

Research Article

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La Divina Pastora, the *Dougla*¹ Madonna

https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2019-0006 Received October 9, 2018; accepted December 7, 2018

Abstract: This article contextualises the adoration of la Divina Pastora (Siparia Mai) in Trinidad with the racially charged politics of the island nation. Using interviews and participant observation, it demonstrates the importance and unique nature of this practice which allows people of many faiths share in the space that is la Divina. This religious, cultural and social space is one of many on the island where diversity is celebrated, unlike the political arena where race-baiting is used to rally the electorate. The article uses various theories of race to analyse why Hindus and Catholic devotees are willing to share access while their political leaders seem unwilling and/or unable to do the same meaningfully. The paper concludes that while no current theory of race sufficiently explains the la Divina experience but that She embodies the national hegemonic ideal which politicians claim they embrace but which they do little to encourage because doing so will undermine their political base.

Keywords: Trinidad, la Divina Pastora, Siparia, Hindu, Catholic, race

The worship of la Divina Pastora at Siparia, Trinidad² where Hindus and Catholics pray, side by side is an example of the ability of diverse groups in Trinidad and Tobago (see Tables 1 and 2) to live in harmony with each other. This practice counters the politics of race that is part of the country's national landscape. Trinbagonian³ politics has always involved questions of race starting with the divide and rule politics of British colonial officials and continuing with two major political parties, the People's National Movement (PNM) and the United National Congress (UNC). This political reality seems a stark contrast to what happens in Siparia where Hindus and Catholics worship together before the statue of la Divina Pastora in the Catholic church of the same name and have been for over one hundred years.

Before proceeding further, it is important to clarify two terms that will be used throughout this document. Firstly, when referring to race, it is not to validate the construct, rather it is a recognition of the sociopolitical categories used as an identifying marker. Within the Trinbagonian context, these racialised groups are usually thought to be African, Indian, Chinese, White, Mixed, Syrian/Lebanese and Other. These racial groups do not in themselves indicate ethnic allegiances. A Trinbagonian's ethnicity is the product of a more complex set of markers. It is a result of "race" as well as the country or countries of origin of an individual's ancestors Yelvington⁴ and Khan⁵, both explore this in their separate essays on Trinidad ethnicity. Another

¹ This term is traditionally used to describe the offspring of Indians and Africans. It is said to be derived from either the Hindi word for black or bastard and has been extended to include all products, both tangible and intangible, that results from the mixing of Indian and African culture.

² The church where the events described in this paper take place on the island of Trinidad however the country is the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

³ A colloquialism used instead of the more formal Trinidad and Tobago.

^{4 &}quot;Introduction: Trinidad Ethnicity." Trinidad Ethnicity, edited by Kelvin Yelvington, University of Tennessee, 1993, 1-32.

^{5 &}quot;What is 'a Spanish'? Ambiguity and 'mixed' ethnicity in Trinidad." Trinidad Ethnicity, edited by Kelvin Yelvington, University of Tennessee, 1993, 180-207.

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important point is that although the geopolitical nation is Trinidad and Tobago, throughout this paper, its citizens will be referred to as Trinbagonians. This is a matter of simple convenience (shortening the name) and the events described in this paper take place in the town of Siparia which is on the island of Trinidad. It is important to note that many of these issues of race and ethnicity discussed in this paper do not manifest themselves in the same way on the island of Tobago where the population is not as racially diverse as Trinidad. However, regardless of the island on which they live, the issues discussed there are national ones that impact citizens.

Table 1. A Comparison of the Ethnic Groups within Trinidad and Tobago, 1980 to 2011. Source: *Trinidad and Tobago 2011 Population and Housing Census Demographic Report*, The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Central Statistical Office, Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development, 2012, http://cso.gov.tt/media/publications-documents/.

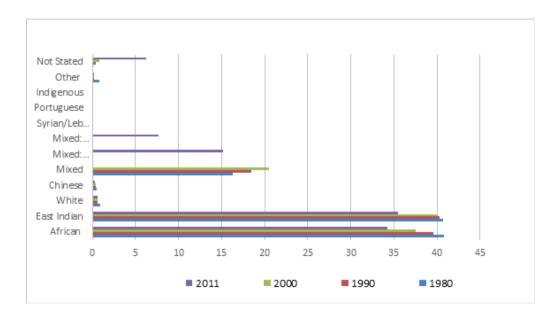
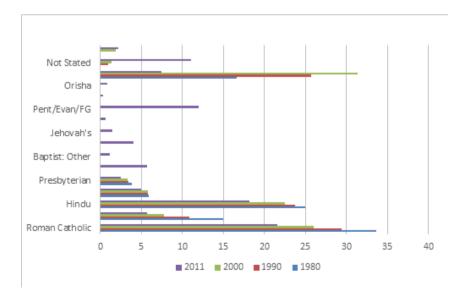


Table 2. A Comparison of the Religious Groups within Trinidad and Tobago, 1980 to 2011. Source: *Trinidad and Tobago 2011 Population and Housing Census Demographic Report*, The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Central Statistical Office, Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development, 2012, https://cso.gov.tt/media/publications-documents/.



This paper argues that la Divina and Her pilgrims are instructive in the understanding of race and race relations in Trinidad. The contraction between the national narrative (every creed and race find an equal place) and political practice (rum and roti politics) is what this paper seeks to investigate. La Divina is not the only example of shared national spaces, but it is one that is both a site of tension and collaboration; an intimate experience and a national shrine; regulated and open; contested and embraced.

This paper begins by introducing the reader to the historical events that shaped the cultural, political and ethnic landscape of Trinidad and Tobago with a significant focus on the island of Trinidad where la Divina is located. Next, it discusses some of the common theories of race specifically as they pertain to multi-ethnic and Caribbean societies and Trinidad in particular. Then it turns to the voices of the pilgrims to understand how their experiences of la Divina helps them understand race, politics and Trinbagonian society. The paper concludes that la Divina pilgrims are very aware of the attempts of politicians to divide and rule but, in part because of their devotion to la Divina, they can recognise in each other, and by extension their fellow citizen, a fraternity that goes beyond religious, racial or political ideology.

Explaining La Divina in Trinidad

The Aragonese Capuchins founded a mission at Siparia in the southern part of the island sometime between 1756 and 1759 (Ottley 58-59), and it was there that they introduced the feast of La Divina Pastora or the Divine Shepherdess (see Figure 1) to Trinidad. The origins of the statue are not known; however, Goldwasser explores some of these origin stories in her 1996 dissertation.



Figure 1. La Divina Pastora covered with offerings from the faithful on Holy Thursday/Good Friday. Source: Alison Mc Letchie, 2002

Trinidad, a neglected Spanish colony attempted to increase the population by issuing the Cedula of Population in 1783 which was extended to French and Irish Catholics (White men and freed persons of Colour) requiring that all migrants be "subjects of a nation tied to Spain" ("Modern Trinidad" 14). The Cedula established a direct link between wealth and the ownership of slaves, not just as a potential source of labour, but as a means of acquiring land. Free men, especially Blacks and Coloureds, saw their investments grow on this (culturally) French (ethnic, ideological, civil liberties and language), Spanish (political) colony where Roman Catholicism was the official religion.

In 1797 when Trinidad became a British colony, officials attempted to institute a more rigorous type of rule. Although Catholics were guaranteed religious freedom, the British government worked to encroach on the civil liberties of the slaves and the free Blacks and Coloureds and worked hard to instil a rigorous class/caste system in Trinidad. Post emancipation, there serious labour shortages and officials looked to migration to solve their problem. Turning (unsuccessfully) to newly freed slaves from the Eastern Caribbean and African colonies and freed Blacks from the United States. Then to Europe, next to the Chinese before finally settling on Indian immigrants as a source of migrant labour for the British. Starting in 1845 and ending in 1917, approximately 143,939 people came to the island from India (see Table 3).

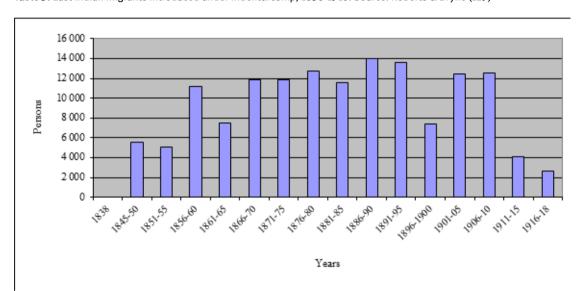


Table 3: East Indian Migrants Introduced under Indentureship, 1838-1918. Source: Roberts & Bryne (129)

Most of the labourers came through Calcutta's port (smaller number originating in Madras) were Hindu, but there was a small Muslim group (both Shi'ites and Sunnis), and a smaller number of Christians. Housing was provided on the estates and those that left the plantation without permission were penalised. The terms of indentureship required that immigrants work, initially for five years (later ten) on the plantation in return for a wage and return passage to India. Between 1869 and 1880, however, an immigrant, resident in Trinidad for ten or more years, could receive ten acres of land if he gave up his claim for free return passage to India. Less than 20% of the Indian workers returned to India.

The country's movement towards self-governance began in earnest at the end of the Second World War and political independence was achieved in 1962. The PNM was established in 1956 and from its inception, it has always been perceived as a political party that serves the needs of Christian, middle-class, Afro-Trinbagonians. However, there have always been several high-profile members, even among its founding members, who were both non-Christian and/or Indo-Trinbagonians.

The UNC in its present incarnation is the second major party on the island. Its roots can be traced to the labour unions of sugar cane workers which explains the party's traditionally strong ties to the Indo-Trinbagonian population. The party descended from, and is related to, other parties, which have either been absorbed by it, or with which it was once, but is no longer, affiliated. These include the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the Democratic Labour Party (DLP). In recent years, the UNC has managed to recruit several Afro-, Christian-Trinbagonians.

According to Vertovec⁶ local racial, political polarisation began as early as 1956 as a direct result of the methods used by the colonisers to control the diverse population. This strategy combined with the competition for economic resources and access to the political super-structure has shaped the current climate. This is the Trinidad in which la Divina exists and thrives: a diverse island of many people, with many faiths, all of whom worked hard to create a home for themselves and their children. It is these people and their descendants that She serves, and who serve Her.

Explaining Race in Trinidad

To understand the importance of la Divina in the context of the political and social reality of Trinidad and Tobago, various theories of race relations need to be examined. Plural societies, for example, were defined by J. S. Furnivall in 1939, as "a society comprising two or more social orders which live side by side, yet without mingling, in one political unit" (Morris 124). M. G. Smith (239-240) developed Furnivall's definition further, suggesting that any definition of plural society should be extended to include class and religion. He argues that because of the legal restrictions of colonial societies and the threat of the possible use of force, the groups that comprise plural societies would, in fact, seek to form separate nation-states.

Beckford introduces the idea of plantation society, a type of plural society, where the economic system was developed to serve a colonial overlord. He argues that even in instances where the colonial power has been removed and replaced by indigenous politicians, "characteristics of the plantation system have persisted, and they define a particular social framework" (Beckford 139); this is manifested in the economic system that includes dependence on large amounts of unskilled labour, centralized decision making, authoritative management and strict social stratification. This model can be used to explain the continued "existence of a class-caste system based on differences in the racial origins of plantation workers on the one hand and the owners on the other" (Beckford 144). For Beckford, even though the worker has moved off the plantation, his status remains the same; the authority of the capitalist is supreme.

Beckford however does not account for the many spheres in which people in these societies interact that are not economic like schools, in churches, and at Carnival. His model also does not consider the growth of the Black and Indian upper class nor does he sufficiently confront the complexity of social stratification within Caribbean societies that includes many factors, among them "race." skin colour, religion, educational level, and family connections.

Multiculturalism, another theory of race relations, centres on amicable coexistence of various groups within the nation-state. Roy Todd writes that it can take two forms: ideological or state policy; ideologically, multiculturalism themes discuss "incorporating acceptance of different ethnic groups, religion, cultural practices, and linguistic diversity within a pluralist society" (204). This theory has been criticised on several different grounds. First, there is concern that the unity of the nation-state is threatened by the diversity of which it is composed. Another anxiety is over the possible creation of cultural and social ghettos for ethnic minorities. Finally, some argue that as legislators push multiculturalism, other issues important to nation building are ignored. The problem that confronts supporters of multiculturalism is how to incorporate the principle into the fabric of mainstream social, cultural and political life of the nation-state.

Andre-Vincent Henry suggests: "there needs to be an explanation of the relatively peaceful co-existence among racial groups which is, at the same time, accompanied by suspicion, separateness and hostility" (24). Henry's call for a model that is better suited to the Trinidadian experience is legitimate; however, he seems to ignore his own data that demonstrates that of the six racial categories (Indian, African, Mixed, White, Chinese and Other) in the census reports, the Mixed group is the only one growing. This is clearly

⁶ Vertovec, Steven. "Hinduism in the Diaspora: The Transformation of Tradition in Trinidad." *Caribbean Sociology: Introductory Readings*, edited by Christine Barrow and Rhoda Reddock. Ian Randle Publishers, 2001, 622-642.

an indication that, with respect to personal relationships, individuals are interacting very closely or that individuals acknowledge the benefits political, social and economic that are derived from labelling themselves as Mixed.

Munasinghe answers some of Henry's argument; she claims that Trinidad does not fit the traditional models of plural or multicultural societies. Rather, she suggests that there are two national narratives operating simultaneously upon the national consciousness. Trinidad "has two nationalist narratives, one of a cosmopolitan plural society and the other of creolization" (Hybrid Spaces 667). She contends that the presence of both these narratives causes a new type of national identity to emerge: one that embraces both ideas of creolization and diversity.

Creolization, for Munasinghe, developed in response to the need for postcolonial leaders to create a national identity that specifically addressed the complexity of a multi-ethnic, non-indigenous population. About this notion of creolization, Khan writes that it is a reaction to "a desire to recuperate the subaltern and the marginal, to bring agency, resistance, and resilience back to the disempowered" (Callaloo or Tossed Salad 273); it prevents the development of any single master narrative. Brathwaite argues that creolization leads to the creative development of a whole unit (political, cultural, and social) in Jamaica, rather than two separate societies (Black and White). For him the development of a creolization meant that the "local" and "resident" acquired value and relevance; indigenous institutions and traditions were validated. He claims that creolization allows for, "interrelated and sometimes overlapping orientations...nothing is really fixed and monolithic" (115).

An argument can be made that the Caribbean is a frontier that acts as Lamar and Thompson write as a "zone of interpenetration" (7) between several distinct societies. This zone is a direct result of colonialism, and despite independence, many if not all Caribbean territories are still part of this zone. In Trinidad, this is most relevant. As ethnic and religious groups attempt to create a nation-state and forge a national identity, erosion or infusion is occurring as various groups interact. "Purity" is no longer an option; a Creole identity has emerged and continues to be formed.

More specifically, in the Trinidad context, douglarization has emerged as a contested ideology and personal identity. Douglas, either as a racial category or as a cultural space is an extension of Creolization. For some douglarization is problematic because in their opinion it requires the rejection of parts of Indian or African identity for the Dougla to be created. Others see douglarization is the only solution for racial and political tension in the nation since Dougla individuals are the physical manifestation of the country's two largest ethnic groups. This paper maintains that la Divina is a Dougla Madonna not just because of Her physical appearance but also because of Her ability to draw both Afro- and Indo-Trinbagonians to Her and in this space they can preserve their individual faith traditions.

Munasinghe's work on national identity in Trinidad suggests that it is shaped by the dual narratives (as mentioned above), "a cosmopolitan plural society and the other of creolization" (Hybrid Spaces 667). The complexity of Trinidad and Tobago society forces the observer to consider how traditional theories of race, ethnicity and national identity apply to complex, diverse, post-colonial societies.

La Divina, this paper proposes, is both a manifestation and product of Trinbagonian identity. The fluidity with which non-Catholics accept the Catholic saint into their lives and the willingness of Catholics to accommodate non-Catholics suggests that boundaries, especially of race, ethnicity and religion, are not fixed. Giving the political landscape that endorses and even encourages racial and ethnic tension, particularly at election time; this paper explores la Divina intending to learn whether any of these theories of race and ethnic relations apply.

Living La Divina

This study was conducted in two phases in 2002. In the first phase, devotees and church laypersons were observed over Holy Thursday and Good Friday of the Christian Easter week and they participated in Siparia Mai festival. The second phase took place over a period of four weeks that same summer when pilgrims were interviewed about their devotions. These were semi-structured interviews which asked about their individualised practice, national politics and family history. All the names of the interviewees have been changed to protect their identity.

In Trinidad and Tobago's racialised politics, it is important to explore what la Divina devotees think about each other. Pilgrims explain their views on the national political atmosphere and compare it with their own personal experiences as worshippers at Siparia and as citizens.

Ms Ali: "I have just always believed whenever, like no matter how you pray, whatever form, whatever you use, is just one God."

Many pilgrims made statements like Ms Ali's. The oneness of God was a theme that was repeated often and is an important part of the experience of la Divina. Boodoo claims that Hindus, Muslims, Roman Catholics and other devotees share one understanding of la Divina. According to him, they all view her "as an aid in times of need and one who grants favours and ensures proper guidance and protection" (Boodoo 385). This common bond is what all devotees share. Ms Ali explained why she would encourage anyone to make devotions to la Divina:

Ms Ali: They should come because is a place where dev could find prosperity. And a place where you could sit down and...you could talk to Her. Like I talking to you. And is something that good for me. And as long as it good for me it good for you.

Since pilgrims all share the same need and desire: answers to their prayers; they can empathise with each other. There is no competition for Her attention since access is given to all. Gupta and Ferguson "that identity neither 'grows out' of rooted communities nor is a thing that can be possessed or owned by individual or collective social actors" (13). La Divina's pilgrims have multiple alliances: religious, economic, social, and political. During the Easter pilgrimage, all devotees stand in the same line; wealth, religion, educational background or race does not help gain privilege or access to the statue. Jagassar asked me to guess which political party she belonged to:

Ms Jagassar: I is a PNM. Eric Williams is de best, he was de greatest.

This statement illustrates that in instances where a political party is traditionally affiliated with one ethnic group there are significant numbers of members for other ethnic groups who belong to it. It is also anecdotal evidence of the complexity of the national community. A person's social identity is not fixed by economic, ethnic or religious affiliation. Rather it reflects these and other factors. The statue serves to link pilgrims; before Her, they become a community, because of their belief in la Divina.

Enloe suggests that tension is likely when different religions are practised within a multi-ethnic group, particularly when these religions are "theologically and organizationally elaborate and explicit, and when those religions have generated taboos operative in the routine aspects of life" (198) and if there is proselytising. Within both faith practices, there are traditions that encourage respect and tolerance for differences but still there is can be intolerance or misunderstanding. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, there is little evidence of an evangelical movement within the Hindu community. Historically Catholics have been known to compel conversions in some instances. Many people have related occasions when children were baptised to gain entry to a government-assisted Catholic school. However, since the establishment of the Inter-Religious Organization (IRO), there has been an attempt at tolerance and respect between the various religious groups. The environment of co-existence is in direct contradiction to some of the early efforts by the priests at Siparia, particularly in the 18th and 19th century, to stop Hindus from worshipping la Divina. Many Hindus still maintain that their religion is demonised, their practices scorned, and their devotees victimised.

These attacks are sometimes experienced by non-Catholics at Siparia. Ms Naipaul, a younger, Indo-Hindu woman who was introduced to la Divina (but calls Her Mother when praying to Her) by her maternal Indo-Catholic grandmother and is married to an Indo-Catholic, described to me her experience having witnessed the hostility of two Afro-Catholics toward another Indo-Hindu pilgrim:

Ms Naipaul:

Last year, there were some Catholic people here. It did not happen to me, but there was this woman who, normally every single day while I was doing de fasting, she would come in here. She was ageable [older], her husband was really bad to her. She used to come every day and bring a bread or flowers and just sit here for a couple hours and this particular day that I came, she was praying, and these two women keep saying to her, "why are you coming to de Catholic church? Why don't you all take your prayers into your temple?" And all that. And the woman just did not say anything.

And I just look at them and say, "Well you know what, de church is built for anybody. No matter what race or what colour you are, you are welcome in de church and there isn't any sign. I'm a Hindu and if we are not supposed to come in de Catholic church they should put up a sign. I have known for how many years my grandmother and everybody who are Hindus, so why should you say that to de woman."

Well she didn't take them on. She just continue saying her prayers.

Alison: Did anybody else in de church try to shut them up?

Ms Naipaul: No it was just these two women. It was early in de morning and just these two women who were in the

church.

Alison: Were they Black women [Afro-Trinbagonians].

Ms Naipaul: Yes, Black women.

Alison: But that was your only experience like that?

Ms Naipaul: That was my only experience. Coming here, I never had any problems, 'cause I don't live far from here and

I'm accustomed around and people here know me.

Alison: So why do you think these two women chose to behave like that?

Ms Naipaul: I doh know, but you know you find that in every, in every, like de Hindus as well, we have people like that

too. I won't say no. We have people like that too. I guess maybe they think that she [the pilgrim] always

come to ask for, and never some to give a contribution and stuff like that. That was my thinking.

This was the only incident reported to me by a pilgrim. When I asked Ms Dean, an older Catholic about her opinion concerning Hindu access to la Divina, she told me the following:

Alison: So tell me, I know Hindu people come here too.

Ms Dean: Yes, very, very much.

Alison: How do you feel about that? Do you think they should come or they shouldn't come?

Ms Dean: [emphasis] No, no, no it for everybody. For everybody.

Ms Ali, a Hindu pilgrim related what seemed to be the common experience among non-Catholics:

Alison: Have you ever come and anybody show you a bad way? As if to say you shouldn't come.

Ms Ali: No, never. This is not a place for that and if somebody say they show you a bad face, is something I wouldn't

believe them cause the atmosphere and everything is so cool and calm.

Siparia, it can be argued, serves as a parallel to, and is a microcosm of, the national community. One pilgrim referred to herself "a Hindu-Catholic"; she indicated that she attended many religious services, including Evangelical-Pentecostal. Another stated that although he was a practising Muslim, he had in the past requested the priest to conduct a mass in his honour and continued to come to la Divina while knowing that his Muslim religious leaders discourage participation in this ritual. Many Catholics indicated that they saw no distinction between Hindu and Catholic prayers. According to one pilgrim, only "those with pure hearts have their prayers answered" by la Divina. Another Catholic reasoned that people all see God differently and should be allowed to worship as He/She manifests to the individual.

Another factor that could influence this fluidity of boundaries is the national ideology advocated by the political leadership of "rainbow people." On his visit to Trinidad in the late 1980s, South African Bishop Desmond Tutu suggested that Trinidad was a rainbow country, made up of rainbow people. This statement is one of many that have been used to describe the idea or ideal of "unity in diversity" and is an example of official attempts to construct a national political hegemonic ideology. This is part of the dual national narrative that Munasinghe writes about. According to her, these national narratives, "one of a cosmopolitan plural society and the other of creolization" (*Hybrid Spaces* 667) create tension on the national psyche.

The question then should be asked: Is la Divina an example of this cosmopolitan plural society? If not, what does la Divina represent? Smith defines pluralism as "a condition in which members of a common

society are internally distinguished by fundamental differences in their institutional practice" (238). Certainly, one can argue that la Divina appears to be an example of plurality. However, this paper maintains that by their own definition, the pilgrims are not engaged in fundamentally different practices as illustrated in their statements about the universality of God. Pilgrims acknowledge the differences between them in terms of religious ideology but claim commonality before la Divina. She makes them similar.

How is this possible? Repeatedly, pilgrims acknowledged their shared experience rather than their religious or racial differences. One collaborator thoughtfully related the following:

Mr Hussan: "all denominations gathering and worshipping together. We go to attend one another functions, funerals, weddings, whatever it is. That is how we grow, that is how I was brought up, and that is how it is up to the present time. We have no distinctions against anybody. We live as one. But because of, [pause] well what I should call it, because of [pause] race, which now, well it was before but not as it is. But is only at election [emphasis] time we get this, after election everybody as before."

He and others indicated that they understood the ways in which politicians used race to divide the population. He also recognised that citizens participated in this process at election time; Yelvington calls this "ethnicity is *politicised*" (12). The practice of politicians and other leaders actively engage in the process of appealing to the differences between ethnic groups. However, in Hussan's estimation, short periods of division were a minor inconvenience, and that, overall the idea of a unified community was prevalent.

Based on the account given above by Hussan it would be easy to conclude that Munasinghe is correct in her analysis of Trinidad society. Members of the society are able and willing to create a national identity that suspends differences of race and religion outside of the political arena. So, why are politicians able to manipulate the population? Yelvington claims that given the colonial heritage of the island and the competition on the labour market, ethnicity has become tied to the scarcity of resources. He refers to this as the "commodification of ethnicity" (11). I was able to have Ms Kamal explained some of her feelings about the political situation.

Alison: Do you think that Manning and Panday⁷ understand [la Divina and what She represents]?

Ms Kamal: Yes, Panday does come here. Yes, is the same religion. I doh know for Manning.

Alison: Tell me how you feel about the flag?8

Ms Kamal: That wrong. When you put a flag, it nothing bad is no evil.

Alison: But when I listen to de news and I hear Manning and Panday and everybody in de bacchanal, I think that

maybe dey doh understand how people does live.

Ms Kamal: No, dey know. Everybody know how we does live. But between I and you, to talk de truth, Panday want

everybody together, and Manning want it too, but a little more to his side [Christian, Afro-Trinidadians]. So that is where he making de people feel that Panday doh want them. But Panday making everybody feel

welcome.

Ms Naipaul also offered an opinion:

Alison: So, tell me, you had that one negative experience. What I see here is people come here, and they pray. And

I saw you praying just now, and I could not tell if you Catholic or not. Cause you cyah look at somebody and tell, okay. Even when you see older Indian people, women with orhnis, you cannot tell. And then when I hear Panday and Manning fight, I wonder to myself, 'do these people, the political leaders, know how

people really live?' How do you rationalise that in your mind?

Ms Naipaul: I doh know but sometimes I say to my self it not race. Is just a personal thing between the both of them, so I

just let it be. Anybody could look at this country, Trinidad and Tobago, and will see that in a lot of instances there are unity between both Black and...Catholic and Indian, whatever. So I really can't say anything

about that.

Alison: So do you think is a power thing or a personal thing?

⁷ At the time of this interview, Patrick Manning was the political leader of the PNM and Basdeo Panday, the political leader of the UNC.

⁸ Manning, the Prime Minister at the time, had removed *puja* (Hindu prayer) flags placed on the grounds of the official residence, claiming that it made him feel uncomfortable and was contrary to his religious beliefs. This offended many people, especially within the Hindu community.

Ms Naipaul: I think is a personal thing together with power.

Alison: So do you thing race is really a big issue? I'm not saying there aren't racial people, but is it as big an issue

as Manning and Panday make it out to be?

Ms Naipaul: No, I don't think so. I don't think so at all. My personal view, the way I grow up and all the people around

me, I don't think so at all.

Ms Dean's thoughts, like Ms Kamal's, were clearly vested in a political party (Ms Dean with the PNM and Ms Kamal with the UNC), shared some similarity to the other opinions.

Alison: So, tell me something; when I was here for Easter, this guy came. I guess it was the first time he was there.

And when he see all de Hindu people and all de Catholic people all in de room together praying, he say,

"dat's what Manning and Panday should come down and learn."

You think those politicians understand how to get along with people?

Ms Dean:

No. If Patrick Manning understand, Panday don't.

Alison: I am really interested because there are parts of the world where people kill each other in the name of

religion or in the name of race but it doesn't seem to be happening in Trinidad. Why is that?

Ms Dean: I doh really know. Except Trinidad is a place where people pray a lot.

Ms Ali offered not just an opinion about the political fighting between the two parties but also a solution to it:

Alison: So, tell me, like I said to you, I see people here and I cannot tell if they Catholic or Hindu or anything else.

People stand next to each other, they pray together, they pray quietly, they pray loudly, nobody's bothering

them but yet still Manning and Panday out there fighting. How do you think about that?

Ms Ali: I doh know. I feel if these people really concentrate on God they will find peace. This fighting, it not called

for; a place like this too small for dat.

Alison: So do you think what they saying about race, do you think that's true?

Ms Ali: No, for me I doh believe that. I doh know for anybody else. I doh believe in that at all. I just believe in one

God and one Peace.

Trinbagonians have managed to forge common communication of purpose through what Yelvington would call "syncretisms and acts of cultural borrowing" (11). La Divina is one such example of not only cultural borrowing but also cultural leading. This is an active process of negotiating a multi-religious experience, which could serve as a model for the islands' political leaders.

Conclusion

This article argues that devotees of la Divina are able and willing to share Her with their fellow pilgrims with little conflict. The evidence collected does seem to suggest that, for pilgrims at least, politicians' attempts to divide them by using race, ethnicity and religion have not been successful. While they all concede that there is racial tension, they also recognised that politicians use it as a tool, especially during elections. Additionally, most devotees claim that they do not racialise others since they acknowledge the dignity of their fellow citizens. This appears to be an indication of the acceptance of the state national hegemonic ideal summed up by the phrase used to describe Trinidadian society as comprising of "rainbow people." This ideal is in direct contradiction to the exploitative tactics used by politicians as they attempt to gain power during election campaigns but is embraced and touted by whichever party emerges as the victor upon the campaign's conclusion.

La Divina is Hindu to the Hindus; Catholic to the Catholics; Muslim for the Muslims; and so on. She allows for the exchange (not imposition) of ideas and practices. Because access is freely given, non-Catholics are not threatened by a conversion motive. This also means that Catholic parishioners have an opportunity to support (spiritually and physically) the non-Catholic pilgrims. The larger theological doctrine governing each of these religious traditions does allow for localisation of ritual. Rather than syncretism, this paper argues that the Siparia experience is one of creolization.

It is important to understand that in my experience, creolization is multi-dimensional. There is a subtle understanding of the word Creole in the local (Trinbagonian) vernacular the meaning of which depends on the context, user and to who it is directed. It is because of this complexity that I purposefully call la Divina, a Douglarized Madonna. This title encompasses Her Trinidad and Tobago heritage and Her ability to unify Indo- and Afro-Trinbagonian and which, as Khan (1993) points out [in the case of "Spanish"] threaten the existence of these 'distinct' majorities.

This is not to exclude or invalidate concerns over the use of the word Dougla Reddock writes that douglarization has been "denounced as another arm of the process of creolization" (324). Since I view neither creolization nor its localised version, douglarization, negatively, I have no problems using both these terms when referring to la Divina.

The question then becomes: Is the worship of la Divina an example of creolization? The simple answer is yes. The creolization referred to here is similar to the way the word is conceived within the Trinbagonian worldview, as a local/national phenomenon or occurrence. In this sense, la Divina and the worship of Her is both Creole and an example of creolization. Because the statue itself and the doctrine governing veneration of Her was originally introduced as part of Spanish-Catholicism, it is Creole. La Divina is Creole because it is a localised tradition that is the product of the merging of European and Trinidadian practices. The form that the worship takes, with the inclusion of all its pilgrims, is the process of creolization.

According to Khan (2001), the community engages in subliminal activities that transform previously deliberately held boundaries. Additionally, Khan writes that the categories of 'mixed' ethnicities "separates 'who are' from 'who are not'" ("What is 'a Spanish'?" 182). Creolization, therefore, is a powerful construction that can manufacture new forms of expression and identity. The national political ideology that embraces the concept of a "rainbow people" is an example of the manufacturing of identity. Brathwaitie supports this idea in his essay "Creolization." According to him:

"Normative, value-references were made outside the [Jamaican] society. Creolization (despite its attendant imitations and conformities) provided the conditions for the possibility of local residence. It certainly mediated the development of authentically local institutions" (115).

This movement described by Brathwaite above has transformed into a political ideal among many Caribbean political elite and intelligentsia. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago the political elite, has embraced the idea of creolization as an indigenous response to colonialization. This is because they recognised the problems associated with "blackness" on a global level and, acknowledging that Trinbagonians would never be considered "white," endorsed the concept of Creole as a viable alternative. Perhaps they hoped that by creating this new race (Creole), in this new nation (Trinidad and Tobago), they would be able to unify nation's the various ethnic. Many critics of this policy however particularly those located within the East Indian community view this type of Creolization as eroding or invaliding their cultural heritage.

Ryan wrote:

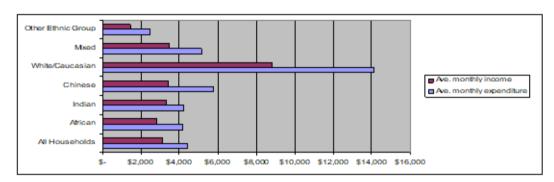
As far as the Indian cultural fragment is concerned, a desire for social integration as a part of an oppressed *class* is not the dominating impulse. Status elevation and legitimacy as a group seems a considerably more relevant goal than the obscuring of all racial differences and peculiarities. Caribbean radicals have committed themselves to a programme based on the premise of the "innate goodness of the people." The ultimate aim of this strategy is total assimilation of all ethnic elements into a culturally neutral creole culture, a goal that is an expression of the universalistic liberal ideology which rejects race as a relevant variable in the behaviour of people and which has until recently been optimistic about the prospects of creating integrated societies. (9-10)

Here Ryan acknowledges not just the division that exists within Trinidadian society but also the reason for Creole as a political and cultural ideology. According to him, the longing by politicians and others to create a Creole society is a direct response to avoid the pitfalls of the American doctrine of separate-but-equal. He recognises that Creolization has shortfalls, pointing to the fact that many ethnic groups worldwide, rather than work towards cultural integration, "are concerned with asserting the validity of their own cultural and group experience and are seeking to give it political expression" (11). Many Indo-Trinbagonian leaders have

rejected the ideology of the Creole, in favour of cultural distinctiveness. Ryan writes, "Multiculturalism in Trinidad is still an essentially passive co-existence relationship with contacts between Indians and others being largely secondary rather than primary" (382). La Divina is an example of primary contact.

Munasinghe argues that Trinidad and Tobago political society is informed by "two nationalist narratives, one of a cosmopolitan plural society and the other of creolization ...In contemporary Trinidad, these two narratives are in tension" (Hybrid Spaces 667). According to her, Indo-Trinidadians are often discounted or perceive themselves to be discounted from the state or official political machinery and thus economic and social power (see Table 4), because of their resistance to creolization. Munasinghe's contention does raise additional questions. First among these is: Do Indo-Trinbagonian really resist creolization? Both Reddock⁹ and Vertovec¹⁰ offer evidence that creolization [douglarization] began with the arrival of the first indentured labourers from India and continues to the present day. Singh claims that the development of the bi-racial party system in Trinidad and Tobago during the 1950s "would make for more effective political bargaining between rural and urban interests and would result in an unprecedented extension of basic services to the rural areas" (226). Khan, Reddock and Vertovec support Munasinghe's argument that it is the competition for, and perceived access to, power that creates conflict within Trinidad and Tobago society.

Table 4: Comparison Summary Characteristics of Households in Samples by Ethnic Group of Head of Households. Source: The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Planning and Development Central Statistical Office (2000).



La Divina devotees do not experience this competition. Pilgrims can share Her giving support to each other and worshipping within their faith tradition without the pressure of proselytising. Her devotees experience the creolization that is embodied by la Divina, and they are part of the process through their devotion to Her. Contrary to Munasinghe's argument, however, East Indians are not excluded from this process. In fact, by their participation, they contribute to it; they may even be considered its catalyst. Without the presence of Hindus, Muslims and other non-Catholics, la Divina would not be a Creole saint. The diversity of the pilgrims and their ability to worship freely creates a new canon that is exclusively Trinbagonian especially in the context of the national political ideology. Civic ideology is transformed and transferred into religious practice. Religious doctrine is disregarded in favour of personal and community harmony. Therefore, while Munasinghe's proposal may be valid in wider political, economic or social arenas, la Divina does not fit her model. In fact, if we examine the statements of the pilgrims, we might conclude that they are not only sensitive to the political ploys meant to exclude groups of individuals, but that they are aware of the tendency to use them at election time or in other instances where access to power (particularly political and economic) is at stake. This awareness and their personal worldviews (a reflection of the national hegemonic ideal), pilgrims claim; prevent them from acting like the politicians who govern them.

⁹ Reddock, Rhoda. "Douglarization and the Politics of Gender in Trinidad and Tobago: A Preliminary Exploration." Caribbean Sociology: Introductory Readings, edited by Christine Barrow and Rhoda Reddock. Ian Randle Publishers, 2001, 320-333.

¹⁰ Vertovec, Steven. "Hinduism in the Diaspora: The Transformation of Tradition in Trinidad." Caribbean Sociology: Introductory Readings, edited by Christine Barrow and Rhoda Reddock. Ian Randle Publishers, 2001, 622-642.

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