



PHOTO: COURTESY THE WEST INDIANA AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS DIVISION, ALMA JORDAN LIBRARY.

## 100 Years of SOIL-ITUDE

The Faculty of Food and Agriculture  
celebrates its Centenary

Two figures, their identities lost to time, stride through the Experimental Banana Plantation of the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture (ICTA). Founded in 1921 at St Augustine to serve the educational and scholarly needs of Imperial Britain, ICTA would in 1960 become the foundation of the Faculty of Agriculture of the University College of the West Indies. A few years later it would become a faculty within The University of the West Indies.

Over the decades, the (now) Faculty of Food and Agriculture has become a true Caribbean resource for the development of our region's food and agriculture professionals, a centre for highly impactful research, a trusted advisor to governments and international organisations, and an advocate for this vital sector.



The Centennial Legacy  
Celebration of Agriculture  
AT THE UWI STA

### OUR PEOPLE - 04

#### Tackling Gender Issues Post-Pandemic

Dr Sue Ann Barrett, IGDS' new Director



### OUR STUDENTS - 05

#### Journey to Europe

Erasmus  
Scholarship  
winner  
Derron  
Watkins



### FILM - 12

#### Welcome to Cheenee-dad

Documentary investigates the  
East Indian experience



### UWI IN SOCIETY - 15

#### Survival Stories

A snapshot of the plight of  
Venezuelan migrants







**UWI**  
ST. AUGUSTINE  
CAMPUS

# The Value Creation Equation

Teaching & Learning + Research + Knowledge Management



- ☒ Educated & Resilient Citizens
  - ☒ Better Communities
  - ☒ Innovation in Industry



The UWI St. Augustine has been creating value for and with the people of Trinidad & Tobago and the wider region for more than 60 years. Find out how we can help create value for you as an individual through our hundreds of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes; for your community through our broad and impactful research agenda; and for your business by taking you from ideas to innovation.

Visit [sta.uwi.edu](http://sta.uwi.edu) to learn more.

**Triple 1<sup>st</sup> recognition among  
THE BEST IN THE WORLD**



- CARIBBEAN'S #1
- LATIN AMERICA'S TOP 20
- WORLD'S GOLDEN AGE TOP 100



## FROM THE PRINCIPAL

# A Fruitful Legacy



**In many societies, there sometimes is a tendency to take food and agriculture for granted.** Trinidad and Tobago has not escaped that “curse” given that we are an industrialised island with a heavily skewed focus on the energy sector. For many of us, our relationship with food starts at the supermarket or restaurant. We often don’t contemplate the process by which that food or meal made it to the supermarket shelves or our refrigerators. The truth is,

without the land and animals, and a network of people, processes, technologies, and organisations, life as we know it would be unsustainable. Food and agriculture are the cornerstones of society.

It’s no coincidence therefore, that when it is time to celebrate the establishment of UWI St Augustine’s Faculty of Food and Agriculture (FFA), we celebrate a legacy that not only stretches all the way back to the birth of this campus, but precedes it by several decades. The FFA is the institutional descendant of the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture (ICTA), created on August 30, 1921.

ICTA was “the recognised centre for postgraduate training in tropical agriculture for the agricultural services of the [British] Colonial Empire”, an article from *Nature* magazine stated in 1938. Its research was focused mainly on “problems relating to cacao, sugar, bananas, and citrus fruits”. The college did important work, but it was primarily for the benefit of Britain, both in teaching and learning, as well as scholarship.

Nevertheless, it was upon this institutional and intellectual foundation that the St Augustine Campus was born in 1960. Established in October of that year, the Faculty of Agriculture would grow to become the only Faculty of its kind in the region and a leader in research and education in agriculture, nutrition, agriculture-related business, entrepreneurship, and food production technology. In 1996, the Faculty of Agriculture was consolidated, albeit for a short period, with the Faculty of Natural Sciences to form the Faculty of Science and Agriculture (FSA).

As time has passed, the faculty, which became known as the Faculty of Food and Agriculture (FFA) in 2012, has grown into its own. No longer a colonial institution, the FFA serves the Caribbean by providing educational opportunities to students across the region, fostering scholarship that has had an enormous impact on our island economies, and supporting regional governments and associations in the development of policy related to food and its production.

A century after its establishment, the Caribbean needs the FFA more than ever given the threats to national and regional food and nutrition security. Among other things, the existential threat that is climate change coupled with voracious appetites for foreign food, have resulted in little attention being paid to this sector. In Trinidad and Tobago, agriculture has not had a real seat at the proverbial table for many decades.

Within recent times, the economic consequences of the pandemic including threats to supply chains that impact the ability to easily import food, linked to reduced availability of foreign exchange, have forced a change in thinking with respect to agriculture and its role in securing food and nutrition, nationally and regionally.

In this issue of UWI TODAY, we celebrate the FFA’s centennial legacy, but a legacy is more than names, buildings and time. The true legacy of the faculty is in its vision of intellectual curiosity harnessed for the benefit of society. It is in its commitment to developing human potential, particularly the potential within our region. The legacy of the FFA is in the many faculty, staff and students who worked to realise the mission of this institution over its 100-year history.

So, how best to acknowledge the FFA and its accomplishments – by continuing its work at the highest possible standard. I believe that the Caribbean needs this faculty more than it ever has before. Let us get to work in ensuring that its next 100 years will bear even more fruit for the region.

*Brian Copeland*

**PROFESSOR BRIAN COPELAND**

*Campus Principal*



A shot of agriculture students in the early 1960s being taught as they observe a cocoa tree.

PHOTO: COURTESY THE WEST INDIAN AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS DIVISION, ALMA JORDAN LIBRARY.

**ICTA was “the recognised centre for postgraduate training in tropical agriculture for the agricultural services of the [British] Colonial Empire”, an article from *Nature* magazine stated in 1938.**



A Faculty of Food and Agriculture student continuing the legacy of learning started so many decades ago.

## EDITORIAL TEAM

### CAMPUS PRINCIPAL

**Professor Brian Copeland**

### DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

**Wynell Gregorio**

### AG. EDITOR

**Joel Henry**

Email: joel.henry@sta.uwi.edu

### CONTACT US

**The UWI Marketing and Communications Office**

Tel: (868) 662-2002, exts. 82013 / 83997

or Email: uwitoday@sta.uwi.edu



## ■ OUR PEOPLE

**“Things become real to you when you see how it impacts real people in a real way,”** says Dr Sue Ann Barratt, new Head of the Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS). She is explaining how she first found her calling while in her third year at The UWI, and how her theoretical interest in gender-based issues shifted when the political became personal.

She started off doing a BA in Media and Communication Studies with Political Science, which she followed with an MA in Communication Studies. That took her to a PhD in Interdisciplinary Gender Studies. Her “aha” moment came as she listened to friends discuss their experiences. It led to a series of theories and hunches that struck her forcefully as she personally witnessed gender-based violence and was startled by how the victim blamed herself. Seeing this conflict was the call that changed her course.

It took her on a journey within academia that led to specialisation in areas of communication conflict and gender-based violence, interpersonal interaction, mass media and computer-mediated communication, social media and user-generated content, gender and ethnic identities, person perception, feminist studies and Carnival studies.

So, when she was appointed on August 1, following the tenure of Dr Gabrielle Hosein, it was no surprise. Although she has been closely associated with IGDS for years, taking the helm during a pandemic has presented unique challenges.

“In terms of the managing and organising, the coordinating side of my function as head, the only difference is that you’re remote instead of being face-to-face, and you lose some of those quick interactions and closeness,” she says, “but the managerial function really retains its normal dynamic, complex and hectic nature.”

Nearly all interactions are filtered through devices and platforms of one sort or the other. It can be mentally exhausting, and you have to help people keep their balance. This is especially vital because they are doing more and the risk of burnout is real.

“IGDS is a safe place where people feel supported and mentored,” she says, but with the personal interaction gone, trying to manage and maintain connections is a real challenge.

She relies on planning to keep things going:

“In IGDS, we have our planned activities and we have things that emerge. There may be public crises that you have to respond to, there may be events or commemorations that people would like you to partner with them. Sometime there is the unexpected.”

She corrects herself, “I should say, always, there is the unexpected.”

Her team has identified what they call a base line—things they are committed to, things they have to deliver—essentially their work plan. So when issues crop up, they assess whether they can manage the “add-ons” and if they can’t, they figure out how to address it.



## Keeping it REAL

*Dr Sue Ann Barratt  
rolls up her sleeves at IGDS*

BY AMY LI BAKSH



“It might seem very systematic, some might see rigidity in it,” she concedes, but it creates a space for freedom. “So, I’m going for a very organised approach because I think that helps you to see for a few months, plan for that period, and systematically respond to demand.”

With the pandemic causing upheavals on all fronts, there is a surge in gender-based violence, she says. Her information comes from general global reports, and conversations from those in the field.

“This is violence against women, violence against children and, of course, there is violence against men, but you know that in gender-based violence, the people who are most affected—in terms of it having an impact on their safety and security and health—tend to be women and children.”

It’s not just physical, it is also emotional violence. The situation is compounded by a host of factors: politics, economics, social, and so on. It could be the loss of a job; different perspectives on how you should live; the pressure of managing multiple responsibilities; unresolved conflict; traumas within families, kinship groups or associates; different personalities; the need for contact with others; secrets coming out; or secrets being developed. Some people feel trapped. Some have mental health disorders that are either under-treated or not treated (persons with mental health challenges are often at higher risk for experiencing abuse). All of these things come into play.

All of us have the capacity to help out during these times, she says. Simple things like sharing a meal, checking up with a phone call, listening to the lonely, and small donations, whatever is within your reach.

Dr Barratt is aware that while many are doing these things, “there are a lot of people who are just creating dividing lines.” She finds it disturbing that there’s a kind of global political-economic trend of “pouncing on people’s doubts and confusion and trauma to get some sort of win.”

She is also concerned about the mental health fallout, which needs vital support, although she says that “...our healthcare workers are already so strapped”. So what can we do? “I think it has to start in small groups, close friends, and those close people have to support each other in honest ways.”

In the case of gender-based violence, confronting it has been a problem pre-COVID-19, and there is no simple, one-size-fits-all solution. But it has to start with “people having conversations, being there for each other”.

Unfortunately, she says, there is a large measure of distrust within the society, citing social media exchanges as an example of how that manifests. This becomes a barrier to fostering community and support systems. She acknowledges that there are serious challenges given the times.

“Crises are before us and will continue,” she says. Climate change, environmental degradation, and the human responses to trauma and crisis will continue on. But so must we.





## ■ OUR STUDENTS

# UWI Psychology Student is ERASMUS 2021 SCHOLARSHIP WINNER

**Derron Watkins is the latest TT national to be awarded an Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Degree (EMJMD) scholarship.** Watkins, who obtained two Bachelor's degrees in Economics and Psychology from UWI St Augustine, will read for a Master's degree in 'Work, Organisational and Personnel Psychology' at the University of Valencia, Spain and at the University of Coimbra in Portugal. He journeyed to Spain to begin this course of study in September.

According to Watkins, hard work and a passion for psychology are the drivers of his success. It was while studying for his first degree that he realised his true interest lay elsewhere:

"When I entered UWI in 2013, I decided to pursue a major in Economics," he stated. "But, along the way, I fell in love with Psychology."

Not being one to quit, Watkins decided to finish his degree rather than switching majors and then made the decision to return to UWI for a second undergraduate degree in Psychology.

It was not an easy road. With GATE funding unavailable for this second degree, Watkins needed to work full-time to make ends meet and pay tuition and other expenses. Still, he was able to graduate with first class honours.

A true change maker, it was while working at one minimum wage job and observing how management treated their employees, that he decided that industrial and organisational psychology were the keys to his future career.

"I want to help companies realise the true potential of their employees, while ensuring that employees in turn feel valued and rewarded," he said.

Speaking about his future plans at the end of his study abroad, Watkins, who worked previously as a business



**'I want to help companies realise the true potential of their employees, while ensuring that employees in turn feel valued and rewarded.'**

*Erasmus Mundus scholarship winner*  
**DERRON WATKINS**

operations assistant in the Social Services Unit of the Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago, Family and Children Division, said he hopes to be able to return to his job providing services for families and children. Longer term, he plans to establish his own consulting business.

The EMJMD Scholarship programme is highly sought after around the world by individuals who wish to study in Europe. It allows scholars the opportunity to read for a postgraduate degree in at least two countries in the European Union, all expenses paid. In 2021, 2,756 scholarships were awarded to individuals in 141 countries.

Watkins is one of an elite group of approximately 100 individuals from Trinidad and Tobago who have been awarded the scholarship since 2005.

Commenting on Watkins' achievement, Charge d'Affaires ad interim of the EU Delegation, Mr Ze Alves-Pereira said:

"We are very happy that this enterprising and hardworking young man was chosen and we celebrate with him and his family this achievement. We hope that he will find his time in Europe to be an enriching one and that he will return to Trinidad fully prepared to play his part in this country's development, as so many of his predecessors have done."

He added: "There are so many talented individuals in Trinidad and Tobago who can benefit from this opportunity to expand their horizons and experience and I would like to encourage more nationals to apply to the Erasmus programme."

■ For more information about the **European Union's Erasmus Scholarship Programme**, visit: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/opportunities/individuals/students/erasmus-mundus-joint-masters-scholarships>

*It was not an easy road. With GATE funding unavailable for this second degree, Watkins needed to work full-time to make ends meet and pay tuition and other expenses. Still, he was able to graduate with first class honours.*



## Learn More

It's never too early (or too late) to learn more about the hundreds of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes offered at UWI St. Augustine across eight faculties; our easy online payment plans, scholarships and bursaries; applying with CSEC, CAPE and alternative qualifications; opportunities for internships and to study abroad; our robust student support programme; how you can build a network of peers across different industries and countries; or how you can become a #GameChanger.

**Ready to Learn More?**

VISIT [STA.UWI.EDU](http://STA.UWI.EDU)

Triple 1<sup>st</sup> recognition among  
THE BEST IN THE WORLD



► CARIBBEAN'S #1  
► LATIN AMERICA'S TOP 20  
► WORLD'S GOLDEN AGE TOP 100



## ■ CAMPUS NEWS

# Improving Caribbean Higher Education

*Dr Sandra Gift releases new book on a university culture of persistent quality*

BY JOEL HENRY



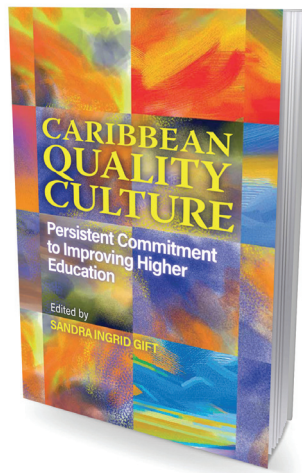
Dr Sandra Ingrid Gift

The emergence of COVID-19 has been one of the most disruptive events in modern history, and institutions of higher education have not escaped its consequences.

United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI), an initiative that focuses on the organisation's relationship with higher education institutions (HEIs), stated that the pandemic "has proven challenging for both students and educators, who must deal with the emotional,

physical and economic difficulties posed by the illness while doing their part to help curb the spread of the virus."

Higher education is a major investment and, as societies are required to deal with the impact of events of this nature, they will undoubtedly reassess that investment. In fact, The UWI has in recent years been faced with financing challenges as Caribbean governments shift their budgetary priorities. So how do HEIs improve their quality and therefore increase their value? How do they prove - and keep proving - their importance and relevance to society?



■ For more information on **Caribbean Quality Culture: Persistent Commitment to Improving Higher Education**, visit **UWI Press** at <https://www.uwipress.com/author/sandra-ingrid-gift/>

A new book edited by Dr Sandra Ingrid Gift and published by UWI Press explores the principles and strategies of "continuous quality improvement" of higher education in the region. *Caribbean Quality Culture: Persistent Commitment to Improving Higher Education*, consists of essays from some of the region's top educators, academic administrators, scholars in education, and education policymakers.

Dr Gift, who held the post of Senior Programme Officer and Head of the Quality Assurance Unit of the Vice Chancellery at UWI St Augustine, states in the opening chapter of *Caribbean Quality Culture*:

"The intention of this publication is to focus on the deliberate strategies employed to achieve improvement of the quality of Caribbean higher education, as part of or in addition to quality assurance processes in institutions that have been investing in building a quality culture."

Consisting of five parts, the book focuses on governance, curriculum and teaching and learning, continuous quality improvement processes, external quality assurance, and lastly, "the way forward". At 23 chapters, one of its outstanding features is the number of diverse specialists and their contributions on topics like leadership and ethics in higher ed, financial challenges to quality education, online learning, community engagement and service-learning, and graduate employability. Several chapters deal specifically with The UWI - its agenda for continuous improvement and case studies on how it has dealt with quality-related issues.

"The contributions reveal," says Dr Gift, "that there is much fertile ground for ongoing research to inform the deepening of understanding of the optimum processes for success of all present and future efforts and, consequently, for achieving the desired positive impact of the higher education enterprise on the sustainable development of Caribbean nations."

## SCHOOL OF VETERINARY MEDICINE, FAO partner on initiative to provide food safety modules/manuals for the pluck shop industry



Dr Karla Georges, Director of the School of Veterinary Medicine in UWI St Augustine's Faculty of Medicine.

**Fried chicken, baked chicken, barbecue style.** Curried, stewed or sizzling in oyster sauce, Caribbean people are fiercely addicted to chicken. A million chickens are eaten every week in Trinidad and Tobago alone, according to the Poultry Association of Trinidad and Tobago (PATT). The local industry has been producing an average of 42 million annually, and eight out of every ten are sourced at home.

Yet, when PATT met virtually with Minister of Trade and Industry, Paula Gopee-

Scoon, and Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, Clarence Rambharat in May 2021, they were informed that T&T still imports more of these birds than it exports. From 2016 to 2020, T&T was spending an average of TT\$12 million on outside chickens, while only managing TT\$3.5 million for export.

Time was when, every Sunday morning's foray to the neighbourhood markets meant a chicken came home with the basket of produce. Poulterers were feeding the nation's appetite from their odiferous pluck shops, and the sanitary states were often dodgy. In 2018, a mandatory Regional Standard for Poultry products was implemented, but it is not enough to impose a standard unless parties involved are taught what this means.

Jumping up to the plate to educate members of the poultry sector, The UWI's School of Veterinary Medicine (SVM), with



**Time was when, every Sunday morning's foray to the neighbourhood markets meant a chicken came home with the basket of produce. Poulterers were feeding the nation's appetite from their odiferous pluck shops, and the sanitary states were often dodgy.**

the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), hosted a three-hour webinar on Food Safety for Pluck Shops in August.

It was part of their overall consultancy for the FAO on Food Safety and Meat Hygiene in the Cottage Poultry Industry in T&T,

and it attracted 158 people, most already in the sector, based in Barbados, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Bahamas, the USA, and T&T.

The first module was "Pluck Shop Construction", presented by Dr Teola Noel, Assistant Lecturer in Veterinary Public Health. The second module, "Pluck Shop Operations", presented by Dr Karla Georges, Director of the SVM and Senior Lecturer, Veterinary Public Health, focused on procedural operations, the importance of good welfare and slaughter practices, ante-mortem

and post-mortem inspections and the link between welfare, economics and safe food. The third and final was from Dr Lisa Benjamin, Lecturer in Veterinary Public Health, who spoke on "General Operating Practices", looking at biosecurity and good manufacturing practices and standard operating procedures for sanitation.

In addition, from this, a manual for pluck shop operators will be presented to participants, and later, another manual on Food Safety for Pluck Shops will be done for public health inspectors alongside webinar training.

Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture, Avinash Singh was pleased as he noted that the pluck shop sector, which processes 30 to 40 percent of total local production, employs between 10,000 to 15,000 people. As he encouraged participants to employ the best practices in the manuals, he reminded them that state grants were available. The Agricultural Development Bank's (ADB) manager for New Business and Development, Denise Dickson, supported this with information on funding opportunities from the ADB.

Introductory remarks were also given by Reuben Robertson, FAO representative for T&T and Suriname, who spoke about the food safety manuals and further training. Professor Terence Seemungal, Dean of the Faculty of Medical Sciences, said a mature food safety culture leads to consumer health and economic gains from fewer losses through food-borne illnesses and waste. Dr Saed Rahaman, Director of Veterinary Public Health, addressed the industry's value and encouraged participants to understand their role in producing healthy food.





FACULTY OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE @ 100

# A CENTURY of EXCELLENCE, CULTIVATED at ST AUGUSTINE

BY JOEL HENRY

*Via colendi haud facilis.* It means “the way of farming is not easy”. The words are carved into the foundation stone of the Main Administration Building of The UWI St Augustine Campus. The message - and the building - predate the creation of The UWI by more than four decades.

They are an artifact of the St Augustine Campus’ ancestor, the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture (ICTA). They are also some of our most potent artifacts of the development of higher education in Trinidad and Tobago, the rise of St Augustine as the heart of UWI in T&T, and the origin of what today is known as the Faculty of Food and Agriculture (FFA).

This year, tracing its roots all the way back to ICTA, the FFA celebrates its 100th year as the nexus of education, research, outreach and thought leadership in agriculture and its related fields.

Under the theme “The Centennial Legacy of Agriculture at The UWI St Augustine”, the FFA has engaged in activities such as tree planting, several virtual events and special publications of their faculty magazine, *Tropical Agriculture*, and a newspaper supplement that can both be viewed online at the FFA site: <https://sta.uwi.edu/ffa/100-years-agriculture>.

On August 30, 1921, the West Indian Agricultural College at St Augustine was formally established. It was very soon renamed ICTA.

“It opened its doors to 15 students in October 1922,” says Bridget Brereton, Emerita Professor of History.



A shot of a tractor ploughing land for experimental plots at the University College of the West Indies’ (UCWI) University Farm in Trinidad. The UCWI was the direct ancestor of The UWI, operating in a special relationship with the University of London. It became independent in 1962 and UWI was born. PHOTOS: COURTESY THE WEST INDIAN AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS DIVISION, ALMA JORDAN LIBRARY.

She adds, “ICTA existed until 1960. It built up an international reputation for academic research on tropical agriculture, with a focus on entomology, mycology, plant genetics, soils chemistry and soil science.”

Today, the FFA has inherited and expanded tremendously on ICTA’s legacy. In academic year 2019-2020, more than 850 students were enrolled at the faculty. Not only do they offer programmes in agriculture, but also human nutrition, food service management, environmental and disaster risk, geography, family and consumer science, entrepreneurship, agri-business, and communications and extension.

Over the decades, the FFA has carried out an enormous amount of research that has not only benefited the local food production sector, but has made a lasting impact on the region. That impact is also felt through the sharing of knowledge and expertise with regional governments and international organisations. In addition, they offer services like soil and water quality testing, as well as plant health services, to the public.

From the UWI Field Station, FFA’s 55-acre farmland in Valsayn, they not only provide a space for research and teaching, but also offer field trips for students and private groups. The university farms even sell some of the highest quality, locally produced fresh poultry, pork, beef and goat, as well as cow and goat’s milk.

It’s quite an evolution from St Augustine’s founding as a higher ed hub so many years ago. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 10**



Princess Margaret, sister of Queen Elizabeth, on a visit to the Cocoa Research “Shed” at St Augustine in 1958. Today, the Cocoa Research Centre at UWI St Augustine is leading the revitalisation of the cocoa industry.



Princess Alice, Countess of Athlone, and the first Chancellor of The UWI, lays a foundation stone for the opening of the Faculty of Agriculture on February 3, 1968.



# AGRICULTURE is alive and well at UWI

BY SHEREEN ALI



Professor Wayne Ganpat

**“If you want to achieve big results, you have to do big things.”**

These are the words of Professor Wayne Ganpat, former Dean of the Faculty of Food and Agriculture when he was asked to describe one of the most iconic events ever produced by the Faculty, the techAGRI Expo. Professor Ganpat and his team pioneered the expo in 2017 and it continued successfully and grew over the next three years until its postponement due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Professor Ganpat is confident however that the expo will be held again because of the light that it shone on agriculture, not just on the campus, but nationally as well. The event ignited an interest in even the youngest of patrons, who Professor Ganpat insisted be a part of the event. He said his team's motivation when planning the expo was for people to see, touch and interact with all aspects of the field. They wanted everyone to see that “Agriculture is alive at The UWI”.

He was appointed Dean of FFA in 2016, a post that he held until his retirement in 2021. During his time with the Faculty, Ganpat always spoke of their aim to become a centre for training and research in agriculture for the entire Caribbean. He spoke proudly of the St Augustine Campus being the only one in the network of UWI campuses that offers programmes in the field of agriculture.

Because of this service to the Caribbean, Professor Ganpat always wanted the FFA's catalogue of programmes to be offered online, so that they could reach more people. He has been happy to see the campus pivoting to online learning over the past year and a half, and sees it as a move that could greatly impact the threats to food security, as now more people can be trained to hasten agricultural development. In 2021, the faculty transitioned all of its taught MSc programmes to a blended mode of delivery. Some new undergraduate programmes have been developed for blended learning.

When asked about what is needed to continue to keep agriculture alive in the region, Prof Ganpat spoke about the importance of technology. He explained that technologies are available now that can enable higher production on less land. He also mentioned soil-less systems, a range of protected structures to drastically reduce the hard work in the hot sun that is associated with farming, and even technologies to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

He calls on graduates of the FFA, past and present, to focus on the three most important roles that they can fulfill to propel the sector's development:

“Ensure that production in the sector is year-round, transform the primary products into an array of value-added products, and lastly, use your social media skills to build markets for products, both locally and abroad.”

Professor Ganpat recalled another milestone anniversary that was celebrated at UWI St Augustine in 2018, the 200th Anniversary of the National Herbarium of Trinidad and Tobago. The Herbarium was originally housed at the offices of the Department of Agriculture in St Clair in the 1800s, until it was moved to the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture in 1947. Professor Ganpat sees this as proof of the importance of preserving and mapping our local flora, and with the faculty now celebrating its 100th Anniversary, this shows the value and longevity of the disciplines of food and agriculture.

When asked about his hopes for the FFA's future, Professor Ganpat wished the faculty nothing but continued success and is confident that it will be around for another 100 years.

*Shereen Ali is a photographer, writer and marketing and communications professional.*



AGRIman, an agriculture-themed superhero created by industry advocate and entrepreneur Alpha Sennon, strikes a pose at the techAGRI Expo. The expo, created in 2017, is an FFA initiative designed to promote the many possibilities of food production and encourage the next generation of farmers, manufacturers, entrepreneurs and innovators.



A member of the FFA team gives a tour of the Technology Demonstration Park. Built by graduate students, the park shows visitors an array of efficient and cost-effective technologies and techniques for cultivation.





# ‘The potential to do GROUNDBREAKING RESEARCH is right here’

*Dr Mark Wuddivira, FFA's new Dean, shares his journey from Nigeria to St Augustine, his views on reenergising Caribbean farming, and his vision for the faculty*

BY SABRINA VAILLOO



The UWI welcomed Mark Wuddivira, PhD as its new Dean of the Faculty of Food and Agriculture on August 1. He has been a faculty member at the St Augustine Campus since 2009, where he has taught graduate courses and completed research projects on agricultural and environmental soil physics, among others.

A Nigerian by birth, Dean Wuddivira has had an extraordinary journey to date. “I always tell my children that if I should just take them to where I started my life, they would never believe it... I don’t imagine anybody would look at that humblest of backgrounds and think that anything would come out of it.”

His surname originates from “one of the very minority, micro-minute tribes” and means ‘close the gate’. His grandmother, having suffered several stillbirths, had declared “the gate of loss and of death was closed” when she gave birth to his father.

“It amazes me where I am today, because all the conditions were not favourable for anybody to progress in life.” Peasant agriculture was the only way of life in his village where survival hinged upon subsistence farming and “whatever little excess could be sold”. “I grew up seeing farm produce being used in exchange for other things, because the money was not readily available.” These were luxuries such as “soap for bathing and other things that people take for granted”.

Dean Wuddivira retraced the arrival at his current role along a string of fortuitous events, including one where a coveted and costly school application form came to him by chance. His father, a rural village school headmaster, who had received some Western education, was at once the village teacher, doctor and nurse, and was “one of the first people in that community who would have gone to school”.

Forgoing other options, a desire to change things in his own society propelled Wuddivira towards a four-year Bachelor’s programme in Agriculture at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria, where he viewed anything difficult as something to be vigorously pursued. Some time after graduating, Ahmadu Bello called Wuddivira to fill a vacancy for assistant lecturer in Soil Physics – a solid achievement, pre-empting his Master’s degree.

In 2002, while on scholarship to read for a PhD in Irrigation Engineering at a university in China, he was offered a scholarship to study Soil Physics – his true calling – at a yet unheard of The University of the West Indies in an unknown Trinidad and Tobago. “When you are talking about taking a scholarship from Nigeria, you are talking about thousands of people coming out for just a



Dean Wuddivira with his wife Juliana Wuddivira at his graduation ceremony at Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Nigeria in 2001.

few scholarship opportunities,” he said of the magnitude of the opportunity. Wuddivira, who considers his circumstances divinely appointed, praised The UWI’s gracious accommodation of him and his family since their arrival 19 years ago.

Dean Wuddivira has witnessed the ongoing challenges at the FFA and hopes to remedy these with a refocused vision. He sees the past merging and demerging of the Faculty of Agriculture as injurious and resulting from political and cultural disdain for the sector. “I’m seeing a faculty that needs identity, whose institutional profile needs to be enhanced and that needs to position itself to become a first-choice faculty.”

Dean Wuddivira wants to shatter the misconception that agriculture is a low-tech field where food production is the endgame, which is but one aspect of “the whole gamut of the food system, the agri-food/environment spectrum”. In reality, a profession in agriculture demands technical proficiency.

His expression changed as he weighed the importance of The UWI’s role in agriculture for the entire region. “As the premier institution that has the mandate of agriculture, not just in Trinidad and Tobago, but in the region”, young people need to be convinced that “agriculture is not just going out into the field”.

They think that “you don’t need any deep science, you don’t need any innovative work to do agriculture, but that’s not true,” he said pointedly, repositioning himself on the edge of his chair. “We have to demonstrate that we can innovate and develop technologies in agriculture that will attract young people, that the potential to do groundbreaking research is right here.”

As for climbing food prices, he said, “Any country that depends on imported, low-quality food will only encourage an unhealthy population and increase the burden of our health sector,” he said, stating that Trinidad and Tobago’s existing US\$5.7 billion food import bill was “unsustainable and unacceptable”.

Dean Wuddivira contextualised the paradox of people’s desire for good health but continued consumption of low-quality foods. He suggested that if the national budget were to be cut for emergency reasons, food quality would be first to the chopping block. “We forget that we must eat...there is nothing that is as healthy as what grows naturally in your native environment.” He especially mentioned this in light of the deleterious nature of comorbidities in treating Covid-19 patients. “Non-communicable diseases are all related to what we eat.”

Dean Wuddivira intends on leveraging the pandemic towards his vision and said that in the pursuit of good health, people were awakening to the importance of agriculture, as is evidenced by the mushrooming of agribusiness startups. The role of the FFA is to organise these entrepreneurial opportunities. “We want to ensure that there’s an environment for them to continue to thrive.”

The FFA is also leveraging future in-house lab facilities and services to be provided by trained experts for clients such as farmers, land managers, environmental agencies, GOs and NGOs. These agro-environmental services will include soil and water quality testing, plant health, diagnoses, and feed formulation for livestock.

“The development of people is important, because if you have happy people around you, then there’s nothing you cannot achieve,” said Dean Wuddivira. He sees his personal values of integrity, honesty, spiritual focus and respect for others as the cornerstones of his professional success. “Anything that has to do with making the lives of other people better, anything that will make me interact with other people, excites me.”

*Sabrina Vaillou is a writer, editor and creative consultant helping brands to attract their ideal audience.*



Fresh produce for sale: One of the aspects of campus life missed by staff and students is the weekly farm sale. Every Thursday, FFA staffers offered farm-fresh produce from the University Farms.





CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

Emeritus Professor in Botany professor Julian Duncan was a lecturer during UWI's first years. He recalls those times fondly, and sees his decision to take up a post at the fledgling university as one of his most important.

"Coming here, and coming in the pioneering days, I can look back with satisfaction at what I was able to achieve, which I would not have been able to do abroad," says Professor Duncan.

He became the sole botanist at the College of Arts and Sciences at UWI St Augustine in 1963 (ICTA became the St Augustine Campus in 1960 and the university became UWI in 1962 when it achieved independent status from the University of London). As such, he served both the College and the Faculty of Agriculture. A pioneer himself, Duncan is one of the Caribbean's most important educators in botany and tissue culture. His tissue culture research led to the development of methods for mass producing plant materials for several plant species.

In his recollections of that time, Professor Duncan stresses the sense of purpose that both staff and students shared. They were Caribbean people, in post-colonial societies, working to develop themselves and their young Caribbean institution.

"There were people who did not have the resources to go abroad and study, and this was the perfect opportunity," he says. "They came in with a more mature approach. They had a focus on why they were here. They were getting an education for the improvement of the country in which they lived."

This is perhaps the greatest difference between ICTA and the FFA - the people the institution was created to serve.

"[ICTA] served the interests of the British Empire rather than the West Indies (hence the change of name). It had minimal links to the local educational system and was regarded (correctly) as a closed British enclave situated in Trinidad," says Professor Brereton.

As the FFA evolved, so did its sense of purpose.

Professor Laura Roberts-Nkrumah is part of the subsequent generation of agricultural scientists who came of age in the 1970s.

"I had the privilege of being part of that illustrious class of 1978," she says of her time as an undergraduate at the Faculty of Agriculture (as it was then called). Today she is a highly regarded professor of crop science and production who spent more than 30 years as an educator and researcher in the Department of Food Production.

Professor Roberts-Nkrumah is also known for her game-changing work in breadfruit, work that has the potential to not only expand local production for export, but also make a serious contribution to food security. This is perhaps one of FFA's most important missions, creating the environment and advocating for Caribbean society to feed itself.

She draws the link between the ideas being developed during the 1970s and her own approach to food production:

"It was a time of a lot of social revolutions. UWI's student body was very vocal and we took the opportunity to discuss what was going on. It shaped our perspective on Caribbean agriculture."

Today, the FFA is very focused on food security, nutrition through eating local, entrepreneurship, technology, research, and attracting new generations to take part in agriculture and food production, and its related industries.

In 1921, agriculture may not have been easy, but it is easier in 2021. That is in no small part because of the collective efforts of the faculty, administrative and support staff, and the students themselves. We can only marvel at what the next 100 years of FFA will hold.

**Today, the FFA is very focused on** food security, nutrition through eating local, entrepreneurship, technology, research, and attracting new generations to take part in agriculture and food production, and its related industries.



Emeritus Professor of Botany Julian Duncan



Professor Laura Roberts-Nkrumah



# In Memory of Leroy Clarke THE MASTER ARTIST

BY PROFESSOR OPAL PALMER ADISA

On July 27 of this year, LeRoy Clarke, one of the Caribbean's greatest artists, passed away at age 82. Clarke, a visual artist, poet, philosopher and Orisha leader, has made an enormous contribution to the creative and intellectual life of Trinidad and Tobago. Professor Opal Palmer Adisa, former Regional Director of The UWI Institute of Gender and Development Studies (IGDS), and herself an author, poet, and essayist, shared some of her memories of Clarke (her mentor and friend) and her thoughts on his importance to Caribbean society.

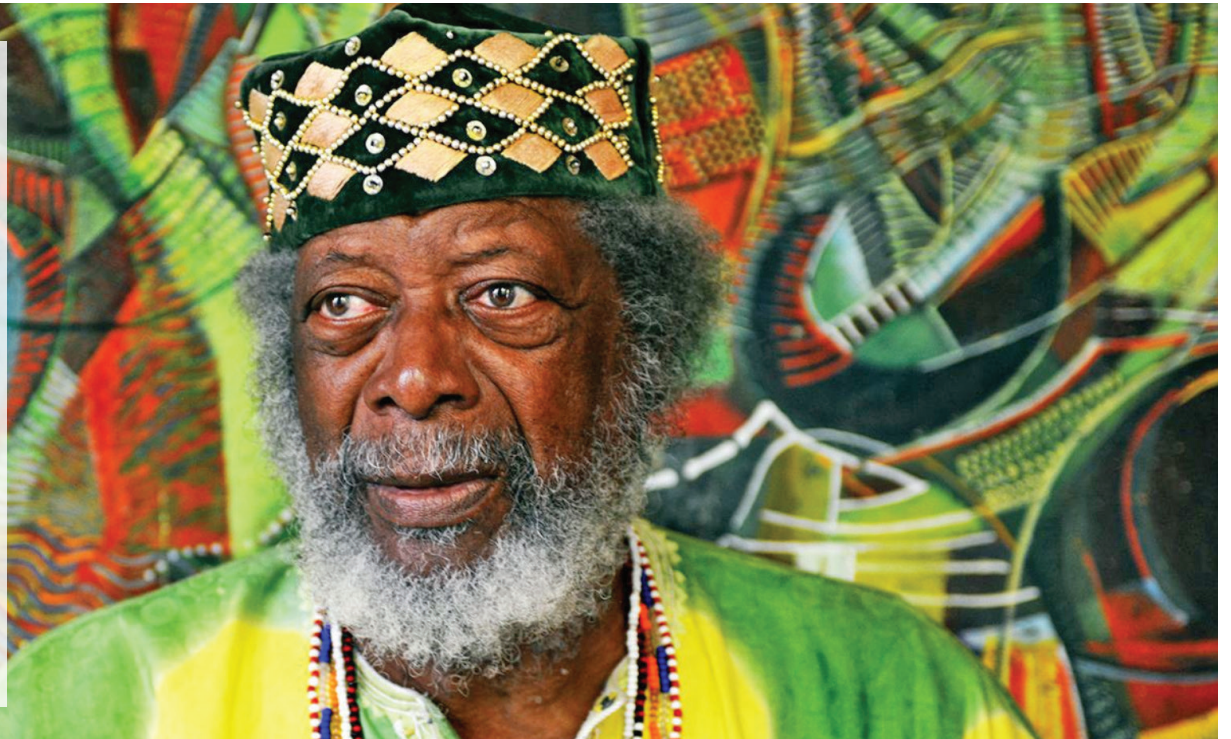


PHOTO: COLIN WILLIAMS | LARGEUP.COM

LeRoy Clarke was a genius, a master artist, as passionate and as complex as the best. You either loved him fully, unconditionally, or you left him alone. He was fierce, full of convictions, and he did not mince his words, regardless of who might be hurt by them.

I met LeRoy for the first time, at 17, recently arrived in New York, getting ready for college, and a friend invited me to accompany her to visit him at his home/studio in Brooklyn. When we arrived, he was working on a massive piece, about 40 x 60, part of his *Douen* series, with such minute details, I thought he would surely go blind. I still don't understand, how up to two years ago when I last saw him before the COVID pandemic, how he was able to see with such clarity those fine lines and details of his multi-layered, prophetic, visual compositions.

I had been around artists in Jamaica as my uncle, Lloyd Walcott, was an artist, but walking through LeRoy's home/studio that day I knew I was in the presence of a master. Also amazing was his ability to work and entertain -- I remember him making and offering us peanut punch, playing music, chatting with others who dropped by, between the four hours we were there, and in the midst of all the activity and talking with us, he kept painting. The caveat of that first meeting, of what would become many, many visits, was that my friend told him that I wrote and he said I should bring some of my poems the next time I came to visit -- that was before computers and cell phones.

About a month later I visited LeRoy and left him a slim folder of my typed poems. He called about three weeks later and declared me a poet. He suggested some books for me to read, including *Rilke's Letters to a Young Poet*, provided critique on several of the poems and told me, "Keep writing." Thanks my dear LeRoy, I am still writing. LeRoy Clarke was my first mentor and he introduced me to many important poets in New York, Quincy Troupe and the late South African poet who was in exiled in New York at the time, Keorapetse William Kgosisile. LeRoy also took me to my



The Master Artist with Professor Adisa

first open mic reading, and at the many parties at his home I met other artists, musicians, and writers/poets from the Caribbean, Africa and the entire globe.

When his first collection, *Taste of Endless Fruit: Love Poems and Drawings*, 1974 came out, he gave me a signed copy. When I left New York after undergraduate college and returned home, LeRoy and I communicated via letters. I believe I was visiting New York when LeRoy said he was packing up and returning home. I was inspired. He told me to come and visit him there and I did, in all of the locations in which he lived before he built his home museum, El Tucuche, where I stayed many times.

LeRoy Clarke has been an inspiration; consistently he was clear and unwavering about doing his work without any distraction or deviation. The first original piece of art I bought when I was 21 years old was one of his paintings that he allowed me to pay for over a two-year period. It sadly was stolen from my California home, when I was away on study leave in 2009, when some very unscrupulous people tried to take over my house and stole it, among other artwork.

LeRoy insisted that I attend his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, and asked me to speak about his work and our friendship at the National Museum in Port-of-Spain; also, I wrote and was interviewed in a local journal about our mentorship/friendship.

In 2016, I spent a week with LeRoy, and during that time we spoke extensively about his work -- his process and some of those conversations were in a taped interview about his *Eye Hayti Series*; an excerpt of that interview was published in the journal, *Interviewing the Caribbean*, Vol 3, No 1, 2017.

About five years ago, LeRoy asked me about his work, and when I visited him three years ago he had me select three images from *Ubiquitous Thunder*, and write about those. I hope this quintessential collection of line-drawings will be a forthcoming publication by his estate, and my essay on his work, "When Lines Converge," which he told me before his passing that he loved and would include in the collection.

LeRoy Clarke has left a massive body of work that will take many, several life times to analyse and process. He is certainly one of the Caribbean's most prolific visual artists and writers, and his work enshrines our history, culture and his future hopes for our restoration. I count myself among those blessed to have known him and who were encouraged to keep steadfast with the work. I am still leaning on the shovel, LeRoy, as you often intoned, and will keep leaning.

Professor Opal Palmer Adisa is a cultural activist, award-winning poet, novelist, performance artist and educator. She is the former University Director of the Institute for Gender and Development Studies.



## ■ FILM

**Cheenee means sugar in Hindi.** Indentured labourers from India were told that Trinidad – “*Cheenee-dad*” – was the land of milk and honey. Leaving their homes in areas such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Bengal, they sought a better life here.

Taking inspiration from this experience, two lecturers from UWI St Augustine have been working on a documentary to record and investigate the culture and ethnography of the indentured Indians and their descendants. *Cheenee*, the film, includes interviews with people across the country to learn about the East Indian experience using food, dance, song, architecture, history and movement.

Currently in post-production, *Cheenee* (2022) is the work of Greek filmmaker Andreas Antonopoulos and Deboleena Paul, a choreographer and performer from India. Both accomplished artists in their fields, they are also seasoned academics, Antonopoulos is a lecturer in the UWI Film programme and Paul is the coordinator of the Dance Unit at the Department of Creative and Festival Arts (DCFA).

“While the documentary does not seek to tell the viewer a specific narrative,” says Paul, “it speaks overall to the Indian culture in TT and how it differs from India.”

*Cheenee*, says Paul, “focuses on the history of arrival and the transformation of a unique culture.”

The film was made with a research grant from The UWI and is a collaborative project that includes dance. “The film is not the traditional documentary approach of talking heads,” she says.

They spoke to people from multiple cross sections of the country such as dancers, architects, people whose families laboured in the cane fields, and teachers. They even spoke to a 107-year-old woman and four generations of her family. A descendant of indentured labourers, she shared the story of her parents’ struggles adapting to the country, especially since they spoke Bhojpuri.

“*Cheenee* has no leading plot or voice overs,” says Antonopoulos. “It is made up of full interviews where the speaker tells their story and the viewer makes their own conclusions. Dance and space tell their own story.”

“*Cheenee* has no leading plot or voice overs,” says Antonopoulos. “It is made up of full interviews where the speaker tells their story and the viewer makes their own conclusions. Dance and space tell their own story.”



Filmmaker Andreas Antonopoulos on location with dancers.

# CHEENEE

## A Story of Arrival, Experience and Culture

*New documentary by two UWI lecturers looks at the East Indian ethnography through interviews, dance, song and architecture*

BY RACHAEL ESPINET AND JOEL HENRY



Deboleena Paul, Coordinator of the Dance Unit at DCFA, guides dancers.

Currently in post-production, *Cheenee* (2022) is the work of Greek filmmaker **Andreas Antonopoulos** and **Deboleena Paul**, a choreographer and performer from India.



## ■ FILM

The film, he says, is an ethnographic work: “*Cheenee* is about a group of people we see as a historical group. We want to demystify the idea of nationality by understanding that there is no race; there is movement, cultural and historical representation.”

He adds, “So if I understand how Trinidad works, it is easy to understand how the world was made by the random movement of people. So maybe we can demystify the differences in countries around the world to show that difference is perceived more like construction on what has been made and retained by political and economic motivation.”

Though the film is set in Trinidad, he says that type of conversation about cultural differences can be had in bigger countries like the US, but it was easier to do because Trinidad was so small.

## CULTURE AND SURVIVAL

One thing he was keenly fastidious about was historical accuracy. If an interviewee said something that was not historically accurate, it was left out.

The music was composed in India by tabla player Debasish Dass in collaboration with UWI DCFA music lecturer Khion De Las. De Las composed and recorded music in Trinidad, which was then sent to India.

Music and movement are essential components of the film. Paul says the dance sequences “evolve in parallel to the narrative of the people”, specifically the challenges they faced in the new world. She also likes the idea of traditions being continued in their new home and the sharing and mixing of music and architecture. *Cheenee*, says Paul, is about the many origin stories of people and how they express themselves. It’s also about survival:

“The buildings themselves speak about the hardships and disparity between classes. The dances speak of the energy, effort and desire to survive. The cultural expressions speak of their origins. The overall effect is to inform the viewer and make them think about the sacrifices and challenges that people can overcome.”

Antonopoulos has been living in TT for two and a half years and believes TT is a great place to produce film work because there is quite a bit of land to explore, but is small enough to be able to see everything, and getting permission to film in historic sites is easier than in larger countries. In one instance, the documentary crew went to a dilapidated sugar cane factory and he was happy that there was no red tape needed to get permission to film there.

However, like almost all work, the filmmaking was affected by COVID-19. They have been working on *Cheenee* for a year, and filming was postponed a few times because of the pandemic.

“I’m grateful for the trust my interviewees gave by letting us into their homes and telling their stories,” he says.

Both Antonopoulos and Paul are interested in exploring Caribbean aesthetics in film and dance. They mix their views in art with what they experience in Trinidad. They are also engaged in radical filmmaking and dance to examine new aspects of culture and history. Paul points out, however, that it is vital to have a firm grounding in traditional forms before embarking on the new.

“That’s why I focus on proper techniques,” she says. “If you do anything new, anything explorative, you have to have a knowledge of proper technique. To explore and experiment with dancing technique, one should be well versed in the classical art form.”

*Cheenee* is now in post-production and still needs editing. Antonopoulos says that working on the sound and colour will take months to finish. He is hoping to complete the film by 2022 and premiere it in international festivals. It’s been a major undertaking, consisting of many weeks of hard, creative work. Fitting for a project that focuses on a people that brought and shared their labour and culture with Trinidad and Tobago so many years ago.



## Asking the Audience to See - and Feel

*Aryana Mohammed's short film on the Venezuelan migrant woman experience screened at the Toronto Fringe Festival*

BY JOEL HENRY

**There's a particularly powerful moment** in the short film *Mangoes from the Valley* where the protagonist presses the titular fruit to her face and inhales deeply. The fragrance is like comfort and rejuvenation all in one.

“In Venezuela, when they run out of food, they eat mangoes to sustain themselves. It’s reminiscent of her homeland,” says Aryana Mohammed, the 27-year-old director of *Mangoes*.

The moment reflects the essence of the empathy-driven work, which was shown this past July at the Toronto Fringe Festival. It was produced by JuneBug Productions.

Mohammed, a psychology student at UWI St Augustine, says *Mangoes* explores “the topic of prostitution among Venezuelan migrants because it is rarely discussed at a national level”, adding that “I wanted to highlight the risks that these women face because of the hypersexualised stereotypes that are associated with them.”

The film stars Renee King, who gives a potent, one-person performance that takes the protagonist on a journey of isolation, exhaustion, sorrow, and even a gruesome, simulated sexual assault.

“It was written with the intent of being a one-woman show with no words,” says Mohammed. “Firstly, I did not want to assign a face to the perpetrator in the film because there is no physique or skin tone associated with a rapist. In reality, it can be anyone. Also, for women who experience trauma such as this, sometimes there are no words to describe the experience. So using sound, movement, body language, and gestures, I attempted to create something that goes past words.”

The director explains that she wanted to provide a window into the moment and let audiences decide because there have been “instances where doubt is cast on victims and the legitimacy of their stories”.

*Mangoes* originated in 2019 as a play for the MICRO-Theatre Festival of Trinidad and Tobago. The theme for the festival that year was “*Building Human Empathy*”, with a particular focus on improving relations between Venezuelan



Filmmaker  
Aryana  
Mohammed.

migrants and the people of T&T. Subsequently, Mohammed was approached by dramatist Danielle Lewis, who had been selected by the Toronto Fringe Festival lottery to showcase a theatrical piece. Lewis (producer of *Mangoes*), who is also an adjunct lecturer at UWI St Augustine’s Department of Creative and Festival Arts (DCFA), heard about Mohammed’s play from fellow actor, educator and UWI alum Tafari Chia Lewis.

So, *Mangoes* was turned into a film and shown at the Toronto Fringe festival, one of the most recognised events of its kind showcasing the work of emerging and diverse artists.

“I knew that taking a play like this and turning it into a short film would not necessarily be easy but it definitely brought unexpected challenges,” says Mohammed. “Actually, we had to shoot the film twice. So it was difficult to meet the deadline for submission but somehow we made it. The film received really good reviews. I was surprised, given the experimental/surrealistic nature of the film.”

Mohammed and her collaborators are currently taking a break from the project. They intend however to revisit the film, make some edits and send it to other film festivals. She is still quite busy with her degree programme at UWI:

“Psychology and art both explore the human condition, just from different viewpoints. My time studying at UWI has helped to broaden my perspective. It has provided a greater understanding of the human psyche and this knowledge assists in my character development process when writing plays.”

She also has other creative ambitions. For the last few years, she has been working with a friend on a short, comedic film. Mohammed, who has been involved in the arts since age 5, starting first with classical Indian dance, has spent most of her life moving in a creative direction, even though she was good at sciences in secondary school. “It was my quiet rebellion, I think.”

The spirit of rebellion is on display in *Mangoes*, a film that refuses to turn away from the harshness of the migrant woman’s experience. The spirit of empathy is just as strong.



Actor Renee King in a scene from *Mangoes from the Valley*.



## ■ FILM

A short film by two students from UWI St Augustine will be screened at Filmschoolfest Munich, a prestigious international student film festival in Germany.

Lee Anna Maharaj, 22, and Jovan Lalla, 25, created the three-minute experimental film *Plant Speech* that imagines what plants sound like when they talk.

The film shows a black microphone recording the sounds of various plants such as a pawpaw tree, palm tree, weeds and aloe vera. It was done for the class Sound and Visual Dynamics, taught by UWI film lecturer Andreas Antonopoulos.

Maharaj told UWI TODAY that she loves the outdoors. She's always taking pictures of trees and she wanted to do something with nature. Lalla is more into sound effects, and the two combined their passions to create *Plant Speech*.

"We thought, 'what if we had a device that could listen to plants and they could speak to us?'" she said.

The plants do not speak English or any other human language. The students wanted the sounds to be an experience for the audience to interpret however they wanted.

"It is nothing that could be translated," she said in reference to the plants' speech. "It's not really like words. It's more like sounds. I don't have any words to describe how the plants talk. It is not of this world. It's alien-like. They have their own language."

Maharaj filmed common household plants in her grandparents' back yard in Arouca. She asked herself 'what would they say if they could talk?'

*Plant Speech*, she said, was made to help people appreciate plants.

"Sometimes we just see them there. We don't take the time to admire and appreciate them. We don't acknowledge the plants. This film is to say: 'I see you. I want to hear you.'"

Maharaj is graduating this year with a BA in Communication Studies and a minor in Film Studies. She's not sure what she wants to do yet career wise, but hopes she can incorporate her film studies in her work.

Lalla was stunned that their movie was chosen:

"I wasn't expecting that film to be chosen because it is pretty short. The concept is pretty simple.... It does not follow a narrative structure with a character and plot line....We were free styling."

He is going into his fourth year at UWI and is majoring in Film Production. He is interested in sound design.

While doing research, Lalla learned that plants actually make sounds, but it requires sophisticated equipment to hear them.

"The plants have their own systems that make sounds like the water systems. It is not a form of communication, but some things just make sounds and you need a good enough microphone to hear. Through the research, I realised I could make the plants do the sounds."

He used a tool on Adobe Audition to edit sounds and generate tones he thought suited to the plants.

"If there was a tiny weed that looked scraggly, I gave it an aggressive sound," he said.

Though he looked at the plant and tried to give a good guess on what the plant would sound like, he didn't want to give it too much of a personality. He would rather leave the sounds up to interpretation so that each viewer could get something different out of the film.

The aloe vera plant, however, was the sole exception to his rule:

"The aloes sound a bit mystical and whimsical, like a hum. It is a relaxed plant, and it also is valued out of all the plants. I would have given that plant a little more subjectivity because I liked it more. It sounded more human because of the hum."

He made the hum out of his own voice.

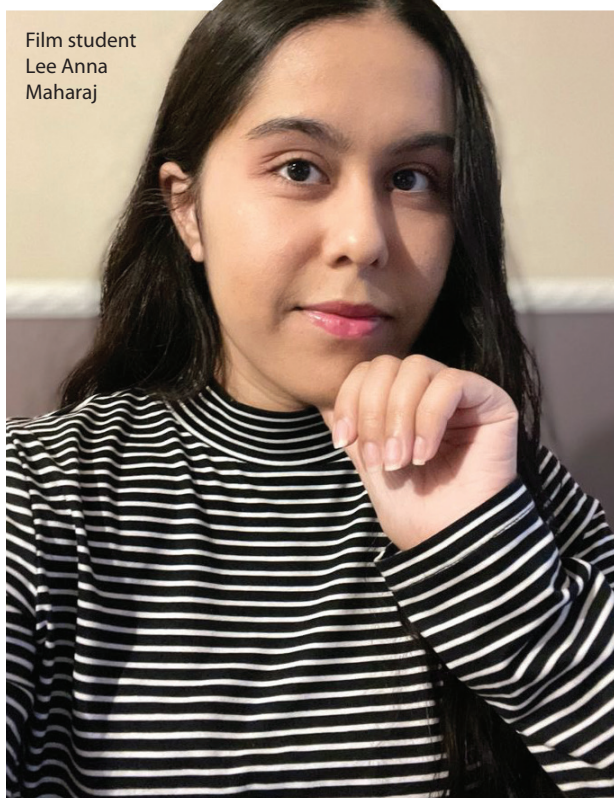
Antonopoulos said he was impressed at the student's creativity:



# Floral Conversations

*Student filmmakers to attend prestigious Munich Film Festival with 'Plant Speech'*

BY RACHAEL ESPINET



Film student  
Lee Anna  
Maharaj

"Their idea is just amazing because no one thought in the past to do that. It was a fine and authentic idea."

He submitted four of the class's films and *Plant Speech* was chosen.

Yao Ramesar, head of the Film Department, said he was proud of the students but not surprised by their success. Over the years, the Film Programme's alumni have been doing well and their movies are well-received internationally.

"It is great news, but not unexpected. Munich is the number one festival for student films. It is a gateway for Academy Award nominations for short films. So it is very good news," he said.

Filmschoolfest is taking place from November 14 to 20. The festival is giving the students accommodation and one plane ticket, and UWI will cover half of the expenses for their trip to Germany.

■ For more information on **Filmschoolfest**, visit <https://www.filmschoolfest-munich.de/en/>



**"It's not really like words. It's more like sounds. I don't have any words to describe how the plants talk. It is not of this world. It's alien-like. They have their own language."**



## ■ UWI IN SOCIETY

**People migrate to survive.** Not only for betterment. This is evident in the comparatively small numbers of Venezuelan nationals in Trinidad and Tobago since 2018. Venezuelan migrants have fled to T&T for a chance at a better life; working to provide money for family members at home and trying to survive in both countries. At present, Response for Venezuelans estimates that there are approximately 31,000 “protected refugees and migrants” from Venezuela in Trinidad and Tobago and more than four million in Latin America and the Caribbean, with almost two million people in Colombia alone.

There has been a great deal of public attention — positive as well as negative, and in terms of the latter, both soft xenophobia and overt vitriol — surrounding this recent Venezuelan presence in T&T. We worry that the basic motivation for survival — to stay alive and to meet basic needs for food, shelter and safety — among migrants, refugees and asylum seekers is being overlooked in these public debates.

Ernesto’s (name changed to protect his identity) family is one such example. He and his brother live in a rented two-bedroom apartment in urban Trinidad. Focusing on his struggles to survive, rather than how he got to Trinidad, Ernesto, his brother, his brother’s wife and their two children braved the ocean in inflatable dinghies, risking the short yet choppy journey across the ocean from Venezuela.

Shortly after settling in the neighbourhood in Trinidad, Ernesto confronted hostile verbal responses from locals, ordering him to “go back” from where he came, while he did routine activities such as going to the neighbourhood shop and walking around trying to find odd jobs. Even though his landlord was “*amable*” (nice) and his apartment sufficient, these encounters were disquieting and threatening, Ernesto explained.

Currently, migrants from Venezuela are the main scapegoats in Trinidad. They are blamed for ills like introducing COVID-19 to the country, rising unemployment and decreasing wages. Stereotypes around the drug trade are tied into narratives of their involvement in crime. And they are blamed for the break-up of marriages, with migrant women constructed as loose and amoral, “stealing” supposedly upstanding local men from Trinbagonian women.

Macroeconomic conditions matter too in contextualising this cultural framing. T&T’s well-developed oil and natural gas industry is subject to international commodity price fluctuations. In addition to economic depression and recession in the past five years, COVID-19 has contributed to decline. While government data is limited, unemployment and underemployment are visible and acute problems. These conditions make it easy to criminalise certain groups of migrants, such as those who arrive by boat from Venezuela.

Arguably, Venezuelans have replaced migrants from Guyana and the Eastern Caribbean who were drawn to the prospects for work in oil and its derivatives from the early 20th century, and likewise previously labelled as bad foreigners and categorised as illegals. But it is the migrants who are trying to survive who confront the brunt of such micro-prejudices and state policies on detention and deportation — not those who are better positioned to mitigate the risks of migration and resettlement, while the government also offers migrant registration schemes to benefit from their labour.

It wasn’t until Ernesto’s labour benefited the community



BY SHELENE GOMES AND ELRON ELAHIE

(working odd jobs around people’s home for little money or in construction) that the harsh words receded. Before the pandemic, Ernesto celebrated: “these days I work at construction. The boss friend building a new house.” It is unclear the kind of work Ernesto did when he lived in Venezuela, but since living in Trinidad, he’s shown skilled hands for construction, masonry, and painting. But the quality of his work isn’t reflected in the thickness of his pockets. “Two hundred, *señor*” he says, is the most he’s made in a day, explaining that he may work three days a week on average.

After Ernesto and his brother (who does the same kind of work) combine their income to pay the rent, the monthly sum is less than what is reasonably required to support a small family. Ernesto is satisfied, though, because his earnings can sometimes surpass minimum wage earnings in Trinidad – TT\$17.50/hour. He also supports an ailing mother in Venezuela. But the perennial dark cloud over his hopeful sky is that work sometimes doesn’t come at all.

When Trinidad and Tobago’s government ordered all construction to be halted due to the pandemic, Ernesto’s weekly earnings evaporated. As neither he nor any member of his family is a national, there was no way to access government social programmes for financial assistance. Wearing a face mask and carrying a bottle of water, Ernesto would walk from door-to-door seeking small jobs to help feed his family. In July 2020, he decided to tell his landlord to cut the electricity. He would no longer be able to pay for the luxury of light or cool air. He preferred his family to sweat

in the still, dark night – sheltered – than brave the street.

But amid his strife, some strangers in his neighbourhood reached out to help. He developed a sense of indebtedness to them for helping to pay his rent, bills and giving him food. Outside of Ernesto’s neighbourhood also, community groups have come together and organised food collection and delivery to Venezuelan families across Trinidad. The community bonds formed in Ernesto’s neighbourhood that complemented the capitalist demands for waged labour also starkly contrast to the popular attitude of a local-foreign dichotomy.

As Ernesto explained, “I have food now, *señor*. And my daughter is happy,” proudly showing photos of the toys she received for Christmas. For now, Ernesto can provide for his family. But at any moment that can change. If his landlord finds himself a member of the anti-migrant mob, if his boss is unable to find him work, if state authorities decide to exercise callousness and disregard for international humanitarian law, or if the state implements the policies of “managed mobility” that are characteristic of hostile states, Ernesto and his family will likely find themselves in the same position they were in two years ago.

This article originally appeared as: Elahie, E. and Gomes, S. (2021, February 8). *Everyday Survival in the Southern Caribbean* [Online]. *The Sociological Review*. <https://doi.org/10.51428/tsr.gaem3482>

Copyright © 2021 Elron Elahie and Shelene Gomes. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.



# UWI Calendar of Events

## October – November 2021



### Call for Abstracts: Conference on the Economy (COTE 2021) October 15 | November 15

ONLINE

COTE, one of Trinidad and Tobago and the region's most important economic/academic conferences, will be held on November 24 to 26, 2021. Hosted by the Department of Economics within UWI St Augustine's Faculty of Social Sciences, this year's theme is "Accelerating Caribbean Development: Retooling and Restructuring Caribbean Economies Post COVID-19". Submit your abstracts in document form by October 15 and your video abstracts by November 15.

Please visit the **Department of Economics Facebook page** for full details or email your submission to [cote@sta.uwi.edu](mailto:cote@sta.uwi.edu)

### 2021 National Health Research Conference November 18–19

ONLINE

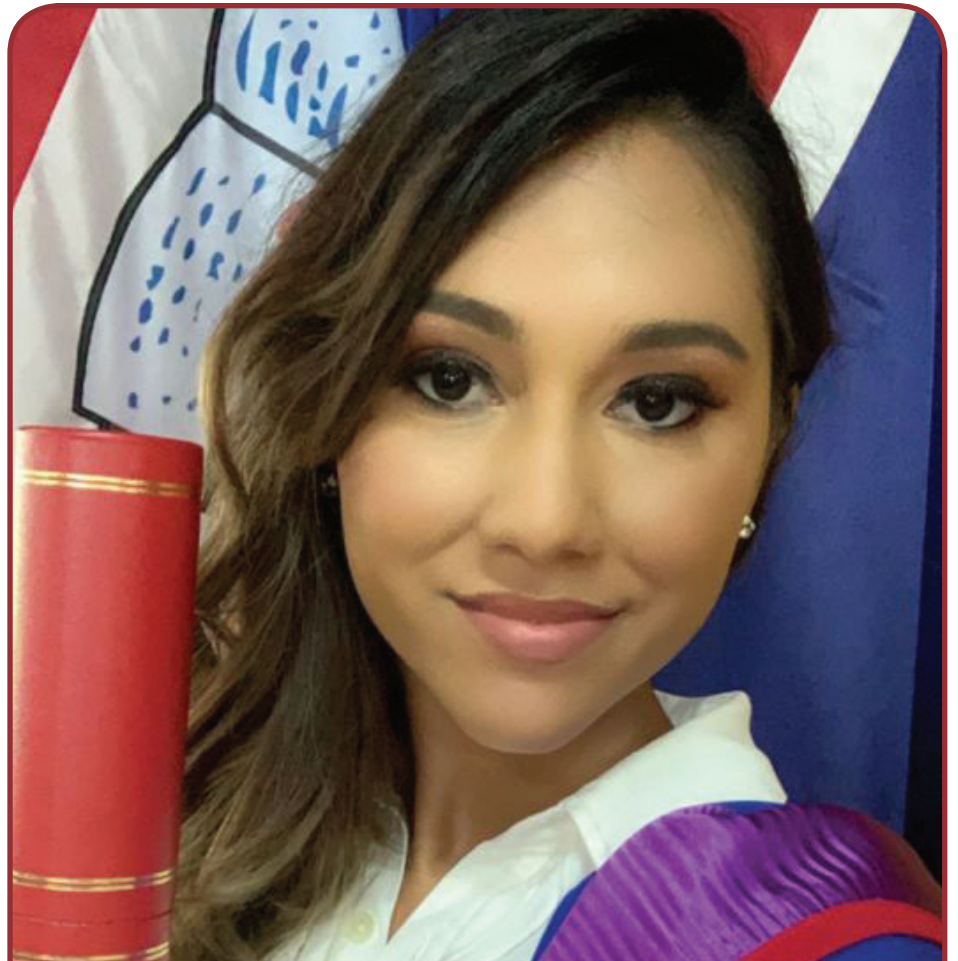
Diabetes, cancer, mental health issues, and now pandemics like COVID-19 – we are confronted with many health challenges. Research is key to solving them. The UWI's Faculty of Medical Sciences and Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research Development, partnering with the Ministry of Health, UTT, the University of the Southern Caribbean and the Regional Health Authorities, will host the second National Health Research Conference to address these issues. This year's theme is "Building Resilience through Research in a Pandemic". The virtual conference will feature 37 oral and 37 poster presentations, and is a forum where local research findings and policy relevant messages can be shared with policy makers. It will take place on the Hubilio platform.

**Cost:** Students: TT\$100 | All Others: TT\$200

For more information, email Shelly-Ann Hunte at [Shelly-Ann.Hunte@sta.uwi.edu](mailto:Shelly-Ann.Hunte@sta.uwi.edu) or Nikisha Headley at [Nikisha.Headley@sta.uwi.edu](mailto:Nikisha.Headley@sta.uwi.edu)

## 2021 NATIONAL HEALTH RESEARCH CONFERENCE

**"Building Resilience through  
Research in a Pandemic"**



### Graduation 2021 October 28–30

ONLINE

Once again, it is time to celebrate the achievement of UWI St Augustine's graduating students. Tune in to the virtual graduation ceremonies for the Class of 2021. See the next generation of young professionals, artists and leaders cross the virtual stage. Enjoy the performances in music and dance, and the words of wisdom from our valedictorians. This year's honorary graduands include attorney-at-law Mrs Lynette Seebaran-Suite, philanthropist and entrepreneur Mr Sieunarine Persad-Coosal, musician and educator Mr Ray Holman, and medical expert and leader Dr Roshan A Parasram.

#### Graduation Ceremonies

##### October 28

10:00 am–12:00 noon

**Faculties of Science and Technology and Food and Agriculture**

4:00 pm–6:00 pm

**Faculties of Engineering and Law**

##### October 29

10:00 am–12:00 noon – **Faculty of Social Sciences**

(A to L undergraduate and Arthur Lok Jack Global School of Business graduands)

4:00 pm–6:00 pm – **Faculty of Social Sciences**

(M to Z undergraduate and postgraduate graduands)

##### October 30

10:00 am–12:00 noon – **Faculties of Humanities and Education and Sport**

4:00 pm–6:00 pm – **Faculty of Medical Sciences**

Visit [www.sta.uwi.edu/graduation](http://www.sta.uwi.edu/graduation) for further details.