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Steel Pan's Heart

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Steel Pan's Heart:

How a drum made in tiny island nation brings world cultures together in the midst of struggle.

Analysis of Trinidad's National Instrument in a multicultural nation-state

SPRING 2012

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Introduction:

We live in world that is constantly evolving; people are more interconnected than in the past few decades. With over 196 nations in the world, terminology such as transnationalism, Creolization, and hybridization has developed as a result of vast arrays of cultures, religions, and traditions intertwining with each other. However, a nation is actually an “Imagined Community”, a concept coined by Benedict Anderson. He believes that a nation is a “community that is socially constructed and imagined by a certain group of people who perceive themselves as part of the group.” (Anderson, 1999) Especially in our world today, a nation contains groups of people who migrated from their original homeland. In addition, hybridization and Creolization emerged as a result of the newly formed cultures in the Americas, Africa, and Europe. This paper will primarily focus on these two concepts and how they form nations that currently stand today. Hybridization is the blending of two cultures which influences a dominant culture out of the two to show elements of another culture. However, Creolization is beyond the blending two cultures.

According to sociologist Robin Cohen, Creolization is an arrangement in which "the formation of new identities and inherited culture evolve to become different from those they possessed in the original cultures." (Cohen, 2007) Creatively, this merging of a new culture eventually evolves certain aspects of previous cultures, including food and music. A great example of a nation (or imagined community) that fulfills the terminology above is the island nation called Trinidad and Tobago. The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is an archipelagic state in the Southern Caribbean, a few kilometers from its neighbor, Venezuela. A strong Creolization example of Trinidad is the steel pan. The steel pan is the

official national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago. However, not many people living outside of the nation are aware about how the instrument was created, or who developed it. As a result, different steel pan groups claim they invented the pan.

Steel pan has developed from the essence of the Trinidadian Carnival. The initial celebration of Carnival in Trinidad came from French elites that lived in Trinidad during the 18th century and enslaved Africans were not allowed to take part. Eventually, the enslaved Africans took over what was we call modern day carnival, and as a result, drumming was banned in exchange. Afro-Trinidadians played with several different types of percussion instruments before finally creating the steel pan. In a different context, Indo-Trinidadians represent cultural hybridization for several reasons. Indo-Trinidadians had reformulated their “own senses of culture and identity in relation to mainstream West Indian contexts, and second, pressing for a multicultural framework that would accommodate both their East Indian ethnic identity and their West Indian national identity.” (Manuel, 2001) Today, many aspects of different cultures that formed Trinidad and Tobago included other cultural symbols, especially Calypso, Soca, Chutney, and Limbo.

Music and food are other examples of Trinidadian hybridization. Doubles and Roti are adaptations of food from India, while Callaloo and Pelau are Nigerian dishes slightly transformed in Trinidad and Tobago. (**Note:** Here is a food terminology chart for those who are not familiar with the four dishes from the nation:

Doubles	Roti	Callaloo	Pelau
A sandwich made with two bara (flat fried breads) filled with channa (curried chick peas or garbanzo beans) and topped with a variety of spicy chutney sauces condiments including: (mango, cucumber, coconut, tamarind) and extra pepper sauce (ranging from a dash "slight" to "pepper").	Curry stew folded tightly within Dhalpuri Roti bread. The stew within the Roti generally contains potatoes and meat such as chicken, duck, goat, and beef. This is considered the dense version of doubles with the addition of potatoes.	A soup or stew made with leaves such as Taro and water spinach. Dish can be also made with okra plant with the addition of coconut milk.	A spicy rice dish consisting of meat (typically chicken) and pigeon peas. The rice dish can also include red kidney beans, served with stewed rice.

This paper not only focuses upon the steel pan as the national instrument of the country, but instead looks at other musical aspects that still embody the essence of Trinidad and Tobago. I will focus more on the Indian musical instruments and music forms such as chutney and its political importance, while my documentary focuses on why the pan was chosen to represent Trinidad and Tobago, despite the fact that it was an instrument created by Afro-Trinidadians in a population, currently mostly Indo-Trinidadian.

Spending a year in Trinidad and Tobago was perhaps my most life-changing experience. I never spent much time in another country, outside of my ancestral homeland, Nigeria. My initial expectations when I was travelling to Trinidad were that I would find a familiar culture in the Caribbean, similar to Nigeria in terms of both weather and the population (mostly Afro-Caribbean). Trinidad and Tobago strongly reminds me of my memories of Nigeria combined with echoes of a country that I never seen before, India. I find it very engaging to study abroad in a country where the majority populations of Indian

and African descent have negotiated their space together. One day, I paraded the streets in Carnival costume, the next day I was covered in colored paint as I celebrated the Phagwa Holi Festival, which was originally from India with my Indo-Trinidadian friends.

I anticipate that this paper can achieve a stronger representation of Trinidad and Tobago's decision in not only having the pan as the national instrument, but analyzes how the pan could bring together a multicultural nation like Trinidad. I would like to clarify the purpose of my video documentary I produced in Trinidad as well as some background information about Trinidad and Tobago. I find that these two pieces of information would be quite helpful before understanding the process of a national instrument. Why it was chosen or its was imposed upon, and did it bring the nation closer or move it farther apart?

Steel Pan's Heart: The Documentary

Link: vimeo.com/23793494

Diaspora is a term for peoples and cultural practices that are found outside the geographic bounds of perceived homelands. My use of the term focuses on hybridities, Creolization, and syncretism (all manners of cultural blending), which talk about the steel pan and other cultural instruments of the country. My argument focuses on the Creolization of Afro-Trinidadian Culture, whereas Indo-Trinidadian culture is hybridized. For example, I have a friend who is Diasporic Indo-Guyanese. That means she is from Guyana, but hold strong roots from India and at the same time embracing the culture of Guyana. She can be also considered a diasporic Indian from Guyana.

My year abroad to Trinidad and Tobago has showed that the word “Diasporic” can be diversified in different groups of people and objects. Most Afro-Trinidadians came from parts of Nigeria and the Congo. However, because enslaved Africans in Trinidad came from different parts of Africa, they formed their own language based on English words in order to communicate with each other. This is similar within their culture. The combination of African and European cultures in Trinidad results in Creolization. Diasporic may consider Creole because of Africans living in another land and adapted European culture. A more direct example of “Diasporic” in Trinidad are Indo-Trinidadians. They are direct descendants from East Indians from poor castes that found opportunities to escape the ill-fated caste system in India. However, Indo-Trinidadians retained as much to their traditions and customs as possible. How does this even relate to why I have developed a documentary on steel pan?

I knew that the steel pan was made in Trinidad, but I did not know it originated from impoverished Afro Trinidadians steel bands inventing ways to have percussion instruments for expression when drumming was banned back in the early 20th century. The steel pan brings people together. Vibrant, resounding sounds attract everyone, regardless if you are Trinidadian or not. This was perhaps the reason why the steel pan was chosen as the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago. I interviewed students of the University of West Indies in St. Augustine, Trinidad. They comprised of my fellow dorm residents, students that play the steel pan, and other international students like me. I have also interviewed a famous Trinidadian playwright Tony Hall and instructor for the Exodus Steel Pan ensemble, one of Trinidad’s top steel bands. Lastly, I interviewed legendary steel band

pioneer Bertie Marshall about his contribution to the steel pan. He was noted for creating Steel Pan harmonics and the double tenor pan. It took me more than two months to make 8 hours of video footage into a 25 minute documentary.

Trinidad and Tobago: Home of the Steel Pan and Calypso.

The demographics of Trinidad and Tobago comprise the following: About 40% Indo-Trinidadian (Indian/South East Descent), 37.5%-40% Afro-Trinidadian, and the rest which is around 20% is an overall mixed population of Chinese, Syrian, Venezuelan, Amerindian, and Portuguese. A common biracial group in Trinidad is called a Dougla (A person of Indian and African descent). However, the percentages of the ethnic groups in Trinidad are skewed because a strong majority of Trinidadians are in fact mixed with at least one other ethnic group than was reported in the demographics. It is said that Trinidadians from both islands could be the most heterogeneous people in the world. Just like the United States, Trinidad is a melting pot where people from all over the world meet. You are certain to meet someone in Trinidad with ancestry from every continent, except Antarctica. Here is a chart of the demographics of Trinidad and Tobago, courtesy of the 2008 CIA World

Factbook:

Indian (South Asian)	40%
African	37.5%
Mixed	20.5%
Other (Chinese, Syrian, Lebanese, Portuguese, Spaniards)	1.2%
Unspecified (Amerindian, other foreign groups)	0.8%

Nonetheless, Trinidad and Tobago's diversity is reflected in its holidays, encompassing Emancipation Day (currently the only nation in the world that celebrates a day when slavery is abolished), Diwali (festival of lights that originated from India) and its world-famous Carnival. Trinidad is also widely known for its national symbols, especially as the birthplace of calypso (a music genre influenced form by the Creole groups of Trinidad that stems from African and European musical aesthetics), limbo, and the steel pan. Even though mostly Afro-Trinidadians play pan, the Steel Pan instills national identity and pride because Pan has become internationally popular and the proliferation of so many steel drum events before carnival, especially Panorama (the world largest Steel Pan competition). The Steel Pan originated from the oil barrels dumped around the country due to the United States' involvement in World War II. Afro-Trinidadians were responsible for turning these oil barrels into instruments since drumming was banned during the early 20th century, a few decades after the emancipation of slavery. We start our journey with the history of the steel pan in regards to the Trinidadian Carnival.

Chapter 1: Steel Pan at last! The Development of the Steel Pan through carnival culture.

Considered as the “Greatest Show on Earth”, the Trinidadian Carnival is an annual event celebrated on the Monday and Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. It was originally a masquerade event that was only celebrated by the French elite, since the enslaved Africans were forced to be spectators. For the French planters, their carnival can be described as: “masquerade balls with European and African music and dancing, promenading on the streets of Port of Spain with masks, house to house visiting, and general buffoonery.” (Stuempfle, 1995) A popular masquerade that French planters utilized during carnival season prior to Christmas season was Negre Jardin (French: Black Field), which was based by activities that occurred during sugar cane fires. These activities included gangs of Africans from neighboring estates who march to the scene with torches while the planters blew horns and cracked whips.

However, thanks to this ambitious night festival named Camboulay (**French:** “Burnt cane” and sugar cane was an important economic resource in Trinidad), the slaves used this as an outlet, which eventually gave them the rights to celebrate Carnival. Because slaves could not initially participate in the French carnival, after emancipation from 1834-1838, carnival began to branch into a very different orientation. Before emancipation went into effect during the 1834 Carnival, a band of Africans masqueraded and caricatured one of the Christmas French militia squadrons. In the following years after emancipation, the Africans increasingly dominated Carnival and in response, the French elite withdrew from the street celebration of the festival. According to a newspaper article from the Port of Spain Gazette, they describe the Africans in carnival committing: “disgusting and indecent

scenes, carrying a stuffed figure of a woman on a pole, and yelling out a savage Guinea song.”(Stuempfle, 1995)

However, this is not the last time the Europeans dominated an aspect of non-white civilians in Trinidad and Tobago. The banning of the drums came as a result of allowing them to play in carnival. During the late 1930s in Port of Spain, metal containers became widely integrated into bands of bamboo-stomping tubes called tamboo bamboo. “Skin-headed drums were virtually banned after the 1882 Camboulay riots between jamette revelers and police and a stigma of vulgarity and danger continued to be associated with the tamboo bamboo that replaced them.”(Dudley 2002) The heritage of tamboo bamboo bands extends back to Kalinda (a form of stick- fighting martial arts that stems its origin from Africa), of which drumming played a huge part, especially during the nineteenth century jamette (from the French word diametre, referring to people beyond the "boundary" of respectability, in other words, whores, and outcasts) carnival. This eventually led to the steel pan of which its metal construction was louder and more durable and also performed the same function as the bamboo because it plays similar polyrhythmic accompaniment to call and response songs.

Evidence suggests that during the late 1930's, young men in a number of different neighborhoods were “experimenting with the plentitude of metal containers and other objects that an urban environment like Port of Spain provided.”(Stuempfle, 1995) These young men, despite the banning of drums and eventually the tamboo bamboo at a time, replaced the skin drums with various objects lying around the streets of Trinidad-

including paint cans, zinc cans, biscuit drums, and dustbins (trash cans). Nonetheless, there is still no direct proof of an individual or a specific group discovering the steel pan. For example, an early member from both the Hell Yard band and Bar 20 “recalls that when a caustic soda drum was repeatedly struck on the bottom, its sound would eventually become “dead”. One would then turn the drum ninety degrees or so and begin striking on a different section of the bottom.” (Stuempfle, 1995) This led into the discovery that denting such metallic cans produce different pitches of sounds. Eventually, Pan men around Trinidad and Tobago were able to actually tune notes into these metal containers according to the standard scale.

Actual steel bands were formed as early as the mid 1940s, but because of a ban on carnival during World War II, it was not often heard in public at first. Thanks to the “father of the steel-band”, Winston “Spree” Simon, the steel pan’s progress underwent further development. The story is told how he lent a steel barrel to a very strong pan man in his band named “Wilson “Thick Lip” Bartholomew, who was strong enough to lift a tub and pour water on himself. When Bartholomew returned the pan to Wilson, the pan was completely dented up and severely smashed in. “In the process of punching it out again, Spree discovered different pitches. He then began to tune a few notes on a caustic soda drum.”(Stuempfle, 1995) He is considered a key innovator and performer of the pan because he hammered the bottoms of containers outward to form its convex surfaces. “After he obtained up to four notes on caustic soda drums, he switched to using small oil drums on which he is believed to have produced with eight notes by around 1945.”(Stuempfle, 1995) The accounts of how the steel pan retains its notes/pitches and

the material used to determine the first few steel pans were resulted from accidental discovery, which eventually led to the pan's future innovations such as double tenor steel pans.

By the early 1940s, a basic steel band had emerged from many different neighborhoods with considerable amount of instrumentation. However, this early steel band has been modeled from different percussion ensembles in the country. The most important model was the tamboo bamboo band. Another important model is the Orisha drum ensemble. Orisha is a manifestation of the Oludumare (**Yoruba**: "God who owns the heavens") in the Yoruba spiritual and religious system. The military marching bands that were prominent in Trinidad provided a third model for the early steel band. A band leader named Prince Batson states that the "kittle was named after the military kettledrum (side drum), that it was suspended around the neck in a similar fashion, and that kittle drum players sometimes rattled their sticks to produce rhythms like those played on the kettledrum." (Stuempfle, 1995) The last model for the early steel band was the Indian Tassa drum ensemble "which perform for Hosay (the Muslim observance of Muharram) and at other occasions, are similar in structure to tamboo bamboo band and steel bands." (Stuempfle, 1995) Tassa groups and steel bands comprise of both Indians and Africans as these percussion groups influenced each other. We will talk about Tassa drumming groups later in the essay.

Simon's contributions were highly important for the breakthrough of the "ping pong", a steel pan sound ornament component which replaces the kettle as the lead drum.

However, he was not the only person that pioneered the Ping-Pong sound. Ellie Mannette, who was a member of the Oval Boys Steel Band from Queen's Park Oval in Woodbrook, experimented with a 35-gallon sweet oil container and claims to have punched in nine notes. He also credited for many contributions to the pan, especially the creation of rubber-tipped Ping-Pong sticks for the pan, which improved the overall tone quality. He is also credited with the introduction of large oil drums for tuning and playing. These oil drums range from 44 to 55 gallon oil drums that were discarded around American base in Mucurapo during the war.

During the carnival of 1946, Winston "Spree" Simon and his band played songs including "Ave Maria" and "God Save the King" in front of a Western audience, including the Governor of Trinidad. Because he was able to play Western music, Simon's performance was not only recognizable, but gave the first opportunity to place the steel band beyond its origin from a poor, inter-city "noise" built by Afro-Trinidadians. However, the status of the steelband did not change overnight. Heightened by concerted efforts from the Afro-Trinidadian community, it was promoted as Trinidad's legitimate art form in both the 1940s and 1950s. "Motivated both by interest in the new instrument and by concern over violent clashes between rival steelbands, a government Steelband Committee convened in 1950 encouraged the formation of the Trinidad and Tobago Steelband Association." (Dudley, 2002) In addition, the Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra (TASPO) was formed from representatives of a number of the major steelbands across Trinidad. In 1951, TASPO performed in London at the Festival of Britain and changed the proliferation and the progress of the Steelband.

Enthusiastic reviews for TASPO in the English press enhanced the status of the art form at home in Trinidad, and in the following year, a steelband category was introduced in the biennial Music Festival. This is where steelbands compete in the performance of European art music, thus led to the Bomb competition. The bomb is the predecessor of Panorama; in terms of a steel band competition of which pan men plays European music. It was extremely popular in the 1950s and 1960s and provided a very different setting for the performance of European classics played in different musical instruments. The Bomb grew out of musical rivalries in which “steelbands attempted to outdo one another with performances of foreign songs set to calypso rhythm.”(Dudley, 2004) Panmen that participates in the bomb rehearsed in secrecy to unveil their performances during the early hours of J’ouvert Monday (Opening event of the Trinidadian Carnival). However, not everyone is in support of the “Bomb” competition. The importance of the Calypso during the 1950s and 1960s not only intensified as one of Trinidad’s official musical genre, but also questions the emerging Bomb competition.

Trinidadians “were generally concerned therefore, that their indigenous musical forms should develop and improve; but some intellectuals (and certainly many calypsonians) were also concerned that their ‘national instrument’ should play their ‘national music’. They worried that steelband musicians, in their pursuit of progress, were abandoning Trinidad's most distinctive musical genre, the calypso.”(Dudley, 2002) As a result from the pressure on the steelbands, the most significant solution was an establishment of a new steelpan competition called Panorama, which was organized jointly by the National Association of Trinidad and Tobago Steelbandsmen (NATTS) and the Carnival

Development Commission (CDC) in 1963, for the year after Trinidad's independence in 1962 with the first Trinidad carnival as a nation. The Panorama competition ushered steelbands into the official showcasing of the carnival arts and gave them increased access to government and private sponsorship. Luckily, the requirement insists that steelbands play calypsos. Steelband musicians initially welcomed Panoramas a chance to compete for reputation and prize money on the same stage. The prestigious Calypso Monarch and Carnival Queen competitions at the Queen's Park Savannah were also formed.

The steel pan is seen as a national symbol because it arose at the time that Trinidad struggled to gain its status as an independent nation. "While the nation as a whole struggled with the economic and cultural consequences of neo-colonialism, the steelband movement raised issues about the development of local forms of artistic expression and public commitment to and financing of such expression. In this sense, the debates and negotiations over the steelband during the 1960s and 1970s were manifestations of the larger dilemmas of independence and the definition of a national identity in Trinidad and Tobago." (Stuempfle, 1995) Does the steel pan represent all Trinidadians? The steel pan is indeed the production of Creolization and it is a component of modern day carnival, but how does it fit with the cultural hybridization of Indo- Trinidadians? Personally, I feel that Indo-Trinidadian culture represented in Trinidad and Tobago is not as extravagant as carnival and calypso, and often overshadowed by Afro-Trinidadian culture. How do Indo-Trinidadians embrace the culture that Afro-Trinidadians already established for Trinidad? Ironically, Indo-Trinidadians in Trinidad are perhaps more influential than any other Indo-Caribbean group in the West Indies.

Chapter 2: After the carnival is over: The Emancipation of Indo-Trinidadians in Trinidad and Tobago

When slavery in Trinidad and Tobago was abolished in 1838, it left Dutch and British planters with the task of finding inexpensive labor to tend Trinidadian resources such as sugar cane. In order to settle this shortage of labor, East Indian peasants were brought from lower-caste regions from the Bhojpuri-speaking region of what is now Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh in India. Between 1838 and 1917, more than half a million East Indians were shipped from poor regions from India to Trinidad. The indentured servitude ended in around 1917, as the majority of East Indians decided to stay in the Caribbean and own land instead of taking the return passage to India (less than 25% returned to India). As a result, Indo-Trinidadians became the largest ethnic group in Trinidad and account for twenty percent of English speaking West Indian population as a whole. It was said that they came to Trinidad because of “the quality and reality of their experience changed that there was really no home to which they could return.” (Cudjoe, 1985) Perhaps the East-Indian peasants that stayed in Trinidad realize that they can live in a world where their destiny is not determined by their castes, but through virtue of their labor.

Indo-Trinidadians brought essential cultural aspects from India to Trinidad during the indentured servitude of the 19th century. For example, curry chicken and Roti is an exceptionally popular food choice in the nation. The incredibly popular street shack food, doubles, is considered Trinidad’s most popular fast food and can be traced to Urdu/Hindi/Bhojpuri roots. Another Indian culture aspect brought to Trinidad was the Phagwa and Diwali holiday. Both of them are Hindu festivals as Phagwa represents the

festival of colors and Diwali represents the festival of light. Both Hinduism and Islam have been brought to the island. Lastly, music from India is one of the biggest contributions to the Trinidadian culture. The conditions that the Indo-Trinidadian diaspora dealt upon arrival to Trinidad push them to maintain cultural continuity, syncretism, and innovation. Many aspects of traditional Indian culture declined in this new social setting that was already cultivated by Creoles and Europeans. For example: "Caste is the most basic feature of Hindu social structure that lost its central significance under the leveling effects of plantation life." (Manuel, 2000)

In addition, the decline of the Hindi language in Trinidad intensified the processes of Indian hybridization among the younger generations, which gave rise to their contributions in Trinidadian culture: "The attenuation of traditional, substantive elements of Indian culture, such as language and Orthodox Hinduism, has led to an unprecedented emphasis on symbolic aspects of culture, including Indian music." (Manuel, 2000) Indo-Trinidadians developed musical genres that underwent various combinations, manners, and degrees, with Indian aspects that were persistent, endured decline, and had their share of revivals: "Perhaps the largest and most extensively cultivated body of music bequeathed by the indentured laborers was the corpus of traditional, orally transmitted songs sung informally at various occasions by non-specialists, particularly women." (Manuel, 2000) Here is a chart of the most important and common of these types of songs from." (Manuel, 2000)

Work Songs (Manual labor)	Life-Cycle Events	Seasons and Festivities	Religious Songs
Dhobi(Washerman)	Wedding songs: Lachari	Vernal Phagwa or Holi/Hori festival	Hindu Devotional songs called bhajans.
Chamar (Leather- worker)	Vulgar women's songs associated with matkor (matticore) dancing.	Chowtal songs performed antiphonally by two groups of men	Ramayana verses are traditional chanted by male choruses in a vigorous antiphonal style similar to chowtal
Women songs (Jatsar/ Pisauni) Sung while grinding grain	Sohar- Associated with childbirth, especially of sons.	Seasonal songs associated in India with the rainy season: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Savan • Kajri • Mallar • Jhula • Chaiti 	Muslim functions often include rendering of quasida, maulad, and among Shiite Muslims, marsiya.
Women Songs (Ropani and Narai) Sung while working in rice-fields.	Funeral songs- Nirgun bhajans.	Ramlila theater, story of Ramayana reenactment	

First interactions with Trinidad

Trinidad is shaped by a historical legacy of plantation slavery and racial hierarchy, comprising of Europeans as masters, Africans as slaves, and East Indians as indentured laborers: "Accordingly, this history of voluntary and forced migration from diverse areas of the Old World combined with the life experiences imposed by the hierarchical relations structuring the plantation-slavery complex continues to linger in and shape Trinidadians' perceptions of their society." (Munasinghe, 2002) The nation was established after slavery was abolished in a sense of reconstructing of what is meant to be "Trinidad". Unless you are a white planter, everyone else works within an agricultural/plantation mentality. However, after slavery was abolished, Afro-Trinidadians dominated the population of

Trinidad before Indo-Trinidadians arrived. Although their ancestors stem from different parts of West Africa, (mainly Nigeria and the Congo) they are Creolized because of the mixture of European and Amerindian culture and ethnic miscegenation between the three.

Unfortunately, the first generation of Indian migrants lacked direct links to India itself as the indentured workers: “hailed the arrival of each new ship, eagerly seeking acquaintances, tidings from home regions, or knowledgeable individuals such as pundits or musicians who could enrich local culture and renew the steadily fraying ties to the homeland.”(Manuel, 2000) Indian immigrants are not only cut off by time and distance from their mother culture, as they now live in a New World dominated by African creolized culture, but they are exploited and abused by English plantation owners, confronted with different traditions, values, and a whole new way of life. For consolation, Indo-Trinidadians would choose to sing reminiscent songs and pour their desires for mother India’s arms to embrace them. While most Afro-Trinidadians in colonial Trinidad scorned the arduous life of the sugar plantations and in many cases moving to different towns and cities, the first generations of East Indian laborers tended to remain concentrated in agricultural regions even after indentureship.

“Living in their insular, rural communities and shunning schools for fear of proselytization, most colonial-era Indo-Trinidadians took little part in the mainstream of their country’s social and political life.”(Manuel, 2001) When first batches of East Indian indentured servants came to Trinidad, it was reported that they only kept to themselves and their traditions instead of branching out to take part of the already established “Trinidadian” culture at that time. However, these East Indian communities seek to

legitimize their own identity within traditionally black-dominated political and socio-cultural frameworks. “As these East Indian populations grow in size, self-awareness, affluence, and political power, they find themselves engaged in complex processes of cultural reorientation.” (Manuel, 2001) Despite claims that East Indians in Trinidad wanted to alienate themselves from both Afro-Trinidadians and the culture, the opportunities the island provided them, prove to reconsider.

By the mid 20th century, the proliferation of steel drums established by Afro-Trinidadians highlighted the fact that there are were other percussion instruments that the Trinidadians (including Indo-Trinidadians) utilized, especially with TAPSO (*Trinidad All Percussion Steel Orchestra*), Indian instruments such as the Tabla¹ and the Tassa drum² became significant in Trinidad, as instruments are an essential part of Indo-Trinidadian music. An ensemble consisting of Indian instruments such as harmonium, dholak, dental, and occasionally the sitar became relevant. Although there are Indians that do play in steelbands because of the aesthetics of different sounding percussions to enhance the pan sounds, the harmonium is actually one of the most important instruments in Indian music. The harmonium is a small, piano-like keyboard instrument.

I believe that the first impression of Indo-Trinidadians may have been when the steel pan was proclaimed national instrument, despite its origins from Afro-Trinidadians to be problematic, because the steel pan, as much as a “seemingly innocent instrument, but one which is of prodigious symbolic importance in the country.”(Manuel, 2001) Are there other

¹ A pair of small hand drums attached together which is used in Indian music. Resembles bongos.

² A form of a kettle drum but longer and uses tip-curved drum sticks to play the instrument. Used in Muslim Hosay festival.

forms of Indian musical hybridization that add to Trinidadian culture? Can the steel pan and other creolized forms of music not only be utilized within Indian hybridization of music, but somehow bring these two different cultural groups together? The next chapter discusses these questions.

Chapter 3: Who is a really Trini, what is really a Trini? The clash between Indo-Trinidadian and Afro Trinidadian's music culture in Trinidad.

While musical instruments can represent a national aesthetic, you cannot simply just take instruments from other countries and call them a national instrument. Conversely, "Trinidadian cultural policy, in however ad hoc a manner, has traditionally exhibited a marked favoritism toward Afrocentric Creole culture and music at the expense of Indo-Trinidadian counterparts." (Manuel, 2001) The fact that Afro-Trinidadians arrived in Trinidad first, places their Creole culture on a higher pedestal than Indo-Trinidadian culture as Trinidad's mainstream culture. Nonetheless, they both represent Trinidad. The cultural difference between the Indo-Trinidadian culture and Afro-Trinidadian culture is adaption within the West Indies.

Basically, the Creole (Afro-Trinidadian) reinvents their own culture versus how Indo-Trinidadians have been able to maintain much closer links to India than the West Indian blacks to Africa, "in terms of both cultural retentions as well as ongoing engagement with the Old World" (Manuel, 2001) It was told that because Indo-Trinidadians:³

³ [Hanoomansingh, 2010]

“In addition to the health hazards, faced open hostility from the freed slaves, who accused them from being strike breakers or scab labor because they accept a 24 cent daily wage which the Africans justly refused after they were freed. In agreeing to work for 24 a day before leaving Calcutta, the immigrants are unaware of the negotiations between the planters and the freed slaves.”

In addition, the “PNM (People National Movement) government under Eric Williams perhaps spent more time with policies that were consistently designed to ensure the support of its core constituency of bourgeois Creoles and, more importantly, the Afro-Trinidadian lower and working classes, at the expense of East Indians. Indo-Caribbean music, which again is seen as the foreign import of a particular ethnic minority, whose increased presence in public culture represents an essentially divisive “Special interest.”(Manuel, 2001) Basically, it is quite evident that Indo-Trinidadians see that the mainstream Trinidad promotes assimilation and integration rather than multiculturalism. This means that Trinidad is in fact a plural (societal) nation, a term coined by M.G. Smith because ethnic groups coexist without sharing and/or mixing basic institutions and values. In addition both races keep to themselves and having black consciousness movements polarized the two further. There are also claims that Indo-Trinidadians faced increased tension from Afro-Trinidadians.

Both Indo and Afro-Trinidadians maintain somewhat separate institutions, politically, economically, socially, and culturally from the mid- 19th century towards the mid 20th century, a few years after the steel pan starts to gain recognition from the western world. However, they did have to work with each other in building the island, especially with infrastructure. Unfortunately, “many blacks have come to feel threatened by the greater Indian presence and assertiveness in society.”(Manuel, 2001) An Indo-Trinidadian

man responds: "We are made to feel unwelcome there, and the orientation is mostly Afro-Trinidadian, but then we are criticized as clannish for not participating." This shows some of the advantages Afro-Trinidadians have over Indo-Trinidadians: "Until 1995, Indian music and dance were generally excluded from state performance ensembles at Carifesta, a pan-Caribbean performing arts festival; in an oft-cited remark, one politician (Ronnie Williams) explained this anomaly by stating that Indian culture was alien and not part of Trinidadian culture." (Manuel, 2001) Carnival and Panorama is much more heavily subsidized by the state than Phagwa (Holi) festival. Not to mention the role of Indian music in Trinidad in radio and other media is quite limited. Journalist Ravi-Ji observed that the two mid-1990s radio stations "each broadcast only one hour of Indian music per week (and also, he noted, favor American pop over calypso); more Indian music was heard on the AM station (FM I-610), but its reception is poor throughout the island." (Manuel, 2001) For many Indo-Trinidadians, this comes to show that the Creole acceptance of Indian culture as part of Trinidadian culture is probably impossible.

This is perhaps the reason why the harmonium⁴ (or any Indian instruments such as the Tabla) is not considered one of the many Trinidadian national instruments, like the steel pan. Poor black neighborhoods created the steel pan and the harmonium is the most popular instrument to play Indian music (sitar). Both seem imperfect to each other groups because both instruments achieve different pitches, tones, timbres, and frequencies. These two instruments only represent disharmony because of the different ethnic groups that play them, especially the mainstream Afrocentric Trinidadian culture. Again, the steel pan

⁴ **Note:** The Harmonium is a freestanding keyboard instrument that is adapted to be suitable for Indian music.

has grown from an invention played by poor urban black youth and is now recognized as a lucrative and cherished national instrument. However, according to Trinidad Express journalist S. Maraj, the harmonium should be taught in schools, because as the pan is created in Trinidad, the harmonium is merely a Western instrument. He also sees that because the harmonium is a cheap, portable, and versatile, its tones and timbre in as keyboard instrument is suitable for different types of music, including Calypso. The problem still relies on Afro-Trinidadians accepting the presence of Indian culture relatively with Indo-Trinidadians finding ways to adjust to Creole Trinidad without losing Indian aesthetics, including music.

Nonetheless, Indo-Trinidadians start integrating with Afro- Trinidadians, despite cultural barriers and historical interactions. In addition⁵:

“Urbanization and the greater participation of East Indians in mainstream society have made the situation more complex than Smith’s model might suggest. Increasingly, and especially in towns, Indians and Blacks interact and socialize amicably, and there is a gradual increase in racial intermarriage, producing a growing population of “douglas” or black-Indian mulattos.”

This resulted from the Black Power Movement of 1970, which confronted these issues of ethnic division and equality. While the Black Power Movement celebrates “Afrocentricity, it also re-ignited East Indian racial consciousness, leading to a cultural revival which came perilously close to mimicry”(Manuel, 340). One can say that the modern Indo-Trinidadian culture has been transformed in the midst of an unfortunate political climate. When Indo-Trinidadians became more integrated in the Trinidadian culture, pioneers like Jit Samaroo one of Trinidad’s leading pan arrangers who is East

⁵ (Manuel, 2001)

Indian inspires more Indo-Trinidadians to join steel bands, bringing both the Tabla and Tassa drums into steel bands.

Perhaps inspired by Creole calypso competitions, lively competitions especially in Tassa drumming and Chutney-Soca have become features of the Indo-Trinidadian music scene. Calypso also resulted the Soca music genre, which eventually inspired the birth of Chutney Soca. “Chutney” named after the condiment because it is described as being spicy and as a contemporary Indian-Caribbean musical genre, it displays influences from diverse sources within the Caribbean music scene. The majority of the genre used both Tabla and Tassa drums, syncopated harmonium playing, and accompanied in lyrics that are often sung in Hindi. Chutney music was originally performed in most Trinidadian Hindu weddings, which now include lively dancing that are no longer separated by sex. Chutney dancing is also more liberated because of the inclusion of “wining.”⁶

There are journalistic commentaries on the political significance of chutney, discussing the interaction between calypso and chutney-and how it is finally the bridge between “two cultures.” These musical genres highlight an issue of ethnicity and the role played by music in society. Direct participation of Indian performers has been relatively infrequent and occasionally controversial. An Afro-Trinidadian mentions, “most Trinis are happy to jump up to any song they like, regardless of who sang it” (Manuel, 2001). The successful cultural “mash ups” of Tassa drums in steel bands along with chutney Soca is development of Modern-day Trinidad culture.

⁶ **Note:** Wining is a dance where the hip rolls in a circular motion.

Conclusion: Whether you like it or not: It's Trini

I ask myself if the steel pan is really a “Trinidadian” instrument and not something solely for the Creole population of the country, even though they invented the instrument. How is it possible that a creole invention can embody both major ethnic groups in a plural nation that have both cultures separate, but is not really equal? Why does the government accept the steel pan as the national instrument, despite other instruments Trinidad has? The straightforward fact is that Afro-Trinidadians were indeed in Trinidad first, but the steel pan came from the ethnic group’s struggle to play percussion instruments in their music after Carnival became part of the Creole culture from the French. Regardless of the exact steel band who originally created the first pan, the steel pan was discovered and later shaped by different innovators such as Winston Spree and Bertie Marshall, who I had the exciting opportunity to interview during the documentary. However, the steel pan is an example of Creolization, of which I personally believe does not also embody the Indo Trinidadians hybridization of their culture.

I always find Indo-Trinidadians just as important as Trinidadians because not only are there as many of them in Trinidad as Afro-Trinidadians, population wise, but I often find their culture to be often overshadowed due to Afro-Trinidadians, especially with holidays and events around the country such as Panorama and Carnival. I wonder what would happen if there were two or more national instruments of Trinidad and Tobago, such as the harmonium and the steel pan. Ironically, I am glad that this did not happen; otherwise Chutney-Soca and the lively competitions Indo Trinidadians established because of calypso inspiration would not exist. I find it admirable that Indo-Trinidadians’ hybridization is not limited to dropping the caste system as they leave India, but rather the

inclusion of Creole music such as Soca and playing the steel pan to aid their Indian percussion instruments such as the Tassa drum.

This paper aids my documentary to point that calypso and Soca offer better integration of Indo and Afro-Trinidadian traditions. Although the harmonium is the most popular instrument in Indian music, the fact that Indo-Trinidadians became heavily involved in the Black Power Movement of the 1970s and became more involved in the mainstream Trinidadian culture shows that this group is aware of their place in Trinidad, without losing their traditional roots from India. The steel pan's popularity serves as a continued reminder of what makes Trinidad a special country. In addition, the Tabla and Tassa drums that are brought to steel bands enhance the Trinidadian musical experience and are key component of steel bands today.

Not to mention, a key aspect of the Chutney music genre was influenced by the Soca and calypso. Trinidad is more or less a plural nation with multicultural aspects brought together. As a result, I feel that the steel pan is a good example of nationalism as a symbol because like both ethnic groups, it started from a point and eventually transforms and evolved into something more dynamic, versatile, and unique. Chutney, Soca, and Carnival are integrations of hybridization and Creolization and are national icons of Trinidad and Tobago. The steel pan brings all types of group together, an important role of a nation today.



(I took this picture when I was in Panorama 2011)

(In fact, I comprised a little photo gallery in the next section)

Picture Gallery of Panorama 2011

Nothing much in particular, I wanted to share my experiences attending Panorama with some pictures I took while I was in Trinidad. Enjoy!









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