of capture on the continent to enslavement and eventual manumission in the Americas. It is also used in respect to post slavery colonization that was characterized by an equally oppressive system that robbed millions of their heritage, dignity and lives. “Maafa” can be studied as a branch of African history that focuses on the impact of slavery on the continent, and the Americas.

129 Telephone interview conducted on September 21, 2009
“The community must be mobilized to include those with the resources—key leaders of political, economic, religious, educational, and juvenile justice and law enforcement agencies. Further, it must include the doers in the community; those that know their community at the grassroots level and know how to implement programs effectively.\textsuperscript{130}

In respect to get tough-on-crime policies that oftentimes lead to heavy handed police tactics, there is reason to suspect that community involvement would lessen the occurrence of human rights abuses and encourage reform in policing practices.\textsuperscript{131}

\textbf{8) THE TRADITIONS AND THE BOTTOM-UP APPROACH TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT}

\textbf{Micro-finance and Environmental Sustenance}

Traditional religions are renowned for its purposeful approach to guarding and preserving the properties of the environment. The recognition and appeasement of ‘spirits’ governing the cosmos and the earth are expressed through rituals and prayer. Sounding very much like the Quechua leaders of Bolivia, a press release promoting the formation of a new African Muslim Environmental Network (AMEN), firstly stressed the connection and responsibility of humankind to the environment. It read:

The Quran says that humanity’s role is to be Khalifa – the vice regent on earth for God. Our role is to protect all life and to use it thoughtfully and carefully so that on the Day of Judgment we can report back to God that we have been true and faithful Khalifas.\textsuperscript{132}

From the “traditional” perspective, the sustenance of man, and the preservation and reverential role of the environment in this process is unmistakable.

The failure of the Eastern and Western political and economic doctrines in the Caribbean can be attributed to their inapplicability to the unique features of the region.


\textsuperscript{132} Taken from “The Alliance of Religions and Conservation.” See \url{http://tyo.ca/islambank.community/print.php?sid=2848} Accessed 7/9/09
With their culture reduced to a form of pastime and religious escapism, Caribbean peoples were unmindful of the practicability of their traditions – for example, the value of micro-financing popularized by Dr. Muhammed Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006.

International relief and development organization Oxfam America referred to Dr. Yunus as “a global champion for the micro-finance movement.” Oxfam’s president, Raymond Offenheiser added:

While there are many notable micro-finance leaders who have contributed to the building of the movement, none have given more to building its credibility and acceptance on a global scale than he.133

Grameen Bank is known for its prodigious strategies on economic empowerment among the poor.

GB has reversed conventional banking practice by removing the need for collateral and created a banking system based on mutual trust, accountability, participation and creativity. Credit is a cost effective weapon to fight poverty and it serves as a catalyst in the overall development of socio-economic conditions of the poor who have been kept outside the banking orbit on the ground that they are poor and hence not bankable. Professor Muhammed Yunus reasoned that if financial resources can be made available to the poor on terms and conditions that are appropriate and reasonable, “these millions of small people with their millions of small pursuits can add up to create the biggest development wonder.”134

One can only speculate on the extent to which Mr. Yunus’ religious philosophy influenced this ingenious undertaking. Notably, Islam shares the concept of communal economics with traditional religions. For example in February 2005, The Alliance of Religions and Conservation convened in Mombasa, Kenya to discuss micro-financing


134 www.grameen-info.org:
projects and the revival of traditional fishing practices. Financing of these projects were based on one of the pillars of the Islamic faith – Zakat or Charity.135

Micro-financing in Nigeria is also becoming part of mainstream banking. It is interesting that its advocates are trumpeting the word ‘Islamic’ to differentiate this particular mode from micro-financing of the past.

Malam Ahmad Dogara of the Association of Oasis Associates states:

While conventional microfinance institutions (MFIs) were always criticized for charging exorbitant interest rates and fees, Islamic microfinance could arguably help current the shortcomings, since it focuses on achieving social justice, disallows exploitation, and battle poverty as well.”136

Without getting too muddled in semantics and terms, it is evident that micro-financing is a communally focused economic policy, rooted in traditional religious expression.

A similar economic strategy that has existed in the British Caribbean islands for centuries is ‘Sou-Sou.’ - an African influenced mode of savings that grew out of the mistrust of banks by former slaves and their descendents. It is still practiced among Caribbean peoples in the Diaspora, especially among immigrants in New York, many of whom are undocumented. Anticipating difficulty in opening bank accounts, and more so protecting their status, the Sou Sou offers immigrants a myriad of financial solutions.

In “Understanding Sou Sou in Today’s World,” Ian T. Alleyne, writing for Caribbean 360.com states:

There are grave misconceptions about traditional and informal means of savings known as Sou-Sou. Sou Sou originated long before the present day financial markets and the phenomenon of inflation. To examine it purely in the context of today’s financial

135 One of the most important principles of Islam is that all things belong to God, and that wealth is therefore held by human beings in trust. The word Zakat means both ‘purification’ and ‘growth.’ Possessions are said to be purified by setting aside a proportion for those in need, and like pruning of plants, the cutting back balances, and encourages new growth. Zakat is the amount of money that every adult, mentally stable, free, and financially able Muslim, male or female, has to give in support of specific categories of people. (Taken from http://www.islamecity.com/mosque/Zakat/. Accessed 7/10/09

institutions is therefore ill advised. A broadminded approach is required to understand the importance of what has become an informal institution in our modern world. Sou Sou serves two main purposes: Firstly, to make savings a discipline, and secondly, to match expenses with cash resources. In the first instance, persons are more committed to monthly financial contribution if they know they have an obligation. The possibility of losing face is an even stronger obligation.\textsuperscript{137}

Depending on the Sou Sou, a member is asked to make weekly or monthly contribution. Each week or month, a member is given the sum of the collected monies (called a hand). This process is continued until every member is paid. Alleyne states:

A Sou Sou has two sides: a front end and a back-end. A hand received early (front-end) has the benefit of boosting investment gains\textsuperscript{138}. A hand received late (back-end) is like putting money under the mattress.

Two points should be noted here – 1) Discipline it instills in the working class person. 2) The spirit of conformity that embodies communalism. These are the attributes that minimize selfishness, greed and individualism, all of which have been used to describe the excesses and duplicity of financial practices today.

In fact, during the throes of the global financial meltdown in early 2009, many pondered on the safety and usefulness of banking institutions.

While one can rightly argue that Sou Sou does not meet every long term financial need, such as outpacing inflation or securing a retirement plan, it strengthens the community while allowing the individual realize personal goals. The qualitative benefits of this traditional practice are undeniable and are underscored by its transnational survival as its members strive for social and economic equanimity.


\textsuperscript{138} Alleyne writes: “An early hand can be invested to earn a higher interest amount. Let’s say a person contributes $1,000 to a Sou Sou over 12 months. He receives $12,000 in the first month and invests the lump sum payment at 6% interest rate over the remaining 11 months. At the end of the year he will receive $12,660 (principal plus interest of &660).
9) THE TRADITIONS: A SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Every authority on traditional religion interviewed, used mythologies to explain the purpose of life, and the responsibility of the individual to live in accordance with spiritual decrees and laws. Social ills are believed to be the direct result of man’s ignorance, disbelief, or flagrant disregard for these laws. Dr. Biodun J. Ogundayo (2008) discusses destiny, choices, and personal responsibility his book “Negotiating Evil and Wickedness in Yoruba Religion: Character, Ritual, and Personal Responsibility.”

The author traces the origin and journey of the soul within the context of Yoruba cosmology, and concludes that the choices individuals make will affect self, group, nation, or the world as they are part of a broader metaphysical plan of which many are oblivious. This concept is not unique to this African culture. Hinduism, Islam and Christianity share similar philosophies. For traditional religions, this detailed teaching that survives today mainly through oral tradition, has become part of daily rituals. And it is this daily guidance and reminder, that cultural activists are counting on to transform societies bedeviled with social and moral decadence.

Beyond science, matter, and cosmology, traditional religions have always provided a body of laws that govern human behavior in relation to man and his environment. The socio-economic and psychological approach of the traditions has little to do with western philosophies.

Again, an esoteric approach is taken. Inspiration is the cornerstone of industry and economic success. Economic innovations and even inventions are derived from the mind that is still, connected with the Cosmos ….inspired. The words of Pundit and Hindu community leader Rakesh Maharaj seems lifted from Sura Al Muzzammil of the Muslim

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130 Dr. Ogundayo is an Associate Professor of Comparative Literature, Communication and the Arts Division, University of Pittsburg. This paper was presented at the Humanities Conference at Fatih University, Istanbul, Turkey, 15-18 July 2008.
Holy Book – the Quran: *Verily, the rising by night (for praying) is very hard and most potent and good for governing (the soul) and most suitable for inspiration.*

Compare this with the Pundit Maharaj’s words:

Prosperity in a society is only possible when there is inspiration. Look, scientific discoveries all came from moments of inspiration. Inspiration is the key to the business person who thinks of ways to improve his output through invention. This is only possible when the mind is at peace…quiet. In Hinduism, we call this a state of *dhyan*.

The teachings of traditional religions are steeped in the concept of inspiration coupled with choice and responsibility. The ultimate beneficiary though is the community, the society.

Eintou Springer stated: It is important to refer to the Orishas and what they signify. For example Eshu is the embodiment of the whole question of choice and consequently taking responsibility for one’s actions.” She continued: “Every important activity must be initiated with prayer and the seeking of God’s guidance. Ochosi, the concept of putting attention and focus on making our goals materialize. Then there is Ogun, who also represents reverence for work.”

When I spoke to Asha Burkhardt-Remesar, Deputy Permanent Representative of Suriname to the UN, she faulted the spirit of individualism promoted by the West. A Hindu, who is familiar also with the Amerindian (indigenous) communities of this former Dutch colony, she expounded on a teaching of the Vedas which exhorted hard work as an end in itself. She stated:

Ultimately in the traditional way of life, there are only collective achievements and collective products and ownership. When this bond is broken social problems like crime and everything that scare us today occur.

10) **THE SPIRIT OF VOLUNTEERING: HALL MARK OF “THE TRADITIONS”**

The teachings and practices of traditional religions are reemerging – a testament to their timelessness and value of the principles upon which they were based. The term ‘balance’ should be defined for it is commonly used in traditional lore.
In a 2005 article on the benefits of volunteering the following was written:

No man or woman. We sometimes take for granted the community we live in. People and societies depend on each other for survival but growth of such things as commercialization is seeing traditional values being disregarded. Communities are suffering due to the growth of secular societies but at the same time we can really bridge that expanding gap through volunteering. Volunteering is about helping others and having an impact on another’s well being. What better way than to connect with your community and give a little back. As a volunteer you return to society some of the benefits that society gives you.140

At a rally at Cornell College in December 2007, then Illinois Senator and presidential candidate Barack Obama unequivocally stated that programs allowing for increased volunteering in the US will be a priority if elected.

There he outlined the following: Expansion of service programs involving retired individuals and those of 55 years; doubling the size of the Peace Corp from 7,000 to 16,000; setting goals for middle school and high school students to serve 50 hours a year of public service, and in the case of college students, a total of 100 hours.

The emergence of volunteering as a necessary part of a nation’s development is yet another acknowledgement of revered practices. The projection, completion, and celebration of a communal goal endemic to traditional societies are now imported to western leaning societies, many of which have witnessed the adversities of individualism and greed. Volunteering promotes social cohesion, fortification of familial institutions, information sharing in vital areas such as education, health, and economic issues.

11) ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION: A KEY TRADITIONAL TEACHING

Every proponent of traditional religions concurs that the environment must be likened to a mother who gives and upon whom we depend for sustenance. To the tribal

leaders of the Amazon and the Hindu and Orisha practitioners of Trinidad, the environment is a sacrosanct incubator, a gift from God.

Pundit Rakesh Maharaj elaborated on this view:

Nature is divine. In fact everything, from the human being to the trees has an atman or divine spark. So the concept of non-violence also relates to our treatment of our environment – the forest, our rivers, our planet. The tree gives to the whole community...so does the river and the sea...so why then destroy them?

"Again," he stated, making reference to an earlier point on man’s misplaced sense of purpose, “this is part of a need to acquire what is not very necessary. Hunting and killing for pleasure to satisfy our whims, and destroying trees to for the construction of the finest furniture are examples of looking outside ourselves for happiness.”

Professor P.R. Trivedy, chairman of the Indian Institute of Ecology and Environment states:

Hindu religious leaders can always help in protecting the environment. In the Vedas and other religious books there are detailed discussions and descriptions on nature and how to protect it. But in the present context there is an urgent need to have a competent cadre of Hindu leaders educated and trained in religion, culture and environment. Let there be trained saints having an eco-mind.

Julian Ticona Ramos of Bolivia spoke extensively of the importance, if not sanctity of the land. Dismissive of any suggestion that the Aymara and Quechua religious traditions were animistic or polytheistic, he noted:

We share a spiritual bond with the land; it’s a harmony and knowledge. We are always learning. We do not worship the constellations but we give thanks and appreciate its presence through our ceremonies. This connects us to time, space and eternity.

Today religions of every persuasion acknowledge their role in protecting the environment:

Religious leaders and laypersons are increasingly speaking out for protection of the

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141 See footnote 134
143 Through a series of electronic exchanges over a period of three months (July-September 2009), Julian Ramos presented the social changes taking place in Bolivia among the Quechua. This included constitutional changes on local and national levels. This he stated, “re-invigorated traditional values.”
environment. The Dalai Lama has made numerous statements on the importance of environmental protection and has proposed that Tibet should be designated a zone of special ecological integrity. Rabbi Ishmar Schorsch of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York has frequently keen on the critical state of the environment. The Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew has sponsored several seminars to highlight environmental destruction in the Black Sea and along the Danube River, calling such examples of negligence “ecological sin."144

Also noteworthy is The Instituto Superior Ecumenico Andino de Teologia (ISEAT), an evangelical organization that promotes Christianity throughout Latin America but defers to the wisdom of the “indigenous spiritualities” in matters relating to the environment. A brochure announcing a 2009 trip to Bolivia reads:


It states: “Seeking non-violent social and economic change, Christian communities of varied traditions were among the wave of social movements that brought Evo Morales to power. Indigenous peoples of Bolivia seek not only a society that is inclusive, but one that is more respectful of the earth and cosmos. Indigenous spiritualities have long influenced Christian practice in Bolivia. In an age of global warming, indigenous spiritualities increasingly inform national priorities as well as traditional theology.

However policy decisions on the environment have been contentious and politically divisive.

12) ON RESTORING BALANCE TO THE ENVIRONMENT

Psychotherapist Sigmund Freud once wrote:

During the last generations mankind has made extraordinary advance in the natural sciences and in their technical application and has established his control over nature in a way never before imagined. Men are proud of these achievements…but they seem to have observed that this newly-won power over space and time, this subjugation of the forces of nature…has not increased the amount of pleasurable satisfaction which they may expect from life and has not made them feel happier."145

145 Taken from “Civilization and Its Discontents” Also see http://www.primitivism.com/discontents.htm.
Preservation of the environment, controlling industrial emission, respecting cultural diversity, the call for oversight and transparency in economics, and the promotion of individual responsibility are all examples of the humankind’s effort’s to ‘restore the balance.’ Wars, social tensions, global warming, and economic meltdowns threaten homeostasis and are the results of society’s failed practices.

Respecting nature’s balance has always been intrinsic to the teachings of traditional religions. Such exhortations are inscribed in many a sacred literature including Sura 55 of the Quran:

And the Heavens he has raised high, and He has set up the Balance, in order that you may not transgress (due) balance; and observe the weight with equity and do not make the balance deficient, and the earth He has put for the creatures.

Replete with such timeless teachings that seemingly have only now caught on in the western world, rededicating the Caribbean people to such a noble path ensures their survivability.

Many believe that mass consumption and production have offset the natural balance upon which the environment is sustained. Efforts to regulate industrial emissions have led to a number of multilateral agreements such as the Kyoto Accord146\[3\]. A recent documentary, “Earth 2100,” hypothesized that effects of global warming 147\[5\] will prove disastrous for the planet if drastic measures are not adopted. In the scientific and political squabbles that surround such controversies, the fundamental beliefs of every traditional religion have cautioned against gross violations of the earth and the cosmos.

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146\[3\] An international treaty whereby countries agree to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases they emit if their neighbors do likewise. It is a very complex agreement that allows trading pollution credits. If it is cheaper to reduce emissions in country A, then country B can buy the pollution credits and have them count toward its own quota of reductions. The current Kyoto agreement calls for a greenhouse gas emission reduction of 6% in Canada and 5% in the US. (Source: http://mindprod.com/environment/kyoto.html).

147\[5\] A theory holds that environment is slowly increasing in overall air and water temperature. Many scientists believe that if this trend is not reversed the earth will be dynamically affected. (Source: http://globalwarming.com). Accessed June 25, 2009
In “Spirituality and the Environment,” Steven Jeffrey makes the case that environmentalists need to inject spiritual awareness in their campaign:

Trying to persuade people to bolster biodiversity on the grounds of economic necessity is a hard argument to win when the forces working against biodiversity (such as the forestry industry) have very strong economic arguments regarding families, jobs and rural communities. As long as environmentalists continue to fight economists in purely economic terms, they are destined to lose.\(^{148}\)

Jeffrey views western religions as complicit in the destruction of the environment. Citing the book of Genesis (1:28), which approves of man subduing and replenishing the earth, he argues:

One of the biggest dangers of conventional religions is that they often seek to show the world as a set creation of which man is a part. We have done quite well on the subduing part but less spectacularly on the replenishing. The staring point (of Judeo-Christian religion) is always that of a natural world or wilderness that must be feared and tamed. This is opposed to a nurturing environment that bore us and has the ability to cradle us within\(^{149}\)

The environment is an extension of ourselves, is here clearly presented. This has always been the theme of all traditional religions.

The search for cleaner and renewable sources of energy has sparked, as Jeffrey has indicated, a contentious debate over bio-fuel technology.

In an April 3 article in the Cuban Communist Party newspaper, Granma, Fidel Castro called it (bio-fuel technology), the “internationalization of genocide.” “Where and who is going to supply the more than 500 million tons of corn and other cereals?” he asked.

Venezuela leader Hugo Chavez, expressing like sentiments stated:

When you fill a vehicle’s tank with ethanol, you are filling it with energy for which land and water, enough to feed seven people have been used.”


\(^{149}\) Ibid
In Brazil, the Landless Workers Movement released the statement: “The expansion of the production of befouls aggravates hunger in the world. We cannot maintain our tanks while stomachs go empty.”150[^7]

In “Biofuels and Trade divide EU, Latin American Leaders,” writers Dana Ford and Luisa Palomino capture the looming confrontation between Latin American countries, such as Brazil that are major exporters of ethanol, and Bolivia that sees the use of alternative source of energy as a threat to sustainable development.

The articles quoted president Morales as saying that “soon, if the crisis deepens, hundreds of millions of people will be threatened by hunger.” It also made mentioned of Peru’s new environment ministry which was geared to coping with the impact of rising global temperatures which could melt the Andean glaciers within 25 years according to some studies.151[^8].

The question of a traditional religious response to climate change, population expansion, deforestation and other exigent social issues is wrought with challenges. A unanimous or unilateral response is hardly likely. An answer may be found in the constitutions of the myriad of traditional groups within the region. Unfortunately, the survival and economic dependence of many of these groups may taint a solution that is based on natural law. These are laws that create homeostasis in the environment and the cosmos.

Clearly, the need for economic sustenance and growth has adversely impacted on the environment. However, many leaders are committed to honoring the various environmental laws and treatise. Trinidad and Tobago Prime Minister, best summed up the difficult choices facing small nations:

We are committed as a member of the Alliance of Small Island Sates to call for deeper and more ambitious cuts in greenhouse emissions. This is an interesting debate because developed countries are calling on us to cut emission, but these countries were at a high level of emission


as they developed. So we are disadvantaged as we are now asked to make serious sacrifices. But we are still committed to putting in place measures to mitigate climate changed the last budget we changed the legislation related to the green fund, which gives financing to grouped for alleviating environmental degradation and promoting projects for conservation. (Press conference, Trinidad and Tobago Mission to the UN, September 25, 2010).

Her statement was indeed refreshing, and not surprising, given her Hindu faith and its propagation of the environment’s cosmological significance. In an age of environmental awareness,152 sustainable development and global capitalism turned sour, the Caribbean region must reconfigure its political and economic goals. Cultural preservation and the role of traditional teachings in contemporary society do not preclude government’s responsibility for the economic well being of its people. However the failures of past governments demand that a new paradigm must be construed to meet the today’s challenges. And the ways and insights of the past must be included.

13) SOCIAL TOLERANCE, TRADITIONAL LORE AND THE CARIBBEAN AMERINDIAN

National and regional stability are predicted by the degree to which social tolerance is practiced. Inter-cultural tolerance denotes the acceptance of a group’s fundamental right to express itself. Today, many political and civil rights leaders have called on all groups in society to exercise tolerance, if not accommodation. History has shown that oppression and cultural suffocation surface in its absence. Trinidad and Tobago and the rest of the Caribbean for the most part have strived to embrace these attributes, with encouraging, if not tenuous resuts.

Political divisiveness and economic competition have derailed the creation of enduring social stability. The absence of the traditional religious value of oneness in diversity has eluded contemporary society. It is this element of trust and universalism

152 Amid its preoccupation with economics and foreign policy, the US government had found the time to establish organizations such as the EPA in 1970. Congress has since passed a number of laws to protect the land, sea and air.
that led to the destruction of one of the region’s indigenous peoples – the Taino. Ironically, it is this very quality that could save this region from a precipitous end.\textsuperscript{153}

The first monumental display and lesson in cultural tolerance occurred centuries ago in the Caribbean. On “A Note on Tainos: Whither Progress” by Jose Barreiro, the communalism of the Tainos Indian, a kind of social grace promoted by traditional religions is highlighted:

The Tainos thought Columbus and his men strange enough to be gods, possibly representatives of the four Skydwelling brothers in their Creation Story. The bearded men with hairy, sand-color faces, with ships of many sails and booming sticks that could cut across a swath of trees were thought to come from the sky. Mystically overwhelmed and naturally friendly, the Arawaks’ first idea was to make peace. What they had a lot of, food and simple ornaments, they gave freely. Columbus soon re-provisioned his ships’ hold with fresh water, dried fish, nuts……During Columbus’ entire first trip, in numerous encounters with the Tainos, both in Cuba and Santo Domingo, the clothed visitors were welcomed and the Tainos attempted to appease all their hungers. Columbus wrote that the young men wondered at the shiny things, grabbing sabers by the edge and cutting themselves for lack of experience, but that otherwise they were quick witted, knew their geography and expressed themselves well. Later writings of Columbus, Las Casas, Pedro Martir de Angleria and other Caribbean chronicles gave many instances of Taino quick-wittedness and eloquence of expression. “They are very loving people and without covetousness.” Columbus later wrote, “They are adaptable for every purpose and I declare to your Highness that there is not a better county or better people in the world than these.

The Amerindians eventually resisted on realizing the nefarious motives of the Spaniards that threatened their very survival: There were many pitched battles where Indians routed the Spanish soldiers and organized resistance persisted for fifty years, but Spanish cannon, steel swords, horses and dogs overwhelmed the Indians. One by one, Spanish captains approached the ruling nucleus of the tribal leadership. The techniques used to lure and trap the sincere Tainos were strictly Machiavellian. The Spanish would

\textsuperscript{153} The Amerindian population of the Caribbean has dwindled due to what many have termed a cultural and human genocide. In 2002, Venezuelan Hugo Chavez changed what was formerly celebrated as Columbus Day, to the Day of Indigenous Resistance. “What they did here was simply massacre the indigenous people,” he was quoted as saying. (Monday October 13, 2003: The Halifax Herald)
sue for peace and start negotiations at which the caciques would put on large feasts. Then the Spanish would attack.154

Ironically, it is this same virtue of grace and trustworthiness that leaders are asking of the global community. How best peace, tolerance, and coexistence be cultivated in an ever competitive and distrustful world, remains one of the greatest challenges for world leaders.

The fall and even absence of the Amerindian in many Caribbean countries should not render their value system irrelevant and inapplicable.155

Belief in communalism, the sanctity of the environment, the proximity of the spirit worlds, and the centrality and essentialism of the leader are some of the characteristics of their belief system. Here, there is a commonality with Orisha worship, Hinduism, and other forms of traditional religions. The history books of the Caribbean region are replete with anecdotes and data on Amerindian life. The vestiges of this culture still resonate in many countries in the region.

The Amerindian culture continue to live in names given to a variety of foods and fauna, such as, cassava, maize, cacao, tobacco, manicou and agouti. But its spirit and earth-oriented philosophies find vents in the teachings of the traditional religions on the islands.”156

154 “A note on Tainos: Whither Progress” by Jose Barreiro, from Northeast Indian Quarterly, pp.66-67, Fall, 1990


Accessed June 29, 2009

155 The Amerindian faith demanded that any indulgence should not offset the delicate balance of nature.

156 Quote taken from website: www.centrelink.org/Trinidad_Tobago.html
PART 5: SANKOFA AS INTEGRATION: A POSSIBLE ROLE FOR INTER-RELIGIOUS DIPLOMACY AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE IN STATE GOVERNANCE

1) THE CARIBBEAN INTERFAITH MOVEMENT

As wars are fomented and exacerbated by religious inter and intra-religious discord, the Caribbean nations continue to enjoy an enviable degree of stability and cross religious pollination. The groundwork for the use of traditional values and practices has already been laid with the preponderance of interfaith dialogue, cultural awareness, in and outside the region.

In Caribbean society, mainstream religions and even those at one time marginalized, are invited to participate in national ceremonies and offer consolation in times of mass distress. The Trinidad and Tobago Newsday captured such a moment in the November 12, 2006 article:

BWIA workers in Tears at Interfaith Service: Some BWIA employees broke down in tears yesterday at an interfaith service held at St. Finbar Church in Petit Valley. Not only were those who are counting down the final days of the airline, but former employees who turned up for the service, were overwhelmed with nostalgia. The interfaith ceremony included messages from IRO (Inter-religious Organization) members – Acharya Karmananda, BR. Noble Khan, Canon Claude Berkley and Father Tom Lawson. The religious heads blessed those present and applauded their commitment to the nation.
A 2003 US Report\textsuperscript{157} on religious tolerance in Trinidad and Tobago noted that “the most frequent public complaints have been lodged by Hindu religious leaders against evangelical and Pentecostal Christian.” Such objections it attributed “to racial tensions that at times arise between Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians communities.” The report finally acknowledged the work performed by the Inter-Religious Organization (IRO) “which promoted interfaith dialogue and intolerance through study groups, publications, and cultural and religious exhibitions.”\textsuperscript{158}

Interfaith-diplomacy too has been used as a means to manage inter-state and intra-state conflicts. Conflict resolution is inextricably interwoven with nation’s mode of strategic planning and external relations. In this context, religious understanding and diplomacy must be viewed as a means to better governance, and along with cultural diplomacy, has must be seen as a viable solution to the region’s problems.

2) RELIGION AND DIPLOMACY

The US has increased spending on cultural diplomacy on the heels of the global polarization caused by the Bush doctrine.\textsuperscript{159} The US Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy stated in 2004:

America’s cultural riches played no less a role than military action in shaping our international leadership, including the war on terror.

\textsuperscript{157} A 2007 International Religious Freedom Report on Trinidad and Tobago by the US Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. The Report stated that the Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. It also affirmed that there were no reported cases of societal abuse of discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

\textsuperscript{158} The Report and its implications were addressed by reporter Sean Douglas whose article “US Report: Faiths Free in T&T,” appeared in the Trinidad and Tobago Newsday, Saturday, December 27, 2003.

\textsuperscript{159} Of the Bush doctrine, columnist Dan Fromkin writes: “The twist George Bush put on it (US Foreign Policy) was embracing ‘preventative war.’ Taking action well before an attack was imminent – invading a country that was simply perceived as threatening. And to be completely accurate, there have been several Bush Doctrines over the years. His declaration on September 20, 2001 that ‘either you are with us or you are with the terrorists’ meant that any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the US as a hostile nation. And there was Bush’s second inaugural address when he pledged himself to spreading freedom and ending tyranny in the world. (Friday, September 12, 2008)
Nalini Taneja, writing for *People’s Democracy (Weekly Organ of the Communist Part of India)*, concluded:

The Report of course only lays down policy and stresses increased funding and outlines the instruments through which cultural intervention is likely to be made by the US, for purposes of pure propaganda in its favor and against democracy. But the content of the cultural intervention could be varied and sometimes quite sophisticated. To the military conflict and the media war we may add another arena through which pressures on us are likely to increase – cultural diplomacy, through which the US intends to highjack debates on and influence the discourses on religion, identity, sports and other concerns of everyday life, in the interests of imperialism.\(^{160}\)

Nalini Tajina reinforces the belief by many that US cultural initiative is solely aimed at persuading its allies and foes alike to blindly follow its dictates. Here, big stick diplomacy is foreshadowed, if not replaced by a deceptive benevolence.

The change in US administration and foreign policy perspective highlight the rationale behind, and benefit of interstate engagement and mutual respect. However, this approach is by no means new, and in fact was promulgated during the last months of the Bush administration.

In September of 2006, the US Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs unveiled its Global Cultural Initiative. Its objectives are:

Connect foreign audiences with American artists and art forms; share American expertise in arts management and performance; educate young people and adults in the United States and abroad about the arts and cultures of other countries. …This state sponsored endeavor has partnered with The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Partnership; The National Endowment For The Humanities partnership; The National Endowment for the Arts Parents; and The American Film Institute Partnership.

(See: http://exchanges.state.gov/cultural/initiatives.html).

\(^{160}\) See http://pd.cpim.org/2006/0820/08202006_nalini.htm
Caribbean nations too have recognized the value of cultural diplomacy. The interplay of cultures promotes recognition, and acceptance of hitherto unknown traditions. The Caribbean and Latin American region with its abundance of subcultures, stand to reap enormous benefits, including political credibility.

### 3) THE ROLE OF CARIFESTA

In a 27/1/2008 press release for the CARIFESTA X symposium on Cultural Diplomacy, Ms. Desa Philadelphia cited the invaluable contribution of cultural diplomacy to the strategic relevance of the region:

Carifesta provides an excellent platform for Caribbean countries to seek to maximize the benefits to be derived from culture. Individual countries in the Caribbean have distinctive brands and these contribute to the overall Caribbean brand. It (CARIFESTA) affords an ideal opportunity for the marketing of Caribbean culture.

The US budget for the “Department of State and Other International Programs” in 2009 calls for, among other goals, the promotion of democratic transitions. It states:

The President has more than doubled funding for democracy, governance, and human rights programs. The budget supports countries that have committed to democratic reforms and human rights by helping them strengthen governance and the rule of law through programs that foster independent media, pluralist political parties, voter education, election monitoring, and human rights. It also provides $80 million dollars for the National Endowment for Democracy. The budgets later notes the allocation of $522 million for educational and exchange and cultural exchange programs, “including the newly launched Partnership for Latin American Youth which will give thousands of students from Latin America the opportunity to study in the United States.

On this question of cultural revivalism, art does imitate life. For example, during Trinidad and Tobago’s Carnival, widely acclaimed for its creative portrayal of historical and contemporary issues, designer Brian Farlane in 2008 provoked discussion in areas of global significance. Of “Earth: Cries of Despair; Wings of Hope, one critic commented:
This is however by no means a pretty mas. Earth is designed to depict the reality of today, which is an ugly one. With sections like Floods of Terror, Army of Fear, Pestilence, and Famine, Earth, Cries of Despair is indeed an anti pretty mas, the theme being the dark disturbing, and macabre. To balance this depressing depiction of the Earth dying, Mac Farlane has also designed “Wings of Hope”; a 5 section band for Rosalind Gabriel’s children’s band that would merge with Mac Farlane’s to complete the story. With sections like “New Dawn,” “Paradise Reborn,” the designer not only gives the story a happy ending but also portrays our dreams and expectations that our youth can save the Earth from our destructive habits and practices.”

4) CULTURE AND POLITICS

Political, economic and cultural repression does oftentimes find an outlet in artistic expression. The blend of NGOs (primarily human rights groups), US cultural initiative, and a weak global economy, may awaken demands for political justice and equanimity once and for all.

One can only surmise on the US response to Latin America’s ‘New Socialism,’ a movement backed by a strong sub-cultural element. One can only envision diplomatic problems if sub-cultural demands threaten the US geo-political and economic objectives. This is quite likely if such demands are characterized by political and economic self determination.

However, the political realism of the Henry Kissinger era that many believed fomented that region’s civil wars is a thing of the past. Equally anachronistic will be any adoption of the Bush administration’s ‘preemptive policy.’ Many believe that the new administration’s intention to close Camp X-Ray at Guantanamo bay portend as seismic shift in US foreign policy.

However, the road ahead in the respect to US-Latin American and Caribbean relations may still be wrought with difficulties. The new US administration with its

propensity for ‘engagement’ and cultural sensitivity, does not translate into trust, compromise and strong diplomatic ties.

In an interview “The People Won the Vote, Now The People Must Become the Government,” journalist Vanessa Davies, when asked to comment on the new US president, Barack Obama, and how his policy is likely to impact on Venezuelan socialist policies, remarked:

I think any way you look at it, the man (Obama) is from the US establishment. Obama was the necessary figurehead for the moment in which the US was living in order to calm the waters and change without really changing. He is not a figure who can generate the illusion of change, without producing that change. To think that because he is of African descent he has a distinct vision of the country or Latin America is a naive illusion, in my opinion. This is not about skin color; it is about political formation and lived experiences. I simply do not think that Obama would have gotten where he is if he had been more radical, and if he had not been to the political and economic machine that controls the Unites States. With respect to Obama there is much to be seen.162

Despite such contrarian views, a new US doctrine of engagement may prove propitious for once marginalized groups, and the new cultural thrust taking place on both ends of the hemisphere.

5) GOVERNANCE AND TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS

Like other social phenomena, sub-cultural religions are subject to social flux. In they may become more mainstream and amenable to the wider society due to a number of factors, including politicization; the rise of human rights and greater global awareness of the disenfranchised; and policy changes by governments to ensure their own strategic and economic advantages.

The rise of the Spiritual Baptist, also referred to as “Shouters,” is a classic example of the fluidity of sub-cultural religions. Of this subject, Roxanne Stapleton writes:

The Baptist community has experienced a measure of success in sharing information on their past struggles. In previous times, they were not a recognized body, and much of the things they were identified with, lay behind closed doors. Today, it is no longer so.”

In 1996 the Government granted a public holiday to the Spiritual Baptist faith to be celebrated on March 30, called Spiritual Baptist/Shouter Liberation Day, in memory of the struggle and in recognition of the Repeal of the 1917 Prohibition Ordinance of March 30, 1951. More importantly, Stapleton states:

The Baptist suffered much persecution and prosecution resulting from the ordinance to render illegal their practices, and the order of the day was ‘beat and arrest, fines and imprisonment for Spiritual Baptist.”

The Voodoo (Orisha) faith on the island of Trinidad also was subject to like hardships. In fact, like Santeria in Latin America, the very survival of Voodoo was based on the craftiness of slaves who worshipped their gods through subterfuge.

The fruition and acceptance of the Orisha faith in Trinidad was a politically grueling process. As recently as a decade ago, laws prohibiting drumming, obeah (esoteric rituals to effect change), and spiritual healing were still on the books albeit unforced.

Parliamentary discussions on granting a national holiday for this once marginalized, stigmatized and persecuted religious group, increased just before the turn of the millennium. In May 4, 1995, Senator Junior Barack commented on the need for a national holiday:

It is a place to start because for the first time we could be saying that we recognize something which is inherently African by putting it on the national stage. It may not mean a change in the physical lifestyle of the individual in the sense that they may not change from one religious perspective to another, but the fact is that they would have been recognized and we would have removed the identity problem

164 Ibid.
165 Slaves buried images of their gods beneath those of Catholic saints having corresponding attributes.
A few years later, Senator Patricia Mejia was more direct and scathing as he denounced the lingering Eurocentric values in the Trinidad society. This, she believed frustrated efforts at nationally recognizing the Orisha movement. She stated:

Our voices seem never to be heard with the same credibility or authority as the voices of others. Depriving an African of his identity and adopting him as a son of god through European Christian doctrines and beliefs commonly called scriptures; so that he can have salvation through a European government is an insult.

She continued:

To refuse the indigenous religion of the Yoruba, the Orisha worshippers a national holiday to honor the deity Lord Shango that is the strength of the black African peoples is regarded as racism and religious bigotry directed against indigenous descendants African peoples of the Diaspora.166

By 1999, the Orisha Marriage Act came to effect. This allowed Orisha priests approved by the Council of Orisha Elders, to officiate at weddings and funerals. Public holiday like Liberation Day (March 30), and Emancipation Day (August 1), are cited as evidence of the recognition and integration of once maligned and misunderstood sub-cultural religious movements in Trinidad and Tobago.

6) CULTURAL EMERGENCE AND POLITICAL RECOGNITION

In May of 2009, the Caribbean Historical Society hosted the African Liberation Day Dinner at the University of the West Indies in Trinidad. It attracted a diverse crowd which included the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency, Musa Jwen. In a report to marking this event the writer notes:

In the 21st century, even as the world has moved closer to embracing Africanism, the way of life, the cultures, the folklores and general mythologies that bind the races, slight utterances that are heard and felt from time to time, reflect the need for Africans worldwide to celebrate their overall liberation from slavery and other similar bondages that, to some degree continues to affect a people’s development.”167

166 “Reclaiming African Religions in Trinidad,” P.69.
Emancipation Day celebration in Trinidad and Tobago in 2009 was reportedly another success. The event was covered by every media on the island and saw a strong turnout. One newspaper called the celebration an “Emancipation Thriller,” and commented:

Despite the intermittent rain which caused a late start and threatened to disrupt the night’s festivities, the crowd was treated to a wonderful display of local and international performances…….Braving the inclement weather was Paramount Chief of the Eastern Region of Ghana, Nana Osei Asieby, who is a guest to Emancipation Celebration for 2009. He was joined by many members of the Diplomatic Corps, officials from the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs and key sponsors. The night also saw the presentation of the Henry Sylvestre Awards of Excellence to two outstanding individuals, Dr Shango Alamu, Agriculturalist and Environmentalist, and Leroy Calliste, aka Calypsonian Black Stalin.”

In a speech delivered by Professor Selwyn Cudjoe at the National Association for the Empowerment of African Peoples (NAEAP), the role of race in national and regional dynamics was poignantly addressed:

We are neither post racial nor race neutral in this country. Race, as a determinant of our life chances, ought not to be minimized. Similarly, having a black prime minister and a black government in Trinidad and Tobago does not ensure that equality is guaranteed to all citizens or that it will be in the future. In the absence of the attempt to empower Africans particularly through groups such as AAEAP one cannot be sure whether we are going forward or backward. Indeed, many believe that we are going backward rather than forward.

He continued:

Nothing of importance to the black community is given any space in our media. No black person who expresses a view contrary to the dominant ideology of the media is ever given any space in the newspapers or on the television. Only negative stereotypes of African people are presented in our media…Nothing of our uniqueness or our contributions to this society is ever published. In fact anything that GOPIO or Maha Sabha says is news. Look at our newspapers - no one would know of the tremendously important work that Brother Kafra Kambon is doing with the African Union. Yet we cannot cast all

\[168\] The Trinidad Guardian, August 2, 2009.
the blame on the media. The black community has not built up its social and cultural resources to promote our achievements and to withstand the onslaught that will only intensify as time goes on. We can support black organizations such as NAEP and the Emancipation Support Committee.

Dr. Williams, President Obama, and even our present government see the promotion of an emancipator education as one of the ways out of our present dilemma. We must also see the development of entrepreneurial competence as an important adjunct to our liberation……There are some higher class Africans who believe that they are better off than the lower class blacks; light skin blacks who feel they are better off than dark skin blacks; blacks who live in gated communities who feel that they are more privileged than black who live in the ghetto and educated blacks who look down contemptuously at less educated blacks. In the final analysis, most of these distinctions are irrelevant if we do not feel and understand a commonality that is found more on our culture; more on our social and cultural capital than our financial capital.169

Despite Professor Cudjoe’s cautionary tone, the rise and acceptance of traditional religions in the Caribbean and Latin America now opens the door for deliberate discussion on their principles and how they can be used to meet contemporary challenges,

7) THE BOLIVIAN INFLUENCE: CATALYST FOR REGIONAL CHANGE

Bolivia – The Regional Player

The traditional or indigenous religion of the Bolivian Quechua has been obscure at best. Theirs has been a culture, silenced by centuries of domination and marginalization. The fight for constitutional reform was significant not only for the Indians of that nation, but for every other cultural expression, victimized by colonialism. Recognition of any one group is a victory for like groups throughout the Caribbean region.

169 Speech delivered at the Center of Excellence, Tunapuna, Trinidad, on July 31, 2009. Professor Cudjoe serves as the president of NAEAP.
Pre-Columbian peoples embraced a cosmological religious system. For the Aztecs, tribal deities assumed the attributes of older Mesoamerican gods, and comprised a complex pantheon that was accessed through rituals and ceremonies.

Aztec rulers, who claimed descent from Quetzalcoatl, were deified during the coronation ceremonies. The king was the most important living link between the earthly and supernatural realm.170

In contemporary Bolivia, a revival of Inca tradition has merged with the reintegration and political activism of the Quechua and Aymara Indians. The ascendancy of Evo Morales, of indigenous roots has mobilized and emboldened, a hitherto marginalized Quechua majority.

On January 22, 2006, Morales was ceremoniously ushered in as the first indigenous president on the archaeological site of Tiwanaku.

In a captivating blend of tradition and politics, Morales was said to have made offerings to the Earth goddess Pachamam and other deities for victory. Journalist Franz Chavez who has extensively covered Bolivia for IPS News wrote in 2002 of Evo Morales’ inauguration:

As a sign of respect for his ancestral culture, Morales will walk barefoot and clad in a cap and poncho knitted from sheep wool, amid the smoke of incense and offerings of llama

fetuses, sweets and aromatic herbs. An estimated 10,000 people and some 1,000 national and foreign journalists will witness the ceremony. Tiwanaku is surrounded by the Altiplano mountains, and the ruins are characterized by the precisely cut coffee-colored stones and monolithic figures representing Tiwanakan gods.

Four years later in January 2006, in *Morales Predicts 500 Years of Indigenous Rule*, he writes:

> The leader of the leftist Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) predicted in his inaugural address Sunday, the start of 500 years of government under indigenous rule, as a change from 500 years against colonialism and neocolonialism.171

This ceremony, in invoking the ancient gods, was reminiscent of the glory days of the Incas when the leader was divine king, embodying the gods. Here, loyalty, stability and continuity were assured.

Of the Inca’s God and religion we read:

> The worship of nature and its cycles suggest that for them, time and space were sacred, and consequently the calendar was religious and each month had its own festival. The most important cult was directed to Inti, the sun god who nourished the earth and man with his rays. The most important feast was the one dedicated to Inti called IntipRaimi. This rich ceremony, with its splendid costumes, gold and silver offerings and decorations was opened by the Inca emperor, his family and the curaca. After the opening ceremony the emperor made a libation to the sun and drank chicha (a maize drink) with his family, then led a procession, followed by everyone to the sun temple where the imperial family made offering of precious vessels or images to the god. Following this, omens were read and llamas were sacrifice. The ceremony ended with drinking and eating.172

Morales, one can argue, assumed the role of “son of the sun” – the god-king, who with overwhelming support of his Quechua peoples (descendents of the Incas), was at the forefront of reshaping a new society, and possibly a new era in regional governance.

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171 <http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=31867>
**Constitutional Reform: The Key to Change**

On January 25, 2009, a national referendum approved a new constitution. Correspondent Benjamin Dangl wrote of the implication of this initiative for “Indian Country Today.”

The new constitution establishes Bolivia as a plural-nation (a nation among many nations), formally recognizing the country’s 36 indigenous and Afro-Bolivian nations. It also requires that government offices be able to communicate with their constituents in their own language, rather than speaking only in Spanish, a language that a significant number of indigenous don not speak.

The constitution gives autonomy to indigenous groups across the nation, enabling them to govern their own communities, develop their own economy and administer the use of natural resources. These changes to the constitution as well as the new parts of the document which call for state control of natural resources seek to ensure the majority of Bolivian benefit from the country’s vast oil and gas reserve, resources which have historically been looted by multi-national corporations and wealthy families.

The previous constitution officially recognized and upheld Catholicism, the new document recognizes the Christian God as equally as the Andean Pachamama (Mother Earth), a central figure for various indigenous religions across the Andes.

It is this communal approach to self governance, sustenance and self determination that form the crux of the traditional approach and throughout Latin America, the theme remains constitutional reform, for it is the sole guarantor of political rights, economic access and land protection for peoples hitherto oppressed.

173 In an earlier interview, Ambassador Hugo Siles appeared concerned at the level of resistance that the Morales government was encountering by what he termed the “privileged few.” He stated: “What is happening in my country is a direct result of our history. Bolivia and its very rich resources have always been controlled by a handful of families. On the other hand, the country’s majority Indian population, numbering close to 60% has always been poor and voiceless. The struggle today is about righting historical wrongs. In order to accomplish this we have to amend the constitution.”

Responding to my reference to the “Balkanization of Bolivia,” Ambassador Siles noted: “The leaders of our four provinces in the lowlands have threatened to declare autonomy. Interestingly these areas- Santa Cruz, Pando, Beni, and Tarija are rich in natural gas. But we should also note that the people there have always been antagonistic to the Indigenous Quechuan speaking people of the highlands. And as you know our President Evo Morales himself is indigenous. So there is also a racial component to this struggle. But let me make it clear, our Government is willing to sit and talk with the opposition, but not one inch of our country will be compromised.

(Filed for The Diplomatic Monitor on June 09, 2008)
The significance of Quechua emergence

Prior to the rule of the Conquistadores over much of the Andes, the Quechua and the Aymara peoples had established a well defined and structured society. The indigenous peoples of today’s Bolivia are the progeny of a powerful Inca nation that grew out of absorption of smaller societies. Thiers was a federalist type system with a central government with distinct provinces.\textsuperscript{174} The Inca nation had excelled in architecture, shipbuilding, and medicine. Its economy embraced socialist principles with a strong emphasis on redistribution. Thus, areas that were unable to meet their economic needs for any reason were assured sustenance.

The arrival of the Conquistadores marked the end of an empire, the remnants of which are guarded by the rural peoples of the Bolivian highlands. The journey of the Indian from the early 16\textsuperscript{th} century to today has been a torturous one. Its social structure was dismantled, its wealth stolen,\textsuperscript{175} and its people ravished by labor and diseases, and its religion vilified and replaced by Christianity.

The extent to which the Quechua religion has been able to survive is speculative at best. Centuries ago, Roman Catholicism’s proselytizing was the biggest threat to the preservation of this pre-Columbian culture. In a paper by an indigenous writer named Wankar, the perilous state of this religious practice cannot be overemphasized.\textsuperscript{176}

\textsuperscript{174} Each province had a governor who oversaw local offices, who in turn supervised agriculturally productive river valleys, cities and mines. There were separate chains of command for both military and religious institutions, which created a system of partial checks and balances on power. The local officials were responsible for settling disputes and keeping track of each family’s contribution to the mita (mandatory public service). Source: \url{http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Inca_society}.

\textsuperscript{175} The silver deposits found in the hills of Cerro Rico is said to be the source of European industrialization, having bankrolled the entire economy of Spain for more than 250 years. The silver mines of Cerro Rico were known by the Incas before the arrival of the European. According to legend, “an Inca emperor had tried to mine the area, only to be confronted by a thunderous unworlidy voice telling the workers to down their tools.” After that the hills were treated with great respect and the nearby settlement was renamed Potoji, the Quechua word for “thunder.” Source: “The Silver Mines of Cerro Rico,” Posted by MazAllen in Bolivia, Economy, and Politics. \url{http://www.mazalien.nl/weblog/archives/2008/12/01/the-silver-mines-of-cerro-rico/} Accessed 6/21/09.

\textsuperscript{176} An excerpt of the paper was translated into English. It read: The white one is the cardinal, the monsignor or the bishop, Quechuaymara is faithful, at most, the altar boy to clean the church. The greatest worldwide reserve of Christianity, according to the Vatican, Latin America, does not have a single Indian saint in five centuries. Miracles? No, this is the forced fruit of a foreign religion.
Notably, his views are far less conciliatory than those expressed by Julian Ticona of the Inter-Religious Council in La Paz, Bolivia. In a teleconference with Mr. Ticona, his question to me was pointed: “Name for me one pure society or religion?”

For Mr. Ticona, Jesus remains central in the Aymara and Quechua philosophical message

Nevertheless, writers such as Wankar believe that the Evangelical movement has all but hammered the last nail into the coffin of a dying religion. This may be supported by Stoll (1991) who believes that of all Latin American Countries, Bolivia's religious landscape has been most affected by the modern day missionary movement. He writes:

Some of the lowest percentages of evangelical population continue to be the Andean countries – Venezuela (in the 1 to 3 percentage range), Colombia (1 to 4 percent), Ecuador (2 to 4 percent), Peru (3 to 5 percent), and Bolivia (2 to 8 percent), where Protestantism had a slow and difficult start.

However, the re-election of Morales may have stemmed the tide of deculturation, re-directing attention to the practices the indigenous and their new found impetus to preserve their traditions and assert their place in modern day Latin America.

**REDEFINING SUCCESS**

Reading Forefathers' wrinkles Doesn’t Require Books. The future lies behind.

The Christian faith is in direct proportion with the scorn of the Indian. The Bible does not lead the way of God, but to the way of the white one. Christianity did not remain because of the kindness of the missionaries but because of the military brutality. The priests urged the attackers to kill us offering the sky to them as prize. The invaders with their way of proselytizing forced us to choose between baptism and death by knife or bonfire.

Today, the priest imposes Christian names, copied from the Bible or almanacs. As the Pope did not sanctify any Indian, our names are diminishing. They can only be used by foreigners. Today the creoles use foreign names. The priests accept them. Sometimes they suggest foreign names and a Christian one. But they continue to veto our names.

Now the Church changes its tone not to age or become obsolete. The Mariknoll illustrate its magazines with Mayan or Inca ruins and says “God talk through many cultures, some of them focused on the past.” The plurality of cultures becomes a singular God. Instead of attacking our wisdom they grow using it. Even our millenary Inca appear converted to Christianity,

Success from an individual to an institutional level cannot be uniformly defined. What criterion determines a successful State? A robust GDP, internal security, equitable distribution of rights and opportunities, cultural preservation, sovereignty and independence, and a high literacy and life expectancy rate, are all reflective of a stable and progressive society. Some countries may gauge economic viability as the principal determinant. In such environments, a strong economy is viewed as the deterrent or panacea for every social ailment.

Nations that have been historically subjected to colonial rule and have adopted a legacy of material, cultural and psychological dependency must redefine the meaning of success.

Countries are prone to dependence due to a number of factors, including lack of human and physical resources and geopolitics178. Most of the islands in the Caribbean rely heavily on tourism as the main source of revenue. The 9/11 attack on the US and the subsequent downward spiral of the airline industry wrought havoc on the overall Caribbean economy. The same can be said of the global recession in 2008.

Conversely, countries replete with natural resources such as crude oil and natural gas have benefitted from the spike of these commodities on the world market. Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago both experienced a windfall and moved quickly to build infrastructure and finance many social programs. Clearly the economy of nations is so interconnected that the notion of independence can be challenged. In other words the failure of any one government may be the result of a complex web of interconnected factors. The failures of Caribbean governments in the past due to mismanagement, cronyism, and pervasive corruption may only provide us with a parochial understanding of global economics.

While the current economic climate is difficult to navigate for nations – allowing for new strategies for survival, there are elements within the Caribbean society that

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178 Aggressive and unpredictable neighbors force countries to sign security pacts with bigger powers. This political chess game was played out in the Caribbean during the Cold War. For example the popularity of the Grenadian Revolution saw neighboring island such as Dominica establishes closer ties with the United States.
must remain indissoluble, and non-negotiable. In fact, these are the factors that will help most nations extricate themselves from economic servitude and helplessness.

The vulnerability of the Caribbean politics and economics is due to the region’s pursuance of ideologies that are antithetical to the very culture of the people. This must be reiterated. Indeed, success must be redefined. Infrastructural development and annual reports of a rising GDP are inconsequential when there is glaring economic disparity among peoples, an alarming crime rate, cultural dissociation and an addiction to mass consumerism at any cost.

In redefining success, the Caribbean can better protect its environment, its culture and promote a sense of social and economic equanimity. Further it can foster regional strength from its historic and cultural affinity, and reassess its relations with the global community. In the US, the role of government is unambiguous. Despite on-going debates between advocates of bigger government and those who uphold a more libertarian approach,\textsuperscript{179} the US remains the purveyor of free market system. Thus, its overall philosophy and objectives are enshrined in materialism. In “Telling the American Story: The role of Government,” one reads:

Government involvement in the economy increased significantly during the most serious economic downturn in US history, the Great Depression (1929-1940). President Franklin D. Roosevelt launched what he called the New Deal to rescue the economy. Many of the laws and institutions that define the modern US economy emerged from New Deal legislation extending federal authority in regulating business and providing public affair. Even with all its regulations, the United States in 2007 was ranked No.3 by the World Bank in ease of doing business after Singapore and New Zealand. Government policies promote business... Government provide certain services – such as defense, administration of justice, education, space exploration, for which they are better suited than private business.\textsuperscript{180}

\textsuperscript{179} Libertarians believe that governmental powers should be restricted in areas of morality and private enterprise. They also denounce the use of military adventurism to promote foreign policy.

The goals of the US and other nations should not be necessarily those of the Caribbean. As a region that has succumbed to foreign rule, its priority must be gaining true sovereignty. This is attainable through the creation of an identity, an identity that bears the trappings of its traditions and culture.

Three years ago, Bolivian Educational minister, Felix Patzi posed a provocative question that every Caribbean nation should answer earnestly: “What kind of society do we want?” Mr. Patzi answer stoked further enquiry:

Pre-capitalist or communal? That’s the decision we face. One thing the new Bolivia won’t need is competition. Competitiveness? I ask myself why. Why study business in a country with no businesses?”

Such hyperbole will be sharply criticized, if not wholly dismissed. However, Mr. Patzi’s question underscores the importance of identifying the specific needs of a nation and how best they can be met.

Asha Burkhardt-Remesar’s posed the following questions in a 2009 interview: “What is poverty?” and “Do you consider communities that are self sufficient but without the luxuries seen in urban areas, poor? “

No two Caribbean nations are alike. The social and economic needs of Bolivia are determinable by the new administration’s determination to reintroduce the values of yesteryear. After centuries of living in the shadows of a small elite class, the emerging indigenous populace is invoking the glories of a kinder past.

At the gathering of Quechua Indian chiefs in Quito, Evo Morales on receiving the Baton of Command from the local chiefs “vowed to reject Western concepts imported “in English,” and recover the wisdom of the elders. At the ceremony, Mr. Morales was quoted as “fighting to defend the Pachmama.”

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181 Ibid, p.3
182 Counselor/Deputy Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission of Suriname to the UN.
183 Ibid, p3
184 Aymara term for “Mother Earth.”
8) INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

The Bhutan Model

Economic statistics that show an impressive GDP and a consumer driven society may mask symptoms of social decay that emerge in the form of judicial injustice, poverty, corruption, and crime. In an effort to devise a system that accommodates and reconciles modernity and traditionalism, the Bhutan model should be examined.

Like Bolivia, the Kingdom of Bhutan is landlocked and shares borders with the People’s Republic of China and India. (It is separated from Nepal by the Indian state of Sikkim). In 2006 it was named by Business Week, “the happiest country in Asia” and earned eighth position when compared to the rest of the world. Once an isolated country, Bhutan is sought by travelers with a flair for nature and the exotic. It (Bhutan) prides itself with its astute admixture of traditions with modernity, and is guided by its principle – Gross National Happiness.

Although the Bhutanese campaign of “one nation, one people” was aimed at integrating the diverse ethnic groups, it was chaotic at times, as the Government enforced an age old code of conduct called Driglam Namzha. This controversial policy has had its share of detractors who accuse the government of systematically dismantling Bhutan’s heterodoxical society.

Driglam Namzhas emphasizes the need to preserve the traditional identity of Bhutan. In a 2004 National Assembly called for the promotion of a national identity and vigilance against the pollution of foreign culture. Although viewed as extreme by some, other realize that the importance of traditional preservation and have found the concept compelling.

The Dagana chimi stated:

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185 His survey to determine a nation’s degree of happiness was conducted by the University of Leicester in 2006.

186 Thousands of Nepalese living in Bhutan were deemed illegal immigrants and expelled. This led to allegations of ethnic cleansing and diplomatic tension between that nation and Nepal.
In the eyes of the world our identity is the gho and kira (traditional dress) we wear and the language (dzongkha) we speak. These days our unique dress code and language have been invaded by foreign cultures and languages. As our young generation pick up this habit, there is a danger of our culture being diluted. The responsibility to preserve our tradition and culture falls on every Bhutanese. If we don’t protect our culture and language, how will we in the future tell others that we are a sovereign country and we are Bhutanese?"

“The responsibility of its education and implementation falls on the shoulders of our officials, dashos and lyonpos to start by educating their children,” said the Haa chimi during this government session. He was followed by Prime Minister Lyonpo Jigmi Y. Thinley who stressed that the aspiration of Gross National Happiness is achievable only if the nation’s traditions are preserved.\textsuperscript{187}

Although this viewpoint has been criticized for its perceived extremity, one cannot help but acknowledge that societies, threatened by the specter of environmental upheaval, communal disassociation, greed and social insecurity are presenting tradition and cultural attunement and identity as a social panacea.

Compare the words of these Bhutanese officials with those of Asha Burkhardt-Remesar, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Suriname to the United Nations. The wording is gentler but the message is the same.

Everything you are searching for is within. Cultural pride and religious identity are important, and when I say religion, I mean the teachings that are handed down orally from our forefathers.

An observant Hindu, Mrs. Burkhardt-Remeasr compares the teachings of the Vedas with those of the indigenous Amerindian peoples of her nation:

The key to turning around our society rests with awareness, understanding and the practice of our traditions.\textsuperscript{188}


\textsuperscript{188} Interview conducted at the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Suriname to the UN on July 6, 2009
Suriname, like other Caribbean nations, has experienced periods of political turmoil and has recently adopted a series of social and economic initiatives aimed at addressing its problems and transforming the society for the betterment of all of its citizenry. Cultural and religious diplomacy are high on its political platform.

9) THE TRADITIONS AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

The Bhutanese model views its youth as the real purveyors of its traditions – for obvious reasons. Today, many Caribbean countries continue to struggle economically. They are also beset by social problems such as drug trafficking, juvenile delinquency, domestic violence, other forms of sexism, racism, and a general breakdown of family structure. The mantle of leadership rests in the hands of Caribbean youth who are struggling to chart a new and purposeful direction for themselves and the region.

In 2003, writer Marvin A. Hokstam reported on this social dilemma that was raised at the 2003 CARIFESTA in Suriname: Caribbean youths have reached several milestones in recent years; one of the most important is the growing recognition that they are better able to bridge the gap between themselves and adults. There are a lot of challenges to overcome though.

He cited Dr. Heather Johnson who identified the following as the main problems facing the youth – failing school systems, lack of skills and HIV/AIDS.

At the conference, Caricom Youth Ambassador Sergio Belfor stated:

We have three themes for 2002-2004: drug enforcement, HIV/AIDS and regional integration. We are executing activities in light of those themes.” These included an anti-discrimination parade, a two-day seminar on the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) and the Caribbean Single Market Economy (CSME), a workshop on sustainable development, and a number of seminars on drug enforcement189.

Efforts to combat these problems with the implementation of new policies and strategies have had marginal success.

The emphasis in the region’s youth is undoubtedly the right approach. Technology has opened the window to new possibilities. The global village is easily accessed; the oppression that our fathers suffered in silence and indifference will not be tolerated in the present environment. However, global consciousness, facilitated by the technological revolution has not been bereft of problems. Information technology has also been blamed for the amplification of many a social problem, human trafficking, child pornography, money laundering and even the recruitment of social saboteurs.

If the future rests in our youth, how best can they be addressed? Dr. Heather Johnson who serves as the manager of Youth Affairs at the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat, stated:

CARICOM is trying to bring some harmonization to the youth programmes that are being implemented in the individual states. There is no networking or coordination between the Government and associations that execute programmes. We have developed a regional strategy, which serves as a focus for programmed coordination and harmonization and to bring people from different sectors together. We are trying to develop intra-sectoral programmes to bring multiple people together.\(^\text{190}\)

Dr Johnson advocates the “top-bottom approach”:

My ultimate goal would be to see the countries working together-at their own pace-towards achieving progress in the youth development sector in partnership. In other words the young people working at the agencies work with more adults. At that point CARICOM’s role will be to monitor and provide support in terms of tools and strategies. The Member States should take the crisis of youth seriously and begin to put programmes in place that are going to be implemented in partnership with young people. So if they are problems they are dealt with in a joint effort.”

This top-bottom approach\(^\text{191}\) has failed the region in every respect. The implementation of governmental policies has been thwarted by complex bureaucracies that lack the pliancy need for effectiveness. In suggesting this approach in a critical area

\(^{190}\) www.uwicaricom.org/papers-and-articles/articles/223-networking-for-youth-empowerment.html

\(^{191}\) This managerial style is comprehensively discussed in the section: Failure of Inter-Religious Bodies. See also footnote 154.
such as youth development, the region’s leaders may fail to take advantage of this propitious period for real change.

Finally, Dr. Johnson and other leaders at the conference have failed to 1) reveal how intra-sector coordination can be accomplished 2) identify the hierarchical structure and composition of proposed bodies and 3) their tactical and strategic plans.

However, unlike Bhutanese officials, Dr. Johnson makes little or no mention of the role of culture and traditions in molding the Caribbean youth. And herein lies the real failure.
PART 6: THE SANKORA PARADIGM AS A PATH OF OFFER
PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS TO CENTURY-OLD PROBLEMS

1) THE EVOLUTION OF THE CARIBBEAN EXPERIENCE

The Caribbean people, oppressed by the colonial and imperial powers had devised ingenious ways of resistance. From passive to active resistance, the millions brought to the shores of the Caribbean assuaged the wounds of mental and physical brutality through the medium of song, dance, and physical retaliation. Others resorted to more extreme methods - suicide and infanticide.

The turn of the 20Th century saw the making of a distinct Caribbean identity. The struggle for higher wages, a better standard of living, greater control of their political destiny, the need for Caribbean integration, women’s rights and a keener awareness of Universal Suffrage saw a politicized region.

Indeed the concept of the global village was already in full throttle throughout the Caribbean. Whether influenced by the international trade union movement in the 20s and 30s, or the rise of black conscious militancy in the United States, the region proved to be a political and socio-economic sponge. By the early 60s to the end of the 1980s, the Caribbean region as a possible theater for a nuclear exchange between the US and the Soviet Union was credible.

Amid the internal political lashes and slumping economies, the Caribbean it seemed had exhausted all the political remedies of the outside world to no avail. The region continued to be a basket case. Caribbean intellectuals began clamoring for greater awareness of culture. National holidays which for centuries had commemorated controversial figures such as Christopher Columbus now marked local heroes. Religious
holidays for the faiths deemed ‘pagan’ by the dominant Christina class were finally given recognition. Afro and Indo-consciousness void of militancy was embraced. The value of culture, tradition, and affinity to one’s African and Indian roots were celebrated. The school system too was involved in this resurgence and celebration of culture.

The once marginalized Amerindian peoples too were recognized, received land titles and afforded a voice in the wider political framework.

As cultural consciousness soared, so did the invasion of American culture through the ‘New Media.’ With its almost instantaneous global reach, a cultural tug-of-war has ensued.

Resistance to this new form of domination no longer involves tin gods, military strongmen, insurgents and bullets.

It entails the formulation of a well defined strategy that promotes the region’s traditions beyond its aesthetic value.

This is a fortuitous period in the evolution of the Caribbean. The world has reeled from the excesses of individualism and a capitalist system. Further, the specter of an environmental Armageddon looms, with each passing day. Many believe that new lessons must be learned and new behaviors must be adopted if we are to save our planet. It is with stark irony that we must learn from the very cultures and peoples that have been shunned, marginalized. The final phase of our growth as a Caribbean people must involve more than cultural awareness and celebration. We must devise and implement strategies earlier identified – (1) Health Care (2) Education (3) Environment (4) Crime Reduction (5) Alleviation of Poverty. (6) Social Justice

2) THROUGH THE LENS OF THE UNITED NATIONS

In an August 2009 interview with Lloyd McCarthy, author of “In-Dependence” From Bondage, proposed concrete solutions to the problems shared by all Caribbean nations, irrespective of language and culture.

Mr. McCarthy, an urban and regional planning consultant has served as Director of Land Policy in the Office of the Prime Minister in Jamaica. He was also Senior Director of Land Administration in the Ministry of Housing and Environment.
He strongly believed that the region’s problem must be first identified through empirical inquiry before it can be addressed.

3) **U.N. DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES**

According to Mr. McCarthy, the needs of all nations are measurable and comparable. He stated:

> In applying the United Nations Development Guidelines, we can find answers that youth and many others in the Caribbean have been asking for years.

Here, McCarthy is referring to the United Nations Development Program’s (UNDP) Human Development Index. In 2007, the Jamaica Observer’s Business Section reported on the standing of Caribbean countries. In an article entitled, “Caribbean Countries Maintain High Human Development Ranking,” the overall standing of the region was compared to that of other nations. It reads:

> The index which measures achievements in terms of life expectancy, educational attainment and real income level, places Barbados as the number one developing country in the world with a global ranking of 31 out of 177 nations surveyed, followed by The Bahamas at number 49, St Kitts Nevis at 54, Antigua and Barbuda at 57 and Trinidad and Tobago at 59.”

Of the Caribbean performance, Dr Rosina Wiltshire, the UNDP Representative to Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean stated:

> This is an incredible achievement and shows the results of concerted national, sub-regional and regional efforts towards sustainable developments….What this report tells us is that while Barbados and the rest of the developing world are not contributing significantly to climate change, the global impact of lifestyles and the development trajectory of the richest countries threatens to overturn everything we have gained.

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192 The Jamaica Observer, Friday, November 30, 2007
193 Ibid
However a few years later, Caribbean countries earlier lauded, slipped in ratings. This was immediately pointed out by Mr. McCarthy whose indicators of success included the life expectancy, adult literacy, and standard of living.

Mr. McCarty is also strong proponent of culture in social development. He states:

Culture facilitates development. We cannot look at success purely, if at all from the perspective of wealth accumulation.

He cites the works of Leonard Barrett and Henry Turner, John Henry Clarke, and George Padmore all of whom promoted Pan Africanism. His words echo those of Professor Cudjoe and Eintou Springer:

We have to speak of cultural development of our people. No leader in the Caribbean should be above the people.

He mentions Maurice Bishop and Water Rodney as examples of leaders of the people:

We don’t need leaders that are controlled by multi-national corporations. His or her vision must transcend the Caribbean and focus on the creation of a nexus between the continent of African and the African Diaspora.

He likens this connection to the bond between the Jewish people and Israel.

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194 Barrett is a Jamaican anthropologist, author, and theologian. His works include, “The Rastafarians: Sounds of Cultural Dissonance.”

195 Turner is a controversial black clergyman born in 1833 in South Carolina. After repeated attempts to effect change in the social and economic conditions of blacks, he gravitated toward the “back to Africa” philosophy. He mixed religion with radical politics and angrily responded to the rejection of the Civil Rights Act of 1875 by the US Supreme Court with the following: “We have as much right biblically and otherwise to believe that God is a Negro (sic), as you buckra or white people have to believe that God is a fine looking, symmetrical and ornamented white man. For the bulk of you and all of the fool Negroes of the country believe that God is white-skinned, blue eyed, straight-haired, projected nose, compressed lipped and finely robed white gentleman, sitting upon a throne somewhere in the heavens. Every race of people who attempted to describe their Gods by words, or by paintings, or by carvings, or any other form or figure, have conveyed the idea that the God who made them and shaped their destines were symbolized in themselves, and why should not the Negroes believe that he resembles God.”

196 Instrumental in establishing African studies as a branch of academia. He served as professor of Hunter College of the City University of New York in the late 1960s.

197 A native of Jamaica, Padmore is widely known as the father of the Pan African movement and was actively involved in the independence movements in Africa and the Caribbean,
In some way reminiscent of Marcus Garvey’s African experiment, he believes that the Caribbean should extend its sight beyond North America and establish political and economic ties with Africa. He argues:

As the saying goes, ‘when the US sneezes, we in the Caribbean catch a cold.’ Why then are we not looking to the vast resources available to us not only at home but in our original home?

Like so many scholars interviewed, Mr. McCarthy is an advocate of culture awareness and application. He invokes the term “Sankofa,” as the pivotal to effecting change. He refers to religion as “the code of culture,” but acknowledges that the successful implementation and embrace of new ideas will be an arduous and protracted process.

“How long does it take for a tree to grow,” he asked rhetorically. And like his peers, there is a moment of pause when the “how to” aspect of this change is raised.

His response is organic - revolving around reclaiming one’s heritage – that the orishas (gods), or Hindu deities are integral to the redirection of the nation. The Caribbean is at the crossroad. To traditional religion activists, the term “crossroad” is replete with esoteric meaning. It is an intermediary state that is ruled by a god with whom one must consult and seek guidance before the right path is chosen.199

199 The following excerpt is taken from “Letter to the Editor,” published in the New York Times, Sunday April 26, 1987. It was written by Manfred R. Lehmann and conveys the Garvey’s “Back to Africa” experiment, albeit short on facts: “Garvey’s ultimate goal was to make Afro-Americans conscious of their roots and to organize their return to Africa, their motherland. The Black Staliner which he founded was supposed to furnish ships for this giant enterprise. In this he was inspired by Zionism, which also aspired to take a people, the Jews, back to their motherland, Palestine. It was therefore not surprising that Garvey could find no nobler name for his movement than “Black Zionist.” This is something to ponder for those who still maintain that Zionism is racism.”

199 Papa Lega is the Haitian voodoo god who acts as an intermediary between the loa and humans. He is also the god of the crossroads; he opens the gate to the spirit worlds. He taught mankind the use of oracles and how to interpret them. Papa Lega is the forest loa invoked, so that he may “open the gate” for communication between the worlds. (Taken from “Haitian Legends in Voodoo.”). See http://www.unsolvedmysteries.com Accessed August 4, 2009.
4) EVALUATING THE PARADIGM: SOME CONCERNS

There is a risk in devising a new socio-political paradigm that involves religious matters of any kind. Indeed one may be cautioned against creating a multidimensional theocratic system of governance or producing a legal document that resembles Sharia.200

In an interview with Dr. Harold Robertson,201 the role of the IRO (Inter-religious Organization of Trinidad and Tobago) was discussed. Dr. Robertson acknowledged the interaction of the country’s interreligious office with the highest lever of executive power, although he cautioned against excessive clerical influence.

In a new release from the Office of the Prime Minister, the involvement, if not the influence of religious leaders in policy decision is evident:

This afternoon, the Honorable Patrick Manning, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago met with nine representatives of the Inter Religious Organization (IRO). Involved in the meeting were His Grace Archbishop Edward Gilbert of the Roman Catholic Church, Bishop Reverend Calvin Bess of the Anglican Church; Anthony Hughes of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church; President General Haji Yacoob-Ai of the Anjuman Sunnat Ul-Jamaat Association Inc; Reverend Olson Holder of Mount Olivette Spiritual Baptist Church; Brother Harripersad Maharaj of the Brahma Kumaris Raja Yoga; Brother Noble Khan of the Trinidad Muslim League Inc.; Lawrence Coward the Bhaia Assembly of Trinidad and Tobago; and Babalorisha Sam Philis of the National Council of Orisha Elders of Trinidad and Tobago.

200 Iran is such a theocratic state where sharia or Islamic law is interpreted by a Constitutional Council of Sages, also called the Council of the Guardians of the Constitution. This body is defined as an upper house of Parliament, “with the power to veto other lower house’s resolution....It has been established to safeguard Islamic rules and the Constitution. It is assigned to check the laws passed by the Majlis, compare them with provisions of the Islamic law and constitution, and ratify them, or return them to the House to be amended. (See www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iran/guardian.htm). Accessed 5/18/2009

201 The Trinidad and Tobago Consulate, March 15, 2009.
The Prime Minister briefed the attendees on the genesis of the Police Service Reform Legislation aimed at facilitating an efficiently operated Department. At the meeting the IRO was also asked to organize a nationwide “Day of Prayer.”

The composition of the meeting included groups that fall in the category of traditional or sub-cultural religions, such as the Spiritual Baptists and the Orishas. More importantly, one must ask if the platform was used to solely brief religious leaders on already established government policy. Or, is the IRO empowered, through their social influence, to initiate and implement change at the highest level of Government? This Press release did not give such an impression.

Nevertheless, many politicians and journalists questioned then Prime Minister Patrick Manning’s motives in briefing religious leaders on the proposed legislation, and the invitation of leaders to organize a special day for prayer.

Stephen Kangal in the “Politics of Prayer” cautions IRO members that its neutrality in politics is essential. He writes:

The IRO must never abandon its neutrality and policy of non-interference and partisanship in domestic politics by staging a prayer vigil that is tantamount to being a cog in the current political wheeling and dealing. The IRO cannot be seduced into being used and abused to telegraph that God is on the side of the Government (the good) and prayers must be directed at getting the “non-God fearing” Opposition (the bad and ugly) to support the bills.

Mr. Kangal is right in stating that the IRO must not be manipulated. However, any suggestion that religion should be divorced from politics is purely a Western concept that should have little bearing on the Caribbean experience.

The “religion is life” adage embodies traditional religions, so endemic to Caribbean life. The traditional religious expression is practical and pragmatic. It influences politics, society and the economy through action.

From the perspective of the traditionalist, the IRO is an ineffective tool used by political and religious leaders for self-serving interests. It has followed the script that

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202 June 17, 2004
western society has prepared for religious expression – as one distinct from national governance.

5) REFLECTIONS ON RELIGION AND POLITICS IN WESTERN SOCIETIES

Traditional religions are way ahead of the curve when it comes to tackling pressing issues facing our world. In fact, we have to play catch up and learn from their leaders.

(Interview conducted with Gary Cozette June 3, 2009).

Lecturer Andreas Oslander argues that Western religion has, since its inception has been used as a vehicle for political and social control. That Church teachings with its less than nuanced approach to culture and theology was responsible for history’s most violent periods, leaves little for debate. Much has been written about the Middle Ages and the Enlightenment, where the Church continued to be pivotal in the political and pedagogical direction of nations.

Today, the influence of Christianity in the Western World is restricted by constitutional frameworks that demarcate the roles of Church and State. The role of Western religion has been relegated to the houses of worship where social issues like

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204 Mr. Cozette is program director and co-founder of the Chicago Religious Leadership Net Work on Latin America (CRLN), a 600-member network of lay leaders, pastors, priests, nuns, rabbis, and denominational executives in Illinois, who together, work for human rights, social justice and peace in Latin America. He has served as a Presbyterian lay mission worker in El Salvador (1984–1987) where he reported from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of San Salvador, to an ecumenical urgent action network in North America.

205 Ibid.

206 During the 11th century, controversy arose between church and state over the problem of lay investiture. Theoretically, on assuming office, a bishop or abbot was subject to two investitures; his spiritual authority was bestowed by church officials and his feudal or civil authority by a layman – feudal or king. ... The most ambitious advocate of church reform was Pope Gregory V11 (1073-1085) who claimed unprecedented power for the papacy (Taken from “The Church in The Middle Ages.” See http://history-world.org/midchurchhigh.htm

207 Natural philosophy, or natural sciences as it was sometimes called, was one of the key subjects taught at medieval universities and promoted by esteemed doctors of theology such as Thomas Aquinas and Albert the Great. They wrote commentaries on Aristotle, exclusive of religious ideas. This runs counter to the popular view that the Middle Ages were void of science, and dominated by faith rather than reason. (Taken from Bede’s Library : Medieval Science, the Church and Universities. http://www.bede.org.uk/university.htm Accessed 5/18/2009
abortion, same sex marriages, poverty, social justice, crime and terrorism are left for openly debated on political platforms.

The Christian Church in the West has become nothing more than society’s moral conscience. On many occasions, religious edicts have been at odds with contemporary thought as in the case of family planning and the abortion issue.

Unlike the US, which considers itself built on pillars of Judeo-Christian beliefs, the foundations of the Caribbean society is far more complex. One of its resources rests in the multifarious religious base from which its citizenry find answers. Christianity has historically influenced the Caribbean society and will continue to do so. Church institutions such as Christian Primary schools and colleges will ensure that the fundamentals of Christian thought are handed down to future generations. Hinduism and Islam have also established reputable schools with the same feat in mind.

6) THE WORLD COUNCIL OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Admittedly, the World Council includes traditional or indigenous religions and extols their relevance to peace and environmental issues. It defines indigenous religions as “the traditions of the native, aboriginal or indigenous peoples of all parts of the world,” of which it writes:

“Indigenous peoples have diverse cultures and religions but share a long–standing and profound connection to their land, as sense of the kinship of all life and an intimate relation with ancestors, the spiritual world and the Creator or source of life.”

The World Council was launched in June, 2002 in Bangkok. Its Charter outlines the ways in which religious leaders can adopt and implement effective tools in solving global problems and concerns. The mission statement aims at pursuing of peace and mutual understanding and is committed “to providing the United Nations and its agencies with the spiritual resources of the world’s religious traditions in the prevention, resolution and healing of conflicts.”

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209 ibid
Article 5.2 of the World Council Charter states that in order to achieve its mission statement the body will a) Assist policy formation at regional, national, and global levels b) Establish subcommittees on subjects such as conflict resolution, environmental issues of local and global importance, prevention of crime, prevention of terrorism, and gender equality c) Create a forum for the debate and dialogue on matters of concern to any religion.

While these ideals are enshrined in its charter, co-existence and collaboration with ruling political bodies for their implementation demands comprehensive policies that are yet to be established.

7) THE FAILURE OF INTERRELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

The Problem with Centralized Structure

Many world bodies have been faulted for creating top heavy institutional networks that are disconnected from the pulse of the communities. Interfaith organizations for example may comprise ostensible leaders of religious bodies that are oblivious or unable to address political, economic realities on the ground. Inter-religious schisms are sometimes the consequence of such shortcomings.

The apparent “top-down” approach of the World Council of Religious Leaders may render ineffective its purported objectives. This model usually fails to identify the elementary elements of a system that are only discernible from the bottom-up approach.

At a recently concluded event that brought together the clergy, the Caribbean media, and community activists at the District Attorney Office in Brooklyn, the need to encourage goal oriented participation through the bottom-up organizational methodology was emphasized.

The top-down approach is described as the following: A method of breaking down a system to gain insight into the composition subsystems. In a top-down approach an overview of the system is first formulated, specifying but not detailing any first-level

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210 The meeting was held on July 16, 2009. Its purported goals were to create support for the Caribbean media; create a working relationship between the clergy, community leaders and the media, and to examine ways to strengthen the effort of each group in the community.
subsystems. Each subsystem is then refined in yet greater detail sometimes in additional subsystem levels, until the entire specification is reduced to base elements.\textsuperscript{211}

The bottom up approach is modeled after the classical grass roots movement. It is people centered and reflects the true meaning of democratic participation. The following aptly defines this model:

It is the piecing together of systems to give rise to grander systems, thus making the original sub-systems of the system. In a bottom up approach the individual base elements of the system are first specified in great detail. These elements are then linked together to form larger system, which then in turn are linked, sometimes in many levels, until a complete top level system is formed. This strategy resembles a "seed" model whereby the beginnings are small but eventually grows in complexity and completeness.\textsuperscript{212}

The ascendency of Barack Obama is a classical example of the effectiveness of this approach. Ariel Alexvich reported on this political method adopted by the Obama electoral campaign:

The Democratic race is turning out to be a battle of Hilary Clinton’s “top-down” style of politics and Barack Obama’s “bottom-up,” grassroots approach. What is rocking the boat? The internet mostly. Every day it seems, the Web provides another way for average citizens to be active in the political process, instead of having the effects of politics trickle down to them. Nowadays, any way, Democrats at all levels across the country are more and more considering themselves to be “partners in the fight, not donors to the cause.\textsuperscript{213}

Any attempt at engaging the populace to be proactive in social and economic change must involve similar methods of organizational structure and information dissemination. Newly formed inter-traditional bodies must be based on this principle. Its functionality and solidity must begin at the grass roots level, the new media and traditional methods to inform, and galvanize support.

\textsuperscript{211} See \url{http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Top-down_and_bottom-up_design}  

\textsuperscript{212} Ibid

8) CARIBBEAN INTEGRATION THROUGH CULTURAL FUSION

In a July 2009 interview at the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Suriname to the United Nations, Ambassador Henry McDonald expressed optimism with the inter-religious work that was being done in his country, for as he put it, “Culture is the way of the future.” He encouraged the incorporation of his country’s inter-religious body into the political process, and expressed his disappointment that regionalism is still undermined not necessarily by language barriers, but by the lack of communication routes linking the islands. In a letter addressed to the writer, he elaborated on our earlier discussion:

“I sincerely think that in the future, global alliances can be forged along lines of cultural and religious understanding, since the value of cultural and religious activity comes from its independence, its freedom, and the fact that it represents and connects people, rather than governments or policy positions. As such it must be brought into the international and global policy-making processes at the United Nations.”

Since 1989 the Inter-Religious Council in Surinamese has been the venue for consultation and dialogue between the main religions in the country. This council is composed of the principal representatives of these religions. Council members meet at least twice each month to discuss planned ecumenical activities and their position on government policies when necessary. It is noteworthy that in the past this institution has been instrumental in bringing solutions to major national political impasse. On the regional level the Inter-Religious Council in Suriname cooperates with its Caribbean counterparts with the aim to discuss regional and global issues.

As identity politics exert an increasing influence on domestic, regional and international exchanges, culture and religion could be a critical forum for interaction, negotiation and a medium of exchange, in finding shared solutions for all kinds of national and international problems. Cultural and interfaith dialogue provides a forum for mainly unofficial political relationship building. It mainly keeps various channels of negotiation open, when official diplomatic ties are in jeopardy.

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214 This letter was a follow up to an interview with the Ambassador, conducted at the Suriname Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York on July 6, 2009.
In societies marked by cultural and religious pluralism, fostering mutual understanding through dialogue is vital in maintaining social homogeneity. A strong proponent of the use of religious and cultural diplomacy in conflict resolution, Ambassador MacDonald concurs that greater study lies ahead in respect to the creation, expansion and integration of inter-religious bodies with other governmental institutions.

9) SOCIAL MEDIA AND CARIBBEAN SOCIETY: LAYING THE GROUND WORK FOR APPLYING THE TRADITIONS

That modern society can be governed using the values of yesterday may not be that uncommon. In “A Dash of Mysticism: Governing Bolivia, The Aymara Way,” Jose de Cordoda and David Luhnow reveal the seemingly peculiar diplomatic style of Bolivian Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca.

According to the writers, the Foreign Minister is incorporating Aymara concepts into the way the new Bolivian government does business:

Mr. Choquehuanca and other Aymara ministers would like to go back even farther—to 1491, before Columbus sailed for the New World.” stated the writers, noting that most Bolivian intellectuals wish to recreate a communal Eden in contemporary Bolivia. The work of cognitive scientist, Rafael Nunez of the University of California at San Diego was also cited: “Dr Nunez found that to speak of the future, elderly Aymara thumbed or waved back over their shoulder while to speak of the past, they made forward sweeping motions with their hands and arms.215

Any expeditious response to the demands of society will require a confluence of tradition with modernity. Unfortunately, the availability and accessibility to technological hardware and software is part of a broader economic consideration. Countries such as Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela216 have earmarked considerable

216 In “Venezuela: Bringing information technology to the People,” Noah Tucker writes: “With the involvement of the communities, the government is working to enable every Venezuelan to be able to have access to computers and the Internet.”
funds to ensure technological parity with the developed world. This was evident at the 2009 Summit of the Americas in Port of Spain which facilitated over a thousand journalists from all corners of the world with the best information and communicative systems. A press release by the Ministry of Public Administration highlighted the vision of the Government in this area. It reads:

Trinidad and Tobago is in a prominent position in the global information society through real and lasting improvements in social, economic and cultural development and usage of information communication technology. Trinidad and Tobago’s fastforward agenda is all about transforming the country into knowledge-based society by 2008. Government working with the public and private sectors has produced an exciting roadmap that charts a clear and determined course to an online society and knowledge based economy.”

This has not been the case in countries such as Haiti where it is estimated that fewer than 5,000 people have access to the Internet via the country’s servers, and where the most popular internet café, Computer World, is still plagued by some our nationwide problems such as intermittent electrical power. The cash strapped government is now attempting to develop an intranet network that will enhance communication among its ministerial offices.

The value of Sankofa must be detailed through an educational platform. This is realizable through the informational services of every nation. Propagated clearly and concisely at every educational level, governments will receive the support of their people in identifying, streamlining and implementing practices of immediate necessity. It is at this juncture that the ground work would have been laid for a new paradigm that focuses on the interrelatedness of modernity with ancestral traditions, and how society can draw upon the latter for guidance, security and happiness.

Tucker interviewed Ireland Trotman, one of the workers of Venezuela’s hundreds of infocenteres. Trotman stated, “We want to reach the remote areas. We have what we call the infomovil (mobile infocentres), including the infolancha (boats), and the infocampamentos – these are camps which are set up so that the indigenous communities have access to the technology.” This interview at the Ramon Infocentre in Caracas, also appeared on the website 21stcentury socialism.com

217 See http://www.fastforward.tt
Accessed 6/1/2009
218 See http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/43a/160.html
Accessed 6/2/2009
10) ON MODERNITY AND TRADITIONAL RELIGION

Science and the World through ‘Traditional’ Lens

The picture of anthropomorphic gods castigating a recalcitrant mankind or that of human endeavors to placate their gods through animal sacrifices is a simplistic representation of traditional religions. Traditional cosmology is applicable to every phase of mankind’s development and experience.

This point must be emphasized for traditional thought to be welcomed as a valid tool for today’s scientific and technological world. The teachings attributed to traditional religions are timeless and as such are complementary to the scientific world. Any suggestion to the contrary threatens the successful implementation of the new paradigm presented.

That science and traditional religions are indeed complementary is corroborated in the teachings of the Hinduism. Shukavak N. Dasa, writes:

There is a chapter in the Gita entitled Sankhya Yoga. The word “sankhya” means “counting,” “enumeration,” or “analysis.” In the Gita there is a simple form of analysis that classifies matter into eight constituent elements: earth, water, fire, air, space, mind, intelligence and ego. There is essentially a periodic table and an excellent example of early science or what used to be called natural philosophy. Even before Gita, Hindu thinkers had taken the theme “counting” and developed it into one of the six traditional philosophies of ancient India called Saankya. From the perspective of the Bhagavad Gita, it is fair to say that modern science is simply a highly detailed analysis of matter, and in that, sense there is no conflict between the Gita and science…but where the Gita would disagree with modern science is that the latter does not go far enough into the analysis of reality. Vedic “science” is not simply about the mere analysis of matter it also includes the analysis of the soul and God.”

Eintou Springer also expressed similar views on the Orisha faith. In the pantheon of the orishas, each is granted a divine responsibility. They are the vehicle through which the sustenance of the universe is made possible:

Oshun is a divine force of primal attraction that makes creativity possible. The anthropomorphic element to the belief system speaks to the link between man and nature, and therefore to the understanding of the environment so that it will take care of you. But even beyond these mythological analogies that guide our relationship with God, our inner core and the universe, there is the wonderful corpus of the ifa odus220 that really, apart from giving us maxims culled from centuries of acquired knowledge, through the ancient process of divination, can reveal our destiny.221

While Islam’s monotheistic thrust is at odds with traditional religions, it shares a common belief in science and the Cosmos (God).

In May 1995, Dr. Abu Ameebah Bilal Philips, Jamaican native and Director of the Islamic Information Center in Dubai, edited a study by Dr. Maurice Bucaille, entitled, “The Quran and Modern Science.” The study examines what is referred to as “the scientific miracle of the Quran,” citing verses to verify its claim that every facet of scientific enquiry had been comprehensively addressed by the Holy Book:

These statements (verses) and many others are veritable invitations to humanity to enrich their knowledge from all sources. It comes as no surprise, therefore, to learn that in Islam, religion and science have always been considered twin sisters and that today, at a time when science has taken such great strides, they still continue to be associated. Nor is it a surprise to earn that certain scientific data are used for better understanding of the Quranic text. What is more, in a century where, for many people, scientific truth has dealt a death blow to religious, it is precisely the discoveries of science that, in an objective examination of the Islamic scripture, have highlighted the supernatural nature of revelation and the authenticity of the religion which it taught.222

This new traditional religious forum, (inclusive of Islam) steeped in merging the contemporary with timeless spiritual edicts adds a new dynamic to changing the social

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220 The Yoruba Ifa is a system of letters or signs that are commonly referred to as odus. They are fundamental to understanding divination and oracles.
221 Interview conducted July 10, 2009 via telephone and electronic mail.
and cultural patterns in the Caribbean. Its eventual translation will be determined by an innovative paradigm for social reconstruction.

11) THE NEW INTER-RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION:
FOUNDATION OF THE NEW PARADIGM

We must correct and change our ways, go back to the spiritual ways and take care of Mother Earth. If we do not, we are going to face terrible destruction by Nature. Wars will become like powerful winds, bringing Purification of Destruction. The more we turn away from the instruction of the Great Spirit, the more signs we see in the form of earthquakes, floods, droughts, fires, tornadoes; along with wars and corruption. If we do not correct and change these things, we are going to suffer. There is no way we are going to help each other after this. The world problems and the Destruction of Mother earth will be so terrible there may be nothing left on the Earth. We do not want to see this happen. We hope that in bringing these warnings to the attention of the people of this land, and around the world, that we will understand the seriousness of this moment that we may be able to help one another, and to bring about a better way of life.”

(Excerpt of a letter signed by the Traditional Hopi Elders, to the United Nations, August 7, 1994).

Features of the Inter-Religious Traditional Organizations

Unlike the Church in the US, the Caribbean must not allow its traditional religions to play a spectator role in politics. The call for neutrality by writers and politicians is an affront to the foundation of traditional religions. The constitution of any IRO in the Caribbean must safeguard its duty to participate in the political process. The IRO must be meaningfully engaged by politicians in the adoption of policies that affect the people of the region.

The emergence of religious thinkers and philosophers in the Caribbean is not a vote for theocracy as skeptics may believe. It is rather a step toward in restructuring the society in a sharply defined pluralistic setting where social, political and economic control is not commandeered by the state and its organs under the guise of democracy.
This form of pluralism was the underpinning of the Roman Empire, the Empires of Songhai and Mali, and the Gupta Empire between the 3rd to the 6th centuries CE.

Of the Mali Empire, Ibn Battuta writes:

The Negroes possess some admirable qualities. They are seldom unjust, and have a great abhorrence of injustice than any other people. There is complete security in their county. Neither traveler nor inhabitants in it has anything to fear from robbers or men of violence.

The ubiquity and diversity of religious expression in all of these cultures must be noted. Further, religion was not centralized, nor was it used as a form of a centralized governmental control. Instead it provided “ethical guidance” in legal, economic, and other secular matters.

The unique role of religion differed to that historically offered by the Roman Church and Christianity as a whole. In assuming its traditional roles in society, Hinduism, Orisha, and in fact, any movements upholding the tenets of liberation theology are at odds with present day mainstream religion. This incompatibility makes it unfeasible for the IRO in its present form to effect social change.

12) EFFECTING CHANGE THROUGH THE IRTO

The foundation of the IRTO is based on traditional and indigenous values. It is best characterized in the following:

223 Pre-colonial African empire existed from the early 15th century to the late 16th century. It occupied present day Niger and Burkina Faso and covered 1.4 million square km. The renowned Timbuktu was its educational and political base where substantial executive control was delegated to governors and mayors. Local qadis maintained control by maintaining sharia or Islamic law to settle economic and legal disputes.

224 The Mali Empire flourished from the 12th to the 16th century. It comprised present day Guinea and Mali.

225 There was an efficient administration and political unity in India under the Guptas. The empire was divided into provinces which were under control of the governors. The Guptas were tolerant to any religious tradition and continued worshipping their family deity Vishnu. Hinduism was revived, characterized by major deities, image worship, the importance of the temple and devotion. That period saw the advancement and specialization in grammar, logic, astronomy, metaphysics, mathematics, and medicine. (See Gupta Empire in India. http://www.indianetzone.com/5/gupta_dynasty.htm).

The traditional institutions include norms and procedures that shape people’s actions (Fisher, 1993). They consist of codes of conduct that define practices, assign roles and guide interactions. Traditional institutions are generally instrumental in natural resource management and rural development processes at large. Many of these institutions are sustainable over a period of hundreds of years (Pretty, 1990).

The ability of this body to effect change in areas that are critical to social and economic betterment is contingent on support on the local level. The ITRO should not be used as an extension of the incumbent government. In societies where politics is viewed with suspicion, the identification of this group as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) is advisable.

NGOs comprise individual and private associations known for their work, sometimes amid intractable social conflicts. Some are involved in human rights advocacy, social and economic development, and peace building. Its contribution has been invaluable in environmental issues. Highly respected in many circles for the work its grass roots approach of problem solving, it serves to reinforce governmental policy, and are registered and accredited to the United Nations Economic and Social Control.

The formation of such a body can lead to the following: 1) The redefinition of the role of traditional religions in past and contemporary societies; 2) The identification of and recognition of traditional religions through clearly defined guidelines; 3) The introduction of a school curriculum that examines the structure and composition of traditional religions; 4) The establishment of institutes for the instruction and preservation of traditional religions; 5) The establishment of diplomatic and cultural ties with like bodies in the African and Indian continents; 6) Granting observer status to “traditional” leaders during parliamentary and plenary sessions; 7) Funding of “traditional” bodies by central government to undertake secular responsibilities in their

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228 NGOs have increased exponentially. In 1945 when the UN was founded there were 2,265 such organizations. By 1990, the number has risen to 13,591. The online Conflict Resolution website, “Beyond Intractability,” features Carol Stephenson article, “Nongovernmental Organizations’ which details the role, functions, successes, and concerns surrounding these bodies. (See [www.beyondintractability.org](http://www.beyondintractability.org)) Accessed 5/26/2009
respective constituents. 8) Funding scientific projects in the undertaking of research in traditional medicine, and the protection of intellectual property. 9) The development of effective learning and volunteering programs. 10) Ceding authority to “traditional” leaders in respect to minor “village” disputes and justice. 11) The implementation of programs for sustainable development and economic justice in rural areas using the guidelines prescribed by traditional laws.

The time for promoting such a revolutionary concept has never been more propitious, with what appears to be a concentrated global initiative to recognize and restore the traditions.

In “Native Rights Declaration Challenges ‘Settler’ Nations,” Haider Rizvi reports that there is a growing consensus for the protection of indigenous rights, property and culture. The US is currently reviewing a UN resolution to recognize the rights of the world’s 370 million indigenous peoples over their lands and resources. The Bush Administration had rejected this resolution. So have New Zealand and Canada. The new left leaning Australian government of Kevin Rudd has reversed its predecessor’s position. Jenny Macklin, MP stated:

We show respect for Indigenous Peoples. We show our faith in a new era of relations between states and Indigenous peoples in good faith.

In his report Rizvi noted that:

The declaration reflects growing concern of aboriginal communities about the continued exploitation of their resources and the suppression of their cultural values and practices by commercial and government alien to their cultures.229

He further mentioned the growing list of scientists who strongly believe that the traditional knowledge and cooperation of indigenous communities are vital elements in the global fight against climate change and the loss of biodiversity.230

The struggles facing the indigenous peoples in distant lands are one and the same with those of the Caribbean and Latin American peoples who practice their

230 Ibid
traditional cultures. Although the terms “indigenous” and “traditional” are interchangeably used throughout this paper, there exist marked differences. Admittedly, some in the Caribbean Amerindian population in the Caribbean feel oppressed and marginalized by every ethnic group in their midst. For example, this frustration is expressed in “Does Trinidad Recognize Its Indigenous People? What Recognition?” It contends:

The fact of the matter is that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has no legal definition of the term “indigenous peoples,” and frequently appropriates the term for referring to all peoples born in the country, in contradiction to establish international conventions. Secondly, the Government has recognized only one specific organization, and worse yet, it has recognized it in a manner that suggest it is only possible representative of Trinidad “Amerindians,” rendering any other claimants to indigenous identity as fakes. Thirdly, while claiming to recognize the Caribs, the Government has not signed any international conventions or agreements that pertain specifically to the rights of indigenous peoples.232

Despite such concerns, the growing recognition by governments of the indigenous peoples is testament of their worth in facing the challenges that are afflicting societies today. From crime to environmental concerns, indigenous or traditional cultures must be protected and integrated into mainstream organizational and managerial methods.

13) IMPLEMENTING THE IRTO

Allegations of religious interference in the affairs and responsibilities of the state must be met with a prodigious campaign to educate the public on how such a body can effectively respond to challenges outside the confines of religious based practices. It is

231 The Caribs, Kalinas, Kalinago, and Garifunas reside in St. Vincent, Dominica, Belize, Guyana, French Guiana, and Suriname.

232 This essay appeared on “Caribbean Amerindian Centerlink” website. The CAC was established in 1998. Its motto, “From the Guyanese to Central America, from the Antilles to North America,” reflects the thematic message of unity, despite territorial divide. According to its website, its 'network' is expansive: “It (North America) was included since many Caribbean territories currently have Diasporic populations resident there, i.e., Tainos form Puerto Rico and Garifuna from Belize. Central America was included due to the deportation of “Black Caribs" from St. Vincent in the 1970s to that region, with contemporary communities existing in Belize, Guatemala, Suriname, and French Guiana) have formed a cultural and historical part of the Caribbean, from pre-colonial times to The present. (See http://www.centrelink.org
important here to focus on how this was done in the past and how present societies can successfully employ such measures.

Further, the formation of such a body does not negate or marginalize the efforts of the Christian churches to solve problems and contribute to nation building. However, it is important to note that traditional religious doctrines are at odds with Christian Thought. The latter’s uncompromising view of Soteriology through the personage of Christ is at odds with the polytheistic, deistic, and naturalistic elements of some traditional religions.

14) KEY VARIABLES TO SUCCESS OF THE IRTO

Demographics and the Selection Process:

Demographic changes due to the urbanization and a shift in economic planning will complicate efforts of implementing such a program. For example, in developing nations such as Trinidad, a particular area can no longer be identified by its race or ethnicity. The erosion of “Indian” areas and “negro” areas are not complete, but technology, infrastructural development and accessibility to areas once inconceivable, including the movement from the crime ridden urban setting to the “country” have new multi-racial and ethnic enclaves. The “pujaree” can no longer effortlessly administer rulings as mandated by the central government in villages and towns well known for its East Indian make up.

This challenge can only be met with the formation of ethnically mixed subcommittees within traditional inter-religious organizations to serve alongside elected state and local officials in districts and boroughs.

Inter-Organizational Coordination

The constitution of the ITRO will determine the job specifications of its officials, their mandate, and coordination with other institutional bodies. The establishment and implementation of such a body, is an undertaking of marked complexity. It demands
new ideas, the abdication of closely held political and social customs, and the willingness to undertake innovative policies to meet today’s challenges.

**The role and jurisdiction of ITRO**

The ability to be flexible, accommodating and progressive, with a willingness to surrender or delegate duties is the key to administrative success. Indeed, a clearly defined mandate and boundaries may minimize administrative bottlenecks and counterproductive managerial styles.

**Standards in Nomination:**

The composition of such an august and important body demands a thoroughly transparent vetting process. In societies where the offices of politics and religion have been marred by scandals and compromised ethics, nominees must have been actively involved in communities, have earned respect through exemplary service.

**The Challenge: Sustainable development and cultural identity.**

In late June 2009, colleague and friend, journalist Anton Foek of Suriname stated:

Poverty is one of the main problems of the region. Poverty destabilizes and leaves no hope for the future. Poverty means no education, means a devastating brain drain, enriching the developed nations, means un-constructive paralyzing developments which translates into improper housing and even a poor health care system. I believe that the remedy lies in the diverse cultural activities that the region enjoys. Reliance on communalism and sustainable development projects are sure ways to address poverty. In Suriname there is a common perception that race relations are among the best in the world. But I believe that there are some major problems among the different groups. Ethnic groups still shun each other especially when they are competing for economic interests. Again we see the importance of resolving the economic problems in that country and the region as a whole. Stronger diplomatic ties are needed and so too is the need for intimate exchange of information on regional politics, economics, and culture. This is the only way that we can achieve internal and regional prosperity.233

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233 Interview conducted at the Foreign Press Center, New York on July 1, 2009.
Professor Selwyn Cudjoe also shared his thoughts on the persistent problems facing the Caribbean. He elaborated on the concept of identity and “going beyond social elements such as sports, music and the arts.”

He stated:

The political circumstances of the eighties, with an incarcerated Mandela and apartheid, created a scenario where cricket was viewed as more than a sport….but we cannot replicate the past. Now times have changed and I believe that cricket is not as popular as it once was. I remember being in Germany for the World Cup ad it was an unforgettable feeling when the Trinidad and Tobago anthem was played. I got chills, but creating an identity is more than that. It is about social and cultural evolution. Sadly there is no conscious policy where we can study these aspects of our growth.”

Professor Cudjoe then ended the interview with a message to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and the entire region:

We are a small economy, and I do think that we are taking the necessary steps to deal with globalization; for example the Free Trade Initiatives and the move toward a single currency. However what is really needed is for the Caribbean people in the Diaspora to contribute more to the well being of their respective nations. I am tired of people criticizing what is going on in the islands, and not offering any tangible solutions. We must look at the Jews in New York and their relationship with Israel. We must establish contact with villages and organizations at home and learn to solve problems without the involvement of Government every level.235

234 “CaribNews,” November 14, 2006, p.8
235 Ibid
CONCLUSION

One can always view the challenges facing any region or country through the lens of politics and economics. Jose Zaragoza, analyst at FOCAL (Canadian Foundation for the Americas), suggests that economic integration, the tourism industry, and political stability are the principal areas that the Caribbean region must address:

The significant inequality between trading partners in the region has again led them to seek preferential treatment. Caribbean countries argue that in order to survive within the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), they will need to undertake widespread economic reforms. Such reforms would prepare them for an eventual end to preferential treatment and their heavy reliance on income from taxing imports.236

Zaragoza also recommends the improvement of environmental conditions and the development of eco-tourism as vital steps toward bolstering the tourist industry. Finally, on the question on democracy and political stability, he writes:

Most Caribbean countries differ from their Latin American neighbors in terms of their relatively long history of political stability. Yet the stability could change quickly if the economic security of the region does not improve. He then goes on to recommend programs for sustainable development; strengthening regional cooperation and environmental protection, and a united foreign policy as practical solutions to the regions problems.237

While Jose Zaragoza’s analysis touches on vital areas of Caribbean reconstruction, it fails to address the axis of the Caribbean experience which is its traditional cultural

237 Ibid
DNA. Such a comprehensive exploration requires a protracted study of the region, quite possibly, through the lens of a native.

My contention is that the traditional religions of the Caribbean – Orisha, Pachamama, Hinduism, Voodoo, Santeria, and to a lesser degree Islam - have always served the needs of the people. They provided solace in times of anguish, healed the infirmed, exorcised the demons of the mentally ill, offered guidance in governance of self and the environment; and sounded the battle cry when armed resistance was necessary. Furthermore, the element of “liberation theology” found in every one of these expressions cannot be marginalized.

As the principal point of reference, the reintegration of the Aymara and Quechua peoples of Bolivia may prove to be the most influential development in the entire region.

Pundit Rakesh Maharaj is among the many leaders who contend that it is only through religious education in schools that our society can reduce crime and construct a productive and stable society. However, if schools are funded along ethnic and religious lines, are we beginning the process of ‘Balkanizing’ the region?

In his 2009 keynote address commemorating Emancipation Day, Professor Selwyn Cudjoe chided political opportunists and racial antagonists in Trinidad for intentional inflaming passions for cheap political gain. He also reminded the audience that earlier efforts to integrate schools by one former administration failed because of the Indian community’s determination to promote and establish exclusive Hindu schools. This is a critical issue because the success of religious schools has brought social mobility and economic success of Indians in Trinidad. Professor Cudjoe alluded to this and hence the clarion calls for Africans to reclaim their heritage and sense of cultural destiny. However, as culture is reclaimed at every social level, the need for constructive inter-ethnic dialogue becomes even more exigent. Herein lays the challenge.

The equal promotion of all cultures at every level will mitigate, if not remove the underlying mistrust among competing groups. In this regards, one can suggest that governance should not be centralized or dominated by any one ethnic group.

In “Integration in a Diverse Society,” Laksiri Jayasuriya writes:
Western democracies which have sought to emulate an American or French model of a nation state, regard all citizens integrated into a common societal culture, i.e. one which involves a common language, social and political institutions rather than a common religion or other personal lifestyles such as those derived from the ‘culture’ of the majority group. In other words this view of a ‘common societal culture’ acknowledges that in a modern liberal and secular democracy, the culture of life styles is pluralistic and accommodates different religious and other social groups.

Ethnic identity is clearly not a reified fixed identity but one of mixed identities operating in the political domain. This underscores the need for diverse plural democratic societies to have a common understanding and acceptance of the political dimension of a nation. This is fundamental to any sense of social solidarity, identity, and integration. In a pluralistic society, integration is based on the unifying commonalities of the political nation.”

Jayasuriya, whose study was based on Australian society, will agree that the Caribbean region is comprised of a number of plural societies and not, to use his definition, “cultural nations” (with elusive shared values). The common values binding among the diverse groups in this region revolve around a hybrid art form, language, traditions, and a distinct political and economic culture.

Regional stability is only possible when there is freedom of cultural expression and identity and the promotion of political and economic fairness among the groups. This must be evident at every level of governance and policy decisions.

In this study, we have suggesting that recovering the past in order to safely and sanely embark on the future is the path of Sankofa. A common misconception is that in embracing Sankofa, one abrogates all connection to contemporary technological innovations. But such a concept is far removed from truth. Caribbean society has moved beyond the misguided view that identification with ones heritage whether in attire, religion, or name change, is anachronistic and counterproductive. A belief that all things European or American are emblematic of modernity lingers but is hardly powerful a notion that it once was.

238 University of Western Australia, Institute of Advanced Studies, Issue 4, January 2007.
In this respect, controversial Guyanese journalist Enrico Woolford explained the problems of the Caribbean purely from the aspect of information technology and communications.

Caribbean society is still playing catch up I am convinced that our difficulties are caused by lack of accessibility to information. In Guyana and the rest of the Caribbean, there is always this assumption of truth when it comes from the so-called official channels. But the official word does not mean the true word. There is also a fear to comment on a matter for fear of knowing how that information will be handled. In other words there is always a hesitance to speak out if you believe that you are creating a problem.\textsuperscript{239}

As a journalist who has crossed paths with the Government due to his candid and in depth style of reporting, he is well aware of how the levers of power can choke the pipeline of knowledge and information, especially in small societies.

In addressing this problem, which Mr. Woolford agrees permeates every fabric of governance; he advocates the immediate enforcement of a Freedom of Information Act. He also advocates a higher standard of journalism and the decentralization of organizations in both the public and private sector for there to be a freer flow of information.

In respect to government officials he stated:

Our Caribbean politicians are suffering from the “Nixon Syndrome.” This is as an obsession with the right public image at the expense of responsibility, ethics and the law. The goal of the Caribbean politician it seems is holding on to power as opposed to service.\textsuperscript{240}

Mr. Woolford went on note the inevitability of a transparent and open society as the compelling argument for change in the Caribbean.

The world has changed; technology has changed and we are being left behind from a governmental level right down to the smallest level of organizational structure.\textsuperscript{241}

\textsuperscript{239} Telephone interview, August 29, 2009
\textsuperscript{240} Ibid
\textsuperscript{241} Ibid
Mr. Woolford’s approach of “testing” the veracity of information and querying “official facts,” can also be adopted in presenting this new course or paradigm for national and regional development. As he stated, the channels of communication must be open at the smallest level of organization structure.

“Finding truth,” can translate into the presentation of traditional religions as a well defined and structured approach to understanding God, Life and our relation to the Universe.

In order to participate in this process, the structure of traditional religions must also undergo change. The repackaging of traditionalism in a world of high technology is paramount.

Traditional leaders must use new technology to dispel misconceptions of their faiths; to present, if not defend their relevance to contemporary society; and to reach prospective members. In so doing, traditional leaders and their apologists in the Caribbean can lift the shroud of mystery and ignorance that has bedeviled their movements.

To facilitate this change, the concept of restructuring government to accommodate NGO offices is necessary.

These new units will introduce and coordinate the implementation of ‘traditional ideas and methodologies.’

Interestingly, Caribbean nations can learn from Bhutan, a small nation in the Himalayas committed to preserving its traditions, while embarking on a progressively modern agenda. The innovative agenda of Vanuatu, a small Pacific island that has ambitious plans of solely using solar energy should also be studied. The Vanuatu Daily Post on May 25, 2009, stated that members of the Teachers Union were expecting to throw away their hurricane lamp and sell off their generators that use fuel. Solar equipment is also expected to supply other appliances such as irons and refrigerators. The paper finally reported that many families living in the remote part of the island with inter-island cargo vessels rarely visit them with their supply of kerosene, can now breath an air of relief with the knowledge that solar energy is an alternative source of power.
The confluence of traditionalism with modernity can be a complex marriage. Clearly, this is not a marriage of choice, but an arrangement that was brought on us by the dire nature of our global circumstance. However, the region’s traditions must be preserved through the establishment of well funded and operated academies, research institutes and museums. Only then can we capture their true worth and relevance to the challenges facing today’s society.

The time tested edicts and practices of yore are only relevant when engineered by a commitment to their implementation. That the Caribbean region is poised to embrace a future free of corruption, and injustice will only be determined by the willingness of its people.

In March 23, 2009, at a ceremony at the National Museum in Port of Spain, Poet Laureate, Eintou Springer’s address touched on many of the issues raised in this paper:

In the years since I assumed this post of Laureate, I have confronted the continuing sterility of our school curricula geared towards producing persons with pieces of paper ready to fill a niche in the job market; devoid of rootedness to their cultural moorings and basic information about their history. The celebration of our community heroes, our gifts and talents are still not given pride of place. ....In this Carnival country, we still have not recognized that we can teach Maths, History, Geography, Arts and Social Studies through Carnival, our history and our Folklore. Rather, our Ministry spends countless thousands on ads couched in language to which clings the stench of the innate social disapproval of the Mas.......Yours is the task to then take this knowledge and then create the link between tradition and modernity, a responsibility given to us by the Fanonesque242 doctrine. There should be no dichotomy between tradition and modernity. There is no reason that the La Diabliesse,243 her light coloured skin, her long right dress and her club feet cannot be used to represent the dangers of AIDS, of cocaine and one –night stands.

242 A foremost authority on race and psychopathology, Franz Fanon was born in Martinique and grew up under the French occupation of the Caribbean island during the World War 11.
243 La Diabliesse is a folklore figure in Trinidad and Tobago. This she-devil appears normal but her diabolic side is revealed by one cloven foot which is hidden under a long skirt. She is attractive to young men who follow her into the woods where she suddenly disappears. Days later the unsuspecting victims are found dead either by a precipitous fall or ravished by wild animals.
There is no reason why the stories of the Douen,\textsuperscript{244} cannot caution about kidnapping, dealing with strangers ... the possibilities are limitless.

Culture is our unique and individual way of defining ourselves as a people. The artist in all the many formulations in which the art exists, is by extension the Curator of the nation's soul. To ignore us, is to ignore and devalue ourselves, to reap the whirlwind now swirling about our heads."

On the heels of Mrs. Springer's stirring social diagnosis, it was refreshing to learn of the creation of a Peoples' Ministry in Trinidad and Tobago. During her 2010 press conference at her country's diplomatic mission to the UN, Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, acknowledged the high anticipation with which this new office was received by the public. "There has been a lot of buzz about this ministry," she said, as she praised the vitality of its youthful minister, Dr. Glenn Ramadharsingh.

Conceding that all the mechanisms were not in place and not fully operational she clearly seemed to grasp the importance of this office to the overall success of her tenure as political leader.

In my commentary the following day, I wrote,

I believe that the Ministry of the People is pivotal and decisive to the fate of the administration. The concept and fruition of this ministry are at the core of the democratic process and should be used to facilitate personal, social, political and economic empowerment. Yes, the ministry must aid the most vulnerable, but it must create mechanism of sustenance at all levels. This is the challenge of the Ministry."\textsuperscript{245}

I interacted with Dr. Ramadharsingh, at this press conference. He appeared receptive to the ideas presented in this dissertation. Only time will determine if his ministry will undertake further dialogue and study of Sankofa, and its relevance to his country and the region as a whole.

\textsuperscript{244} Douens are lost souls of children who were never baptized or christened. They are depicted as faceless with feet turned backwards. They encourage unsuspecting children to follow them into the woods where they get lost, sometimes never to be found. Sounds of whimpering in the night are attributed to douennes.

\textsuperscript{245} (http://guardian.co.tt/print/commentary/columnist/2010/09/29/wildly-popular-ny-visit-kaml...
GLOSSARY

Ayoba: Termed is used in Cuba to denote the Yoruba religion.

Bush doctor: A term used pejoratively to describe one with little formal training in medicine. In the past, the services of bush doctor were readily sought by villagers who had little or no access to modern medical care.

Dougla: a distinct racial group from Indian and African miscegenation, primarily found in Guyana and Trinidad,

Durga: A Hindu goddess, believed to be very popular during the Aryan invasion of India. The goddess Kali is said to be one of her manifestations.

Candumble: A syncretic religious system in Brazil that blends Roman Catholicism with Yorubal traditions. It is markedly similar to Voodoo found in Haiti, Santeria of Cuba, and the Orisha faith in Trinidad. All of these New World eclectic religious expressions are heavily influenced by West African and Christian lores.

Cocoa panyol: A racial type in Trinidad said to be descendents of Venezuelan natives. They are identified by their “reddish” complexion and reside in the North western part of the island.

Kali: The worship of mother Kali has been misunderstood. It has been equated with the so called dark side of Hinduism. Nothing is further from the truth. The worship of the Mother by renowned spiritual masters such as Sri Ramakrishna, a Brahmin is well documented. A huge Kali temple is found in Pasea Village in Trinidad, and attracts worshippers of various ethnic backgrounds during Sunday worship. The stigma associated with Kali may have derived from the depiction of her as black in complexion. Kali worshippers in the south of India are also black skinned (sudras) and tend to be at the bottom of the caste system.
Islamo-Fascism: A controversial term popularized by conservative writers to describe the philosophy of terrorists fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. The term has appeared less frequently with a new US administration that has criticized the previous administration’s foreign policy and methods of fighting “the war on terror.”

Obeah: An occult or mystical practice used to create a change in someone’s present or future life. The objective is to benefit or hurt an individual(s). To work Obeah signifies that a particular action is being taken to bring about that desired effect. Special paraphernalia, incantations, and environmental conditions are needed for a successful outcome. The practice has its origins in West Africa and is derived from the Ashanti word ‘Obi’ meaning ‘sorcery.’ It is popular in the English speaking Caribbean, especially Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica.

Ogun: Popular god of the Orisha faith. Ogun is the god of iron, the god of war. Not surprisingly, he was invoked by Haitians slaves during the 1791 insurrection. Years later, he is again said to have appeared on the battle field alongside the insurgents, ensuring a decisive blow to the French expeditionary forces.

Pujaree: A Hindu holy man who officiates at pujas (Hindu prayers). His spiritual work is not unlike the hougan or Voodoo priest.

Hougan: A voodoo priest. The term is used in Haiti.

Mambo: A Haitian Creole term used for a Voodoo priestess.

Quetzalcoatl: Both a creator god and cultural hero for the pre-Colombian people of Central America. In “History of Things of New Spain” by the 16th century writer, Bernardino Sahagun, one reads: “In the city of Tollan reigned for many years a King called Quetzalcoatl. He was exceptional in moral virtues. The place of this king among these natives is like King Arthur among the English.”

Spirit Lash: This is a popular expression in Trinidad to describe an inexplicable illness that attacks the mind or body. The stricken person is said to be victim of a spirit lash, administered by the occult practices of an obeah man or woman.

Santeria: An admixture of African and Roman Catholic religious practices found in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela.
Sharia: Islamic jurisprudence. Islamic states such as Iran are governed by the prescriptions outlined in this comprehensive body of laws.

Shango: The most popular and colorful god in the Orisha pantheon. He is associated with thunder and lightning.

Soca: A rhythmic melody that fused calypso and American soul music. Originated in Trinidad and the early 1970s, it was then criticized as a corruption of authentic calypso.

Sudras: Verses in the Ouran

Voodoo: A comprehensive religious system that includes cosmology, eschatology, rituals, prayers and a hierarchy of teachers, mediums, and priests. A study of this religion has little, if anything in common with the sensational and erroneous depiction of Hollywood.
ILLUSTRATIONS

ILLUSTRATIONS 1 AND 2: The “integrative” view of traditional religions. Man is never divorced from his surroundings. The “seen” and the “unseen” are inextricable. Man is but a part of a complex, and at times, unintelligible puzzle. Controlling or placating the environment and its sometimes inimical forces, is the work of the spiritual or traditional leader. Nevertheless, all must ultimately succumb to Fate.
15) ILLUSTRATION 2

SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY
ILLUSTRATION 3: THE NEW PARADIGM FOR CARIBBEAN SOCIAL 
AND POLITICAL REFORM
**Illustration 4. The Western concept of man’s ordained interaction with his environment**

Here, in this failed model, mankind is touted as the master of his environment and even destiny. He is favored by God amongst the creation. God is said to have had his very Son sacrificed for the salvation of man.

Man is outside God’s creation, looking outward, master of what he sees. From the Age of Reason, to the Industrial revolution and the Age of Science and Technology, man is continuously seeking ways of mastering self and surroundings. This has led to the relegation of religion and spirituality as useful tools in times of solace and “higher” needs. It has also led to materialistic theories such as agnosticism and atheism.
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**6) HISTORY/RACE AND CULTURE/**


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