

54 years

By Safiya Moore

The Caribbean region's constituent nations are relatively young in comparison to the wider world. However, as a region it maintains the characteristics of many other countries that are centuries ahead of them. In particular, when analysing any country and attempting to determine its successes, failures, history and potential future, its architecture is a tangible way of ascertaining the progression, regression and background of a region. Architecture literally conveys pivotal information. Figuratively, a country can be viewed as a piece of architecture and analysed accordingly. More specifically, in analysing Trinidad and Tobago as we celebrate more than fifty years of decolonization, both the unique actual architecture and the figurative consideration of the twin-island state as a piece of architecture, allow for an understanding of our successes and failures since Independence in 1962 and, what these may augur for our future. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, our foundation should be considered as our history before Independence. The construction team should be considered as our human resource, the skeletal superstructure of our architecture considered as a combination of the parliament, judiciary and media, and the overall building, as our adaptation to the various experiences we have been exposed to over time.

A historical definition of the Caribbean describes the region as the area that saw the impact of European colonization, slavery, indentureship and the plantation system.¹ Trinidad and Tobago shares this history, and from that history a foundation has been generated to support the architectural marvel that is our fifty-four-year-old twin island state. Prior to Christopher

¹ See <http://www.slideshare.net/egfred/definitions-of-the-caribbean> for historical definition

Columbus' discovery in the 15th century, the country was inhabited by Amerindians, evident by Amerindian words and place names that have survived hitherto, such as 'Oropouche' and 'cassava'. Following this, the country was subjected to colonization and the influence of the Spanish, French, British and other Europeans. Literal architecture, in the form of the 'Magnificent Seven' located near the Queen's Park Savannah in Trinidad and the Courland monument located in Plymouth, Tobago, are paradigms of their presence.² Due to European colonization, slavery, indentureship and the plantation system came to fruition. Consequently, our multi-ethnic society is a testament to this.

Our foundation has had a pivotal influence on our progression over the last half century. Our political structure is reminiscent of our colonial era, as we abide by a Westminster political system.³ Over the years, this system has evolved in a way that is more conducive to the needs of our society. This vestige of our past allows us the opportunity to conduct our nation's affairs in an internationally accredited democratic manner. Our foundation through the era of colonization has generated the formation of linkages with regions that have become profitable and diplomatic allies. This is shown through our participation in Commonwealth activities, CARICOM initiatives and adherence to United Nations conventions.⁴ Additionally, through foreign relations we have consistently concretized our national development goals, particularly, people-centred

² See <http://www1.american.edu/dlublin/travel/trinidad2.htm> for more details on Magnificent Seven: Killarney, Whitehall, Archbishop's House, Roomor, Mille Fleurs, Hayes Court, and Queen's Royal College.

See <http://www.travelmuse.com/pois/TT/attractions/courland-monument-and-great-courland-bay> for details on Courland Monument built by the descendants of 600 pioneers who arrived in the late 1600s from Courland, a small principality in Latvia.

³ See http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Westminster_system.html for details on Westminster system

⁴ Basdeo and Mount make mention of bilateral relations e.g. the United States' provision of short training programs awarded to cadets and military personnel and expound on multilateral agreements e.g. CARICOM Single Market and Economy C.S.M.E

development, poverty eradication and social justice, national and personal security, information and communication technologies, a more diversified, knowledge-intensive economy, good governance and foreign policy.

Our foundation has stimulated beneficial relations and resulting outcomes. Nevertheless, we may be encumbering ourselves with another form of slavery by depending so heavily on the support of foreign states and, in turn, not adequately nurturing an independent society. Our history may be considered as succeeding in engendering a sort of inferiority complex within our society; we believe foreign is always better and that our local innovations are inferior. As we consider the future, this tendency may thwart our ability to institute and adhere to our own customs and culture. In the event that our bilateral and multilateral relations are undermined by conflict, our current dependency culture suggests that we might be incapable of standing on our own two feet when circumstances so require.

As indicated by our foundation, Trinidad and Tobago, as a piece of architecture, has been exposed to the expertise of many craftsmen. The construction team, our human resource, originates from a myriad of ancestries. The Amerindian population was the first to set its hands to work. Following them, European adventurers would have added to and rearranged their efforts. Europeans increased human resources by the forced mass migration of persons as slaves from Africa from 1776 to 1838 and subsequently, the addition of more labour through the indentureship of East Indians from 1845 to 1917. These two groups represent the two major ethnicities present in Trinidad and Tobago. Apart from these, however, is the contribution in the form of human resource represented by the Asians, particularly the Chinese who arrived from as early as 1806, and the Syrian/Lebanese immigrating to Trinidad and Tobago in 1904. This

collection of ethnicities, has uniquely constructed the country we know today as Trinidad and Tobago.

The Rt. Hon. Dr. Eric E. Williams in his speech on Independence Day, August 31st 1962, stimulated the human resource with the words, ‘...*let us present to the outside world the united front of a Nation thinking for itself, knowing its own mind and speaking its point of view.*’⁵ The attainment of Independence and our achievement of Republican status in 1976 are prime examples of the dedication of our human resource. More specifically, the Amerindians’ culture of symbiotic relations and reliance on their environment is evident in our agricultural practices, such as multi-cropping, that have developed over the years to generate the manufacture of food supplies and beverages. As for the Europeans, enforcement of formal education proved to be a most essential contribution. The Africans’ brought a new sense of ingenuity evident in what is now our national instrument, the steelpan, which has been developed over the years into steel orchestras. Our Indians diversified our religious landscape evidenced by the thriving Muslim and Hindu population marked, respectively, by the numerous mosques and the Temple in the Sea located in Waterloo. Our Asians and Syrian/Lebanese, stimulated a metamorphosis of our economy, represented by the extensive restaurant services and textile marketing that flourish today. The pivotal craftsmanship of our country due to our human resource includes the examples abovementioned, but is by no means limited to those stated. These construction teams have created an intricate design pattern on the landscape of Trinidad and Tobago that conveys the collaborative, innovative and constructively fuelled populace that inhabits our country.

⁵ Cudjoe, S. R. (2006). Eric E. Williams Speaks. Wellesley, Massachusetts: Calaloux Publications. See pg 267

Fifty-four years have passed since Independence, and the work of this diverse human resource has not ceased. Trinidad and Tobago can boast of a population with a literacy rate of 99% and according to certain accounts, is home to some of the world's happiest people.⁶ We also have a reputation as an excellent investment site for international business and have been dubbed one of the most diversified economies in the English-speaking Caribbean.⁷ Our human resource has undeniably yielded these successes but we have also had downfalls. Trinidad and Tobago is by no means as productive as it is capable of being. Our work ethic has deteriorated and our patriotism has evolved into an occasional phenomenon. Apart from our major source of revenue, oil and gas, there is great potential in our agricultural and tourism sectors but they are not being sufficiently realized. The smaller of the two islands of this twin island state, Tobago, has won Gold Medals in 2011 and 2012 in the 'Great Taste Awards,' for its chocolate produced from local cocoa.⁸ Annually, we showcase our Carnival festival also known as, 'The Greatest Show on Earth.' However, the industries to which these activities are related have not been properly developed and focused on. These downfalls highlight a structural flaw; the construction team seems to be lapsing, and the design has become less intricate and thorough. This does not bode well for the future of Trinidad and Tobago. In a sense, it suggests that we have no adequate shock absorbers, so that if the economy suffers a dramatic decline in our main source of income, there is no alternative sector sufficiently poised to absorb the effects and add stability to our society.

⁶See <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/td.html> for literacy statistics

⁷ See <http://www.investt.co.tt/country-profile/economy#sthash.1iYalBVF.dpuf> for economy description

⁸See <http://www.newsday.co.tt/features/0,165373.html> for article on Great Taste Awards

The foundation and construction teams have engineered the skeletal superstructure of Trinidad and Tobago. Our skeletal superstructure is a combination of our Parliament, Judiciary and media. These institutions aid in stabilising our social framework. The Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is a vestige of our colonial past as it originates from the British Westminster system. Our Parliament is bicameral, consisting of a Senate and House of Representatives.⁹ The Parliament, also known as the legislature, is the arm of state entrusted with the responsibility of making laws for good governance, and providing oversight of the Government and Executive. The President or Executive is the head of parliament according to Chapter 4, Section 39 of the Republican Constitution. His Excellency Professor George Maxwell Richards TC, CMT, PhD, former President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago stated [in his speech entitled, ‘The Role of The Head of State in a Bicameral System of Governance,’ on 19th December, 2011]

‘... the Constitution sets out certain responsibilities of the President vis a vis the Parliament, for example: to appoint members of Parliament such as Senators, according to Section 40, to assent to Bills, according to Section 65, to lay reports of Service Commissions in Parliament, according to Section 66 B, C and D and to summon, prorogue and dissolve Parliament, according to Section 67.’¹⁰

The Senate, also known as the Upper House, assumes the pivotal role of representing and taking into account the views and interests of those elements of society which may be insufficiently reflected in the composition of the elected House. The Senate contributes to parliamentary

⁹ See <http://www.ttparliament.org/about.php?mid=5> for description of parliament

¹⁰ See Evolution of a Nation Trinidad and Tobago at Fifty for President’s role in parliament

debates as Bills are first introduced in the Senate with the exception of ‘Money Bills.’¹¹ The Senate comprises thirty-one senators all appointed by the President: sixteen on the advice of the Prime Minister; six on the advice of the Leader of the Opposition; and nine Independent at the discretion of the President from outstanding persons from economic, social or community organizations and other major fields of endeavour. These persons must be citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and at or above the age of twenty-five years.¹² The House of Representatives, or Lower House, is made up of the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the elected representatives of the forty-one constituencies. These representatives must be citizens of Trinidad and Tobago at the age of eighteen years or upwards; and be resident in Trinidad and Tobago for a period of two years immediately before the date of their nomination for election. The elected persons also have the mandate of representing and taking into account the views and interests of their respective constituencies and taking leadership roles in ministries and offices.¹³

The Parliament in the skeletal superstructure plays a decisive role. It is the seat of democracy; it makes a clear statement that we have worked for our Independence and want to represent ourselves and make our own decisions. It also centralises the opinions and interests of the populace under one roof. Over the past fifty years, the Parliament has facilitated the addressing of concerns and making of critical decisions, not limited to but including the implementation of Value Added Tax (VAT) in 1989-1990, the granting of public holidays such as Emancipation Day in 1985, allocation of funds for Government Assisted Tertiary Education (GATE) and the establishment of the present Tobago House of Assembly by Act No. 37 of 1980.

¹¹ Money Bills are projects of law providing for raising revenue and for making grants or appropriation of the public treasure.

¹² See http://www.ttparliament.org/chamber_business.php?mid=12 for more in depth description

¹³ See http://www.ttparliament.org/chamber_business.php?mid=8 for more in depth description

The Parliament is supposed to be an esteemed institution. On the contrary, the manner in which the nation's business is conducted there has deteriorated. The level of discourse and efficiency in the treatment of matters is often disheartening, such as the Section 34 incident.¹⁴ Taking into consideration the fact that persons aspiring to acquire seats in parliament are observing and learning the behavioural patterns and customs of the sitting Parliament, our future may be grim as new legislators are likely to assume the attitudes of their predecessors. If our nation's business at the highest level is not conducted in a way coinciding with the esteem of the institution and what it represents, then we are communicating negative messages to the world. These communicated messages may suggest that we are not yet mature enough to embrace our Independence and conduct our country's affairs in a credible or civil manner. If, in fact, the behaviour of Parliament continues to deteriorate, then we may reach a point of no return and may well have to resort to the kind of United Nations intervention that can obtain in the case of failed states. This could certainly re-shackle us under the yoke of colonization.¹⁵

The Judiciary also has a pivotal role in the skeletal superstructure of Trinidad and Tobago. It works, independently of the government, towards the resolution of legal disputes between individuals and bodies, including the state, and involves the application of remedies and the punishment of offenders. The Judiciary is headed by the Chief Justice and comprises the Supreme Court of Judicature and Magistracy. Over the past decades, the Judiciary has evolved as in 2012, legislation amending the Supreme Court of Judicature Act approved the largest increase to the statutory complement of judges since the country's Independence. These new provisions

¹⁴ Section 34 was a part of the Administration of Justice (Indictable Proceedings) Act that caused public outcry when UNC financiers became the first to apply to be discharged after it was proclaimed.

See article <http://guardian.co.tt/news/2012-09-19/ramadhar-section-34-tt-i-am-sorry> for in depth explanation

¹⁵ See <http://www.undispatch.com/failed-states-and-the-un/> ; See also <https://www.globalpolicy.org/nations-a-states/failed-states.html>

allow for 36 judges, an increase of 13 at the High Court level, and 12 judges, up from 9, in the Court of Appeal. There are at present three Masters of the High Court. This quantitative improvement in the Judiciary is geared to stimulate more timely and thorough resolution of disputes.¹⁶ The Judiciary safeguards the rights and freedoms of our populace enshrined in our Constitution and in legislation such as the Equal Opportunity Act of 2000. Sadly, efforts to stabilise this legal structure are being undermined by inadequate funding. As the present Chief Justice Ivor Archie stated, *'At a time when the country's crime situation is spiralling ... the need for improvement in the judicial system in order to deliver swift justice is extremely urgent.'*¹⁷ Crime is one of the major problems traumatizing the social framework of Trinidad and Tobago. Ultimately, and to address this problem, more funds should be allocated to institutions at the forefront of dealing with this dilemma. However, the opposite is true and consequently, this arm of the state is not well poised to carry out its functions. This current process of undermining may stunt the growth of the Judiciary as an institution, despite its recent developments, and thus limit the efficiency with which conflict resolution is handled in the future.

Another part of the skeletal superstructure of Trinidad and Tobago is our media. Thanks to freedom of the press provided by the Constitution, the media represents the people and upholds democracy by criticising, commenting on, and investigating affairs of the country and the international community.¹⁸ Since Independence, Trinidad and Tobago's constitutional provision has allowed for the accommodation of more than two dozen newspapers, inclusive of both written and online publications. Additionally, the country consists of more than three dozen

¹⁶ See http://www.ttlawcourts.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=86&Itemid=53

¹⁷ See Express newspaper article http://www.trinidadexpress.com/news/___call_for_more_judiciary___-115358724.html

¹⁸ See Section 4 of the Trinidad and Tobago Constitution

radio stations; more than half a dozen local television stations; nearly two dozen local television producers and news agencies.¹⁹ The strong presence of media in the structure of Trinidad and Tobago communicates the freedom of expression and independence that our citizens enjoy, so we are able to avail ourselves of information (both foreign and local) in our own unique style.

Unfortunately, the content of the media is becoming skewed, particularly as it relates to local media production and transmission. Although we have a substantial collection of institutions making up our local media, the transmission of our local productions are biased. Two instances of apparent prejudice are materialising. One, our completely local productions, spanning the various art forms, are not as prominently transmitted as foreign productions and, in the event that they are, they are seasonal. Case in point, the genres of music and artistic productions associated with our Carnival season are most prominent at that time, but hardly exist at other times of the year. Additionally, the local productions that are being transmitted are subject to a form of favouritism, controlling the frequency of transmission of some artistes' work. As a result, the development of upcoming artistes and productions is stunted. This does not portend well for our future, as we need to provide an even playing field for those who aspire to pursue entertainment careers directly linked to media transmission. If an unequal playing field continues to develop, then the phenomenon of cultural erasure may well arise, as certain genres of music and art forms are being neglected.

More than fifty years ago our foreman, the Rt. Hon. Dr. Eric E. Williams would have urged his construction team to take pride in their Independence:

¹⁹ See http://www.discover-tt.net/general_info/media_newspapers_magazines_radio_tv.html for media in Trinidad and Tobago

*'You hope soon to be a member of the world family of Nations, playing your part, however insignificant, in world affairs. You are on your own in a big world, in which you are now one of many Nations, some small, some medium size, some large. You are nobody's boss and nobody is your boss.'*²⁰

The shifts have changed many times since then. We have now had the first female foreman, the Hon. Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. The architectural marvel that is Trinidad and Tobago has definitely developed over the last fifty-plus years. Our foundation, as our history preceding Independence; the construction team, as our human resource; the skeletal superstructure, as a combination of the Parliament, Judiciary and media, all these have collectively allowed us to evolve with our fair share of successes and failures. According to Prime Minister Persad-Bissessar in her 2012 Independence Day address:

*'In areas such as academia, labour, sport, culture, literature, business, energy, entertainment, fashion, indeed in every sphere of human endeavour, we have produced global heroes: men and women who have excelled, bringing us gold, silver and bronze [medals], record-breaking scores, titles in beauty and the fashion industry... all sons and daughters of our soil who have ensured we will always be remembered as a people of great achievement, as a great Nation.'*²¹

The ever envied status of being a developed society is not a destination, but a journey, so that the failures we have experienced over our fifty-four years of de-colonization are merely examples of our attempt to attain success. In the large scheme of things, we are a relatively young nation, and

²⁰ Cudjoe, S. R. (2006). Eric E. Williams Speaks. Wellesley, Massachusetts: Calaloux Publications.

See pg 266

²¹ See <http://www.trinidadexpress.com/news/Prime-Minister-Kamla-Persad-Bissessars-Independence-Day-Message-168213536.html>

though a structural analysis would disclose some instability arising from our foundation, weaknesses in our skeletal superstructure and pessimistic predictions, within the building surveyor's report also lies recognition of magnificent potential for the future. As the 'Father of Our Nation' Dr. Eric Williams urged, and fifty years later our female Prime Minister reiterated:

*'We are now the co-creators of the present, paving the way for those who come after us... Let us recommit ourselves to the service of our country. Let us endeavour to live our lives by the inspiring words of our national motto "Together we aspire, Together we achieve". And let us continue to solemnly pledge our lives to this our native land Trinidad and Tobago.'*²²

Once we continue to do these things and intensify the manner in which they are done, we will continue to progress.

²² See <http://www.trinidadexpress.com/news/Prime-Minister-Kamla-Persad-Bissessars-Independence-Day-Message-168213536.html>

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