Re-Engineering Indigeneity
Cultural Brokerage, the Political Economy of Tradition, and the Santa Rosa Carib Community of Arima, Trinidad & Tobago

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Abstract

Re-Engineering Indigeneity:
Cultural Brokerage, the Political Economy of Tradition, and the
Santa Rosa Carib Community of Arima, Trinidad & Tobago

Maximilian C. Forte

In the social sciences, conventional depictions of the post-Conquest cultural development of the Caribbean are founded upon the absence of ‘the indigenous’. However, groups such as the Santa Rosa Carib Community (SRCC) in the Borough of Arima, Trinidad, have begun to assert their identity and the ‘traditions’ that they posit as emblematic of an ‘Amerindian heritage’. Furthermore, groups such as the SRCC have also received the recognition and support of the state, the attention of the national media, and they have increasingly acquired a privileged place in nationalist discourses and local historical narratives. The questions that are addressed in this project are thus: (1) Why does ‘Carib’ still exist as a category and as an available identity in Trinidad? (2) What were, and what are, the conditions that make possible the reproduction of ‘Carib’ as an identity and as a historical canon? (3) What value does Carib hold, to whom, when, why?

Indigeneity in Trinidad and Tobago is treated in this project as both a problem and as a ‘presence’. The case of the SRCC is analyzed, not as a group reviving or defining itself as a bounded unit in relative isolation, but as a demonstration of the production of indigeneity in terms of multilaterality, that is, as a multiple vesting of interests and as a joint venture between various cultural brokers and institutions, acting via established social conventions and in dialogue with dominant historical narratives. Moreover, this case manifests the engagement of multiple processes of reinterpreting, reinventing, and articulating ‘tradition’ and the ‘Carib’. I summarise this phenomenon as the re-engineering of indigeneity, standing at the intersection of three analytical axes: structure-agency, past-present, and local-global. I focus on the role of cultural brokers, working within a context constituted by the political economy of tradition, i.e.: (1) the politics and economics of associating certain values with particular cultural representations pertaining to groups of individuals marked as specific ‘peoples’; and, (2) legislated recognition and rewards for groups engaged in competitive cultural display. The results of these processes serve as an entry point for critically examining the ‘vacuum of indigeneity’ perspectives that have neglected the colonial canonisation of the ‘Carib’, the nationalist reinterpretation of the symbolic archetype of the ‘Carib’, and current ‘Carib revival’.
This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

Unless indicated otherwise, all illustrations, charts, diagrams and photographs are property of the author.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT:

DATE: 05 FEBRUARY 2002
Acknowledgements

Since this project first started in 1995 while I was a M.A. student at the State University of New York at Binghamton, I have received the assistance, encouragement, insights, and criticisms of numerous individuals. Beginning with previous teachers of mine in the Department of Anthropology at SUNY-Binghamton, I must thank Professors Richard Antoun, Safia Mohsen, Ann Stahl, Bill Isbell and my past supervisor, Richard U. Moench. I am proud to call Dr. Moench a mentor and friend whose ongoing critical commentary and correspondence is always appreciated. Also at SUNY-Binghamton, I feel fortunate to have studied in the post-graduate courses offered by those associated with the Fernand Braudel Center, including Professors Immanuel Wallerstein, Giovanni Arrighi, and Anthony D. King. After completing the first year of my Ph.D. at Binghamton, I transferred to Adelaide where I was the beneficiary of the critical inputs of my supervisors, Dr. Michael Roberts, Dr. David Murray, and Dr. John Gray who supervised the final stages of this work. I appreciate the care they have shown in their detailed reviews of my work.

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With the support and assistance of so many individuals in so many places, I must be held responsible for any and all lingering shortcomings that are perceived in the text that follows, especially where I maintained a perspective that differed from some of the critical inputs. Likewise, I retain full responsibility for the work as a whole as presented here.
Abbreviations

ABC: Arima Borough Council
AFN: Assembly of First Nations of Canada
AMC: Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs
BWIA: British West Indian Airways
CARICOM: Caribbean Community and Common Market
CDCC: Committee for the Development of the Carib Community (St. Vincent)
COIP: Caribbean Organisation of Indigenous People
CUFU: Communities United to Fight Underdevelopment
FSIN: Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations
HERBS: Herbal, Educational, Recreational, Biological Services
IBRD: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank)
ILO: International Labour Organisation
IMF: International Monetary Fund
JTTN: Jatibonicu Taino Tribal Nation of Boriken (Puerto Rico)
KTK: Kairi Tukuienyo Karinya
NAEAP: National Association for the Empowerment of African People
NAR: National Alliance for Reconstruction
NPATT: National Parang Association of Trinidad and Tobago
OAS: Organisation of American States
PNM: People's National Movement
RC: Roman Catholic
SIFC: Saskatchewan Indian Federated College
SRCC: Santa Rosa Carib Community
TIDCO: Tourism and Industrial Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago
TTT: Trinidad and Tobago Television
UCTP: United Confederation of Taino People
UNC: United National Congress
UNCED: United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNDP: United Nations Development Program
UNEP: United Nations Environment Program
UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
URP: Unemployment Relief Program
UWI: University of the West Indies
WCIP: World Council of Indigenous Peoples
WIPO: World Intellectual Property Organisation (United Nations)
To Allison, my angel,

And

To Justa Werges (n. 01 May 1915—d. 16 January 2000), Queen of the Caribs...my queen. *Eternal rest grant unto her.*