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Taapsi Ramchandani  
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## ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines an unflattering aspect of political partisanship in Trinidad: the ambivalences of being a party loyalist. Extensive scholarship on Trinidadian politics points to the confluence of race and patronage shaping political decisions yet less is spoken of the conflicting subjectivities of loyalists that are obscured by their exercise of franchise once every few years. In truth, there are limited options to reject one's socio-historical conditioning towards a party in Trinidad because, here, political identities are also psycho-social identities. They are entangled in generational dependencies, shared egalitarian aspirations, and hyper-local networks of reciprocity that make opting out an almost impossible proposition even when faced with a sense of betrayal, anger and anguish towards one's underperforming party. I trace this disjuncture between lived experiences and political choices against the backdrop of eight local government reform consultations held in the country in 2016. Here I witnessed a disconnect between the political performativity of these events organized and sponsored by the PNM party and the emotional and affective interjections of a disgruntled and distressed public. Tellingly, the majority of my participants who attended these events also identified as PNM party supporters. Through interviews and participant observation at political events, community meetings, intimate family affairs, and backyard parties or "limes," I piece together the compelling configuration of ethnic mobilization, political patronage and everyday sociality that fundamentally shapes partisan articulations of being and belonging. By continually realigning themselves to their failing party, my participants came to reenact their structural dispositions even as they asserted their own agency – concealing race talk in articulations of morality, demanding patronage through narratives of entitlement, and disavowing politics while seeking intervention in civic matters. My goal is to complicate our assumptions of party loyalty as a stable, purposeful and individualistic display of partisanship by viewing it also as a product of contested and ambivalent political subjectivities.

***“Put a crapaud in a suit and people will vote for the PNM”:  
A critical examination of patronage, loyalty,  
and the structuring force of party partisanship in Trinidad***

---

by

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Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology.

Syracuse University

May 2020

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND METHODS (A CASE FOR STUDYING PARTY PARTISANS)

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#### *Introduction*

The famous American philosopher Josiah Royce argued that loyalty or “the willing and practical and thoroughgoing devotion of a person to a cause” (Royce 1908:18) makes life worth living.

The display of loyalty towards something or someone can be a stabilizing force that imbues one with a sense of purpose (Royce 1908:20). In this dissertation, I examine how loyalty is nurtured, articulated and reenacted by party partisans of the People’s National Movement (PNM) political party in Trinidad. I suggest, however, that we also deconstruct party loyalty as a socio-historical force that makes it arduously difficult for one to break away from his/her stated political identity. One can explore such a phenomenon by critically examining the conditions that keep loyalists loyal.

Historical and contemporary processes that underwrite the production of party loyalty in Trinidad also curtail partisans’ abilities to wrestle practical benefits from their underperforming political representatives, revealing in effect a type of fractured loyalty that manifests through narratives of angst, anger and betrayal towards the same party. This is because, in Trinidad, party identity is also a social identity configured out of colonial race relations, state-sponsored patronage and the conviviality of community life. Ultimately, I situate this research in critical theory on voter intent, or the motivations that drive voters’ decisions to vote for one party over another.

To make my case, I take an anthropological approach to understanding *how* politics becomes personal. I inquire into how the subjective relations between voters and parties shape “self-formation” (Jakimow 2014a) and “self-becoming” (Jakimow 2014b). In other words, how

do loyalists view their status and their relationship to the party they voted for? What conditions lead to the evolution of party partisanship as a socio-political identity; when are these identities contested, how are they reconciled, and why are they reenacted?

To understand how the exercise of loyalism affects one's sense of self, I examine party partisanship in Trinidad as a reflection of socio-historical conditioning that gets entangled with the postcolonial project of party politics. Processes of socialization linked to family, racial identity and community networks engage with an entrenched culture of political patronage to offer a "default" choice for some voters making political choices. Articulations of loyalty become racialized, and also encompass assertions of entitlement premised on a social, and not economic, logic of reciprocal exchange.

Most PNM party loyalists I met rejected the possibility of ever voting for the main opposition party even if their own party "failed" them. Expressions of party loyalty reflected an inward-facing stasis borne off structural constraints in combination with pragmatic dependencies. Martha, a PNM loyalist I met, directly blamed her Member of Parliament (MP) for her job loss at a government agency. Martha was a PNM party member who had campaigned for the MP in the 2015 general election; her job was a form of patronage that acknowledged her loyalty. We talked about how she felt after losing her contract. She said to me, "It not nice because I walk with the party<sup>1</sup> and they do this to me<sup>2</sup>." The failure of the party to take care of its own complicated her feelings of commitment towards it. Despite her anguish, however, Martha confirmed she would support the PNM candidate running for local government in her area regardless of whether she reaped practical benefits in exchange. Of this she said, "She [the Councilor] seem nice. I give myself to her. I can't make the walk but girl, you have my vote."

My study of the ambivalences and contested political subjectivities of party partisans lends itself to contemporary scholarship on the growing populist trend around the world. Do we really know if someone voted for a party because they identified with it or because they felt they had no other alternative? This is a provocative question. Electoral reforms like instant runoff voting, proportional representation and citizen referendums try to redirect focus to the thorny issue of voter intent through the ballot box (FairVote 2017; see also Kang 2010; Schwartz et al. 2002). I offer an ethnographic perspective that situates such voting behavior within the complex interplay of historical structure, socio-cultural conditioning and individual agency.

My focus on subjectivity also inserts this research into literature on the politics of identity. I elaborate on the fragmentary and processual nature of political identities that are sustained on emotions of love, brotherhood and camaraderie but also fraught with sentiments of anger, frustration and betrayal. My interest in this area rests on the premise that partisanship is a social identity continually reinforced through shared religion, gender, and ethnic or racial ties (Groenendyk and Banks 2014; Valentino et al. 2011; van Zomeren, Postmes, and Spears 2008). In the following chapters, I pay close attention to how loyalists in Trinidad are nurtured through interlinking social networks encompassing family, friends, neighbors, politicians, and political brokers. I witnessed a groupism to party partisanship that transformed one's political identity into a social one.

I leverage the sites of state-sponsored consultations on local government reform held in 2016 to contextualize the disjuncture between partisans' expectations of their parties and their consistent support for the latter. These events became a confluence of all the factors shaping loyalty that I have articulated so far – ethnic mobilization, party culture, the desire for patronage, and inter-personal networking, all amidst the rhetoric of local governance reform. Consequently,

in the context of Trinidad, the quest for insertion into the client-patron matrix, and the implications of falling outside this exchange relation offer critical dimensions to understanding the structuring force of party partisanship in this study.

Over the course of my research, I befriended many a staunch PNM party supporter like Martha who remained firm in her loyalty while simultaneously harboring feelings of betrayal, anguish and desperation towards her unresponsive party leadership. I ethnographically leverage the story of one such participant, Aletia, whose status as a poor African woman raised on the clientelist generosity of the PNM party's first and most illustrious Prime Minister, Eric Williams, betrays her dependency on political patronage to buttress the economic vicissitudes of a life in poverty. Her socio-political support network is, unknown to her, entangled with those of other impoverished PNM partisans in her area, like Vera, who I introduce in Chapter 6. Aletia and Vera's conjoined efforts to seek political assistance take them through an ad-hoc assemblage of local government representatives, public service contractors, and political brokers operating as agents of their party in a critical swing municipality that is also the poorest in the country.

On the other side of Trinidad, in Moriah Hills, the story is a little different. This community of, what I call, political "leftovers" represents PNM loyalists in an area dominated by the opposition party. Their political subjectivities are forged out of geo-political stress in a highly centralized and racially-polarized party culture. Here, creative forms of networked sociality between party group members, community council members and ordinary residents reveal the slippages between civic and political life that become necessary to exploit in order to "get things done." Paradoxically it is in these spaces of rupture - caused by extreme poverty or geo-politics - that the tenacity of party loyalty becomes most evident. Despite the metaphoric kicking and screaming, most PNM party partisans I met reaffirmed their desire to continue to support their

party. This demands critical ethnographic analysis that can contextualize the urgency of everyday needs with blind devotion to a party irrespective of the economic outcome of such affection. To support my argument that party loyalty is also an unstable category comprising of conflicting and ambivalent political subjectivities, I rely on the situated narratives of a handful of key informants in combination with interviews and observations covering over 80 people I came in contact with during the course of this research.

To be a loyalist when loyalty fails you is a disrupted identity that demands simultaneous conversations on structure and agency. Party loyalty nurtured in the shadow of patronage manifests as an interminable wait for acknowledgement that is as much about reciprocation through material benefits as it is about assigning personhood. One participant explained her disappointment with her ungrateful MP like this –

When you are going up, championing, it's going a year now since the election, and you know you never come back in the area and thanked the people, that real bad! What will it take for you to just come around and say, 'I'd like to thank you for voting for me. Thank you all very much?' Christmas go on. You can say, 'All right, look there, plenty children in this area. Let me have a small Christmas party. There is an empty lot over so rent a tent, we could have clean up the area with a waka and have a little Christmas party for them children.' Nothing. You passed around, we vote for you and then nobody see you.

The bulk of my dissertation is spent situating these displays of loyalty through the ballot box, and also through participation in party campaigns, election walks and political events, within socially entangled formations of self that serve to remind a party partisan of her own structural conditioning that makes it almost impossible to opt-out of such a socio-political configuration even in moments of rupture. For these reasons, a loyalist is both proud and cursed.

### *Why study party partisanship?*

My interest in party partisanship stemmed from an incongruity I observed early in my fieldwork. In 2016, the year I conducted my dissertation fieldwork, the PNM political administration (2015 – present) was regurgitating an old promise of local government decentralization through a staid public consultation format. I expected a weak showing from the public especially as these events were spread across fourteen locations in a country hardly bigger in size than Philadelphia, PA<sup>3</sup>. I was sorely mistaken. I attended eight of the fourteen consultations; each event had an average attendance of 150-250 people (I counted). Who came to these events? What value did they see in patiently waiting through the three-hour event? What did their attendance and participation index about their relationship to the state and/or their party?

Following research with 83 individuals connected to the consultations, I was able to categorize majority participants as partisans of the PNM party under whose administration the consultations were taking place. For this project I use “partisan” as an etic term to describe someone who self-identifies with a political party. I use it interchangeably with “supporter.” I substantiated participants’ claims of being party supporters by asking them to also share their individual voting histories – did most or all of a participant’s past votes go towards the party she claimed to support?

This exercise revealed that not all partisans only ever voted for their party of choice. Some had, indeed, swung their votes towards third parties, and even the main opposition party. Yet these same individuals overtly or metaphorically continued to express their support to the PNM party so I left them in the category of partisans. While voting behavior might offer a technical solution to categorizing partisans, I found the focus on self-identification more productive for my study of political subjectivities. For example, a voter named John told me, “I

vote UNC when UNC didn't win the election with Pandey [read: 2002 general elections]... PNM was the government for 45 years and they do nothing." However, in the same interview, he contextualized his rebel vote by admitting, "I was PNM since I was eatin' breakfast." Irrespective of his voting behavior in a single election cycle, like Martha, John's political identity was entwined with the PNM party and, in fact, manifested more painfully because of the party's failure to live up to his expectations.

On the other hand, Arden, a retired 69-year-old school principal, claimed fealty to no party in particular. He had voted for the People's Partnership (PP) party in 2010. He said of his voting choice in the 2015 general election – "I voted for PNM this time because too much damn thievin' in the UNC [United National Congress]." He got more visibly upset as he spoke. "But the PNM stupid, stupid, stupid! You bleedin' the blasted country," he claimed agitatedly. For him the short-lived Organization for National Reconstruction (ONR) political party had been the best party – "all races - Indian African, Chinese – were there," he said, aligning his Mixed identity with the cultural ethos of the ONR party. I categorized him under "No preference/Didn't say" (see also Table 6 and Table 7).

In the context of patronage, Stokes et al. (2013:56,111) view loyalists as a sub-category of partisan voters who would vote for the party "in the absence of rewards." They also tend to exhibit "network-proximity" (Stokes et. al 2015) to their party, meaning they are intimately linked to party activities and goings-on through socio-political networks of local political brokers and their own local party groups. Loyalists make up part of their party's core constituency. Aletia, for example, repeatedly used the phrase "foot soldier" to describe her devotion to the PNM party. In Chapter 5, I also describe an emotional interaction between her and her fellow PNM party group members that confirms her deep-seated affiliation to the party. Similarly, here



is my field diary entry after meeting with Martha, the PNM loyalist I alluded to in the earlier section –

She told me she was born into the PNM family. There was no question where her support lay. Her daughter voted in elections for the first time last year. Martha told me her daughter was so excited to cast her vote for Barbara [read: PNM Member of Parliament]. ‘When I find out we win, I bathe and I come back out on the road,’ Martha said. She was liming and celebrating with other party supporters till 4 a.m. the next day.

It was not possible for me to map the two attributes, the “absence of rewards” and “network proximity,” onto all partisans I interacted with. As a result, I cannot clearly define a sub-category of loyalists amongst my PNM partisan participants. That said, whenever I do use the term “loyalist” in this dissertation, it signals a more intimate relationship to a participant whereby I can confirm either one or both of the aforementioned attributes characterizing partisan loyalty. For this purpose, I cross-referenced interview data with observations at local party group meetings, election rallies and even informal community gatherings.

The 2016 consultations offered the situational context within which I could observe partisans interacting with their party leadership. The events were as much a publicity stunt of a new government as they were a political exercise to reaffirm party identity (see Chapter 2). Many came to encounter and interact with their political leadership, to demand public accountability but also crucially to seek favors from their leaders in the form of patronage. This dissertation delves into the feelings, actions and thoughts of party partisans for whom the consultations represented another opportunity to access party leadership rather than deliberate the merits of a policy initiative.

In political science the examination of party partisanship prioritizes the *implications* of political fealty for the political machinery. Quantitative and qualitative studies explain the phenomenon of party stability over time (Lupu 2013; Stokes et al. 2013), the relative “immunity”

of loyalists to short-term political upheavals (Huddy, Mason, and Arroe 2015), and how a shared party identity predetermines policy positions (Cohen 2003; Dancey and Goren 2010).

Social and political psychologists have phenomenologically examined the subjective dimension of party partisanship – the fact that it exists, and that it results in “expressive” (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002) motivations leading people to the polls. So loyalty is categorized as “psychological attachments” (Campbell et al. 1960) that loyal voters have to their party that encompass both beliefs and feelings. Beliefs reflect synergies with the party’s ideological platform and policy positions (Huddy and Bankert 2017; McGann 2016) while feelings are “affective” (Dalton 2016) and “grounded in partisan loyalty” (Huddy and Bankert 2017). Loyalists are studied for *what* they display.

Recent scholarship on the theory of family socialization goes a step further to explain the context that leads to intense emotional identification with a political party. Social learning theory suggests that “observational learning” of parents’ preferences shapes the political choices of children (Abendschon 2013; Gidengil, Wass, and Valaste 2016). Even after leaving home, family conditioning can instill guilt in children to exercise their franchise (Blais 2000; Wass 2007). This work is premised on extensive research conducted by Stokes et al. (2013) who distinguish between party identities which often “endured” across family generations and vote intentions in any given election. Their research with Peronist supporters in Argentina suggests that political patronage flowed to individuals on the basis of their loyalties and not on vote intentions in any particular election (Stokes et al. 2013, 56-65).

Within the anthropological discipline, there is a large body of work that engages with processes of subjectification or how citizens and/or voters construct “new senses of self” (Phillips 2006:311) in relation to the state (Anjaria 2011; Elyachar 2005; Jakimow 2014b;

Riggan 2013). Jakimow (2014b) claims that in encountering the state, “subject-making” occurs through the reflection and refraction of the self through these encounters. Anjaria (2011) shows how street hawkers materially, discursively and performatively leverage their “objectified status” (65) to negotiate rights to urban spaces within the Bombay Municipal Corporation in India. His work is, in part, inspired by scholars like Akhil Gupta (1995) who give equal, if not more, weight to the imaginary of the state discursively constructed through everyday engagements with contingent practices of state power. The relationship between subjectivity and the state is also considered by Riggan (2013) in her article on teachers and the discourse of punishment via the state. Her emphasis is on the production of the state through narratives of jealousy, grudges, and ambition that linked private citizens intimately to state-level decision-making.

My research is located in the inter-personal relations between party partisans and their party representatives (not the state, writ large). As such it examines the impact of party identification on formations of the political self. It expands on literature in political anthropology that focuses on voter subjectivities. However, in most anthropological scholarship, voters are defined normatively as those who exercise their franchise at the ballot box. In other words, the relationship between voter and party has been studied *outside of* the factor of party identification defined by Dalton (2016:1) as a “long-term, affective attachment to one’s preferred political party.” Koch (2016:283), for example, studies the “personalized exchange relation” between residents and their locally elected representatives that is premised on the principle of representative democracy. Banerjee (2011) explores the extraordinary “*communitas*” between voters and party representatives made possible during election time. In the context of patronage, Auyero (2012) examines the politics of waiting that undergirds the relationship between voters and their party patrons. In keeping with my own training, I adopt an inter-disciplinary approach

to examine not only how political identities shape subjectivities and vice-versa but also the networks and practices that have nurtured political identification in the first place. Consequently, my research sits in the interstices of political and anthropological theory on party identification, intra-group solidarity, identity making, and affect studies to offer a contextually unique understanding of the nature of party loyalty in Trinidad.

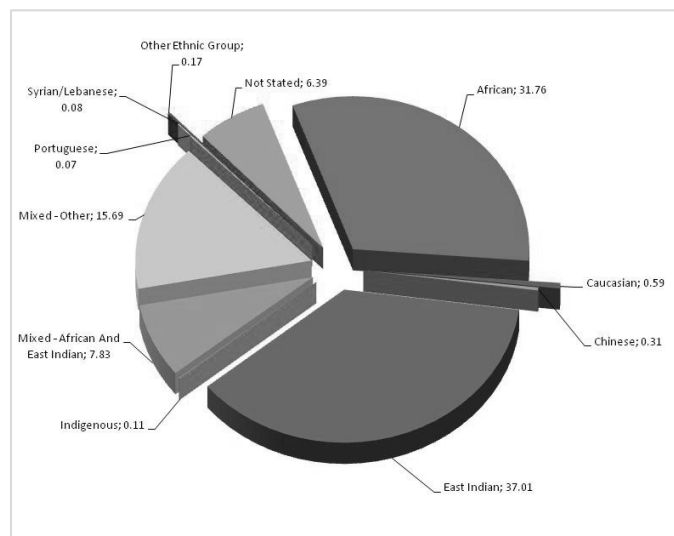
### ***Why study party partisanship in Trinidad?***

In order to justify my meta research site, i.e., Trinidad, I need to first clarify an important distinction between my use of “Trinidad and Tobago” (TT) versus “Trinidad” in this dissertation. The nation-state of Trinidad and Tobago (TT) is made up of two islands – the larger island of Trinidad and the smaller island of Tobago. My research took place solely on the larger island of Trinidad. I use “TT” to denote the nation-state of Trinidad and Tobago, and “Trinidad” to emphasize the specific island context. Similarly, “Trinbagonian” is a colloquial term referencing a native resident of Trinidad and Tobago, while “Trinidadian” applies specifically to a resident of the island of Trinidad.

While both islands share a history of European colonization, their socio-economic and political trajectories are vastly different. From the 15<sup>th</sup> century till the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Trinidad was ruled first by the Spanish and then the British imperial government before acquiring its independence in 1962. In Chapter 2, I discuss Trinidad’s political developments at length, beginning with the Crown Colony system of government that was introduced in 1831. The smaller island of Tobago has had a more tumultuous colonial history – it was colonized by the Spanish, French, Dutch and the English between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century. Self-government

was introduced in Tobago in 1764. Under the British, it was annexed to Trinidad in stages between 1889 and 1898. So formed the nation-state of Trinidad and Tobago.

The socio-cultural history of Trinidad and Tobago is, therefore, distinct on account of the two islands' unique colonial legacies. For example, 85% percent of Tobago's population identifies as African; only 2.5% identify as East Indian (GRTT 2012:16). In Trinidad, by contrast, 32% are African, 37% are East Indian, 23% identify as Mixed<sup>4</sup>, and all other ethnic groups make up the remaining 8% (GRTT 2011:16). Identity politics in Trinidad is shaped by forces of creolization and discourses of multiculturalism (see Chapter 3). Consequently, ethnic or racial identity is an important factor in my analysis of party partisanship.



*Image 1: Ethnic composition on the island of Trinidad (Source: GRTT 2012:16)*

Trinidad's colonial habitus of subjugation and acquiescence to power makes this research comparable to other post-colonial examinations of centralized power. In his research on post-colonial India, for example, Ranajit Guha (1998) ominously noted that colonization allowed for "dominance without hegemony." The historical paradox of British colonization was that an

autocracy was installed in the East by the most powerful democratic nation in the Western hemisphere (Guha 1998). Persuasion was inherently irrelevant to governance under colonial rule.

At the same time, the islands boast of a unique socio-political configuration on account of TT being the earliest testing ground for the Crown Colony government system that was then propagated to colonies in Africa, Asia and other parts of the West Indies. In that sense, it is the oldest representation of a governance system that sat “in-between” colonial rule and self-determination/independence. From 1831 – 1925, a Governor appointed by and answering to the British Crown oversaw the administration of the Trinbagonian plantation economy. The country’s Legislative Council (LegCo) remained politically emaciated, made up of “official” and “non-official” members answerable to the Crown (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008). The phenomenon of centralized authority and a Legislature beholden to the office of the Governor (now, the Prime Minister) continues to characterize the Westminster parliamentary system in use in TT today. The country’s historical struggle with “arbitrary irresponsible authority” (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:85) was perpetuated through British Governors and official and unofficial members of the Crown Colony system before Independence, and now through multiple-term Prime Ministers (PMs), and also politically subservient but individually enterprising state and local elected officials.

So Trinidad exhibits a governing contradiction – in the absence of devolution, the state directs the administrative and governance priorities of local governments (Schoburgh 2007; Schoburgh 2012) while simultaneously creating silos of unchecked power as enterprising Members of Parliament, Mayors and even Councilors consolidate their own political capital through networks of patronage (Premdas 2011; Ragoonath 2000). The dispersed state begets many leaders. In this context, party partisanship promises exclusive access to political leadership

and brokers. It has a functional purpose – politics can get done what government cannot. Consequently Trinidad offers a compelling context to examine the contemporary political consciousness of a people who have lived through the oldest colonial experiment of notional self-governance.

### ***Preliminary fieldwork***

I first visited Trinidad and Tobago on New Year's Eve in December 2012. I returned twice thereafter, in the summers of 2013 and 2014. During both these stints, I worked as a consultant for the Caribbean Local Economic Development (CARILED) project whose mandate was to offer technical assistance to local governments around the issue of local economic development (LED). My association with the aforementioned organization gave me direct exposure to the overlapping activities of government ministries, local governments, and civil society organizations (CSOs) entrusted with stimulating micro, small and medium-sized businesses in the boroughs (read: municipalities) of Chaguanas and Point Fortin. I worked closely with representatives from the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government<sup>5</sup> (MRDLG) to understand and incorporate CARILED's blueprint for local assistance into the government's policy around LED stimulation.

In the summer of 2014, I attended a public consultation in the Chaguanas Borough Corporation (CBC) that was attended by a Cabinet Minister, the Mayor of CBC, the deputy Mayor, other local government employees and community residents. At this meeting, I witnessed civilians strongly disapprove of the format of the meeting like the fact that government officials sat on a higher-level podium than the public, and that they *informed* rather than consulted with the public. Heated exchanges around livelihood and issues of citizen empowerment like the

relocation of street vendors, the expansion of a mall, the absence of streamlined business services, and the absence of civilian voices in development planning suggested to me that the performance of a consultation took precedence over any real desire to encourage deliberative dialogue (see also Nabatchi 2012).

Together with my access to the decision-makers overseeing LED planning, I was interested in how the state-promoted message of “people participation” (GRTT 2011:11) was interpreted, practiced and negotiated by the assemblage or “temporary groupings” (James 2010:85) of local, national and transnational actors interacting within the context of LED. Marcus and Saka, who have examined the dichotomy of the structural and social aspects of assemblages, contend that such an analytic “generates enduring puzzles about ‘process’ and ‘relationship’ rather than leading to systematic understandings of these tropes...” (2006:102). In other words, assemblages are simultaneously messy and innovative (see also Aretxaga 2003), and demand close attention to the actors who discursively and materially stabilize such a formation. So a crucial aspect of my study was to examine “sociality” as an analytic, hoping to get at the different subjectivities, motivations, and agendas of LED participants whose dynamic socio-political relationships would eventually put policy into practice (Mosse 2004).

At every stage of my professional interaction with government and non-government officials, I made clear my positionality as an academic researcher who would be returning to the country for long-term fieldwork. In 2014, I conducted two in-depth interviews with CARILED’s staff members collaborating with the local government in CBC for the purpose of my dissertation research. For these, I received the approval of the Institutional Review Board at Syracuse University. Upon my return in 2016, I expected to receive Letters of Affiliation from both



CARILED and MRDLG to continue my research at the Chaguanas and Point Fortin borough headquarters starting January 2016.

### *Loss of access*

When I returned to the country in 2016, CARILED had seen a major reshuffle of its staff including its project head. I had cultivated a relationship with the prior leader of the project over two summers; I lost that legitimacy with the new inductee. My past relationship to CARILED kept me superficially connected to the program for two more months, till March 2016. No longer a consultant and in untested waters with the new leadership, I could not attend most project meetings concerning ongoing LED projects. So I fell back on private contacts I had made at MRDLG hoping to find an “in” into LED planning through that direct route. My past association with CARILED lent weight to my credibility as an academic researcher. However, I found myself in a precarious position – if I were to continue studying the assemblages of “people participation” brought together under the LED umbrella, I would have to engage with the CARILED staff that was spearheading the LED initiative in the two boroughs. However, without the explicit blessing of the project lead and my liminal insider-outsider status with the organization, I would be putting CARILED and MRDLG staff members who already knew me in an uncomfortable position of assisting in an “unofficial” capacity. So I thought it prudent to refocus my attention on a related research topic.

### *Devising a new research project*

In January 2016, while I remained on tentative ground with CARILED, I was invited by a staff member to attend a public consultation on local government reform organized by MRDLG. I

knew from my experience with LED planning that local government reform was critical to its sustainability. If local governments did not have the administrative and financial freedom to prioritize LED in their municipality, then how would such a project make it past an election cycle? I was also familiar with the decidedly un-participatory format of such consultations.

MRDLG was organizing fourteen such consultations on reform across Trinidad's fourteen municipal corporations. Eager to stay involved in MRDLG's activities, I attended three in the first two months of my research season. I would attend five more by April 2016. By this time, I decided I could examine "people participation" through a public consultation format. My research questions morphed into the following – Within the context of centralized governance, what do state-led public consultations reveal about the state's evolving relationship with the public? What factors contribute to civic engagement at these consultations? How are citizen rights and representation negotiated at such events in the absence of strong local representation?

I noticed a few commonalities across the first three events I attended. I was amazed at the sheer size of the public in attendance at both events - both averaged over 200 people - which is impressive as almost all took place after work hours, sometimes going as late as 10 p.m.



*Image 2: (L-R) Crowd spilling outside the auditorium at the Chaguanas consultation; attendees at the Rio Claro consultation; attendees at the Diego Martin consultation*

The question and answer sessions that were open to the public largely centered not on the reform agenda but everyday concerns – street drains, a leaking school roof, lack of public transportation, and women’s safety, among other things. It was impossible to ignore the blatant adoption of red and black colors in the stage design – these were also the colors of the ruling PNM party. The public consultations, while promoted as an MRDLG initiative, appeared to be highly politicized events.

I went to the field having built “a conceptual schema” (Gibbs 2007) to understand the politics and inter-personal relationships that sustain the participatory network of LED implementation in two Trinidadian municipalities. My loss of access and urgency to find a related topic within my research time frame forced me to continually revise my target questions during data collection and retain an agility towards incorporating emergent themes into ongoing research – what started out as a study of state/civilian interactions eventually morphed into an examination of political subjectivities anchored in the party/voter dyad.

However my decision to refocus attention towards the relationship between civilians and their elected leaders at the consultations was not theoretically uninformed – I was already aware of the implications of centralized governance through my prior engagements with MRDLG. Race-relations, which serves as an important analytic in this study, also figured centrally in a paper I published on East Indian narratives of economic development in CBC. There I assert that “narratives reflect the lived experiences of a community and, importantly, reveal discursive patterns of social discrimination and inclusion that can affect implementation of development projects going forward” (Ramchandani 2016:43). In other words, racial identity continues to shape social relations in post-colonial Trinidad. As such, my revised research topic and data collection methodology were both already informed by “key thematic ideas” (Gibbs 2007).

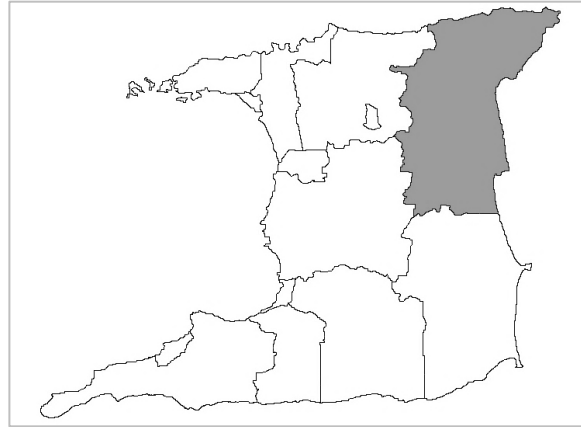
### *Research sites*

Based on the five consultations that had already taken place by February 2016<sup>6</sup>, I decided to focus on the two that took place in the San Fernando City Corporation (SFCC) and the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation (SGRC)<sup>7</sup>. Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte suggest that similar research questions and strategies across two comparable sites allow the researcher to “study the degree to which structures, patterns, themes are stable or exist” (1999:244) so enhancing the internal generalizability of qualitative studies like the one I undertook (Maxwell 2005:115). A comparative ethnographic study is also analytically useful to check the threats to the validity of claims and interpretations that emerge from qualitative data analysis (Maxwell 2005:113).

I was interested in the variations and similarities in how civilian participants differently interpreted and enacted civic participation through the consultation format at these two locations that exhibit racial and geo-political similarities yet differ in their socio-economic development. Consequently, I expected similarities in the racial and political profiles of participants in both locations but dissimilarities in the public discussion points reflecting differences in living conditions.



*Image 3: Location of San Fernando City Corporation  
(Source: Wikimedia Commons 2019a)*



*Image 4: Location of Sangre Grande Regional Corporation  
(Source: Wikimedia Commons 2019b)*

Both SGRC and SFCC have almost the same racial make-up which tellingly is not skewed towards either of the two major race groups in the country. In other words, they were not what Khan (1997:41) calls “racial landscapes” in the country that are dominated by one race group or another. Both East Indians and Africans are almost equally represented in the two municipalities.

	<b>Total Population</b>	<b>African (%)</b>	<b>East Indian (%)</b>	<b>Mixed* (%)</b>	<b>Other (%)</b>
<b>San Fernando City Corporation</b>	48,635	36	30	8	26
<b>Sangre Grande Regional Corporation</b>	75,605	30	31	13	26

*Table 1: Demographic table for SFCC and SGRC*

*\*African/East Indian mixing only*

*(Source: GRTT 2012:96,102)*

Both municipalities encompass two electoral districts, one of which is a distinct PNM “party fiefdom” (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:121) and the other that has swung towards either

the main opposition party or a third party. In SFCC, the San Fernando East electoral district has been a PNM stronghold for decades. This district is also the parliamentary seat of Trinidad’s second-longest reigning PM, Patrick Manning. In the last five general election cycles, SFCC’s other electoral constituency, San Fernando West has swung in the favor of the opposition, as well as a third party in the 2010 elections. On three sides, San Fernando West is surrounded by districts that are the stronghold of the main opposition party, the United National Congress (UNC).

Since 2002, SGRC has been largely comprised of two electoral districts as well. Toco-Sangre Grande is considered to be a PNM stronghold (even though it oscillated once towards a third party) while Cumuto-Manzanilla is dominated by the main opposition party, the UNC.

	2015	2010	2007	2002	2001
<b>San Fernando East</b>	PNM	PNM	PNM	PNM	PNM
<b>San Fernando West</b>	PNM	COP* (PP** <sup>8</sup> )	PNM	PNM	UNC
<b>Toco-Sangre Grande</b>	PNM	UNC (PP)	PNM	PNM <sup>9</sup>	UNC
<b>Cumuto-Manzanilla</b>	UNC (PP)	UNC (PP)	UNC		

Table 2: Five-year election results in SFCC and SGRC constituencies

\*Congress of the People

\*\*People’s Partnership

(Source: GRIT 2019)

As a result, the two municipalities that are characterized by tumultuous politicking offered me fertile ground to examine how the promotion of the reform consultation event was differently interpreted, and so attended by those of differing political affiliations. I could not predict the implications of geo-politics on the type of public turnout in these “outlier”

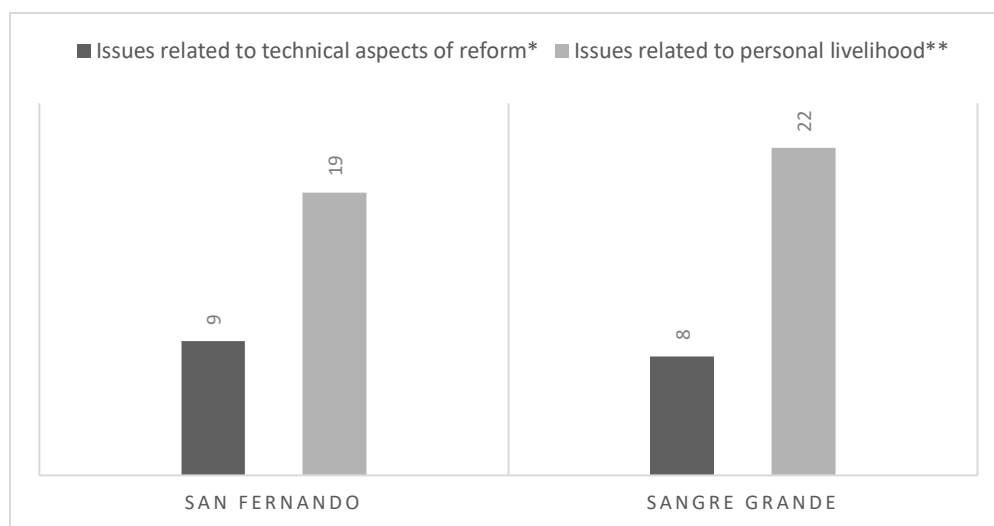
municipalities yet I expected these spaces with multi-racial co-habitation to somehow shape the productive outcomes of the reform consultations, or at least in interviews after, reveal distinct forms of political subjectivity that are cultivated through close proximity with the “other.” In Chapter 5, I examine in detail how political identities are negotiated in spaces of political marginality through the story of Peter, a key informant and public participant at one consultation, and his community of Moriah Hills that is characterized as a PNM-bastion in a UNC-dominated neighborhood on the outskirts of SFCC.

The two municipalities, however, are starkly different in their economic development. SFCC is an urban city more densely populated than SGRC. It ranks the lowest on the multidimensional poverty scale which defines poverty as “a multidimensional issue caused by a level of deprivation of essential assets and opportunities” (GRTT and UNDP 2013:14). SGRC, on the other hand, ranks the highest on this scale. SGRC also has the least population density of all fourteen municipal corporations in Trinidad. It is considered a rural municipality with large swaths of tropical land boasting of pristine beaches, turtle watching hikes, and dense undergrowth juxtaposed with sorely lacking infrastructural development in the form of roads, sewage, transportation, etc. Consequently, I was alert to the economic determinants that motivated civilians to interact with state representatives at the two locations.

	<b>Area (sq. km)</b>	<b>Density per sq. km</b>	<b>Multi- dimensional poverty (2006)</b>
<b>San Fernando City Corporation</b>	19	2,570	2.7
<b>Sangre Grande Regional Corporation</b>	927	82	8.8

*Table 3: Size, population density, and poverty in SFCC and SGRC  
(Source: GRTT 2011; GRTT and UNDP 2013:14)*

Interestingly, at both locations, speaker discussions leaned more towards personal or communal livelihood concerns than technical aspects of the reform, feeding into Jansen’s (2015:154) theory that a dispersed state (like in TT – see Chapter 4 for more on this) creates conditions where the public clamor for the state’s attention – “can the state please see us?” At the consultations, civilian yearnings for state intervention were distinctly evident to me. So in this study I ask, what do the enterprising, yet unsystematic confrontations of civilians with political leadership at the local and state level tell us about the cultural logic of seeking political patronage, embracing race-based politics and invoking one’s political identity to address the urgency of everyday needs? A multi-sited ethnography has allowed me to tease apart the overlaps and disparities in these pursuits of my participants.



*Table 4: Speaker concerns during the Q&A session of the consultations*

*\*These include public accountability, public health, revenue collection, spatial planning, decentralization of the police force, etc.*

*\*\*These include local crime, drainage, employment/jobs, electricity, education*

*(Source: FKJackie Consultancy 2015, 2016)*

A note before proceeding. Being more focused on the participants and what factors contributed to their attendance, my interest in the locations of SGRC and SFCC was primarily to



index the kinds of people I could expect at each site while remaining cognizant of the fact that as public events, the consultations were principally open to everyone. In Trinidad, as I explain later in this dissertation, identity, place and politics often go hand in hand. For the purpose of this dissertation therefore, “place” serves as a “grounded metaphor” (Creed and Ching 1997:9) for race-relations, class and geo-politics as it unfolded on the ground.

The search for stability “in place” was, in fact, a significant motivator driving speakers to the public podium at the consultations – drainage, home ownership, flooding, electricity were all universal themes at the consultations I attended. I do not discount or ignore their significance. However, in my analysis I have chosen to focus not on home ownership and how place-based identities shape political subjectivities but instead use this commonality across both locations to tease apart the various processes and embedded networks through which such urgency is articulated and pursued as a desire for political intervention.

### ***Research participants***

Each consultation event had a sign-up sheet in which attendees filled in their names, addresses and their phone numbers. Of course, not everyone filled in the information but almost all did. I can extrapolate this from the fact that the number of participants listed in the sheets almost matched my head count at the eight events. At both locations I decided to interview relatively equal proportions of Africans and East Indians, with a third category being a combination of Mixed<sup>10</sup>/Other ethnicities. This type of analysis gave me a chance to really parse out political leanings within the three, roughly equally represented race groups in my sample. I explain more in the following section.

In all instances I asked participants to self-identify. Notwithstanding, I view the categories of the dominant racial/ethnic groups, “African<sup>11</sup>” and “East Indian,” as proxies and not attributes of the groups I sampled. Interestingly, Mixed populations tended to culturally and racially identify with the African ethnicity – a phenomenon Sudama (1983:84) also acknowledges in his own research. Some Mixed participants oscillated between the “African” and “Mixed” labels within the same interview; this group was also most likely to reject ethnic labels altogether and invoke being a “Trinidadian” above all else.

Despite the inherent constraints of access related to being an Indian researcher (see section on “My positionality”), and working with a small, fixed data set, I tried to get my sample size as close to my aspiration of giving equal weightage to the three race groups across both sites. I wanted to leverage quantitative data so that I could more easily identify patterns across groups while simultaneously remaining cognizant of the “intrinsically local”( Maxwell 2010:479, original emphasis) nature of qualitative research in both contexts. I used an online program to generate a random sample of participants until I was able to roughly match my desired sample categorization.

	<b>African</b>	<b>East Indian</b>	<b>Mixed/Other/Not specified</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>San Fernando Regional Corporation</b>	18	14	10	42
<b>Sangre Grande Regional Corporation</b>	17	14	10	41
<b>Total</b>	35	28	20	

*Table 5: Sample size of research participants across two locations*

Appreciative of happenstance, I also made acquaintances and built alliances with some participants based on no particular recruitment method. For this, snowball referrals came in

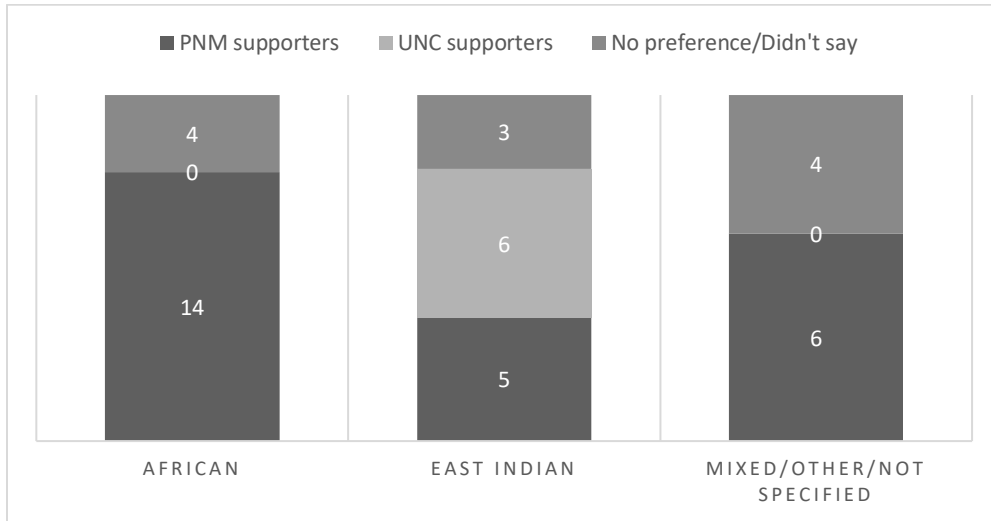
handy, especially in order to “study up” (Nader 1969) political networks. For example, I was able to leverage my positionality as a past international consultant with CARILED (see section below) to connect with a powerful political broker in one of my research sites; one thing led to another, and very soon I found myself breaking bread with the consultation-campaign team in charge of organizing the fourteen events around the country. Interviews with this team were pivotal for my understanding of the intricate networking of politics through the representation of state-ness at the consultations. In addition to the campaign team, I also conducted interviews with local and national elected leaders (Councilors, Mayors and Members of Parliament) as well as members of CSOs, many of whom had also attended the consultations.

### *Focusing on PNM supporters/party partisans*

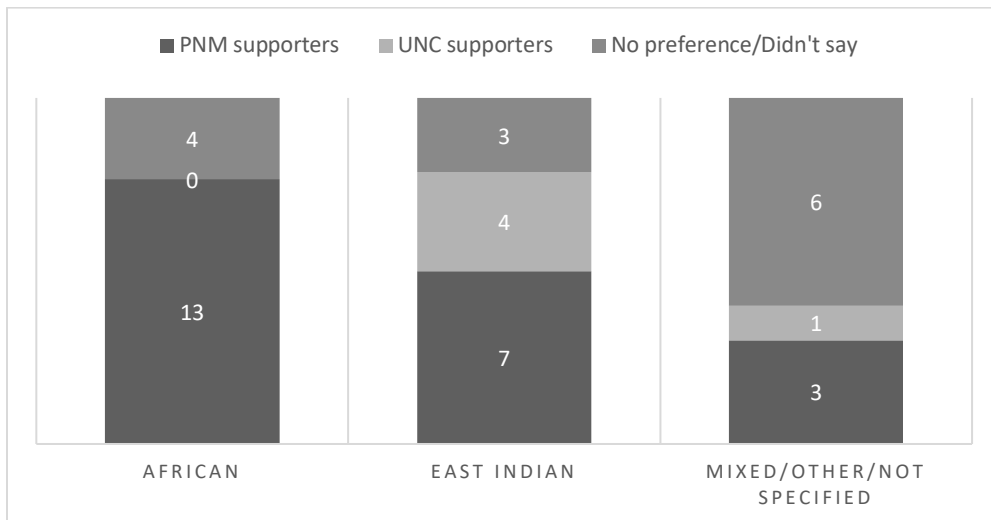
At both locations I inquired after the racial and political motivations of the consultation attendees, especially as these events were held in spaces of geo-political contention. The rhetoric around the consultations was that they were an apolitical exercise of governance reform (see Chapter 2 for an ethnography of the SGRC consultation). Consequently, I expected an equal show of strength of both Africans and East Indian populations that reflected their racial distributions at both locations. However, this is not what happened. Surveys commissioned by MRDGL in both locations show that African participants outnumbered East Indians and Mixed groups combined by more than double (FKJackie Consultancy 2015, 2016).

In my own research design, I chose to interview roughly equal numbers of participants in order to insert my research into extensive scholarship on Trinidadian politics that already speaks to the phenomenon of race-based politics in the country (Harvey 1974; Henry 1990; Khan 2004; Malik 1971; Meighoo 2008; Munasinghe 2001; Yelvington 1995). In other words, at both

locations I expected to see intra-group alignment of racial identity and party affiliation, meaning more Africans identifying as PNM supporters. Indeed, I found this to be the case.



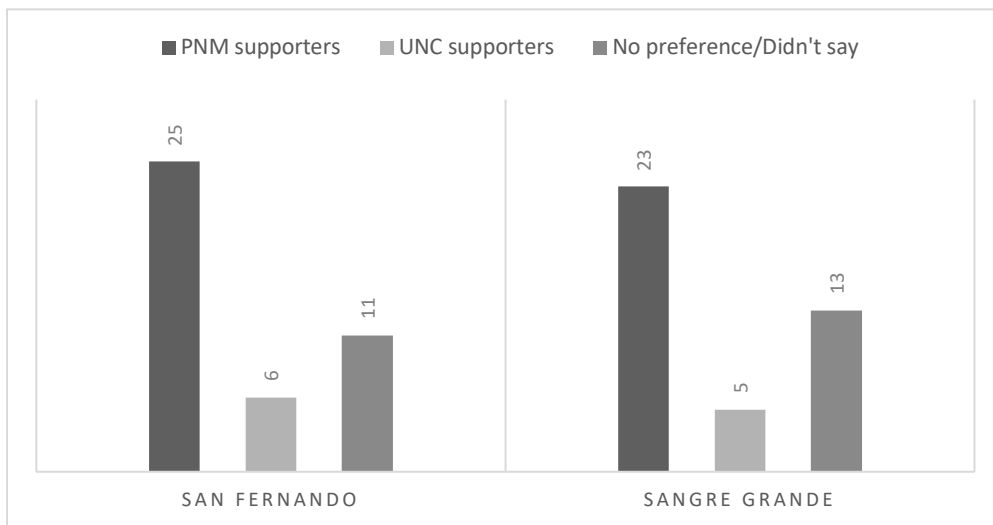
*Table 6: Party partisanship correlated with race/ethnicity in SFCC*



*Table 7: Party partisanship correlated with race/ethnicity in SGRC*

An influential political broker in SGRC had told me confidently in an interview that majority of the attendees at the consultation were somehow linked to the PNM party. The attendees were likely contract workers, she confided, working either for the state-run Unemployment Relief Program (URP) or SGRC; both were PNM-controlled. In exchange for

patronage in the form of temporary job placements, these contract workers dutifully contributed to the “turnout count” at the consultations. Indeed, my data supports her thesis of party politicking - the net majority of my participants articulated their support for the PNM party (see Table 8 below). This told me that, in both swing locations, the consultations that were organized during the reign of the PNM political party either coincidentally attracted PNM party supporters or, more likely, that the attendees viewed the consultation events as political events.



*Table 8: Party partisanship of research participants in SFCC and SGRC*

These findings affected my research design in two ways – it made studying party politics and party culture more relevant than studying the theoretical “state” as an analytic. This was reinforced through line-by-line coding I did using an analytical software called Atlas.ti. Nervous about having to alter my research focus, I wanted to stay “close to the data” (Gibbs 2007:52) by transcribing and coding as I went along. As a result, I latched on to the performativity of the consultations early on.

Second, the phenomenon of encountering mostly PNM supporters made this group the focus of my dissertation. My ability to build intimate relationships with certain PNM partisans, and especially African PNM partisans (in Chapter 3, I discuss race as a heuristic for party identity in detail) built my confidence to critically examine and present a case around their contested and ambivalent political subjectivities. The historical reality of the PNM party being in power longer than its competitors inserted a wonderful complexity to the analytic of party identification. I anticipated historically saturated references to freedom, leadership, precedence, and loyalty shaping perceptions of 21<sup>st</sup> century politics, and I was not disappointed. All this said, I am critically aware of my positionality as an Indian researching African subjectivities, and how it might have shaped the perspectives, practices and narratives I encountered. I discuss this in detail in the section on my positionality a little later.

<b>Term of office</b>	<b>Approx. duration</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Party affiliation</b>
1961 – 1981	20 years	Eric Williams	PNM
1981 – 1986	5 years	George Michael Chambers	PNM
1986 – 1991	5 years	Arthur Napolean Raymond Robinson	National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR)
1991 – 1995	4 years	Patrick Augustus Mervyn Manning	PNM
1995 – 2001	6 years	Basdeo Panday	UNC
2001 – 2010	9 years	Patrick Augustus Mervyn Manning	PNM
2010 – 2015	5 years	Kamla Persad Bissessar	PP
2015 - Present	3 years and counting	Keith Rowley	PNM

*Table 9: Prime Ministers of Trinidad and Tobago  
(Source: GRTT 2019b)*

In exchange for access to the contact sheets from the consultations, I helped MRDLG revise a feedback form that they had been circulating with consultation participants after the

event. Courteously, MRDLG shared with me the anonymized data they collected from these forms across nine locations. While the questions were largely binary (Yes/No) for quantification purposes, they shed light on a third dimension that became critical to my research on party partisans – age and generation. In total, 811 participants filled out the surveys that showed that 63% of attendees were over the age of 45, and 44% were over the age of 55. This data point is important because it situates most attendees in the early years of the country’s independence (in 1962) and even before that.

As a result, my own research sample of 83 consultation attendees consequently reflects an older demographic; 40% of my participants were over the age of 55. I was, thus, also forced to remain alert to the implications of age, and then nuance my study to incorporate “generation” more broadly. Generation became a critical factor in examining the articulations of loyalty amongst those participants who had been raised on Eric Williams’ metaphoric shoulders (see Chapter 3). For them, loyalty to the party was first loyalty to its most illustrious leader whose charisma, social welfare policies and race-based patronage to the African community had nurtured a devoted voter base.

### *Itinerant fieldwork*

I did research for this dissertation as an itinerant anthropologist. My research took place conveniently in a year of elections. Local government elections were scheduled for October 2016<sup>12</sup>, and so I also wanted to explore “election time” by incorporating activities, encounters and narratives specific to this distinctive event. I structured my research so that I would complete the bulk of my interviews before elections, leaving post-election time for a type of longitudinal analysis with key participants. Consequently, I spent four months in Port of Spain, then three

months in SGRC, three months in SFCC, and then divided up the remaining time between SGRC and SFCC doing follow-up interviews.

During my year of fieldwork, I was myself unmoored from “place” in that I stayed in multiple locations across three parts of the country. This has a straightforward explanation. Funding for this project came largely from Syracuse University grants. I could not rent an apartment for 12 months because the costs of doing so are surprisingly prohibitive<sup>13</sup>. Even if I could, rentals were impossible to find in SGRC which is not only an impoverished municipality but did not boast of any rentals that I was aware of. Most Trinidadians live in single-structured units. Pragmatic considerations made me opt for homestays instead.

I lived in the capital city of Port of Spain (PoS) for the first four months. I had a comfortable and safe homestay at the home of a widowed, retired School Principal for 100 USD a month. The capital city was the hub for the main offices of all government Ministries. In the initial days of research when I was networking extensively with both MRDLG and the consultation-campaign team, living in Port of Spain proved to be both convenient and safe. I had the option to hitch a ride with either the campaign consultants or government officials from MRDLG to the eight reform events I would eventually attend.

Good connectivity also allowed me to commute easily to my two research sites to begin data collection. Trinidad has two highway networks connecting, what is colloquially known as, the “North-South corridor” and the “East-West corridor.” My two research sites, SGRC and SFCC lie along these highways. Port of Spain was the most convenient location for me to travel to these sites because it was the hub of the national transportation system. Being a small island, I could commute from PoS to either location in approximately two hours. Generally, I had to use a combination of a “maxi<sup>14</sup>” and “shared” cars to get to specific sites. This was exhausting but, as



public transport to and from PoS was the most frequent route for both locations, this option also gave me flexibility and peace of mind during the time I lived in the capital.

I could have found an apartment in Central Trinidad and commuted to my two sites located at opposite ends of the country from there. An apartment outside of Port of Spain would have cost me between 600 USD – 750 USD a month but in addition to the cost, I would have foregone the connectivity and frequency of public transportation that PoS afforded me. I would also have needed a car because traveling using public transportation is generally not recommended after dark. Car rentals are geared towards short-term needs, for when a tourist visits. I could have bought a used car for approximately 3000 USD; I could not afford that either.

Eventually, I moved eight times during my research. In some places I paid for living there, in others I was welcomed with no strings attached. My experience of constantly being on the move shed light on an integral aspect of Trinidadian culture that I might not have appreciated had I the comfort of my own rented apartment – the geographical intimacy of island life. I was grateful to have met people who could insert me to their networks in different parts of the country.

My itinerant lifestyle lent itself to a heightened appreciation for why some participants evoked their political identities with such emotion. Politics was personal because island living was articulated as an intimate, personal affair. One participant said he voted for a candidate because he was the Principal of the school the candidate's son attended. Another said she had taught a Minister when he was in school so she knew his "character." Another felt betrayed by a Councilor because he knew him personally – "When PNM was in power in the Patrick Manning regime, I was in poverty. A rain wet me, I got pneumonia, [Councilor] came one day, they didn't send any orange juice or anything for me, nothing. We grew up together. The PNM regime did

nothing for me.” Even I experienced first-hand the compactness of social networks in Trinidad. My connection to the PM of the country (whom I met), Keith Rowley, was literally seven people apart. I knew someone at CARILED who introduced me to a local LED consultant who introduced me to my first homestay who knew a political broker whose home then became my second homestay. The latter introduced me to a politician who introduced me to a friend who invited me to the fortuitous dinner party where I met Rowley.

In a country where relations are borne off close proximity, inter-personal relations are naturally infused with emotions and affects. Even in PoS, the most urban space in the country, basic etiquette in the form of greetings took precedence over the bustle of one’s hectic day. My homestay in the city was a 10-minute walk from the nearest taxi stand. Every morning I made my way through three narrow streets lined with free-standing homes, some newly renovated and at least one that boasted of French-Portuguese architecture that was over 100 years old. If I happened to catch the eye of someone watering her plants or simply watching the street from her porch, it was culturally appropriate that I say “Good morning!” loud enough that she hear me. The greeting was always returned. Later in this dissertation, I expand on how the *lack* of acknowledgement even in the form of a simple greeting could scar the experience of partisans with their chosen leaders. To acknowledge is to assign personhood.

### ***Interviews and observation***

Data for this research were collected through a combination of interviews and participant observation (see Appendix II for my interview questions). My first point of contact with research participants was through a phone call based on contact information I collected from the consultation sign-up sheets. These were recruitment-style conversations, structured around my

introducing the project, legitimizing the study through my collaboration with MRDLG, and requesting participation. Taking my cue from the “vibe” of the conversation, I then categorically inquired into their ethnic identity, justifying my question as a necessity for data collection purposes.

For face-to-face interviews, my technique oscillated between the open-ended and the semi-structured format. I started with semi-structured questions in keeping with the formal nature of cold-calling to recruit participants. Participants expected this and it made them feel at ease because of the semblance of “officialness” it lent our meeting. I resorted to a formal, written guide of questions that was also useful for my interviews with elected officials and other “busy” officials who might be pressed for time (see also Bernard 2006:212). In each case I subjectively determined how much I could expand our conversation to other dimensions like racial identity, political affiliation, and family. With those willing, I then veered into a semi-structured format of questioning to flesh out my data (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999:249). Sometimes this happened over multiple meetings.

At the reform consultations, I was a passive to moderate participant-observer (Spradley 1980), sitting amongst the attending audience like an idiosyncratic fly-on-the-wall anthropologist. My role as a participant at the consultations was restricted to my engagement with MRDLG to create the new feedback forms, and then when I hung out with the consultation-campaign team as they deliberated the upcoming consultations from a “branding” perspective. As a participant observer in these scenarios, I was witness not only to the stuff of the consultations but also the inter-personal networks that crisscrossed in these spaces. For example, I spent a lot of time with the team in a meeting room at the back of a converted house. Often, the TV in the room was set to the Parliament Channel where debates and discussions are broadcast

to the public. Once we watched a Senator give an impassioned speech on TV; half an hour later the same person swung by to meet the team. He was close friends with the team lead, Sean.

Participant observation also included attending community council meetings, cooking with families, participating in two local election drives, and attending Saturday church, amongst other activities. That said, I “lived” (hung out) mostly with three individuals – Aletia, Vera and Peter. Cumulatively, their experiences and stories gave me an intimate look into everyday socialities where racial identity, economics, family, friendships, and politics easily interweave to create a complex socio-political subject. In both SFCC and SGRC, I also attended monthly statutory or town-hall meetings organized by local governments that were open to the public. Most of my participants didn’t know of these meetings. These public yet inconspicuous meetings helped me understand the emaciated role of local governments, the limitations of civic awareness, and the rituals governing formal state-civilian interactions.

In addition to interviews and participant observation, I also used “drive-alongs” as a type of “fieldwork on the move” (Czarniawska 2007:17). Driving with somebody was literally the way I got to the eight consultations that I incorporated into my study. I travelled with the MRDLG team or the consultation-campaign team or sometimes hitched a ride with a participant. Drive-alongs were, however, also an extension of my itinerant methodology that enabled me to bridge the interpretive divide between observations in natural surroundings and the detailing of experiences through the standard interview format. Such sessions were usually instigated by participants themselves who would tell me a story that was anchored in place – abandoned projects that became an eyesore, a park down the street that was a community pet project, a hilltop that was someone’s favorite spot in the city. I would then request the person to take me to

the site, or sometimes participants would volunteer that themselves. Often, we would stop for food along the way or take detours to meet friends and make new acquaintances.

As I did not live with my participants other than Vera for a couple of weeks, I maximized on the time that I could spend with them by traveling with them during their daily routines. All three participants were unemployed for atleast sometime during the course of my research; Aletia lost her job due to illness midway through 2016, Vera didn't have a job when I met her, Peter had recently retired from working at the oil rigs. Drive-alongs took the form of extended interview sessions but also became instrumental in how I built a more informal, open relationship with my participants.

Particularly in SFCC, where geo-politics directly affected local development (see Chapter 5), the visceral experience of driving through a particular neighborhood or street made me pay attention to the potency of place-based politics in shaping political subjectivities around belonging and incorporation. Drive-alongs revealed the political geography of a place. Once a participant waited for me in her car in the pouring rain because she had promised me “doubles” (a street snack) the last time we met. We then drove past her neighborhood where she pointed out those projects that the PNM party had spearheaded like a community plaza, three schools, a trade school and a bus service. She was a PNM loyalist who lived in the heart of San Fernando East, a PNM stronghold. During our drive-along, she also happened to express concern over the increase in crime in her area, placing the blame on the opposition party – “Kamla’s government had said that if they don’t get elected that blood would flow on the streets. It’s come true. Blood is flowing on the streets.” In truth, politics and commentaries on crime go hand-in-hand in Trinidad across both sides of the aisle (Griffin and Persad 2013; Katz and Maguire 2015). My point here

is that my participant's evocation of fear for her community was a direct product of her being viscerally present in that space while we were having our interview.

In her analysis of shadowing as a methodological technique, Gill (2011) suggests we embrace a different term, "spect-acting" because a necessary product of "going along" with study participants is the interpellation of the researcher herself within that setting (see also Kusenbach 2003). Spect-acting as a methodology recognizes the crucial role of the ethnographer *and* the subject in experiencing and creating knowledge emerging out of such an intimate study. Similarly, Kusenbach credits the "go-along" method with "promoting a shared perspective and a more egalitarian connection" (2003:462) between the two individuals. In my research methodology, drive-alongs became the equivalent of shadowing or "spect-acting." They presented a unique opportunity to practice self-reflexivity related to my gender (which cars I felt safe to get into), my neutral political background (what information participants chose to share with me), and, significantly, my status as a researcher from the United States (which types of cars I traveled in). I say more on this in the section on my positionality.

### *Language*

As Standard English (SE) is widely spoken in TT, and it is also my native language, I was linguistically equipped to conduct interviews and engage in ethnographic fieldwork within the country. Nevertheless, over the course of a few years, I have fostered close friendship with a Trinidadian school teacher who served as my unofficial tutor for learning Trinidadian English Creole (TEC). Her home also offered much needed respite when I needed a break from research, or was in between homestays.

### *Use of pseudonyms*

In this dissertation I have used pseudonyms to protect the identities of civilian informants, especially as some of their commentaries concerned sitting elected officials. Similarly, I have also changed the names of the specific villages, communities and electoral constituencies where my participants live. When referencing comments made in public at the reform consultations I have only used pseudonyms when it concerns my participants. Upon request, I have also changed names of some political brokers and elected representatives who wished to remain anonymous for their candid perspectives.

### *My positionality*

Mindful of doing research in the context of a multi-ethnic yet racially-politicized environment as Trinidad, I did not suppress my own Indian identity but neither did I divulge it unless explicitly asked. I discovered early that my fair(er) skin and facial features accompanied by the appropriate attire sometimes allowed me to transgress assumptions linked to the Indian phenotype in Trinidad. For example, I was asked multiple times if I was Venezuelan. My accent added to my ethnic ambiguity. In the field I joked about it being a “callaloo<sup>15</sup>” accent implying a hodgepodge of American, Indian and Trinidadian accents.

Even when I clarified my racial identity, I experienced the “special type of egalitarianism” (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:91) characteristic of Trinidadian plural society where difference is incorporated into everyday practices of sociality. Take my experience with Cecil and Sheila. After multiple meetings with them discussing politics, I was invited to a cooking session at their house. The couple’s daughter was a food caterer and offered to show me how to make *pastelles*, a Spanish-influenced dish popular around Christmas season. We were six

of us, Cecil, Sheila, their daughter, son-in-law, grandmother and me. Expectedly, in the middle of kneading the *pastelle* base, the conversation veered towards politics and the current state of affairs in Trinidad -

Cecil: We have a reactionary political cycle in Trinidad. There are generational political upheavals that take place in a 20/30 year cycle.

TR: What cycle are we in now?

Cecil: We in the cycle of “we time” now. [Pauses]. Don’t mind – you are Indian.

TR: Please don’t worry about me.

Cecil: It *must* matter to you [original emphasis]!

I stayed quiet and Cecil carried on. By inserting my Indian ethnicity in the same conversation as “we time,” Cecil betrayed the racial motivation behind it. Yet the fact that Cecil insisted on the significance of his comment *for me* also suggested that he was socially comfortable invoking ethnic identity as a marker of difference. Later, as a matter of pride, he told me he was well versed in many religious texts including the Bhagwat Gita, the Quran, and the Bible.

At the same time, I was hyper-aware of when and with which populations I encountered racist comments – and encounter I did. This speaks less to the prevalence of racism in one group over another (this is where my positionality as an Indian becomes very relevant) but rather that race remains a potent social category of difference in the midst of multicultural articulations. In Chapter 3, I reveal how on more than one occasion I was witness to racist comments by East Indians against Africans (see also Ramchandani 2016). In the same chapter I also reveal Aletia’s own aspirations for “black people” like herself.

I cannot know what I don’t know – namely what I did not gain access to during my research. However, my arguments, experiences, and commentaries on African PNM partisans are based on rigorous ethnographic reporting on those who willingly and openly invited me into their homes and their lives. I travelled with them, lived in their or their neighbors’ homes, attended social events with them and formally and informally interviewed them. So I excitedly embraced



this type of access that, however fraught with the politics of identity, gave me a unique opportunity to reject the type of “native anthropology” inherent in an Indian studying East Indians in Trinidad. I hesitate to make too much of this point because the East Indian culture in Trinidad is itself highly creolized (see Chapter 3 for more on this) but I selfishly yearned and appreciated the opportunity to immerse myself and thus test the limits of my access to an entirely different cultural experience. Some might construe these articulations as exoticizing the “other.” Alas, that is the double bind of studying non-native cultures.

At the higher echelons of political power, my social capital of being a researcher from the United States was very instrumental in “opening doors.” Through a professional network that took seed during my work with CARILED, I was able to access powerful political brokers, elected leaders, and politically-networked citizens that made me perfectly positioned to “study up, down, or sideways” (Nader 1969:292). This was problematic, however, in small communities where I lived where my associations with power holders were difficult to hide. For example, in SGRC, I lived in the home of a political broker, Elizabeth, where I witnessed the unfolding of power from close quarters through the assistance she eked out to civilians visiting her. She got someone a food card, put in a word for someone’s employment in a government agency, mentored another to run for local government office. She even pulled strings to get me quick medical assistance when an eye infection got out of hand.

I do not know if Elizabeth’s generosity to let me stay in her home for three months was politically motivated but her status as a powerful broker did, at least inadvertently, affect my research in the early days of our “courtship.” Elizabeth would sometimes casually ask me how my research was going, and even go as far as to volunteer names of people she knew had attended the consultation in SGRC. Not wanting to offend my host, the first time she did that I

took her up on her offer and met the man whose number she shared with me. It was only towards the end of our long conversation that I discovered that not only was he an aspiring PNM candidate for the upcoming local government elections but that Elizabeth had also told him I was living with her. My heart sank when he unassumingly mentioned this point during our interview – I knew then that what he told me was likely skewed if he thought I might discuss it with Elizabeth later.

After that incident, I kept interviews with her references to the bare minimum, prioritizing her connections to “study up” (Nader 1969) the political grapevine instead. In practice, I also learned to quickly skirt the subject of where I was living, sometimes asking to be dropped off before the turn to her house or if that was unavoidable, to emphatically state my positionality as an apolitical researcher. I still suspect some participants sugar-coated their responses because of whose ear they thought I now had. I take that with a pinch of salt and so have relied on the triangulation of data from observations, interviews and secondary research to contextualize my findings.

All this said, I feel uncomfortable chalking her assistance to the simple binary of either being politically motivated or not. It was more complex than that. Elizabeth was genuinely helpful – not just to me but to people all around her. People milled through the house all day, she was out and about attending board meetings, community group events, and advising people non-stop on her phone. Once after a village council meeting in SGRC, a lady on the council offered to drop me home (it was late in the evening). When she heard I was living with Elizabeth, she mentioned another researcher who had also lived with her a few years ago. I found that fascinating and asked Elizabeth about it when I got back. Elizabeth made light of the situation,

astutely chalking it up to “an opportunity to serve.” Broker or not, in the context of her already generous time with people, I was grateful for the hospitality.

My privilege also showed conspicuously when I hung around the consultation-campaign team. Sean, the team lead, was an affluent, deeply-networked, political broker. By the end of my research, he also became a close friend. Sometimes I’d drive along with his team to the events. Other times, his driver would drop me in his imported SUV. On these occasions, I would slink out of the car and hope the MRDLG staff manning the front doors wouldn’t see me. In a country that runs on “who know who,” such an overt display of my access would definitely have impacted interactions and research responses.

This privilege, however, also made for surreal experiences like the time I had dinner with PM Rowley. April 29, 2016 was the day of the last consultation on reform. It took place in the Diego Martin Regional Corporation, also Rowley’s constituency seat. I traveled to the consultation with Sean’s team. Rowley attended this last consultation, and also participated in the question-and-answer session at the end. The crowd spilled outside the school auditorium where the consultation was taking place. I counted eight Land Rovers and Porches in the parking lot to the right of us, including the one I had ridden in. I knew Mayors of at least two other municipalities who showed up to this gathering.

After the last comments, Sean suggested I join his team for dinner and drinks to celebrate the end of the consultations. I was whisked away to One WoodBrook Place, a restaurant attached to a high net worth residential/commercial compound in the heart of Port of Spain. When we got there, Rowley was sitting by himself at a table for two. He was expecting Sean and his team. Introductions were made, and we moved to a bigger table. Our soiree lasted till 1a.m. by which time we had moved to an even bigger table with more people and food. I left the dinner in a daze,

clutching a map of Tobago (Rowley's native place) that the PM had drawn for me on a paper napkin. It had all the places that he suggested I visit on my next trip there.



*Image 5: (L-R) Me with Rowley; Hand drawn map of Tobago*

My gender had a prominent role shaping both access and accessibility in the field. In her dissertation on the self-representations of women at the Trinidad Carnival, Noel (2009) examines the “visual construction of femininity” (45) through the Carnival format wherein she suggests that erotic body movements of women be examined not as “self-objectifying and self-denigrating” (44) acts but rather “part of a history of women of different races, classes, and thus realities: women who have negotiated and contested for space, visibility and power in Trinidad Carnival” (41). The Carnival culture represented not a moment of extraordinary feminine agency but rather it was embedded in a culture where women carried their bodies with pride and reveled in it.

For my part I found that, especially in urban areas like Port of Spain and San Fernando, women were almost too well-dressed for my standard. They did not shy away from flaunting their curves, donning artful eye make-up and elaborate hairdos. Consequently, two summers of preliminary fieldwork informed my wardrobe when I eventually moved to Trinidad for long-term fieldwork. I developed two distinct sets of attires – one that included button-down tops, figure

hugging skirts, dresses and heels for formal meetings, and one that ended at jeans, cotton trousers and a handful of T-shirts for “everyday” research.

Juxtaposed to the confidence and flare of femininity is the escalation of violence against women in Trinidad. Approximately one in three women in the country have reported at least one act of physical or sexual partner violence in their lifetime (Pemberton and Joseph 2018).

Jacqueline, Aletia’s daughter, has three kids of which two are from the same man. That man had physically abused Jacqueline, so she left him, moved in with her mother, and now has a child from another man. Her jilted lover regularly called and threatened her, sometimes when I was with her and her mother during research.

I kept my distance with the men I encountered during fieldwork. If they were not already networked into my own social circle, I remained cautious. Men everywhere flirted openly, on the streets, in conference rooms, and during interviews; even those who were married - even those who knew that I was married. During preliminary fieldwork in 2013 a Trinidadian friend joked that wearing a wedding band would make no difference. She was right. Unabashedly, when it came to engaging with men in power, I learned to take objectifying comments like “Are girls as pretty as you in India?” in stride. I did not feel threatened because these comments were sometimes made in public with other people around, or in office spaces with people at least milling around.

Out on the street, when by myself, was a different story. According to the most recent data, Trinidad and Tobago Police Services noted a 5.5% increase in overall criminal activity between 2016 and 2017 (GRTT 2017). The U.S. Department of State assessed the capital city of Port of Spain as “critical” on the crime index (United States Department of State 2018; see also

Seepersad 2016). Crime and safety always made it to dinner-table conversations; it also shaped perceptions of how the current government was faring.

Trinidad is not a country where a woman generally travels by herself at night. Normally travelling by public transportation means taking a maxi or a shared cab that, at night, is often not shared. After 8p.m., I almost exclusively stayed indoors, not being comfortable taking public transportation or walking on largely empty streets by myself. Having a ride to the consultations was crucial because most events started in the evening and sometimes went as late as 10pm. If I did not have a guaranteed ride to the consultations, I did not attend the event. This is how I came to attend only eight consultations.

In exchange for access to the consultation sign-up sheets (from MRDLG), I helped MRDLG revamp the survey questionnaire they were distributing to attendees at the consultations. I also collated all the data after so that the staff could share it with the Minister of MRDLG. Similarly, Sean categorically asked me how I could help him in exchange for access to the strategy team. I agreed to share research on how locals perceived the incumbent and aspiring candidates for the local government elections coming up. I shared this information orally and without revealing names of my participants.

During my own data collection, more than one participant thought I was directly affiliated with MRDLG to conduct follow-up interviews after the consultations. This came to light when one participant pointed out that MRDLG staff at the consultation had told her and her friend that if they wrote their names down on the sign-up sheet someone would contact them after the event as it won't be possible for all questions to get answered at the event itself. She was disappointed that I didn't work at the Ministry because she was worried about a drain issue under her home compound and was desperate for government assistance. Regardless, she shared

her woes with me. I was not so lucky with her friend (who had also attended the consultation) who joined us 20 minutes later. She said belligerently, “So we are helping *you* really?” I concurred. She told me she has children in college and knew of research work “like this.” I was wasting her time, she implied. Not surprisingly, our conversation didn’t last much longer after this exchange.

This experience stands out because it was the only belligerent encounter I had during my data collection process. In most other cases, I found people willing to talk because, well, they wanted to talk to someone. When asked if MRDLG would be reading this study, I almost always said something to the effect of, “The Ministry knows I am doing this research and it will be publicly available once I am done. I hope they read it too.” The exchange I highlighted above, however, decentered me – I felt like a sham, a privileged “researcher from America” who in reality could do nothing to mitigate the desperation that motivated some participants to agree to be interviewed.

However, my growing awareness of how citizens encountered their state at the local level, and what they understood of elections forced me to reconcile with a new, unexpected subjectivity – that of part-activist/part-teacher. Sometimes my interviews transformed into a civics lesson on Trinidadian politics where, albeit uncomfortably, I was doing the teaching. One PNM partisan admitted she had never voted in local government elections because she didn’t understand the difference between the two levels of government. She also didn’t know that the Trinidad Parliament is made up of two Houses. However she voted religiously in general elections. “If I don’t vote in general elections, I feel like I’m part of the problem. You’re not part of the solution,” she said. Then she added, “But I don’t do research on representatives.” Party loyalty shaped civic duty.

I also discovered that all municipalities are required by law to hold statutory or town-hall meetings once a month that are open to the public. The Municipal Corporations Act of 1990 explicitly states that “[t]he [statutory] meetings, except meetings of a Committee including a Committee of the whole, of every Council shall be open to the public, and no person shall be excluded therefrom except for improper conduct” (1990a:54). At these meetings, the public has a chance to learn about ongoing projects undertaken by the Council and also address their Council members directly. However, they were not publicized by the Councils in my two research locations. So very rarely did the people I meet know about these public meetings.

Once at a community council meeting, a member asked me if so-and-so Councilor had attended the statutory meeting that I had mentioned in conversation. She wanted to know if the Councilor, who she had beseeched for assistance regarding a community center only a week prior, had advocated for the same. My message was disappointing – the Councilor hadn’t. “Go attend!” I urged the group. I had stumbled upon the percolation of “differential knowledge” (Li 2007) between the Mayor and Councilors, between the Mayor and his public, between Councilors and their constituencies. During my study, I therefore took advantage of the opportunity to do “situated reflexive research” (Bowman 2009) that organically opened up a space for me to give back to my participants through information dissemination. I started keeping track of the dates and times of these meetings through my personal contacts at the Mayors’ offices in both locations; often these meeting days moved around. Consequently, I felt redeemed whenever I saw familiar faces at these events.



### *Outline of the chapters*

Chapter 2, “The culture of party politics in Trinidad,” lays the foundation for understanding the development of entrenched party politics that characterizes the socio-political landscape of TT today. I begin with an ethnography of a state-sponsored consultation on local government reform in 2016. This event was part of a package of 14 that were implemented by the PNM-administration to garner public feedback on its reform policy initiative. It sets the tone for contextualizing the encounters of the public with its state, and the extended ambiguity between a seemingly apolitical governance initiative and an exercise of party consolidation. To present my argument that the consultations were, in fact, cultural artifacts of a historical process of party consolidation, I go back to the British Crown Colony system introduced in Trinidad in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century that was premised on centralized power in the hands of a single individual, the Governor. I then examine how post-Independence, the PNM party, which stayed in power for three decades after, perpetuated a party culture by opting for majoritarian politics over coalition building under a parliamentary system. I leverage Judith Butler’s theoretical framework of “performativity” (Butler 1988) to bring the discussion back to the setting of the consultations as the launchpad to understanding how state-sponsored events as these are effectively political exercises to reaffirm the party paramount in matters of state/civilian interaction.

In Chapter 3, “Identity politics in a plural society,” I begin with the premise that the African attendees at the reform consultations confirm the context of race-based politics in Trinidad. In order to ethnographically understand the political subjectivities of my African PNM participants, I trace the history of colonial discourses and practices of segregation and exploitation between the two dominant race groups – Africans and East Indians – that precipitated the formation of the two main political parties along racial lines. I also pay attention

to the intersection of class in the historical development of political parties in TT. In spite of the historical phenomenon of ethnic mobilization in the country, my participants actively embraced multicultural ideas and egalitarian principles suggesting that the idea of race-based politics was contested and fraught with ambivalences. Race-based politics was, in fact, re-articulated through the language of tolerance, leadership and even morality, suggesting that party identification offered an alternative route to reconciling the messiness and viscosity of race (Saldanha 2007) in everyday life. As such, it enables party identity to become an extension of one's sense of self in a plural context.

In Chapter 4, "The subject of patronage," I turn my lens towards Aletia, an attendee at the SGRC consultations on reform. Aletia's identity as an ultra-poor party partisan is embroiled in a habitus of dependency that has been historically cultivated by the PNM party towards its loyal base, first through the creation of a welfare state, and later through the unmitigated flow of non-programmatic benefits to party supporters. Consequently, I decode her presence at the consultation as one of many interactions she has had with political agents or brokers of her party to seek "gridding" (Jansen 2015) into state-sponsored housing as well as to secure a job for her daughter through the route of patronage. I show how her dependency on political brokers for patronage represents hyper-local networks of relational exchange where formal and informal party representatives function in overlapping spheres of influence to help loyalists like herself. This ad-hoc yet socially effective mode of interaction has so kept loyalists like Aletia within the fold of the PNM party.

In Chapter 5, "The politics of everyday sociality," I further build on the tenacity of party identification by focusing on the social dimension of building partisanship bonds. I introduce the Moriah Hills community that is caught in the geopolitics of TT's "racial" landscapes (Khan

1997) – it is a PNM bastion in a majority UNC electoral district. Here, PNM loyalists like Peter find themselves sidelined from formal government assistance because of party politics. Their liminal position draws into focus the slippages between the roles of local party groups and community/village councils to leverage their own connections to bridge the gap in service delivery. Fictive kinship ties nurtured in the shadow of the PNM party’s unresponsiveness to Moriah Hills’ woes confirm that party identities are also social identities that are embedded in community circles, peer groups, and neighborhood “limes” (hang outs). Desperation leads networked residents like the Moriah Hills Community Council President, Natalie, to practice a form of peripheral politics - working across the aisle with Opposition party leaders to get things done. I show how convivial exchanges like selling raffle tickets to a UNC MP also conceal “[c]ertain inassimilable excess” in the form of emotionally-fraught political subjectivities as Natalie struggles with her decision to continue to support the PNM party.

In Chapter 6, “‘I am very disheartened and disenchanted’: Subjectivities of affect and emotion,” I come back to the site of the consultations as emotionally and affectively charged spaces where party partisanship is simultaneously enacted and contested. I show how these events reveal the capacity for civilian agency on the one hand, and the emotional weight of political dependencies on the other hand as individuals clamored for both state and party intervention. I address the interplay of loyalty with the praxis of citizenship through demands of an engaged public but also through voter intent. I introduce a third key participant, Vera, whose conflicted subjectivities of agency and dependency emerged as a consequence of failing to secure government assistance or PNM patronage to get electricity in her community. Vera’s story represents a culmination of the different facets of party loyalty that I have alluded to in this dissertation. Here, I juxtapose her assertion of citizen rights with her reconciliation to

support the PNM candidate in the local government elections, also tying her existential struggle to that of the other key participants in this study. In doing so, I reveal how the citizen/loyalist dyad within a culture of entrenched party politics is infused with the continual negotiation of identities, rights, moral values, and personal aspirations that calls into question the stability of partisan loyalty in the country.

## CHAPTER 2 THE CULTURE OF PARTY POLITICS IN TRINIDAD

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### *Setting the stage*

I left home at 7:30a.m. on a cool Wednesday morning to attend the SGRC public consultation on local government reform. I was living in PoS at the time – almost two hours away from the consultation site. Having played my “researcher” card right, I had got official clearance from MRDLG, the organizer of the events, to attend this and other similar consultations as part of my dissertation research. So rather than change three maxis to get to SGRC, I travelled in the lap of luxury – an air-conditioned minibus rented primarily for MRDLG’s team that now included me.

In twenty minutes, city skyscrapers and urban shanties gave way to dense greenery that whispered names of birds and reptiles native to this part of the world. Only a handful of man-made structures clung to the side of the main East-West highway that transported me from one end of the country to the other. Occasionally, my eyes caught the random “doubles” vendor by the roadside, with his giant aluminum pot of chana (chickpeas curry) and steaming hot bread deep fried in oil that he sold for 6 TTD (1 USD) a plate. My gurgling stomach reminded me I was hungry or perhaps simply greedy.

SGRC is the largest municipality on the island of Trinidad. Its picture-perfect beaches are offset by spectacularly choppy waters offshore that make water travel virtually impossible. Inland, the landscape is littered with roads less travelled. Public transportation is infrequent and inconvenient. SGRC is sparsely populated yet ranks the highest in the country’s multi-dimensional poverty index (GRTT and UNDP 2012:15). It is a package deal of natural beauty that barely conceals the lived experience of human hardship.



*Image 6: Waiting for a participant at a coconut stand in SGRC*



*Image 7: The main street of SGRC*

The seat of SGRC is the town of Sangre Grande. It is surrounded by rural swaths of land that together make up the bulk of the municipality. Getting closer to the municipal center, it was impossible to miss the handful of one-room “mini-marts” that sell coal, sand and gravel alongside fresh vegetables and stale biscuits. In a conversation much later, a research participant lamented that the community’s wealth was being drained from the municipality by rich, non-local, mining entrepreneurs.

By the time we reached SGRC the sun was blazing hot. Our location was the Guaico Government Secondary School auditorium – schools are free venues for government-sponsored events. The two opposite walls along the length of this space had steel shutters that could be opened for cross ventilation. Loud fans hoisted 10 feet above us loudly swirled the hot air and spat it right back at us. Between 250 and 300 chairs were already neatly lined in rows across three sections of the auditorium. The first three rows had chair after chair marked with “Reserved Seating” placards where eventually Councilors, Mayors and Ministers in suits, boots and heels

would share inside jokes and pose for photographs. At the back of the hall, an expansive technical unit was set up. Like Medusa's mane, a giant screen monitor sported an array of snaky wires connected to laptops, amplifiers, speakers and cameras. This was to be a heavily publicized event.

The main stage was a portable 20-foot wide platform that stretched across the front of the hall, spatializing the verticality of the state before its public. On it sat a large 10-foot by 6-foot screen that would project the administration's vision for reform. A tall TT flag mounted on a pole was placed on the left side of the presentation screen. The entire set including the stage was recycled for each of the fourteen reform consultations across the country. When held at night, some consultation venues also had strategically placed spotlights that bathed the audience and speakers in yellow light and heat.

A table propped up against a wall on the inside of the auditorium held gift baskets and flowers. It was manned by an MRDLG female employee I had travelled with in the minibus. She was poised, impeccably dressed, and standing confidently atop lofty four-inch heels. Her job was to usher in and felicitate the dignitaries. During the half-hour we had before the consultation began, I had noticed her in a different avatar - engaged in much friendly banter with her friends manning two tables outside the auditorium. The latter were in charge of collecting names and phone numbers of public attendees on their way in. When the event began, one of these two "outside" women would switch roles and take on the role of ushering as well - guiding late-comers to empty seats in the almost full house.

As one of the early ones to the venue, I had the luxury of choosing my seat. I sat near the front in an aisle seat, wanting a clear view of the stage and the public speakers who would be standing, literally, next to me during the Q&A session. Eventually the seat beside me would be

taken by a woman clutching one of the feedback forms MRDLG was circulating. A few minutes before the event began, I asked her what brought her to the event. She told me she and her friends worked at the SGRC headquarters. She was holding two seats next to her for them.

The SGRC consultation began 20 minutes late at 10:20 a.m. – not too bad by Trinidadian standards. It began with the event moderator (he was the same moderator across the eventual eight events I attended) promptly introducing a litany of government dignitaries seated in the audience – Franklin Khan, the Minister of MRDLG; Desdra Bascombe, Principal Secretary of MRDLG (part of the taskforce for local government reform); Stuart Young, Minister of the Ministry of Attorney General and Legal Affairs (part of the taskforce for local government reform); PNM MP for Toco/Sangre Grande electoral district (part of SGRC); UNC MP for Cumuto/Manzanilla electoral district (part of SGRC); PNM Mayors of neighboring Arima and Point Fortin municipalities; a PNM Senator; Terry Rondon, the PNM Chairman of the SGRC local government Council; and local Councilors. The introduction was followed by the National Anthem sung by a select group of school students and then an opening prayer by a local pastor.

Minister Khan was the main speaker at this event but before he could take center-stage, the Chairman and the two MPs from the area gave opening speeches. All three observed the protocols of personally addressing the main dignitaries and then launched into an emotional performance of political showmanship – highlighting what they have done for the community, how special SGRC is, how much they welcomed reform. The main opposition MP from the UNC party expectedly outlined an exhaustive list of concerns about the reform, ending with “... and so there are many more questions but I would stop at this point Honorable Minister. As a matter of fact, I will submit this letter to you. And I will stop and I hope that during the consultations, these concerns will be addressed.” On the heels of her commentary, the PNM MP



stated, “I commend the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development for putting people first and I pledge the support of the people of Sangre Grande and the environs.”

I stifled a yawn. It had been over 15 minutes since the proceedings began. I was hot, sweaty and hungry, and Khan was yet to take the stage. This was only the second consultation I was attending but I knew I should have come better prepared. Behind me I heard the rustle of a bag of chips. Thankfully, Khan came on right then. He is a man of medium stature and a pleasant tone that easily complemented his smiling demeanor. He wore a black suit, white shirt, black shiny shoes and a pinkish red tie – his attire remained the same across the fourteen events. Almost immediately, he ushered us into a short one minute animated video on encountering Trinidadian bureaucracy that began with the poignant words, “Home sweet home, you grew up here...” The video leverages the story of a fictive home being threatened by an eroding embankment, and the family’s time-consuming search for accountability amidst centralized bureaucracy.

Khan came back on stage and reminded the audience that “[u]nder the current system, and this is fundamental, when a community needs to get something done, it has to take place in one of the many clogged and narrow arteries that run through the centralized heart of government.” For 45 minutes after that, Khan outlined the government’s vision for reform - invoking the successful decentralization of Tobago’s governance structure<sup>16</sup> and alluding to the aspirational qualities of how local and state governments function in the United States of America. In spite of reading his script from a discrete teleprompter placed low on the ground in front of him, Khan was not afraid to ad lib. He directly addressed the UNC MP when he outlined his vision for financial accountability linked to reform. He spoke directly to the audience,

sometimes looking almost pensive, his hands in his pocket, recalling his days when he attended North Eastern College in SGRC, referring to the area as his “second home.”

Standing confidently on that expansive stage, Khan’s affable demeanor and empathetic personality made him justifiably believable. He was an effective speaker who used the call-and-response technique to energize his audience. We clapped, nodded and went along for the ride. The PowerPoint screen behind Khan kept pace. Title slides like “Executive Authority” and “New Responsibilities” and “Accountability” backlit Khan as he casually and confidently meandered across the length of the stage to connect with each side of his audience. The visuals were crisp, modern and minimalist but were conspicuous for their lack of any substantial text, not even bullet points. On one slide, a red “location pin” animatedly liberated itself from PoS in the north-west of the TT map and traced a dotted path to the south-eastern edge of the country signaling decentralized decision-making – a paradoxical promise given the inherent ambiguity in the slide on exactly *how* such power would be redistributed.

I wondered how many attendees caught on to the irony of Khan talking about accountability and power redistribution. Khan was himself not an elected member of Parliament. The first and last time he held elected office was in 2002. In 2005, he resigned after being indicted on corruption charges that were dropped five years later. He had returned to Parliament only the year prior as a Senator appointed by the new Prime Minister, Keith Rowley. At the SGRC consultation, Khan teased an avatar that was both familiar and supreme. On the one hand, he promised the public a more participatory role in their community’s development, on the other hand he invoked the consultation as an extraordinary opportunity for state-civilian engagement: “Speak now or forever hold your peace,” he warned as he wrapped up one presentation and opened the floor for discussion. By the end of 14 consultations, Khan had managed to transform

the public hearings into a slick, sticky, closed-loop circuit of preempted questions and refined justifications for the government's plan for reform. He was able to humanize the state, bring it closer to the people while promising them nothing tangible in return.

By around 11:15a.m., I counted over 300 people in the auditorium. Every seat was taken; a few people were standing or sitting on plastic chairs in the awning just outside the main auditorium. At the end of his presentation, Khan offered us another animated video that took off from where the first one had ended; it began ambitiously with the word, "Imagine." It laid out a utopian plan of hyperlocal service delivery, although, Khan acknowledged at a different consultation, the reform plan would not formally include a quota system for local vendors. Khan then opened the floor to discussions by gently prodding us with the words, "I hope you like what I have said." We clapped on cue.

Khan's speech was followed by a public Q&A session. Khan, Young, and Bascombe, representing the reform task force, sat on plush white single-seater couches that were hustled on to the stage as speakers from the audience eagerly formed two long lines behind designated mics in the two aisles. Amidst sounds of shuffling and soft murmurings as people adjusted their seats, sometimes to let people through, the moderator studiously warned us that the event was being broadcast live on radio so to keep comments and questions to the point. There were also photographers and a transcriber at this event – a fact I learned later when I liaised with the consultation-campaign team. Over the next hour and a half, 31 people spoke before Khan and his colleagues.

All comments began in a similar fashion of deference – "Good day all Members of Parliament, all members of Council, Councilors, all elders and all my members of Toco/Sangre Grande" or in the least, "All protocols observed." Many congratulated Khan for his initiative and

thanked him for the presentation. Some speakers spoke softly with their hands clasped low in front of them or behind them but others vigorously pointed fingers and raised their voices at the stage or at the front rows of seated dignitaries. Those who spoke the loudest elicited the loudest claps. The mood was respectful but saturated with the potential for disruption.

The topics of discussion varied. Some members of the public directly addressed the technical ambiguity surrounding decentralization talk – “There is [already] the Sangre Grande Spatial Development Plan which is a public document... the question really is, would the [new] legislation take into consideration partnerships between the public and private sector for development plans?” Others came with ideas on improving local conditions – “One of the examples is aqua culture, I mean I heard cray fish is 80 TTD (12 USD) a pound.. What is local government doing to develop revenue in our communities?”

Many shared local and/or personal woes surrounding drainage, roads and employment opportunities. A 70-year-old man said, “Mr. Minister Sir, there are two rivers, the Poole River and the Petite Poole River. They have been clogged for the longest while and this causing problems to farmers in the Manzanilla area. All the rivers up there are clogged and the lands become soggy soggy so that you cannot get anything out of the land except disease...” As he spoke, the audience clapped energetically. A woman somewhere behind me shouted “yuh understand?” to no one and everyone at once. Right in front of me, another woman raised her hand, flicked her wrist in the air and jerked her head, a performance of disapproval of some kind. It went in line with hissing sounds and “steups<sup>17</sup>” that sizzled in the air. It was as though the audience had been patiently biding its time till this moment. The old man’s lament evoked in me images of colonial drudgery, decrepitude and neglect.

The moderator played a critical role in this exchange. A respectable journalist, his job was not only to liaison between the attending public and state dignitaries but also rearticulate public concerns to fit the paradigm of reform. For example, a local pastor asked the following of the task force –

As a Minister of Religion, I am very saddened with the level of poverty that we experience... you alluded to... where we would have a system where we would know for certain the exact amount of people in every village that is under the poverty line... that is public knowledge that is published on the website. We would like to know now that you are approaching to treat it in terms of reduction, what are the specific measures that we are engaging so that if you have three years, we know you attempt to reduce three hundred persons from under the poverty line. We know that you have built a factory and in the first year you would have absorbed one hundred. We know in the second year we only have two hundred remaining to treat with and that is also publicly published.

Khan responded with a long-winded discourse on urban versus rural poverty, and then a list of rural projects MRDLG is planning to implement in communities like SGRC including overseeing a new fishing port, a connector road, a ferry service and agricultural development.

The moderator then stepped in and delicately suggested instead that “[t]he gentleman had a concern about what I would describe as data-driven decision-making and certainly there would be the need for some institutional support for such data, statistical information and so on. Would you care to address that?” His diligence in assisting the public link technical aspects of the reform discussion with their lived experiences made his role almost incongruous with how I was now coming to view the consultations – as political events. More about that later in the chapter.

The public consultations became a liminal space where both locally elected representatives and their voting publics together clamored to be seen and heard by the state. One of the speakers was a first-time PNM local Councilor, Simone Gill. Of African descent, Gill was a skillful orator, using her mic time to align herself with the cause of her constituency. She said emotionally, “I am pleading... we are a disaster-stricken area when it comes to landslides...

where if a person's roof flies off we have to wait three, four months to get material to fix the roof. I am pleading with the Minister ... to please allow self-help, especially for disaster victims, let it be placed in the corporation's ambit." The difference in positionalities between Gill, an elected local leader, and other civilians, both standing in the same line, beseeching their state for assistance was so indiscernible that had Gill not introduced herself as a Councilor, I might not have known she held public office.

The reform discussions dragged on for almost two hours. Everyone who stood in those lines patiently waiting their turn got a chance to speak. The whole time Khan and his two colleagues answered questions, sometimes together, sometimes individually. When the last speaker had had his say, the moderator signaled the end of the session, thanked everyone for their time and reminded people to share the word about the other consultations taking place. We all got up, cracked our backs, and slowly ambled out. I went looking for the MRDLG team that I was to travel back with. I noticed the two ushers picking up the feedback forms from the chairs in the auditorium, some others were strewn on the sign-up table outside.

People did not immediately disperse after the event. They lingered in clumps outside the auditorium, greeting each other, discussing, eating. MRDLG had organized food for everyone – a tiny burger and some fries in white take-away thermocol boxes. I eagerly got myself one before they ran out. A few weeks later, an unemployed research participant who was at this consultation would lash out against this paltry offering –

Normally, people come and they take the whole day and you give them something to eat and drink. And the VIP were eating ham, lamb, and jam. You could have had a box of food with something, na? You don't give people two buns in a box?! Two buns? Common on, man! That is so disrespectful. I would've preferred food! Chicken, pelau, something. You see people come for hours... After that thing, everybody should have eat.

In the least, the “VIPs” were not eating “ham, lamb, and jam” at the event. This much I knew through my access to the VIPs through MRDLG and the consultation-campaign team. Yet this participant’s positionality of a wanting, deserving attendee juxtaposed with his assumptions surrounding political privilege was not lost on me. At 1:30p.m., six hours after I left PoS, I found myself back in the minibus on my way home.

To me, the participant observer, the event did its job of signaling a rotting system of governance and public service delivery that has left Trinidadian youth underemployed, schools with subpar construction, potholed roads, disgruntled local residents, and serpentine bureaucratic channels already traversed by the public countless times. The SGRC consultation fit the pattern of ritualistic deference, ambiguous policy details, and brilliant design execution that I encountered across eight such events. They also brought to the fore some critical questions - What conditions have led to the phenomenon of an emaciated local government in Trinidad that has left both local officials and the public clamoring to seek assistance from their state? And in this context, what value does a consultation on local government reform hold? I spend the rest of this chapter answering these questions. Their purpose to this dissertation lies in their integration with the culture of party politics. An emaciated local government, centralized power, and party politics together offer the foundation for understanding political identities in the context of the dispersed state.

I start with a historical account of how the centralization of power by British colonizers influenced the actions and decisions of Trinidadian politicians in the run up to Independence. Then I turn my lens to the more critical phenomenon of party politics, charting its course from the early day of Independence to contemporary politics wherein power now resides almost exclusively in the hands of the politically-determined Executive branch of government. This

framework allows me to contextualize the SGRC consultation as a party (and not state) initiative so setting the stage for questioning its value for the organizers and the public attending it.

### *The Crown Colony system*

Columbus is alleged to have discovered Trinidad on 31<sup>st</sup> July 1498 (Kiely 1996:44) but Spanish settlers didn't arrive there until 1592. Under Spanish rule, Trinidad had an administrative unit called a *cabildo*<sup>18</sup> which, while theoretically elective, had morphed into a “hereditary possession” of a few Spanish families<sup>19</sup>. In 1783, the Cedula of Population opened up Trinidad to a plantation economy by encouraging planters from the neighboring countries of Martinique, Guadeloupe, Saint Domingue (now Haiti), Grenada, and St. Lucia to settle in Trinidad along with their slaves. These planters included free people of color (or mulattoes) as well as African slaves who had been manumitted. The Cedula granted all settlers including free people of color equal civic and legal rights (Williams 1964:41).

When the British annexed Trinidad from the Spanish Crown in 1797, Trinidad became a colony that was governed solely by the British Government through the Governor. The Governor was “bound of course to obey the Queen’s commands conveyed to him by the Secretary of State, in his legislative as well as in his executive capacity, whether or not the course prescribed accord[ed] with his personal views and opinions” (Wrong 1923:141–142). For the purpose of running the colony, a Governor’s Council of Advice was established but to avoid an occasion that “might perhaps arise from the conflicting views of the Imperial Parliament and of a subordinate Legislature” (Sanderson 1813:430), selection of its members was left entirely to the Governor.



The establishment of self-government in Trinidad was vehemently rejected by British imperialists for two reasons, and it involved the status of the free people of color who owned considerable property in Trinidad and made up the biggest segment of the non-slave population. The census data of 1808 listed Trinidad's population at 31,478 of which 21,895 were African slaves, 1,147 were British, and free people of color numbered 5,450, more than double the total White population.

	Amerindians	Whites	Free people of color	African slaves	Chinese	Total population
1797 (year the British annexed Trinidad)	1,082	2,086	4,466	10,009	0	17,643
1808 (during the reign of the British)	1,635	2,476*	5,450	21,895	22	31,478

*Table 10: Pre-Independence census of Trinidad*

*\*Of this, 1,147 were British, 781 were French, 459 were Spanish, 36 were Corsican, 29 were German and 24 were "others."*

*(Source: Williams 1964)*

The British Crown consequently decided against a self-governing constitution so as to entirely avoid the dilemma of the franchise of free people of color. The first Governor of Trinidad, Colonel Thomas Picton, said this about having a popular elective assembly in Trinidad - "... Of two things one will necessarily happen, they [free people of color] must be either formally rejected, or openly acknowledged. Disaffection is the natural consequence of the former; the latter may have an ill effect in its consequences on the same class in the neighboring islands" (Williams 1964:69). The biggest fear for the British was becoming a minority amongst the Whites in a freely elected assembly.

Free people of color who made up a significant chunk of the country's planters were understandably unhappy and angry with this state of affairs. They agitated for self-government, demanding the rights they had enjoyed under the Spanish Cedula of Population. In 1829, led by Jean-Baptiste Phillippe, the free people of color were granted complete equality making Trinidad the first British Caribbean colony for free people of color to gain their civic rights (Campbell 2000).

During this time, the Britain public was getting aroused to the injustice of the slavery system in general while British capitalists also duly noted the unprofitability of slavery. The nearby Haitian slave revolt that began in 1791 was making British colonizers in Trinidad anxious about similar movements in their backyards. Serendipitously, the confluence of external historical factors and the internal agitation for political representation primed Trinidad as a candidate for an entirely new system of British governance – the Crown Colony government system - that would then spread to other colonies in Africa, Asia and the West Indies. In 1831, the British Crown acquiesced to public pressure within and outside Trinidad, and replaced the Governor's Council with the colony's first Legislature, the Council of Government. This would be made up of the Legislative Council (LegCo) and the Executive Council. The LegCo constituted "officials" and "unofficials" whose membership was determined by the British Crown and/or the Governor.

From 1831 till 1925, the British Crown Colony rule fostered a paternalistic, centralized administrative system wherein the colonial bureaucracy perpetuated a normative relationship with Trinbagonians based on elite consensus (Jones 1987:19–21) rather than through an elected assembly. The stronghold of British colonizers over the social, economic and political dimensions of everyday living in Trinidad made it possible for them to promulgate a narrative of

civilian dependency and political ineptitude to justify their control over the administrative functions of the country. In the 1945 Moyne Commission Report on violence and unrest in TT between 1935-1938, it was noted: “One of the strongest and most discouraging impressions carried away by the investigator in the West Indies is that of a prevailing absence of a spirit of independence and self-help. [There is] a tendency on all matters to appeal to Government for assistance with little or no attempt to explore what can be done by individual self-help” (Moyne 1945:35; see also Samaroo 1996).

Lloyd Best called the Crown Colony system a “government without politics” (cited in Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:48). The growing rights of the free people of color continued to remain a concern; it was articulated through discourses denouncing too much diversity between colonizers and the colonized. For example, the aforementioned Governor Picton had claimed in 1802,

Popular Elective Assemblies have been productive of much ruinous consequences in some of the neighboring Islands where the elements of society are too different to admit a similar composition to those of the Mother Country. An Elective Assembly will unavoidably introduce a question which cannot fail to generate the seeds of lasting fermentation, in a country composed of such combustible material. [cited in Williams 1964:69]

In 1925, Trinidad held its first elections. The Crown-controlled LegCo would now include a mix of popularly elected representatives as well as nominated members at the behest of the Governor. Leveraging the combination of “official” and “unofficial” British appointees within the Crown Colony system, the Governor was able to ensure the continual consolidation of his power even while a local opposition coalesced around him. In 1945, universal adult suffrage was instituted and with it, the Governor lost his guaranteed majority in the LegCo. The introduction of County Councils also brought some structure to local governance through boundary administration. In 1950, with still more constitutional reform at hand, the Governor

lost his autonomy in the Executive Council as well<sup>20</sup>. The latter transformed from an advisory body to the “chief instrument of policy” (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:51) and was designed to be answerable to the Legislature with half its members elected by secret ballot from the LegCo. The first elected government of Trinidad was a multi-party, multi-racial one.

While the state apparatus was seeing changes at the national level, the local administration was still heavily dependent on the center. Since the 1950s, TT has had a *de jure* policy of political decentralization with Town and Borough Councils at one level, and County Councils (later, City Councils) making up the next tier of administration. However, all three Councils functioned like “agents of the central government rather than as partners” (Ragoonath 1996:74) as they continued to rely on the central government for finances and project approvals. In 1956, the PNM party under the leadership of African leader, Eric Williams, won majority seats under the same Crown Colony system of governance.

The PNM party was elected with a plurality of votes (38.7 percent), capturing 13 of the 24 elective seats in the 31-member<sup>21</sup> Legislative Council. This was not enough to form a majority government, but the PNM party refused to enter into a coalition with any of the other three parties or two independents elected to the Legislature. Williams shunned the possibility of a coalition for its promotion of “notorious individualism” (Williams 1964:237). He asserted that a Legislature composed of the fractured interests of independents and small parties would lead to an “unfocused, undisciplined government” (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:54; cf. Williams and Sutton 1981:103–160) where “[e]ach seeks aggrandizement at the expense of his neighbor, giving rise to attitudes that threaten equality of opportunity and jeopardise political democracy” (Williams 1964:281). His justification for rejecting a coalition government was an eerie reflection of Picton’s justification for rejecting self-government in 1802 on the grounds of

disunity in diversity. To get a guaranteed majority then, Williams convinced the Secretary of State for the Colonies to give the party the right to advise the Governor through two nominated seats (there were five in total) in the LegCo. This gave the PNM party the majority it needed to form the government.

According to Meighoo and Jamadar (2008), Williams' insistence on prioritizing single-party politics over coalition formation portended the culture of party politics in the country. The number of constituency representatives now became critical for the control of the LegCo and, by extension, the Executive. In 1957, the Democratic Labour Party<sup>22</sup> (DLP) was formed out of the opposition groups to the PNM.

In 1959, under the PNM administration, a Cabinet government was introduced in TT wherein the Executive Council's name was changed to "Cabinet" and the Chief Minister became the Premier<sup>23</sup>. As Premier, Williams had the power to appoint and remove Ministers. In 1961, before the next round of general elections, the PNM party introduced the Representation of People Bill, part of which included increasing the number of constituencies from 24 to 30. The DLP saw this as an exercise at gerrymandering – "Every sentence, every clause in the Ordinance contains one aim and purpose and that is to make sure that the present government keeps itself in power. Make no mistake about it" (Malik 1971:112).

In Chapter 3, I show how a culture of party politics makes it paradoxically conducive for a democratically elected party and leader to gain "maximum" control. At a lecture series organized in 2012 to commemorate the country's 50 years of Independence, erstwhile Prime Minister, Basdeo Panday, so lamented this particular state of affairs –

What I believe is happening is, at the present moment, most of the ministers are also members of the executive of the Party. That is, they're the officers and the executive and, therefore, the Party as a party cannot have an independent view and be at arm's length so

that it can speak to the government. The Party cannot speak to the government because the government is the Party and is in control of the Party! I think they need to separate the government from the Party so that the Party will be in a position to tell the government how they feel, what is right, what is wrong, what their feelings are and so on. How can you do that when the General Secretary of the Party is employed full-time in the Office of the Prime minister? [Panday 2015:30]

A few definitions before proceeding further. Taking my cue from Meighoo and Jamadar (2008), I define “state” technically as the aggregate of official institutions in a country, inclusive of but not limited to schools, ministries, courts, police and local government bodies.

“Government” is a part of the state that encompasses those entities enlisted with the responsibility to govern like the Public Service Commission, Parliament, local government bodies, the Legislature and Executive. Consequently, government represents the institutionalized and mostly bureaucratized subset of what the state represents. Finally, partisanship or party politics is the domain of the country’s “Executive administration.”

These conceptual differences are crucial for this dissertation because the theoretical separation between state, government and party, while conceptually bound, is in practice messy, overlapping and easily manipulated. The following paragraphs attempt to deconstruct the processes by which party priorities become entangled with civilian understandings of what the (apolitical, professional) government should be providing. This is critical because it reflects the lived ambiguity of politics versus governance, patronage versus public administration, and loyalty versus political representation. On multiple occasions I encountered an opaqueness surrounding public accountability (“Am I voting for a representative of my constituency or a party affiliate?”) as well as social service delivery (“Do I access this service through the state or through political patronage?”). My participants almost exclusively used the terms “government” or “party,” never “state.” In this dissertation, therefore, state offers a conceptual, all-

encompassing framework within which to examine colloquial expressions of government and party.

### *Independence, and the might of the Executive*

With Independence in 1962, the modern form of government in TT took shape. The House of Representatives was the elected Legislature forming the lower House of the Parliament while the Senate was the wholly nominated upper House with a guaranteed government majority. On the heels of the Representation of People Bill, Williams now also gave himself the power to dissolve the Parliament if under threat of a no-confidence motion<sup>24</sup>. In 1966, under Williams' continued reign, the Elections Commission proposed to further increase the number of electoral constituencies from 30 to 36.

Over the next two decades, Williams retained control of the government through a combination of political machinations and the lucky absence of a strong enough Opposition<sup>25</sup>. Enamored with the philosophy of developmentalism promoted by the St. Lucian economist, Arthur Lewis Williams, Williams instituted a policy of "Industrialization by Invitation" (IBI) that not only prioritized industrialization fueled by foreign investment but it also complemented Williams' vision for strong state control through the creation of a welfare economy.

In the decade following the country's independence, the government generated two Five-Year Development Plans informed by the Lewis model of industrialization (Bernard 2008:141). The country's long-term affair with cocoa, coffee and sugar was now dictated by the export-led economic policy of the state. TT's role in the global commodities market was similarly impacted by the push for industrialization and expansion of its domestic produce. In 1968, a free-trade

zone - the Caribbean Community and Commodity Market – was set up to encourage regional trade and stimulate TT’s export sector.

Williams embarked on his own journey of amassing power through a consolidated welfare state model. In keeping with his resolve to expand public service to the fields of education, housing, and health, and provide employment through infrastructural projects, he expanded the number of state ministries from 10 in 1958 to 18 by 1973 (Bissessar 2004:91, see also Henry 1990:66). Yet like his colonial predecessors, Williams’ actions reaffirmed the supreme authority of the central government across the politico-economic strata of the free nation. A 1964 report commissioned by the Working Party on the Role and Status of the Civil Service in the Age of Independence lamented the entrenched system of centralized state authority where “every decision, no matter how simple, required the personal approval of the highest level of officers and sometimes the highest executive authority itself, thereby significantly slowing down the decision making process” (GRTT 1964:12).

In 1968, under Williams’ tutelage, the election system changed to a first-past-the-post<sup>26</sup> (FPTP) system – a definitive shift to majoritarian party politics. This came hand-in-hand with single member districting meaning that each constituency now only has a single representative in the House of Representatives. Candidates gained prominence as party flag holders (see also McAllister 2016). In 1975, another exercise in constitutional reform further enhanced the power of the Prime Minister. The Republican Constitution gave the Prime Minister, a.k.a. Williams, the power to circumvent the elected House of Representatives and appoint as Minister any nominated Senator from the Upper House. Even within a robust party system, governance could remain in the hands of the unelected. It was the paradox born out of the Republican Constitution, and TT has been operating under it since 1976.



During his era of governance, Williams ensured his party's identity became an extension of his own (see Chapter 3 for more on this). Under Williams, post-colonial TT barreled down the path of state consolidation in the same vein as its colonizers. Williams retained his position as Prime Minister for 19 years till his death in 1981. By 1985, the state was majority shareholder in 48 firms across the country, in 37 of which it owned 100 percent equity (Bissessar 2004:95). Twenty years earlier, the international bourgeoisie had controlled the oil industry in TT; by the 1980s, the state controlled oil production and, through race-based patronage, precipitated the disproportionate control of the commercial and industrial sectors by the petty bourgeoisie elites favored by the PNM. Manufacturing, light industry and construction became new employment generators, albeit to the continued detriment of the agricultural industry concentrated in the erstwhile plantation sites of Central and South Trinidad. For almost two decades, from 1962 – 1981, Williams' charisma and strategic appeasement of Africans (the largest voting bloc at the time) cultivated life-long loyalists of the PNM party.

The 1990s ushered in the formal end to the welfare state; then-President Robinson keenly pointed out that the state can “no longer be a tireless mother, forever providing, a guarantor of welfare, and a haven of security” (Rogozinski 2000:338). This ushered in an era where the government became just one of many “stakeholders” that by itself lacked “the critical mass necessary to support a development effort alone” (GRTT 2005:15). The transformation from a welfare state to a capitalist state by the end of the twentieth century should have disrupted the cycle of expectation nurtured through the generosity of the welfare state but what the state couldn't offer, the political machine carried forward. Political patronage thrived in the wilting shadow of social welfare.

Top-down political favoritism towards the mainly African voting base continued unabated during the time of neoliberal reform. Between 1991 and 1995, in a targeted effort to stimulate privatization, reduce government spending, and promote private property rights, the PNM government began significantly divesting from agricultural production<sup>27</sup>. Agricultural land, that was occupied and cultivated by predominantly East Indians, was repurposed to create new housing projects. These lands came to be managed by contractors employing pro-PNM temporary workers, expanding the cultural rift between the two major ethnic groups in the country (see Chapter 3 for more).

The push away from the welfare state precipitated the infiltration of politics in the state's service delivery system. The state retreated from its social obligations while reinforcing the consolidation of state power. Citizens were neither guaranteed the same level of welfare nor could they expect reliable localized assistance from their institutionally weak local governments. The welfare state has since performed in spurts, driven solely at the discretion of its state-level leadership ensconced in a single-commodity (read: oil) economy.

Meighoo and Jamadar (2008) point out that the amalgamation of the FPTP electoral system with the culture of party politics amidst the historical Crown Colony legacy of centralized governance in Trinidad has borne a "disfigured" form of self-government wherein "[p]olitics becomes totalitarian, engulfing every field of human endeavor" (88). Unlike most bicameral governments in the world, in independent Commonwealth Caribbean countries including TT, the Legislature dissolves completely when the Executive changes, confirming the dependence of the Legislature on the Executive rather than the other way around. To this effect, the authors also gravely note the absence of any motion of no-confidence or censure against a sitting Prime

Minister or his Cabinet since the country's independence in 1962 (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:70).

The subordinate role of the Legislature to the Executive fundamentally transforms the nature of accountability that binds elected representatives to voters. MPs are, in principle, supposed to be accountable to their electoral constituents. However, with the power vested in the Prime Minister to not only appoint nominated Senators to top roles in the country but also dissolve the Parliament has distorted this format of political representation. Minister Franklin Khan represented this distortion – he became the top official of MRDLG without even running for office. In this context, his comment “Speak now or forever hold your peace” is an uncomfortable reflection of supreme unaccountable power. Such a type of governance model reflects what political scientists call the “‘presidentialization’ of parliamentary politics” (Poguntke and Webb 2005; see also Maddens and Fiers 2004) or “presidential parliamentarism” (Hazan 2005). Poguntke and Webb (2005) use this theory to explain the contemporary phenomenon of political leaders circumventing their party machinery to directly appeal to their voter base (think: Donald Trump’s use of Twitter in the United States context). In Trinidad, however, the transformation of parliamentary politics is happening *through* and not in spite of the formal political system.

Trinidadians employ more pungent vernacular to describe the cycle of elite political factions – “dictatorship on a five-year lease” (cited in Jobson 2018:462). Elected representatives serve their Prime Minister first, their constituents second, hoping to ascend the political ladder through loyalty-based patronage. A research participant expressed disgust at the phenomenon of internal “shuffling” amongst political appointees – “Now they just recycling Ministers. You fall

from grace and you end up the CEO of WASA (Water and Sewage Authority of Trinidad and Tobago)! Or they bring you back as a Senator. I fed up of that.”

Currently in TT, general elections to elect 41 MPs happen simultaneously across the country. What should be interpreted as separate constituency elections is instead perceived as a single general election to elect a party government and a Prime Minister (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:xvi). Conflating the election of the Legislature with the establishment of an Executive has in effect discharged MPs from the responsibility of “representation” – they are elected as party members rather than constituency representatives. Also, unlike the earliest elections in TT where MPs representing a constituency had residency requirements<sup>28</sup>, now MPs are not required to fulfil such criteria. They are “installed” in districts at the behest of their party leaders, based off a calculation of “weak” versus “essential” seats in the Legislature. This again signals the prioritization of party over constituency representation. At best, MPs are viewed as extensions of their political party; at worst, they are simply emissaries of the Executive. MPs are fielded by the political party depending on their popularity and the relevance of the seat they are fighting for. Most favored candidates are fielded in “secure” seats; weak candidates are tested in swing or losing seats (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:105).

The subservient status of the Legislature has led to an erosion of the democratic functioning of the TT state. Meighoo and Jamadar (2008) stress that democracy as an exercise in self-governance should be reflected by “an effective, robust, autonomous, responsible, conscientious, and representative national legislature” (34). By this definition, Trinidad and Tobago is hardly a democracy, taunt Meighoo and Jamadar (2008:34). Consequently, the authors tantalize us with the notion that “the government has been most democratic in the colonial period

of 1950-56, under the responsible quasi-ministerial system and colonial self-government” (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:60).

The authors also point to the complex product of cultural and historical consciousness that has shaped the relationship of Trinidadian civilians to any authority, including the political. The collective history of enslavement and indentureship has been selectively incorporated into assertions of independence and freedom creating a head-scratching sort of “ambivalence” to authority – “Many simply go along, making calculations along the way. They serve power faithfully at the same time as they despise it. They rely and thrive on the arbitrariness of authority and the systemic abuse of power, at the same time as it is genuinely derided” (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:86-87). In other words, Trinidadians are imbued with “something like an ancient implant stored in the recesses of our individual and collective unconscious” (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:85) that makes it possible for a strong leader to thrive in the context of this democracy. Bourdieu might call it “habitus.”

This perceived “arbitrariness” within Trinidadian society that allows deference and disobedience to coexist is in part a rotting vestige of the Trinidadian slave society wherein history and economics have morphed into a sort of cultural system determined by “the inability (or unwillingness) to judge truth independently of authority” (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:85). In this climate of contingency, loyalty and its association to patronage frame the organizational structure of political life.

### ***Local government reform***

The Municipal Corporations Act of 1990 (MCA 1990) was the first real attempt by the free country to reform governance by sharing power with local governments. MCA 1990 created two

cities, nine regional corporations and five borough corporations as part of a large-scale administrative exercise to standardize public administration. It was a culmination of several prior efforts to alter the organizational and institutional structure of the polity in the name of decentralization. Rather than devolution, what MCA 1990 ended up doing was precipitating the deconcentration of select ministerial services from the capital city of Port of Spain to other parts of the country.

A few clarifying definitions before proceeding – the exercise of decentralization is fundamentally about the redistribution of power. It can be practiced through three modes of power-sharing: deconcentration, the transfer of responsibilities from the central government to local administrators without local authority to shape, alter or independently fund those responsibilities; delegation, which shifts responsibilities to CSOs and the private sector; and devolution, which is the most wholesome transfer of power and authority to local political units including the ability to manage local budgets and make administrative changes (Garrity and Picard 1996:8).

Under MCA 1990, Councilors would be elected for each of the fourteen local governments, and a Mayor/Chairman would be nominated from within this group. These representatives, however, would be directly answerable to MRDLG for directives on government policy pertaining to local government functions (CLGF 2013). Clause 269 of the MCA Act 1990 reflects the continued tenacity of power the central government wields over municipalities: “The Minister [of MRDLG] may give general or specific direction to any Council in relation to government policy touching or concerning any matter; and it shall be the duty of the Council to govern its actions in accordance with such directions” (GRTT 1990:139).

In no less words, local government Councils made up of elected officials were instructed to function under the directives of a State Minister. A subsection of the same clause also states that “[w]here a Council willfully neglects or refuses to carry out its responsibilities in relation to a particular matter, the President may by Order transfer responsibility for that matter to the Ministry” (GRTT 1990). These qualifications to MCA 1990’s decentralization mandate highlight not only the pragmatic and ideological contradictions to the decentralization process, but also the entrenched desire of the state to consolidate national authority and power at the local level. Over time, this overreliance on the central government for local administration has created an emaciated local government with weak accountability measures surrounding its governance. The power of local governments in Trinidad is largely limited to the maintenance and management of existing services provided by the state like corporation buildings, minor roads and drains, recreation grounds, and garbage disposal. New projects require financial and administrative clearance from different state ministries like the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Works and Transport, and MRDLG.

On January 20, 2016, as a part of CARILED’s contingent, I attended my first consultation on reform in the municipality of Tunapuna/Piarco. If this reform process were to advance, it would resolve at least some of the issues connected to the current centralized governance model – local governments would be vested with financial and administrative authority to manage a larger scope of local work within their jurisdictions. Unfortunately, in the Trinidadian context, such consultations on local government reform are unspectacular events. The year 2016 marked the seventh time since the country’s independence that the party in power had dangled this promise of change before its people. The trope of local government reform was wielded on the Trinidadian public in 1965, 1974, 1983, 1990, 2009, and 2013. Each time, this

promise was legitimized by publicized stratagems of a government-in-action: conversations, committee reports, green papers, white papers, and draft policy documents make up the archive of past failed attempts at devolution of power to local government authorities (GRTT 1965; GRTT 1974; GRTT 1983; GRTT 1990; GRTT 2009; GRTT 2013). As of 2019, local government reform under the PNM-administration was still being deliberated (Alexander 2019).

Predictably, the state's agenda in 2016 was to take the message of reform once again to the people, hear their concerns and incorporate them into a final recommendation that would be presented by MRDLG to the Parliament for final approval. In short, these consultations sponsored and organized by the central government were an exercise to bring the state closer to its people but why was this necessary? In the context of a highly centralized governance structure where party is paramount, why invest in another series of consultations premised on an old promise of reform, and that too one event in every one of the 14 municipalities across the country?

Across public administration literature, public participatory processes similar to Trinidad's public consultations have been examined, both, as a methodological step towards shared benefits (Arnstein 1969) as well as a technical tool to comment in advance on government activities (Bingham 2010). McComas similarly defines public meetings as "nonrestricted gatherings of three or more people for purposes that include providing information, discussing issues, obtaining information, reviewing projects, evaluating options, developing recommendations, and making decisions" (McComas 2001:36-37). Public forums have, however, also been criticized for paying lip-service to international discourses on good governance (Grindle 2010), practicing exclusionary politics (de Haan 2000), and becoming tools of statecraft (Scott 1998). For instance, in his research on mining negotiations in Peru, Perrault



contends that “a consultation functions as a form of mundane, everyday statecraft, which is intended to draw boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable forms of social mobilization...” (2015:435).

Indeed in the context of emaciated local governments, one can view the Trinidadian reform consultations primarily as exercises to reaffirm the verticality of the (centralized) state over its populace (see also Ferguson and Gupta 2002). Khan and his colleagues sat on a stage in front of the audience, both signaling and enacting a very structured two-way style of communication that left little room for robust deliberative dialogue. Although the consultations represented an assemblage of shifting agendas introduced by state politicians, and deliberated on by local government officials, public servants, the media and the public, there was a discernable level of standardization and uniformity that transformed each event into a tool of state legitimacy with both canonical and indexical dimensions (Rappaport 1999). They were “ritualistic reproduction[s]” (Butler 1990:34), if you may, in that they leveraged strict ordering and continuity to exact the effect intended.

Acts of deference – the national anthem, the Lord’s prayer, the opening statement by each Municipality’s political head - formalized each proceeding into an event of controlled expectations. At one consultation, when a Mayor with whom I was closely acquainted took his seat next to me at the back of the room, it took barely a few minutes for an MRDLG staffer to show up by our side and urge him to take his rightful place in Reserved Seating. The Mayor politely declined, confiding in me later that he wished to make a quiet exit when the session began. By thwarting the rules governing Reserved Seating, he had disrupted the ritualistic production of the consultation as a sacred exercise of the state in the presence of its people.

As the state official presiding over the events, Khan unapologetically determined the scope of discussion at hand. This was in line with historical efforts of vertical encompassment (Ferguson and Gupta 2002) by the centralizing state. Khan promised reform and, in the same breath, warned attending local government officials - “I give you money, I give you power, I give you authority. You have to give meh [*sic*] something back! You have to give meh [*sic*] governance and accountability.” In the process he reinforced the emaciated status of that very branch of government the reform exercise was set to rectify.

For their part, attending Councilors and Mayors simultaneously displayed strength and deference to their state leaders reflective of a history of incubated subordination. For example, in response to a Minister’s comment on illegal waste dumping in front of a resident’s house in the Mayaro/Rio-Claro Regional Corporation, the Chairman quickly took to the mic, made a case for his failed attempts to curb the practice and ended by saying “That is all a Chairman can do!” The public plea of their local political head in front of state leadership was cause for much chatter amongst the public. At another consultation, a local Councilor responded to an angry resident with the proclamation, “I am also a member of the public!” The Councilor’s retort again spoke to the disenfranchised status of local politicians in the country. They were, after all, democratically elected tokens of the central administration at the local level. Some Councilors told me they hadn’t even been informed that the consultations were happening in their municipalities.

The culture of hierarchy and subordination is so deeply ingrained in TT society that a Trinidadian political scientist, Bishnu Ragoonath, found some mid and lower level government officials to be uninspired to challenge the status quo from within state institutions (1996:79). At the consultations, the political divide between clamoring citizens and administratively emaciated local government officials seemed to collapse. In the absence of devolution, state-ness became

both a normative condition of being an elected leader and an aspiration of local politicians currently functioning as brokers of their party (see also Stokes et al. 2013).

There were other, more glaring, aspects of the reform consultations that indexed a distinctly performative agenda - that of cultivating party loyalty. I define performativity as the cumulation of conscientious acts to induce certain effects (Butler 1988; 1990) – in this case, to reinforce the presence of party (not state) in everyday Trinidadian life. In the next section I show how the consultation events that were hosted in schools, markets, and auditoriums wrapped party language and political memorabilia into the fold of “everyday statecraft” (Perrault 2015). As such, the consultations represented cultural artifacts of a highly politicized state machinery that fed into processes of ethnic mobilization (Chapter 3), the institutionalization of political patronage (Chapter 4), and entanglements of everyday sociality (Chapter 5) that continue to dictate the structural relationship between party and voter.

### *The performativity of a promise*

In Trinidad, every consultation on local government reform has been devised by a political party instead of an independent non-governmental committee (Sudama 2016). For the 2016 reform agenda, all members of the reform task force were also members of the PNM party. In other words, this was an “internal” initiative, bereft of any potential for dissent. The PNM party had leveraged local government reform as an election promise in the 2015 general election. For its execution, they hired a highly qualified brand strategy team of four core members to refresh the 2016 events through creative design – freelance designers and political consultants worked closely to create an image of a modern, professional state project under the auspices of the PNM

party. Through my political connections, I got embedded into this team that called the shots with regards to the branding and messaging of the consultations.

Even though the campaign team worked closely with MRDLG to execute the events, its mission was enfolded into the PNM party's political agenda. In fact, the same group of people had assisted the PNM party's political strategy for the 2015 general elections, the local government elections in Trinidad and Tobago in 2013, and would also come to handle the campaign strategy for the 2016 local government elections. A member of this team had been involved in politics herself before diving into the realm of political and brand strategy. The team had access to public polling, data on voter sentiment, and in fact also leveraged my research findings to inform some of their strategy decisions on the ground. Needless to say, my contribution to the team was entirely oral and anonymized.

The campaign team that executed these events worked arduously on every material dimension of the consultation to index the authenticity of the PNM party's agenda over the past failed attempts of both leading political parties. They were all too aware of the dulled expectations of the attending public when it came to reform. So the intent became to present a tightly packaged message of devolution that signaled both commitment and a new frontier.

Throughout the five-month schedule (from December 2015 – April 2016), information on the location, time and content of every consultation was broadcast through radio, newspaper ads, social media, and even TT's ubiquitous "micmen" who drove around in cars outfitted with microphones, blaring out the information at hand. After the first few months, television ads on the reform consultations had to be suspended due to increased costs. Instead, the deployment of social media – Facebook pages, YouTube videos<sup>29</sup> and a website dedicated to the reform agenda – presented other ways to reinvigorate the fifty-year-old message of reform (see also Tack 2008).

Perhaps rightly, Snider would have defined the Trinidadian consultations as “high stakes” activities (2010:92) that were both highly publicized and recorded for future leverage.

The deliberate use of red color - the official party color of the PNM party – on printed banners and publicity materials indexed the association of the event with politics<sup>30</sup>. The official icon of the consultations was also a red location pin, inspired by the symbol used in Google Maps and the mobile application, Wayz. A member of the consultation-campaign team said of this decision, “The pin is not a place. The pin is where I am. The pin is where you are. The pin is the person. So if you want to get to local government, the rationalization for the logo and the look was, ‘I’m here. Are you here? *Where are you* [original emphasis]?’”



*Image 8: Banner promoting local government reform*

The stage itself was purposefully reduced in height, “so people felt closer to the Minister” (pers. comm., April 26, 2016). It was flanked by four to six giant banners propped up on wooden stands that read - Transparency, Democracy, Accountability, Autonomy, Efficiency, and Employment. A team member said they made for a great TV frame and also suggested a forthright government that was ready to talk.

Khan didn't use a podium or a hand-held mic on stage; the team feared it would make the event a "preaching forum." Instead, he relied on a mouthpiece that was barely visible, disappearing behind his ear and down into his shirt from the back. This was a conscious attempt to make the venue seem "cozy" and more "personal," said a team member. The familiarity of the message and format of discussion lent the consultation an aura of stale predictability that stood out sharply against the desire of the campaign team to differentiate itself from past consultation experiments. Multiplied fourteen times, these decisions signified an overt political strategy to emphasize authenticity through political differentiation.

The last time local government reform had been promised was in 2013 under a different administration – a coalition called the People's Partnership (PP) that included the main opposition party, the UNC. Then, too, the promise of reform was taken to all 14 municipalities between March and May 2013. This exercise resulted in a draft white paper, "Local Government Transformation and Modernization 2013" (GRTT 2013a) that is now relegated to the annals of online archiving following the election of the new government. It does not require a stretch of one's imagination to consider that the 2016 consultations were organized as a political response to the efforts of the prior administration. Furthermore, the timing of the consultations could not have been better - local government elections were also due the same year as the consultations. Local elections continue to be important to the state-level political machinery because they serve as a barometer of how the political administration is faring (Daily Express Editorial 2018). Control of local government Councils would ensure a favorable perception of the party in power.

Ahmed (2014:92-93) points out that "[i]f the performative opens up the future, it does so precisely in the process of repeating past conventions, as to repeat something is always to open up the (structural) possibility that one will repeat something with a difference." The value of a

performative act thus lies in the transformative potential of the activity itself (Lambek 2013) - the means over the end, if you may. Politicking lay not in the message of the consultations, which was tediously old, but in the craft of execution. In fact, it was more important for MRDLG (read: PNM Executive) to ensure that the consultations *happened* than what their outcome was. The most glaring testimony to this was the sheer absence of formal documentation of the proposed reform agenda before the consultations. Unlike attempts by previous administrations, this set of replicated promises had almost no paper trail. Except for a paragraph in the PNM Manifesto which outlined broad plans for the new government in power, there was no green paper, white paper or draft policy for the public to peruse and comment upon. These events were not intended to encourage deliberative dialogue (see also Amsler and Speers 2005) or promote public decision-making (Leighninger and Mann 2011). They were political exercises of showmanship and image consolidation.

At the first and last consultation of the series, PM Keith Rowley himself shared the dais with Khan. Rowley's positionality as the government head and party leader obfuscated the distinction between a government versus party initiative in the form of the consultations.



*Image 9: Stage set-up at a consultation with Rowley second-from-left*

Many a time Khan adamantly asserted that the reform consultations were an apolitical initiative. In one instance he demurred, “I just want to give this audience another assurance, this empowerment that we would be embarking on is not for PNM corporations only.” He used his speech to frame the political project of reform as an apolitical aspiration of good governance. In doing so, his speech act attempted to re-constitute the relationship of party-voter to state-citizen -

For example, in the United States, if Walmart wants to come into a community to build a big store, they can't just do it, you know? You'll have a town hall meeting in your town and the residents would come out and if they adjudicate that they don't want no Walmart there... Walmart could know Obama, no Walmart ain't building because the system of governance is very much empowered to the community. America votes for everything. [Consultation event, Jan 27, 2016]

At the same time, he applauded his party, the PNM, for steering reform talk to this juncture -

Ladies and gentlemen, in speaking about transformation since 1962, successive administrations have researched, tracked, discussed and consulted with the public on the benefits of a decentralization of Government and really and truly it has all been talk... essentially, successive administrations have kicked the can down the road. Now the ball is in our court and I want to make a bold statement today that under our Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley we are not going to kick the can along the road any longer. Local government reform is going to happen in this term of office of this PNM administration. [Consultation event, Jan 27, 2016]

Taken in totality, the extensive emphasis on the presentation of the consultations, the strategic use of PNM symbolism, the timing of the events, and the fact that it was overseen and presented by PNM leadership confirms that the reform consultations were arduously planned political exercises that signaled, both, the ushering in of a new political administration as well as the reinsertion of politics into matters of local governance. This is paradoxical given the content of the reform consultations but in the context of how party culture has been historically nurtured and prioritized over decentralized governance, this is also not surprising.

Yet, at these events I also witnessed a disjuncture between the slickness of the consultations and the raw laments of a public that is already conditioned to such political



exercises of showmanship. The agenda of the campaign team was to present a consolidated and rebranded message of reform on the heels of local government elections later in the year. In practice, those spaces where the state and public collided (like the Q&A session, the selection of the moderator, Councilors standing in the same line as public speakers) incubated ever-ready opportunities for the disruption of such state-ness. In essence, I witnessed both the perpetuation of and failure of party politics to satisfy the wants and needs of its target audience. This critical observation frames the rest of this dissertation.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter opens with an ethnography of the SGRC consultation on local government reform – one of eight such events that have laid the foundation for my research on the entrenched nature of party politics in the lives of ordinary Trinidadians. In order to make my case that such “sightings of the state” (Jakimow 2014b) be viewed as performative, political exercises to consolidate party identity, I first offer a detailed historical account of the centralization of authority in the hands of the British Crown in colonial TT. I contend that the desire to retain fierce control over the country’s administration (that was first wielded by the British Governor’s office) has since been incorporated into how the free and democratic nation-state of Trinidad and Tobago chooses to govern. Like its predecessors, in the free state as well, ultimate control rests in the hands of a few – one might even say in the hands of one (read: the PM). The evolution of a party culture has led to the decay of governance as partisan motivations overshadow the responsibility of representation and accountability. The Executive arm of government dominates over matters of administration and governance alike.

I use this backdrop to deconstruct the cultural specificities of the public consultations on reform for their dual purpose of performing politics through the representation of state-ness. These events reinserted the state into the local thus reinforcing its leviathan influence over everyday life, and also leveraging a familiar, unkept promise in order to reintroduce the political into matters of local governance. Such an execution of statecraft lends itself to the project of state consolidation while surreptitiously enforcing the primacy of party politics. For the PNM party influencing the flow of these events, the absence of government materiality was over-compensated for by an almost manic focus on the visceral demonstration of authenticity of intent. The campaign team in charge of “producing” the events repainted a stale promise with the glossy veneer of showmanship. Cleverly hidden in the regurgitated transcript of reform was a message of political vigor that was elaborately spread - fourteen times over five months - across the country.

The consultations became the perfect sites to witness the stress between the everyday anxieties of the public and people’s ejaculations of praise and ritualistic deference upon encountering the monolithic state and its charismatic leadership. Consequently, in the rest of this dissertation, I turn my lens towards those in attendance, and the making and unmaking of political subjectivities in the midst of reform rhetoric. I suggest that public attendance and participation at the “apolitical” reform consultations paradoxically indexes the structuring force of party partisanship linked primarily to the socio-historical confluence of racialized, clientelist dependencies.

### CHAPTER 3

## IDENTITY POLITICS IN A PLURAL SOCIETY

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### *Introduction*

So far I made the case for viewing the reform consultations as political events favoring the PNM party. Indeed, most of my research participants who attended the consultations confirmed their support for the same party. Of these, majority also identified as African (see Table 6 and 7). In fact, according to an independent research firm hired for the consultations, the *majority* of all public attendees at the SFCC and SGRC consultations identified as African (FKJackie Consultancy 2015, 2016). This is pertinent because, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, the two municipalities actually boast of almost equal proportions of African, East Indian and Mixed/Other race groups; this was not reflected at the reform events.

In this chapter, I turn my lens towards the structural relationship between race and politics in Trinidad to understand how race-based politics within the context of a plural society affects how political subjectivities are cultivated. I do this by exploring the dialectic between the language of multiculturalism and race to show how even the rejection of race-based identification reproduces the structural conditions that makes it a salient category of groupness in the Trinidadian context. Consequently, race retains a viscous quality (Saldanha 2007), a stickiness, that manifests significantly through political organization.

While I acknowledge the conceptual distinction between race and ethnicity, for the purpose of this dissertation, I use the terms interchangeably to signify both physical peculiarities between social groups as well as cultural distinctiveness (Sudama 1983:78). My decision is also in sync with the emic uses of the terms in the specific context of TT - Trinbagonians colloquially

embrace “race” to differentiate between social groups while formal government documents resort to “ethnicity” for the same purpose.

### ***Encountering racism***

Sandra is a dear friend and part of my clique of three Trinidadian girlfriends (Sandra, Ramona and Aisha) since my days of preliminary fieldwork. All four of us are of Indian heritage – I am Indian from India, they are of East Indian ethnicity in Trinidad. My friendship with the girls is a product of both chance and cultural synergies. Our engagement began auspiciously on New Year’s Eve in 2012 when my husband and I arrived in Trinidad and promptly looked up a Couchsurfing<sup>31</sup> host we had been communicating with over the internet – Ramona. Ramona is a school teacher who is also friends with Sandra, a teacher from another school, and Aisha, an administrative assistant in her own school. Ramona couldn’t host us on that first trip but over the next few years I stayed with her many times, unabashedly viewing her home as my safe haven whenever I was in between home-stays. Ramona’s ethnic identity was irrelevant during our search for hosts on that first trip to Trinidad but it did the job of endearing me to her much more quickly. Her father was a temple priest – when I first met him, he almost immediately asked me if I was married, if I had married a Hindu, and if I spoke Hindi. Whenever I visited Ramona’s home, the television channel would almost always be set to a Hindi soap opera with English subtitles (most East Indians do not know Hindi). Ramona lives in a predominantly East Indian community; I celebrated Indian festivals with her family, attended an Indian wedding, and was even invited to speak at an East-Indian community felicitation event once.

Over the next few years, my friendship with the three women grew considerably. We would “lime” over *phoulories*<sup>32</sup> at Aisha’s house some days or visit the Laxmi Narayan Temple

when there was live music and a buffet dinner or, when the timing was right, go for “high tea” to the Mount St. Benedict Monastery. We drooled over Shah Rukh Khan (read: Bollywood) movies together, did the Caroni Swamp tour countless times (just because) and talked about food, family, lovers and everything in between. From our conversations I knew that neither girl would ever marry outside the East Indian community – even if the route to marriage was littered with the sorrows of ill-fated “other” relationships.

Sandra lives close to SFCC - where I was doing fieldwork in 2016. On lighter days, I would send her a text and we would meet up for lunch or dinner. Sandra is a strict vegetarian and a strong believer in the Hare Rama Hare Krishna movement – once she insisted on treating me to paneer butter masala at her favorite Hare Rama Hare Krishna restaurant to prove that the dish made in Trinidad was still authentically “Indian.” Unlike my experience with Ramona, I stayed with Sandra only once during my fieldwork and it has everything to do with her mother. Sandra’s mother (“Aunty”) will forever live in my memory as the most racist person I have ever met.

Aunty is a short woman with a heavy stomach. She spoke in a rough voice, her face permanently crumpled into wrinkles. She is sour and grumpy. She complained about everything, most of all Africans – “dem with their curly lips and curly hair.” I did not know this side to Aunty when I excitedly told her and Sandra the night I stayed with them that I had, quite by chance, had dinner with Keith Rowley after the last reform consultation event. Sandra asked what I thought of him. I interpreted that to mean she was awestruck because, after all, I had broken bread with the country’s Prime Minister. However as the evening progressed, I realized that the mother-daughter duo were, in fact, incredulously curious as to why I would want to hang

out with “dat man.” Even then, I naively chalked it up to mean that they did not approve of Rowley, the politician, until the conversation veered in the direction of appearances.

Sandra softly admitted to me in front of her mother that African faces scared her. I was taken aback because it seemed incongruous with the fact that she taught African children in school. In fact, her school was a Christian-denomination school with majority Africans. Unlike her mother, however, Sandra appeared to struggle with her own racism. At one point, the conversation turned towards “dem 20,000 Jamaicans” who Sandra’s mother asserted were living in Trinidad. “Dey all thieves, they all come in with guns!” she said forcefully to which Sandra said mockingly, “All have guns?!” “Most of ‘em,” her mother quipped back. I stumbled along in the conversation, desperately trying to reconcile my multiple subjectivities that were thrust together in that moment – that of a cultural confidant, a sympathetic friend, a critical researcher, an ethical human being.

A few more wince-worthy comments later, Sandra’s mother said something about the country being doomed because Africans were a majority. I couldn’t help myself in that moment - I blurted out that East Indians, in fact, outnumbered Africans in the country. “See?!” Sandra turned around and said to her mother. Her mother muttered a response and waddled slowly towards the kitchen. Just like that our conversation had ended. On the television set that was on this whole time, I overheard a news report of yet another African found dead “in de bush” in Laventille. I stared blankly at the screen for some time. At 9p.m., not at all tired, I excused myself and went to my room, eager to suspend all thoughts with an episode of *Call the Midwife*.

In a way, the above incident epitomizes my experiences with both Africans and East Indians when it came to discussions on race. My positionality as an Indian and also my status as a transient, non-local researcher opened up intimate and private spaces for me to encounter deep-

seated mistrust between East Indians and Africans even as the two groups espoused discourses of multiculturalism in public. Indeed, I observed racial groupness in the midst of everyday conviviality like liming together, kids of different race groups attending the same school, and participating in multi-racial community events (see Chapter 5 for more on this). In the analysis that follows, I explore the history of racial tensions between the African and East Indian communities and also how such identities are continually being renegotiated. The core of my argument, however, rests on the premise that the complexity of mixing (Khan 2004; Munasinghe 2001) in the Trinidadian context forces the re-articulation of race talk in politics through narratives of loyalty, tolerance and the language of ethics instead, so paradoxically revealing the potency of race in a plural context. Race, it appears, continues to be a structuring force in how Trinidadians organize themselves socially and politically. I begin with some theory on identity politics.

### *Theory on identity politics*

Foreshadowing the post-structuralist approach to the study of agency among ethnic groups, more than forty years ago, social anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1969) suggested narrowing down the definition of ethnicity from cultural traits and shared norms to what was socially effective. He emphasized ethnicity as a social relationship independent of the group's properties. Such an examination of ethnicity gives it an inherent plasticity that prioritizes agency. In anthropological literature, the construction of ethnicity based on shared traits tends to be overshadowed by theories about how such constructed identities encounter and engage with one another. As such, the study of identity in anthropology is always a social construction.

Brubaker (2006) expands on the notion of ethnicity without groups, emphasizing the need to focus on “categories” rather than “groups” as the former allows for a processual view of identity formation – one that includes the ebb and flow of relations between and within group members that are contingent upon varying historical contexts. The parameters of identity formation can thus be interpreted as an exercise in “boundary-making” (Wimmer 2013) that is critical to understanding how identities can also be manipulated (see also Li 2000; Ebron and Tsing 1995).

Consequently, Wimmer (2013:148) offers us a heuristic tool for understanding the fission and fusion between group identities - ethnicity, he said, was a social category made up of several “nested levels of differentiation,” thoroughly flexible in its creation and maintenance. Inspired by Max Weber, Pierre Bourdieu and Fredrik Barth, Wimmer (2013) thus offers us insight into how ethnic groups might actually lack habitus but retain agency to navigate multiple socio-political boundaries made by the state or exogenous economic parameters.

As a dynamic process, identity creation involves the negotiation and articulation of rights and responsibilities within structural constraints. According to Comaroff and Comaroff (1992:54), ethnic identity in the postcolonial context represents the “asymmetric incorporation of structurally dissimilar groupings into a single political economy.” In development literature, scholars like De Zaldivar (2008), Li (2000; 2001) and Hall (1985) have examined processes of identity formation by looking at them as a matter of “positioning and articulation” (Li 2000:151) as opposed to overt strategies of subalterns or a reflection of false consciousness. In her work with the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago based in Indonesia, Li (2001:662) engages with the notion of ‘otherness,’ acknowledging that while ethnicity was never a historical division amongst the Indonesians, indigenous minorities were actively asserting distinct cultural



identities without which their demands for access to resources would not be considered legitimate. These groups were inserting ethnicity into the larger development discourse by acknowledging that “the concept of natives attuned to nature is associated with an attractive set of images, the approval of the international environmental lobby, and donor support” (Li 2001:671). Identifying as tribal, native or indigenous thus became a matter of negotiation and was readily adopted by ethnic groups for whom the “tribal” slot opened up room for maneuverability unavailable to ordinary villagers.

Riggans (2013) and Jakimow (2014b) have similarly explored formations of political subjectivities through the interpellation of social identities in relation to the state. For example, in Ecuador during the 1980s, the rallying cry of identity enabled the unstructured community of Indians to become “a sort of community capable of imagining itself as a social group, its members joined by shared symbolic and historical bonds reinvented through political rituals such as uprisings” (De Zaldivar 2008:594). It is within social, political and economic constraints that minority groups are articulating their ethnic identities and wielding a particular type of agency through that process.

However, unlike most scholarship on ethnic identity making, in Trinidad the study of ethnicity is not grounded in an analysis of dissimilarly positioned social groups. In other words, neither Africans nor East Indians can claim to be marginalized nor coopt subaltern strategies towards political representation. In the next few sections, I offer a synopsis of race relations in colonial Trinidad, highlighting how the East Indian faction opportunistically embraced a discourse of racial marginalization in the build-up to TT’s first general election in 1962; they had to discard that narrative following the oil boom and subsequent wave of economic prosperity in

the 1970s. By this time, however, they had consolidated their identity as a formidable voting bloc.

The perpetuation of racial rhetoric in politics in spite of the social restructuring of both major ethnic groups suggests a different force is at play that keeps race talk relevant. I suggest that we view party identity in Trinidad as a heuristic for racial identity in that the former does the job of boundary maintenance between the two racial groups. In this context, cultural differences become mere functions of groupness, rather than characteristics of a group (Jenkins 1997:11; see also Hughes 1994). I discuss this at length in the following sections.

### *Trinidad's history of colonial racism*

Contemporary ethnic or race relations in Trinidad have their basis in the colonial history of the country and the Caribbean, writ large. Following Haiti's anti-slavery rebellion that ended in 1804, British colonizers in Trinidad became fearful of similar unrest within the country. Thirty years later, their fears were confirmed - public sentiment and political pressure within Britain forced the Crown to abolish slavery across its colonies with the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. Post emancipation, the availability of land in the Northern Range became an appealing location for many African manumitted slaves in Trinidad who viewed squatting as a better alternative to continued servitude on the sugar estates (Khan 1997). Desperate for labor, British colonizers took to promoting a discourse of laziness amongst slaves in order to justify, to the British Crown, replacing African slaves with indentured laborers instead (Munasinghe 2001).

The confluence of emancipation and labor shortage so became a historical watershed that opened the door for indentured laborers from Asia, mainly from India but some Chinese as well, to enter and replace the erstwhile slave workers in the West Indies. Working conditions of these

contracted laborers replicated those found under African slavery. Unhygienic and cramped living conditions, laborious work days, and minimal pay severely restricted East Indians' prospects for social mobility (Fonaroff 1968; Munasinghe 2001; Ramesar 1976; Singh 1994).

The British Crown's racial segregationist policies of the 18<sup>th</sup> century became a type of "biopolitical investment" (Ong 2005:86) linking African and East Indian bodies and identities to their bankability in the world market, and contribution to the domestic economy. The two dominant race groups were importations into practically "empty lands" (Mintz 1996). As such, these two groups were "always already commodities" (Yelvington 1995) wherein their racial identity was linked to their ability to work. Colonizers used these socio-economic parameters to cause fragmentation between the groups: Africans, for example, were made security guards on those estates that had East Indians working in the sugar fields (Despres 1969).

Soon British colonizers adopted the same derogatory contempt towards indentured Indians in order to justify the continuation of indentureship and servitude that they used to decimate the Amerindians and enslave Africans (Williams 1964:111). In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, the then Governor of Trinidad, Lord Harris lumped Africans and Indians together when he said,

The only independence which they would desire is idleness, according to their different tastes in the enjoyment of it... After having given my best consideration to the subject, it appears to me that, in the first place, the immigrants must pass through an initiatory process; they are not, neither African nor Coolies<sup>33</sup>, fit to be placed in a position which the laborers of civilized countries may at once occupy..." [cited in Williams 1964:111]

The "outsider" status of East Indians was compounded by discrimination within the African community itself. That indentured laborers were willing to work in servile conditions with sharply reduced wages led many Africans to take a progressive view of their own race as a people "who have got beyond the stage of civilization that is satisfied with a loin cloth and a pot of rice" (cited in Singh 1985:36). As a result, East Indians found themselves *already* stigmatized

as an ethnic group that would be satisfied with “a low standard of living, manual drudgery, seasonal underemployment and wasted labor, and unfair and ill treatment” (Ramesar 1976:13). The existing social hierarchy didn’t see any major reshuffle as East Indians were relegated to a position *outside* this ideological framework. Segregation and derogation of this population by the African populace was a direct result of their association with agricultural labor.

The division of labor between the two race groups forced the creation of economic niches and social divisions between the East Indian and African populations that continued to manifest in 20<sup>th</sup> century socio-economic relations. In his ethnographic study on factory workers in Trinidad, Yelvington (1995:137) highlighted the historical ramifications of the successful “divide and rule” policies of the British wherein, even in 1995, both ethnic groups agreed that they would rather have a White boss oversee their work so as to not be taken advantage of by either an East Indian or African superior! Stress between the two groups had come to assert itself across horizontal rather than vertical social tiers (Lowenthal 1967).

Such a type of segregation along occupational lines also historically contained the two groups within different geographical boundaries. The agricultural sector in Central and South Trinidad came to be dominated by East Indians while Africans found themselves as either squatters in the north or engaged in petty jobs on colonial estates as free men and women. As an economic and symbolic resource, land became imbued with racial identity and as such harbored “reduced and concealed representations [of race] that are seen as natural and imbued with predictive power, rather than as social and contingent” (Khan 1997:65). For example, conceptual linkages between identity, race and place got epitomized through cultural tropes and folk songs from the “South” that was now identified as the bastion of East Indians. In effect, the municipal

corporations of Chaguanas, Penal-Debe, and Princes Town came to be viewed as “consummate sites of ‘real’ East Indian life and culture on the island” (Khan 1997:62).

Ethnic identity as a structuring force became a form of “‘involuntary’ social identity seen in relation to a socially constructed ultimate ancestral link between an individual and a named group, which has presumed to have shared ancestors and a common culture” (Yelvington 1995:24). It mattered less that the “South” actually encompassed much of the middle of the country. Similarly, the East-West corridor, in the north of the country became racialized as the mainstay of the African population. One of my research sites, SGRC is located along this East-West corridor while the other, SFCC is located in South Trinidad.

### ***Race relations in the build-up to Independence***

Following the end of indentureship in 1917, Trinidadian society experienced a new wave of sociocultural restructuring that reflected the emergence of new livelihood options outside of the plantation sites. In the years preceding Independence in 1962, the country’s populace could be characterized by three class categories: the international bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie and the working class (Sudama 1983). The international (or metropolitan) bourgeoisie was made up of wealthy, foreigner Whites who controlled the production of oil, sugar, cocoa, and coffee. The local petty bourgeoisie was itself bifurcated into racial fractions of East Indians, Africans, and local Whites made up of French and English Creoles, Portuguese, Chinese, and Syrians. This class comprised of traders, small manufacturers, farmers, self-employed individuals and other white-collared professionals (Sudama 1983:82). East Indians and Africans, the two dominant racial groups in the country made up the bulk of the working class.

However, as historically East Indians and Africans occupied different socio-economic niches, they exhibited ideological differences in spite of occupying similar class positions. For example, East Indians represented the category of independent petty bourgeoisies who along with the local Whites were interested in least government interference in their economic activities (Sudama 1983:84, 88-89); this ideological alignment between the two racial groups would ultimately precipitate a political alliance in the run-up to Independence. Africans, on the other hand, were dependent petty bourgeoisies whose jobs as public servants, teachers, and middle- and lower-level employees in the manufacturing industry encouraged paternalistic dependency on the state for economic and social support (Sudama 1983:84). Within the working class too, East Indians dominated the sugar, cocoa, coconut, and citrus industries while Africans commanded higher salaries through skilled and unskilled labor associated with the oil industry, and public works departments (Sudama 1983:84). The majority of the organized working class was comprised of Africans.

The first general elections were held in TT in 1956 under the auspices of the Crown Colony system. In a desire to control the state apparatus currently managed by the British Governor, the African petty bourgeoisie aligned with the international bourgeoisie under a system of tutelage; the PNM party emerged from this amalgamation. The party under Eric Williams' leadership formed the government in spite of winning only 38.7% of the votes. It was a consequence of smart politicking that involved collaborating with the Crown Colony-appointed Governor of that time. And so, executive power came to be in the hands of a national minority. This election became a watershed for class and race differences to dictate the country's political trajectory.

The East Indian petty bourgeoisie quickly formed the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in response to the aggressive, nationalist stance taken by the PNM party to take over control of the government. Socio-economic differences between the two dominant race groups in Trinidad congealed around the exercise of amassing political capital. Following the dismantling of the Federation of the West Indies of which TT was a part, PNM pushed for complete independence from the British Crown and declared general elections in 1961. Racial polarization reached new heights: of this Albert Gomes (1974:187) said, "the Indian-Negro confrontation exploded in racial violence during the general elections of 1961 and for a time it seemed that the entire community would be engulfed."

In response to a rapidly strengthening PNM voter base, the East Indian and local White petty bourgeoisies united to lend support to the newly minted DLP party - a coalition of the PDP and two other small parties - the Trinidad Labour Party and the Party of Political Progress Groups. However, the combined voter strength of the African petty bourgeoisie and the African working class proved too much for the DLP. The PNM party once again formed the government.

DLP's failure was in large measure because party members viewed themselves as a minority group that needed protection and so promulgated a narrative of "self-persecution" (Sudama 1983:89). The DLP leader of the time, Dr. Rudranath Capildeo, appealed to his base to use violence to protect the cause but the African petty bourgeoisie called his bluff. East Indians never took to arms; their political leaders rationalized the decision as fearing "the Negroes would create disorder and civil strife and never allow us to rule" (cited in Sudama 1983:89). This episode disenchanted the local White petty bourgeoisie that had lent its support to DLP's cause; they switched alliances to join the PNM party. So Eric Williams became the free country's first Prime Minister. DLP remained the main opposition party from 1957 – 1971.

### *Ethnic mobilization under Eric Williams*

Eric Williams is by far the most popular political figure in TT's post-colonial history. His charisma lay in his ability to coax and cajole a newly-freed people, to convince them to elect him as their Prime Minister in 1962, and to continue doing so for the next twenty years. Williams' political avatar was cultivated in the shadow of the country's struggle for independence, and yet he is most notably known as a Caribbean historian. Williams received his doctorate in 1938 from Oxford University. His doctoral thesis, "The Economic Aspect of the West Indian Slave Trade and Slavery" was consequently revised to become the book, *Capitalism and Slavery*, in 1944. In 1939, he moved to the United States and became an assistant professor at Howard University. With his mentor, C.L.R. James, in 1945 he authored a three-volume series, "Documents Illustrating the Development of Civilization," for a humanities course he was teaching. During his tenure he produced other literary works on political theory and the "Negro question" (Cudjoe 1997:753)<sup>34</sup>.

In 1946, Williams took a leave of absence from Howard University and began work at the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission where he continued his involvement in academic publications and editing. Deeply influenced by African-American scholars during his time in the United States, he became convinced of the importance of education on the path to liberation (Cudjoe 1997:753-754). Denied a coveted position at the aforementioned Commission, Williams entered the political arena in Trinidad and Tobago in 1955. Firmly believing in the power of education, and civic education in particular, he became energetically involved in the University of Woodford Square lecture series between 1955 and 1956. These public lectures that were held in the open, in the heart of Port of Spain, confirmed his appeal as a mass leader with oratorical



superiority to his peers. The University of Woodford Square formed the intellectual basis for the country's fight for sovereignty (Trotman 2007; Williams 1964).

In 1962, the year of the country's Independence, Williams (1964:283) published *A History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago*, claiming that before this book “[t]here [have been] no histories of Trinidad and Tobago, using ‘history’ in the acknowledged sense.” Compiled largely from a collection of 999 documents published by the Historical Society of Trinidad and Tobago, the book conferred upon Williams the status of an erudite politician and a legitimate leader who personified the country's liberated future. His book became symbolic of a nation demanding control over its own narrative. So enamored was a listener at one of Williams' early speeches that De Wilton Rogers (1970:42) noted him saying, “This is man. He is the Savior of the Negro. He expose them slave drivers. Look all those names, the man know what he is saying. We must follow him. Never before the Negro had such a champion” (see also Cudjoe 1997).

Under the garb of a welfare state, Williams' administration lavishly bestowed upon its African voter base government subsidies, jobs and housing options to retain its political loyalty. For the petty bourgeoisies, the PNM administration established financial institutions to stimulate the small business sector and develop an entrepreneurial class at the local level. Housing loans became cheaper, small businesses mushroomed and wage labor rates increased. For the working class, the effusion of welfare policies and programs cultivated life-long political loyalties.

On the one hand, race and party identification became all too-easily aligned. On the other hand, class interests of the local petty African bourgeoisie and local White bourgeoisie also found their synergies. The desire and desperation for capitalist development following Independence nurtured a clientelist relationship between the existing international bourgeoisie class that

controlled the means of production in Trinidad, and the new alliance of Africans and local Whites through the PNM party.

The institution of the simple plurality electoral system (read: FPTP) in 1969 had already side-lined legitimately ethnically-centrist political parties from parliamentary representation (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:121). The continued association of economic interests with racial identity not only informed the coalition of race and class in TT but it also manifested in a type of “graduated sovereignty” (Ong 2005:87) that gave Africans more political and economic privileges over East Indians in the first thirty years of the country’s independence. C.L.R James, who had been a mentor to Williams, and was a stalwart of the nascent PNM party, warned Williams of such pervasive tactics to amass loyalty. For the party to become a truly national movement, Williams needed to “move the basis of the party from loyalty to an individual to a communal project” (Cudjoe 1997:761). Williams did not relent. In the process, he “dislocated” (Cudjoe 1997:761-762) himself from the discursive construction of a shared, national, pan-ethnic political identity. He “ceased listening to his constituency” (Cudjoe 1997:761) that was eager for social change. By 1972, he was pandering to the likes of the privileged class that paradoxically looked to him “as their savior from the ‘barbarous hordes’” (Cudjoe 1997:761). His indifference paved the way for revolutionary leaders of the Black Power Movement to capture the imagination of the masses.

By the early 1970s, African unemployed youth were congregating “on de block” to discuss and debate post-colonial racial ideologies emerging out of Latin America, the United States, and even other Caribbean countries. The PNM party under Williams’ leadership faced criticism from its own supporters, a large bloc of who viewed the government as “the rubber stamp for the White power structure” (NJAC 1971:3-4). This disillusionment with the state

culminated in the Black Power Movement that revolted against the *unequal* control over resources (Crichlow 1998, original emphasis). Black poets and calypsonians like Lasagna Kwesi and the Mighty Chalkdust, and political leaders like Geddes Granger steered this unrest into targeted political action through the movement (Alvaré 2011; Belgrave 1995; Trotman 2007). Critically, Granger also attempted to reach out to the East Indian community but the latter continued to remain loyal to the DLP, fearing that the success of the Black Power Movement “would merely replace one African-dominated government with another” (Alvaré 2011:54). This bifurcation of ethnic loyalties from amongst the jointly discriminated African and East Indian populations precluded a concerted class-based opposition to the PNM party and continued to spur racial antagonism between the two groups.

The PNM government under Williams came down hard on the movement, jailing its leaders and calling a State of Emergency. To appease the agitators, Williams instituted the Wooding Commission to fundamentally examine the utility of a bicameral government in the context of Trinidad and Tobago. Consequently, the Commission recommended dissolving the Senate, expanding the Legislature, and adopting a combination of FPTP and proportional representation to ensure political representation for various interest groups and ethnicities. The Parliament, led by Williams, rejected the report and accused it of being “part of the deliberate effort to break down the centralizing tendencies in this country” (Williams 1975:83).

### ***Oil, and the socio-economic mobility of East Indians***

During this time, international oil prices were booming and the opportunity was not lost on Williams. Oil had been discovered in the country in 1857 by the American Merrimac Oil Company - when Trinidad was still ruled by the British Crown (Furlonge and Kaiser 2010:553).

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, commercial petroleum extraction was significantly contributing to TT's economy<sup>35</sup>. By the time of the Black Power Movement, petroleum accounted for 75% of exports and made up 20% of the country's GDP.

Williams decided to deflect attention from the party and towards the oil windfall the country was experiencing. He sparked a wave of domestic infrastructural investments (Furlonge and Kaiser 2010); the country adopted an "open petroleum economy" with oil revenues dictating the pace of development (Yelvington 1995). State welfare was paid for by the heady abundance of oil monies flowing into the country. Proudly stating that "money was no problem" (Macdonald 1986:191), Williams expanded state ownership across major economic sectors including petroleum, sugar, fisheries, shipping, and telecommunication. He continued to justify the process as "localization" of the economy (Bissessar 2004:94), managed and controlled by the state for the benefit of the local population.

At the same time, it was important to Williams that the two dominant racial groups not collaborate in a joint class-based movement against the state. He used the flow of oil monies to divide and control the possibility of mass agitation. In doing so, "the state apparatus became the instrument for the preservation of an iniquitous social order upon which political power was based" (Hintzen 1989:180). In short, the PNM government adopted a dual strategy of patronage and ideological warfare to continue appeasing working class voters while controlling "militant" elements (Sudama 1983:90). Leadership of large trade unions was determined by the PNM administration, and with it political favors to worker organizations like the Seaman and Waterfront Workers Trade Union, the Amalgamated Workers Trade Union, the National Union of Government Employees, and the All Trinidad Sugar Estates and Factory Workers Trade Union became more overt and systematic. Meanwhile militant unions like the Oilfield Workers

Trade Union were stigmatized and threatened with arrest (Sudama 1983:90). Williams all but ensured politics and racial identity took precedence over a class or labor-based political movement.

The richer the country got, the more its emphasis shifted from domestic production to the importation of foodstuffs; as a result, the mostly East Indian farmers suffered severe losses during this period of industrial expansion (Yelvington 1995). Oil production created a more defined class system that, on account of historical labor and race relations, also congealed around different race groups (see also Ramsaran 2004). Today TT remains a single-commodity economy that teeters on the arbitrariness of fluctuating global oil prices (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:86). Forty percent of its gross domestic product and 80% of its exports are oil and gas-based (Looney 2017). Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the precariousness of oil dependency over a diversified economy has manifested in the form of increased crime and violence, ethnic antagonism, and corruption (Looney 2017).

However, it was during the global oil boom of the 1970s that the East Indian community as a whole exhibited the greatest upward social mobility (Yelvington 1995:66) and spurred the consolidation of disgruntled East Indians into a formidable voting bloc for the coming decades (Khan 2004). Led by the oil boom, economic and political changes through business expansion, compulsory schooling, and new job opportunities East Indians became incentivized to take a more active role in establishing their own identities. In other words, the East Indian community in Trinidad chose to perform its identity with increased vigor within the larger context of Trinidadian culture.

According to his theory of performative cultural identity, Olaniyan views culture “as an intricate and open process of practices and discriminations... Identity in the performative

conception is a *process* marked by endless negotiations” (1995:31, original emphasis). East Indians embarked on a mission of increasing ethnic consciousness and, in the process, instigated a multitude of socio-linguistic changes in Trinidadian society. The East Indian community that had capitalized on the burgeoning oil economy now framed its identity around neoliberal ideals of entrepreneurship and individualism.

In 2013, as part of a consulting project, I had collected narratives on economic development from the East Indian community in the Chaguanas Borough Corporation (CBC) - an erstwhile plantation site. These “narratives of enterprise” (Ramchandani 2016) pitted historical discourses of the “negro mentality” of “free-spending, luxury loving, improvident” Africans against the “industrious,” “culturally saturated” East Indian people (Munasinghe 2001:64). For example, Dev Prasad, an East Indian temple priest said to me,

I will tell you something. This is not a racist statement but everybody in Trinidad knows that the Indian community in Trinidad pays a very high emphasis on education. The parents will make all the sacrifices to make sure that the children go to school and for the simple reason, getting out of the poverty cycle ... For example, I come from a family of nine ... they [parents] made a lot of sacrifices, but they made sure that their sons went to school. The sons accepted the education and they were able to improve themselves. You can't underscore that importance ... so you have that kind of development.... The only way to get them [Africans] out [of poverty] is education and like I said earlier on, with the Afro-Trinidadians, masses do not take to education. The opportunity is there but they don't accept it. [2016:46-47]

I encountered a similar narrative from a Mixed person. Shannon oversaw a non-governmental program for rural women in CBC. In her experience, it is the business-oriented “culture” that has made East Indians successful:

From a business perspective, and here we use the word ‘culture’ ... we have seen the Indians have a capacity for getting into business.... They know how to start small, so you don't have to train them to do that. They also know how to save a little and get into business and use the profits from the business to save and grow. I think it's the culture they came from [in] India ... therefore you have the business bustling in Chaguanas. [2016:48]

Narratives on African ethnicity and their underappreciation of education are misguided and ironic because Williams' emphasis on education in the early years of his rule seared his image as a benevolent leader amongst the African PNM loyalists I met. Yet, as numerous studies of ethnic identity-making have shown (Anderson 1982; De Zaldívar 2008; Li 2001; Munasinghe 2001; Stahler-Sholk 2010), identity construction is inherently a paradoxical exercise – while on the one hand, identities can be manipulated, incorporated, transformed and revived, the process of self-identification necessarily carries with it an inherent risk of perpetuating homogenizing sensibilities. In short, identity is a “double process in which the subject is not only ‘hailed’ into certain subject positions, but also ‘invests’ in a particular position...Depending on the context and the discursive fields in which we position ourselves, different identities are ‘activated’” (Baaz 2005:15). In the context of a plural society, however, individual subjectivities around one's ethnic identity need to be placed within a larger framework of mixing, or creolization, and the subsequent tension of selectively embracing, resisting and redefining the boundaries of belonging.

### *The egalitarian ideals of a plural society*

The social structure of a multi-racial society harbors multiple complexities of engagement and adaptation. Ethnic groups in Trinidad are essentially “socially incomplete groups” (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:151) characterized by ethnic/racial sections that are themselves atomized. They are not “enclosed” in their own languages, their cultural norms are selectively creolized, they co-occupy similar class positions, and, in the context of politics, no ethnic group has ever been attributed with formal political power. To put it another way, Meighoo (2008:121) makes a careful and critical distinction between ethnic politics and ethnic mobilization in TT's plural

society wherein ethnic politics is defined as people “explicitly seek[ing] special privileges, rights, laws, or geographical territory for their ethnic group.” To the contrary, the political landscape in Trinidad is painted with overtones of multi-racial unity and “lived interconnectedness” (Hromadžić 2015:891). Political watersheds like the Black Power movement of the 1970s, the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) party’s electoral victory in 1986, the NAR-UNC alliance in 1995, and the UNC-PP alliance in 2010 were all clarion calls for more, not less, unity in diversity.

Meighoo and Jamadar (2008:91) refer to this phenomenon of adaptability and inclusion as a “special type of egalitarianism” where “difference” in everyday life is called out without malice. Words like “dummy,” “deafy,” “black boy” and “cokey-eye,” while cringe-worthy in most other social contexts, are simply descriptors in Trinidad (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:90). A participant said to me once, “To us non-Indians, Indians were just Indians! We didn’t take time to realize they were different. In Sando (read: SFCC), Indians were just the ‘other fellow’ across the street.” V.S. Naipaul (2002:74), Trinidad’s most famous novelist, described a quintessential Trinidadian as the following - “He is adaptable; he is cynical; having no rigid social conventions of his own, he is amused by the conventions of others.”

This “peculiar sense of tolerance” (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:90) is integrated into race relations between the two dominant groups, Africans and East Indians. I was regaled with facts like how one’s neighbor is of a different race, how one’s niece married outside of her race, and how everyone celebrates Carnival together. This is all true. I have lived with both Africans and East Indians, and witnessed real camaraderie between these two major race groups as well as between other ethnicities. There is no concept of cultural appropriation in Trinidad. All ethnicities celebrate all religious festivals and incorporate cultural elements from across the



spectrum of ethnicities and religions. During Diwali, I saw an African wear the Indian *salwar kameez* and *bindi* to a Council meeting; during Eid-ul-Fitr, a Hindu East Indian donned a pale yellow abaya and a purple hijab; one participant went out of his way to give me a hand-drawn map of his neighborhood with all the religious affiliations of his neighbors, so signifying his religious tolerance.

Today, buzz words like “multiculturalism” and “entrepreneurship” are coopted by CSOs and individuals in an attempt to insert themselves into a neoliberal imaginary of self-sufficiency and participatory ethos (Alvaré 2009, Ramchandani 2016). Alvaré (2009), for example, showed how a faith-based Rastafarian NGO in Trinidad downplayed its racial history in exchange for a “multicultural” identity - an overt attempt to access funding dictated by neoliberal discourses on participatory (read: non-racialized) governance. In this sense, Trinidad represents a truly plural society which Furnivall (1957:306) originally explained as one where “the sections are not segregated; the members of the several units are intermingled and meet as individuals...” rather than one representing self-contained groups co-existing within a single state (see Smith 1965).

So the two largest race populations in Trinidad ontologically oscillate between the discourse of “callaloo” (similar to the “melting pot” reference in the United States) and “tossed salad” as two representative poles of national identity (Munasinghe 2001). For data collection purposes, I had asked participants to self-categorize in terms of ethnicity. Some participants simply refused to adopt a racial or ethnic identifier. “I am Trinidadian, descended from the Prophet,” said one participant. He found the “Indian” tag “too racial.” Another said, “Majority Africans don’t identify as Africans, we identify as Trinidadians.” In the same interview, at one point he made reference to “true Trinidadians” which he clarified to mean “not Indians.” A third said, “I want to reiterate this, while I am of Indian origin, I am first of all a Trinidadian.” In my

research most of those who self-identified as “Trinidadian” confirmed they were of Mixed heritage. The “Trinidadian” label offered an attractive alternative to the politics of ethnic identity.

By extension, some party partisans I met similarly rejected the narrative of race-based parties. They emphasized how “their” party was really created out of “mixture,” an amalgamation of “what remain[s]” that indubitably confirms a multi-racial identity. During my research in SGRC, I met an endearing elderly husband and wife couple, Cecil and Sheila, who support the PNM party. Barring one occasion when they voted for a (new) third party, they have remained PNM loyalists. Sheila was a retired school principal who regaled me with tales of now-Ministers and Senators who passed through her school. I met this couple often as Cecil loved to talk politics. One hot afternoon I found myself sitting around a long rectangular table in the enclosed verandah on the first floor of their stand-alone house. Their son-in-law, Sheldon, was working on his computer at one end of the table. I asked Cecil what he thought about the PNM party today. Midway through our conversation, Sheldon jumped in -

Cecil: The PNM’s sin has been honesty. This is a new era of politicking. US politics is very much like us – evangelicals, like Hindus, have a solid base. You can talk any kind of crap and they will still support you.

TR: So are Africans the other base?

Sheldon: The Africans are what remain!

TR: What does that mean?

Sheldon: The UNC are a voting bloc. They emerged from the DLP. They have very specific interests. After they were formed, by default, the remainders became PNM and they happened to be mostly Africans because the Indians already had the DLP. Those with financial interests – the Syrian, Chinese, etc. – dem in the middle – they chose sides based on personal interests<sup>36</sup>.

Contrast this with Felix’s narrative – the erstwhile alderman<sup>37</sup> from the PNM party. Felix is a Mixed male, quiet, and more interested in talking about his plants than politics. It took a little

prodding to get him to open up. We were talking of the political strategies between the two dominant parties, the PNM and the UNC, and why he quit the party. He said,

Felix: The UNC come out of the ONR, NAR, and other parties. They come out of mixture. UNC is taking PNM old-style politics and using it against the PNM – they make sure that party groups across the country are taken care of, that they’re walking their neighborhoods, listening to people. The PNM party group is just an eggshell. The UNC invest their time and energy in the younger generation.

TR: Is that why you quit?

Felix: I know I wasn’t going back as an alderman again because I wasn’t part of their [PNM] group. I was too clean probably.

What makes the two narratives similar is the story of the political parties emerging in opposition to one another. What makes them different is the order in which one party became the antithesis of the other. This is a crucial turn in the genesis stories because the implication of being the party created out of “mixture” implies racial and cultural egalitarianism. It makes champions out of party loyalists, ensconcing them in a socially acceptable narrative of tolerance.

There are only two historical junctures when a major political party formed the government in Trinidad on a truly multi-racial platform. The first was in 1986, when after almost two decades of PNM rule under Williams, a coalition of opposition parties formed the NAR party which differentiated itself by turning racialized politics on its head. In a very public way, it proclaimed itself to be a party of multi-racial, “one-love” interests at heart (Sriskandarajah 2005:76). It won the 1986 general election in a landslide victory against a three-decade strong PNM legacy. NAR was able to assemble erstwhile loyalists of the Butler (read: labor) party, Hindus, Tobagonians, the French-Creole and other “outsiders” to form an alliance but were unable to appeal to most Muslims and Presbyterians (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:159). As a result of NAR, and the need for more unity amongst the Indian population (encompassing Hindus, Presbyterians and Muslims), Basdeo Panday emerged as a leader of a pan-Indian

constituency (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:159). NAR split to form the UNC in 1995; the latter came to be identified as an East Indian party.

The second instance was in 2010, when the PP party was formed through a coalition of political factions including the dominant UNC, the Congress of the People (COP), the Tobago Organization of the People, and the National Joint Action Committee. By the end of its five-year term, however, the party came to be viewed as a predominantly UNC (read: East Indian) party. Then Prime Minister, Kamla Persad Bissessar, indeed, belonged to the UNC party. In a classic case of race-based patronage, the PP government was also blatantly prioritizing development in those parts of the country with majority East Indian populations. Anand Ramlogan, the attorney general under the PP administration justified the actions on the grounds that “[p]eople think of Trinidad as a predominantly African country. We want to rectify this mis-perception” (Kaufman 2010 cited in Cudjoe 2011). This, while Bissessar espoused a policy of “multiculturalism” wherein she called for the inculcation of “a new national mind” based on the “values of respect and understanding” (Kaufman 2010 cited in Cudjoe 2011). She wanted Trinidad and Tobago “to be the best example in the world of unity in diversity” (Kaufman 2010 cited in Cudjoe 2011).

Indeed, the paradox of the emergence of multi-racial parties as the NAR and PP was their inadvertent abetment in racializing politics even further (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:159). With each subsequent election, the country’s political apparatus seemed only to harden along both visible and invisible racial lines (Abraham 2005:125). Three consecutive deadlocked elections in 2000, 2001 and 2002 reaffirmed the nature of race politics in TT where electoral rivalry was now commanding almost equal-size blocs of supporters (Sriskandarajah 2005:76).

***“This rainbow has teeth”***

In June 2016, I moved into the Ahimsa Habitat near one of my field sites. It was established by a group of devotees originally from India a few decades prior. The Habitat offers room and board for select visitors – I got in because of a high profile contact. It was the most idyllic and peaceful place I lived in during my fieldwork. Perched atop a hill, the Habitat was housed in the erstwhile residence of a French-Creole planter from the 1840s, surrounded by greenery including breadfruit trees, a *chickoo* tree, an herb garden, an almond tree, and a few high bushes lining the walls of the compound. A generous veranda wrapped around the front of the structure from where you could see the banal outline of the city below but also the exquisite vastness of the Gulf of Paria beyond it.

Every half hour, for 30 seconds to one minute, a meditation prayer would play through the centralized speaker system in the house. Everyone would stop what they were doing and listen to the prayer, eyes open, sometimes with their hands clasped and hanging low. The Habitat encouraged quiet time and introspection. There were always visitors – be it local or overseas followers of the faith. Those “Sisters” and “Brothers” who lived, visited, and meditated together at the Habitat exhibited a shared camaraderie – they referenced the same experiences, knew of each other’s family goings-on, and cooked, ate, and cleaned together. The Sisters took turns leading group and private meditation sessions. I became one of their transient guests; in and out of the Habitat for the next three months. Aware that my research was on local politics, I was told that the topic was “too controversial” to discuss in the house. I took my cue.

I was inadvertently part of a few social events during my time there, including one private meditation session. It was obvious that although the Habitat was principally open to people from any race or religion, they predominantly catered to the East Indian Hindu

population. The influence of Indian culture is immense here. Devotees of all ethnic backgrounds (including Spanish visitors from Venezuela) used the same Hindi words – *dal*, *masoor*, *paratha*, *gaddi*, *Murli*; they also spoke eruditely of devils and deities in the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharatha*. Once a Sister visiting from India disparagingly corrected an East Indian Sister’s pronunciation of a Hindi word while we all sat around as a group. Expecting commiseration, the Indian Sister said to me, “This is how they write it!” She told them matter-of-factly that Trinidadians had got Indian spellings all wrong – she was referring to the creolization of Indian names like “Prasad” to “Persad,” and “Ramnarayan” to “Ramnarine.” “It is wrong!” she said to the Sisters. No one interrupted.

A month into my stay I found myself at the dinner table alone with an African Sister. It was just the two of us, and a lot of mosquitoes. I asked her about her experience being a minority at the Habitat. She spoke slowly – a product of her advancing age, or perhaps to ponder my question. She said that when she decided to join the movement, she was told by an East Indian Sister that she would not be accepted in her “costume.” Her costume, she clarified, meant her skin color. She was surprised to hear that, she said to me. “I could not understand... I had some struggle but then it went away.” I was only slightly taken aback with this anecdote because my own research in 2013 with East Indians in the Chaguanas Borough Corporation (see Ramchandani 2016) as well as my present-day interactions with other East Indians including Sandra’s mother had already revealed such hidden racial tensions. So how does one analytically make sense of the dichotomy of a “self-evident and commonsensical structure of ranked social and cultural attributes” (Khan 2004:172) and “the ideally preferable notion of democratic equality and autonomy” (Khan 1997:44) that undergirds most race talk in the country?

In the context of Trinidadian politics, Cudjoe claims that the word “multiculturalism” represents a “foreign ‘ism’” (2011). The challenge, he says, for the public “is to develop a national self-understanding that is based on our citizenship rather than our ethnicity” (Cudjoe 2011). However, there exists a theoretical schism between the “form and substance of [such] citizenship” (Holston and Appadurai 1999:5). Party politics colored with racial overtones continues to prioritize the consolidation of political interests over constituency representation (as I explained in Chapter 2), suggesting that the binary between national interest and ethnic interest is misguided. To the contrary, Thomas and Clarke (2013) warn that the global shift towards apolitical discussions on development, governance, globalization and (neoliberal) multiculturalism<sup>38</sup> has instead suppressed the language of race in such conversations. Two decades ago, Holston and Appadurai (1999) warned of the “tremendous strain” (6) of the liberal logic of examining citizenship as active public engagement towards the acquisition of common goods as a shared equal right. They noted that identity politics will thrive as “the identities of difference are competing more successfully for people’s time and passion than the tired identity of formal, national citizenship” (Holston and Appadurai 1999:9).

One of the most influential theorists who attempted to deconstruct the play between cultural identities found in the context of colonization was Homi Bhabha (1994) who used “hybridity” to explain intermixing between cultures. He held hybridity to be the “paradigmatic instance of identity, not the marginal one” (cited in Stoddard and Cornwell 1999:333) such that it had the capacity to reflect a counter-hegemonic force that deconstructs notions of purity and pollution from within the society that it is a part of. Hybridity is therefore not a simple synthesis from self and other but rather the creation of a third that challenged integration within the larger order. However the term “hybrid” has its flaws - it is grounded in concepts of purity, separation,

and mixing, and as a metaphor conjures up images of passivity, sterility and the lack of agency on the part of the hybridized (Stoddard and Cornwell 1999:348).

Consequently Jean-Luc Nancy's (1991b) philosophy rejects the notion of the pre-constituted individual entirely. Instead, he purports that "we are brought into the world, each and every one of us, according to a dimension of 'in-common' that is in no way 'added onto' the dimension of 'being-self,' but that is rather co-originary and coextensive with it" (Nancy 1991b:xxxvi). In other words, there are not self-enclosed identities, *only* "being-in-common" (Nancy 1991a) which May (1997:19) further paraphrases as "being exposed to the others in a relationship of sharing in which the limits of the individual exposed are neither stable nor destroyed."

Anthropologist Aisha Khan (2004:12), who has extensively studied race and religion in TT, examines "mixing" as an analytic by calling out the paradox of both maintaining and subverting cultural boundaries. She suggests we revisit anthropologist Daniel Crowley's (1957:823) model of "plural" and "differential" acculturation to explain the selective adoption, resistance and rejection of cultural boundaries within the framework of a plural society (see also Khan 2004). Depending on the occasion at hand, Trinidadians can perform acculturation in varying degrees. "This rainbow has teeth," Khan (2004:16) puts it matter-of-factly, implying that "mixing is as much about conservation of boundaries and essences as their subversion; that is, about *not* mixing" (Khan 2004:12, original emphasis). In her study of inter-ethnic flirtations in a desegregated school in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Hromadžić also explores the dynamic relationship between playful cultural transgressions and pedagogical and ideological tropes of ethnic subjectification amongst Bosnik, Serbs and Croat youth. While simultaneously engaging in intimate behavior with the Other, these youth discursively and performatively reproduced



ethno(national)centrism revealing how “mixing discourses and practices materialize as both constitutive and destabilizing of ethnic categories” (Hromadžić 2015:896).

Trinidadians exhibit powerful creolizing tendencies that have fundamentally shaped the country’s social and cultural strata. Consider the cultural negotiation of language in the country. Trinidad identifies as a monolingual state with Standard English (SE) as its only official language. The official adoption of SE, however, mars the reality of the heterogeneous composition of language varieties and, perhaps most importantly, obscures the linguistic history of the country which continues to be rooted in creolized/creolizing languages. From colonial times, laborers of different language groups intermingled to create a pidgin language that laced together various linguistic varieties of African, Indian, Spanish and French descent. Combined with English - the colonizers’ language - pidgin gave way to what is referred to today as Trinidad and Tobago English Creole<sup>39</sup> (TEC). Trinidadian society is a diglossic one where TEC is used in the vernacular while SE represents the highly codified language reserved for official purposes.

My own Indian ethnic identity made me acutely aware of the usage of Hindi words amidst the TEC vernacular. Words like *roti* (Indian bread), *dulahin* (bride), *sari* (traditional Indian outfit) and *nani* (maternal grandmother) are present in the language of all Trinidadians regardless of ethnicity or race. *Chutney*, an Indianized variety of popular soca music, uses a plethora of Hindi loanwords and has a large, receptive national audience. Cultural mixing through *chutney* music is not restricted to the linguistic genre. *Chutney* music is accompanied by a dance form that in itself displays a tension between the two cultural types: the juxtaposition of “wining<sup>40</sup>” with the sensual dance associated with both Indian classical and Bollywood music. It is a space where sacred and profane boundaries are transgressed leading to the inevitable stress of ethnic subjectivities.

In his framework of creolization, Hannerz postulates a view of culture in processual terms - as on-going discursive practices connected with the “management of meaning” (Hannerz 1987:550). It is in traditional calypso music that the strained negotiation (Hannerz 1987:550) between TEC and Hindi is most evident. Consider this - *Jahaji bhai* (Hindi for “boat brother”) was once a fictive kinship term referencing Indians who travelled together in boats as indentured laborers from India. The term, however, has been appropriated within the country’s larger linguistic discourse to refer to laborers sharing a common colonial past. In 1996, *Jahaji bhai* was also the title of one of the most famous calypsos of its time (see Appendix III). It was an amalgamation of Indian instruments, Indian-style vocalizations interspersed with African call-and-response style interactions with the audience. What should have been celebrated as a harmonious representation of creolization sparked a controversy over the rights of African and Indian heritages to exist independently (Stoddard and Cornwell 1999:342), and in the process became a performative art reflective of the social tensions existing in Trinidadian society. Today, the mainly male, African singers who sing calypsos often reduce the use of Hindi in their songs to derogatory or sexually assertive references. Even in broadcast media, Mahabir (1999:26) noted how African newscasters overexaggerated the voiced central alveolar [r], the voiceless glottal [h], and the nasal sounds in Indic-words characteristic of Indian intonation.

Creolization is a politically and culturally-charged phenomenon. It emerged from a history of necessity, was fueled by the survival instinct of a colonial people, and has since transformed into a reality larger than the sum of its parts. While on the one hand, at an *external* level, creolization reflects the ongoing process of cultural syncretism of the whole of Trinidadian society, at an *internal* level it demarcates clear boundaries between ethnic groups that view creolization as a painful reflection of integration and dilution of ethnic identity.

The word “*dougla*” encompasses this tension between difference and cultural syncretism. Post-colonial literature from Trinidad will remind any reader that *dougla* is a derogatory term of reference in the East Indian lexicon for a Mixed person. It is the Hindi translation for “hybrid, mongrel” used previously to reference the bastard offspring of mixed sexual union during colonial rule. It can be used to denigrate the mixing of “pure” Indian and “impure” non-Indian blood (Henry 1990; Khan 2004; Stoddard and Cornwell 1999). The word embodies the belief that the religious and cultural affiliations of East Indians make them morally superior to other cultures, and so they carry more cultural capital as a result (Stoddard and Cornwell 1999:339). That said, *douglarization* is also interpreted as a form of Indianization of Creole culture in Trinidad. In this sense, it reflects a process of de-creolization in that it facilitates “decentering the essential African component from Creole culture” (Stoddard and Cornwell 1999:348). In praxis, however, *dougla* easily slipped off the tongues of both Africans and East Indians with whom I interacted. For example, I was asked by an East Indian coconut vendor to meet her *dougla* helper when I got to the stall; an African participant gave me a history of his community including when his *dougla* neighbor moved in. One participant self-identified as *dougla* – “I am a *dougla*. I represent the good and the bad of Africans and Indians in this country.” Just like that, his statement reproduced the very categories of ethnic difference that his *dougla* status also subverted.

I also witnessed a physical groupness to how ethnic cliques continued to spatially reorganize themselves albeit within a principally democratic setting. At the Habitat, the African Sisters clearly spent more time together – whenever I asked, they knew each other’s whereabouts; often I would find them at the dining table together, talking, laughing, reading the paper. When one African Sister fell sick, it was the other African Sister who took charge of

looking after her – taking her dinner, giving her medication, etc. All this in the midst of communal activities where everyone shared all tasks and took their meals in the same room around a single long table. The Habitat was ensconced in the rhetoric of transformation and spirituality yet pluralism-situated was characterized by groupness. I became most aware of this when I bumped into none other than Sandra’s mother at the Habitat one day. It suddenly all made sense. A regular visitor for the meditation sessions, Sandra’s mother was at ease with the East Indian Sisters - I dare say she looked jovial. It mattered less that “others” were also present. What was important was that ability to find and stick with your own amongst all the mixing.

In his book on the spatialization of race, Arun Saldanha (2007) examines the physical clustering of subcultures - Canadians, Germans, Japanese, Israelis, Indians, etc. - within the context of rave tourism in Goa, India. He introduces us to “viscosity” as an analytic to explain the “spatiality in between fluidity and solidity” (Saldanha 2007:129). There is something to be said about the materiality of race, of organizing and re-organizing oneself to maintain boundaries - indeed, for the race category to be sticky even in the midst of emancipatory practices. In his research, even “psychedelic whites” – those whites who visit Goa to get away from their lives, to be transformed by drugs, music and spirituality if only for a few weeks – paradoxically reinforced their race-based cliques in the midst of Indian culture that they had purposefully inserted themselves into. Saldanha’s analysis of the viscosity of whiteness (read: race) is less a treatise on the hegemony of whiteness as a socio-political construct than a study of the “limits of [] escape and rebellion” (2007:6) even within counter-cultural experimentations.

One of the earliest participants in my study was John, a Mixed male in his mid to late 40s. He is a mason by profession but has never held a permanent job. He had been a drug addict who was incarcerated for a few years; he now fears falling back into his addiction for lack of

having any work. Physically, John looms large - he is at least 6'2" and about 300 pounds. We set up an interview date and time over the phone. When I went to meet him outside a nearby bar, I mistook him for a sleazy catcaller when he tried to beckon me. I was mortified when I called his cellphone and the same person answered. It was an uncomfortable lesson to check my assumptions at the door. Yet I remained on guard.

John had worked multiple times as a temporary worker at the local government headquarters in his area – similar to many others I spoke with. His experience had bestowed upon him a shrewd sense of the power dynamics between the central and local government –

Local and central government - all of them is one body. You have to go through the central government to get to the local government. The local government have to listen to the central government. The central government have to watch what the local government doin' because the central government have to sign for them to do certain things. They have to come to see when they give them money.

John identified as a PNM party supporter - "I was PNM since I been eatin' breakfast" – yet he admitted to voting for the UNC in the past and said he would have voted for the PP party (of which the UNC formed the majority) if he hadn't been in prison. He wished the PP government would have stayed in power for another five years – "The local government, in UNC, them Councilors, they do real thing. They do things for the area. All up in Lara Estate we get box drain when PNM for years did nothing... The PNM go and come, go and come."

John presented a pragmatic justification for voting for the UNC – the PNM party had not helped him or his area with local development projects. Yet, when I pressed him further, the conversation came back to desired preferential treatment based on race -

The PNM don't give me work because they are wicked people. We grew up together, you are not helping your own? The Indian man, Mr. Kesha Maraj who was helping me... And nigger people telling me, you taking sides or what? But no, the man have to work! And the day the man want work, and the man does work! I alone, when permanent [workers] come to work for an hour and a half, I working in the hot sun still! I is done work and go. You understand?

Expressing his anger at the PNM party, John vehemently adopted the African identity that has been historically saturated with tales of discrimination and underprivilege. “They’re [PNM] trying to kill out black people in this place! They are trying to make you an uprising, because that is what is needed right now, you know. Because PNM is not for the poor people. PNM is doing nothing for Negros. Nothing for poor people. PNM hate nigger people, I have to tell you,” he almost shouted inside the liquor mart we were at. There was no one else other than the Chinese owner and his wife who prudently sat behind thick bars to protect them and their cash register from unsolicited visitors and unruly clients. The owner shot me a glance and then continued to ignore us.

Racial or ethnic identity has historically offered “low-information rationality” (Just 2017; see also Birnir 2007) for voting behavior in Trinidad. In other words, race had already been intimately linked to the genesis of political parties. However, in this plural society molded by strong currents of creolization and discourses on multiculturalism, race talk is problematic because of the amorphous linguistic, cultural and class boundaries separating the two largest ethnic groups. Party identification as a heuristic for racial identity, however, offers partisans an alternative route to instilling and inculcating groupness without being “racial.”

### ***Building a “clan culture” in politics***

In his now-famous Woodford University speech, Williams (1964:279) had shrewdly extolled the virtues of a transcendent national cultural identity –

There can be no Mother India for those whose ancestors came from India...There can be no Mother Africa for those of African origins, and the Trinidad and Tobago society is living a lie and heading for trouble if it seeks to create the impression or to allow others to act under the delusion that Trinidad and Tobago is an African society. There can be no Mother England and no dual loyalties...There can be no Mother China even if one could agree as to which China is the Mother; and there can be no mother Syria or no Mother

Lebanon. A nation, like an individual, can have only one Mother. The only Mother we recognize is Mother Trinidad and Tobago, and a Mother cannot discriminate between her children. All must be equal in her eyes.

In truth, the racially-carved landscape of Trinidad combined with occupational segregation based on race had made it easy for Williams and his new administration to selectively control the flow of state resources upon taking office. Political patronage combined with racialized politics provides the context for Trinidadian party leaders like Williams to successfully become the “givers and definers of clan culture” (Kim 2014:411). In politics, clan culture takes the form of party partisanship that, however problematic, becomes the “ultimate heuristic” for some seeking to manage “the complexities of politics” (Dalton 2016:9,14). In my case, I take “complexities of politics” to imply complexities of race-based politics in Trinidad. Williams was a “transformational leader” (Kim 2014) who was able to successfully inculcate an affective and emotional attachment amongst primarily African voters to the PNM party. In doing so, he was able to create a political ethos that unhinged race talk from the fetters of historical discourse and instead inspired its re-articulation through narratives of loyalty, tolerance, and even morality connected to the PNM party personified by him.

Williams astutely adopted “language as conversation” wherein he embraced the culture of oral communication that is a quintessentially Trinbagonian phenomenon. He was able to combine “ole talk” with the “proper” use of English to “generate a particular cognitive dynamic within the body politic” (Cudjoe 1997: 755, 761) that had not been attempted before. In his University of Woodford Square public lectures, Williams encapsulated the “oral culture of the society, from the energy and excitement of the folk” (Cudjoe 1997:757). Cudjoe thus attributes to Williams the development of a new “politics of language” (Cudjoe 1997: 755), the discursive formations of which were also evident in Khan’s speech acts during the reform consultations of

2016. For example, I noticed that Khan frequently code-switched between Trinidadian English Creole (TEC) and Standard English (SE). He would say things like -

*“I have to be careful about what I say, man!”*

*“I don’t have the answer. That’s what this consultation is about. All I ask is that you consider. Should Laventille be part of POS or San Juan? I brave, so I aksing [sic] you!”*

According to Duranti (1997:45), “to speak means to choose a particular way of entering the world and a particular way of sustaining relationships with those we come in contact with.” The subjectivity and positionality of the narrator are themselves a confluence of social, economic, political and historical structures that shape how language is spoken (Bourdieu 1980; Bourdieu 1991; Hymes 1989). In a sense, language becomes a metalanguage of the culture in which it is immersed. Khan’s speech might have appeared off-the-cuff but in its characteristics of being interpretable, reportable and repeatable, they were in fact performed talk. Khan was deploying a style fondly associated with Williams.

Meighoo and Jamadar (2008) attribute the social relations between Trinidadians and their elected leaders to a cultural habitus harking back to the relationship between masters and slaves in the country’s colonial past. “Are Trinidadians and Tobagonians at root imprisoned in our dependence on and need for a messiah, benevolent king, or some other protector who will watch over us?” (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:79) they rhetorically inquire in their book on democracy and constitutional reform. So devoted were some of my participants to Williams the man, the politician, and his legacy that they had an all-encompassing word for him - “maximum leader.” The term “maximum leader” is most popularly used in reference to Cuba’s iron-fisted Fidel Castro. In Trinidad, I heard it used in reference to Eric Williams. He was loved, revered and worshipped because *he* took care of his people, and so came to personify the welfare state. Social benefits that flowed from the state’s coffers to select groups were appreciated as good leadership



rather than good policy. I had witnessed such deference to authority in close quarters at the reform consultation events. The strategic shift towards the “presidentialization of politics” (Hazan 2005; Maddens and Fiers 2004; Poguntke and Webb 2005) at the state level became, in the public sphere, the “personalization of politics” (Karvonen 2010; McAllister 2016) around the cult of the personality.

When affirming their loyalty to the PNM party, many research participants attributed their access to free education, free books and free school lunches to Williams, the party leader who made it all possible. A PNM supporter said to me, “The first PM that I know was Eric Williams. I believe for myself, he did nice education-wise, common man always get employed. That’s why I like PNM, they have good leadership.” Aletia, whose positionality as a PNM loyalist I elaborate on in the next chapter, emphatically supported Williams first, the party second -

I tell the youths of today, they don’t know Eric Williams. But that is the man who gave me my education. Now I tell them, see what he was talking about – about putting a school bag on your back. I get all my books worth 150 dollars [22USD] that he gave us at that time. To buy books. They would give us milk in the schools. You would get nice rich milk and some sweet biscuit when they break, to eat. If you didn’t have breakfast at home you sure they get breakfast at school. We used to carry food to go back. But the milk and biscuits. I eat milk and biscuit in school. The nice kind that melt when you mixing it. Sometimes it was powder milk, like skim milk. So I’m very strong with the PNM because he built the country, he built the black people. Children going to school and doing well.

The stability of the PNM party, meaning its continued robust existence, in combination with the continual flow of non-programmatic benefits to poor African families like Aletia’s fortified fledgling party ties to full-blown identification with the party. For the PNM party, voters like Aletia represented working class Africans whose loyalty could be cultivated through political largesse and an easy confluence of race with political identity. In private conversations, Aletia’s African identity remained a potent force in her articulations of entitlement associated

with being a party partisan. She said of her expectation of Rowley (the current African Prime Minister), “See how Kamla<sup>41</sup> [erstwhile East Indian Prime Minister] seek for she [*sic*] people? I want him to seek for black people. Kamla never forgot her foot soldiers. I want PNM to not forget the foot soldiers. I want to see them get something. There were plenty of us who were foot soldiers for Rowley.” By articulating racial preference as entitlement, Aletia belied her vulnerable status as a party loyalist struggling to come to terms with her own socio-economic dependencies. She explicitly rejected race-based politics when I pressed her about her partisanship -

Aletia: I went back to school as an adult. I did other literacy, I got two credits. If you look at Gypsy [a legendary Calypso singer] thing, “Little black boy, go to school and learn, little black boy, show some concern...” People compared Gypsy with Sparrow [another Calypso legend] years going back. Very rare you see an Indian or Chinese... you see black children in the cry for years. So I was trying to talk to the people and tell them, “Oh gosh, we have to try to uplift the black people.” I want to be something and you don’t get it right away.

TR: So when you support the PNM now, it not racial?

Aletia: No! When I support PNM it not racial. I just like the party.

By articulating her loyalty to the PNM as “not racial,” Aletia relegated race to a “zombie” category (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002:27) that is being continuously redefined, challenged, collapsed and expanded somewhere in between lofty ideals of racial inclusivity and the pragmatism of everyday dependencies. Party partisanship offered Aletia a meta-identity within which the messiness of race could be subsumed. The fiery combination of race and politics was messy and combative, wreaking of acrimonious politicking of the past. Party identification on the other hand had become an emotional matter. When a political party is able to put food on the table and books in your bag, politics becomes personal. Aletia was grateful to Williams, and so now loyal to the party. As such, in the political sphere, it is possible for Aletia to extol egalitarian

virtues while simultaneously practicing groupness. As such, she was continually contributing to the ongoing project of ethnic boundary maintenance.

Aletia's racial identity was "subject-dependent" (Munasinghe 2001:26). Her structural relationship to the PNM party based on race and race-based patronage reveals a "contradictory complexity" (Li 2001:650) wherein she is able to rearticulate her racial identity by exploiting the historical slippages between "party" and "race." To a researcher inquiring about her political affiliations and aspirations, blackness was simply about upliftment and loyalty without being racial. Yet her articulations of the plight of black people, her everyday associations with mostly Africans, her attendance at the public consultations with her fellow African neighbors and party group members, and her narratives of entitlement linked to race-based patronage (see Chapter 4) suggest a stickier formation of racial identity in the midst of multicultural rhetoric, processes and sensibilities. In Trinidadian politics, ethnic mobilization is the "default mode" (Meighoo 2009:122) for political association. Political parties offer "safe cliques by which citizens organize themselves..." (Meighoo 2008:122).

A few weeks before Christmas, I was hanging out with Cecil and Sheila, and their family. We were all in the kitchen. I was helping Sheila make a fruit cake; the men had gone grocery shopping. Grandma sat in a corner and merrily joined in our conversation to describe Trinidad from "long time" (long ago). Sheila, an African, was proudly telling me how racially integrated her family was – her cousin is an Indian, her daughter-in-law is an Indian, her son-in-law is a Christian, her niece married a half-Indian. Just the day prior, Cecil had said to me that I looked just like his daughter-in-law.

While sifting flour Sheila began explaining to me her indebtedness to Williams for making education free in her childhood. Then she said -

If the UNC did something like this [free education], there would be “self-interest written in the fine print.” The Indian traders, businessmen, all are in Central Trinidad. They know how to *manage* things for profit [original emphasis]. The PNM, on the other hand, have university degrees but no practical knowledge. They have good ideas like monetizing gas, free education, building ties with Venezuela.

Is that why she’d never vote for the UNC, I asked her. She responded with an example from her experience as a school principal. If an Indian child cheats in her exam, she said, Indian teachers would dismiss it. In fact, they would expect Sheila to understand that the child had done nothing wrong – the child did what the child had to do to pass. “In Hindu communities, if you ‘get through,’ it’s smart. In Christian communities, if you get through, you’re dishonest!” she said, also conflating religion with race. With the above statement, Sheila not only emphasized the moral superiority of Africans but also leveraged moral capital as an excuse for why Africans are at an economic and historical disadvantage (see also Munasinghe 2001:235).

Sheila interpreted partisanship as an intimate exercise in subjectification – it became a barometer of “self-becoming” (Jakimow 2014b) *beyond and inclusive of* race. The inflammable combination of race, politics and morality shaped her decision of which party to support, and which to consequently reject<sup>42</sup>. Corruptness became an essentialized trait of East Indians, and the UNC was synonymous with the East Indian community. So the UNC was untrustworthy as well.

An African secondary school teacher, Sandra, explained her loyalty to the PNM party by invoking the moral standards of the sitting PM, Keith Rowley. In 2008, Rowley - then a Cabinet Minister - was fired by PM Patrick Manning for challenging the latter over the jurisdiction of an urban development project. Sandra said of that episode -

They [people] talk about morality and ethics. In the last five years how many people were being called corrupt<sup>43</sup>? You don’t have that in the PNM. I’m not saying that it doesn’t exist but you don’t get that. Because when Dr. Rowley challenged the then Prime Minister about the decisions, he was told, “You can’t talk to me like this!” But what are

you saying? I am here, I must say something if I see wrong. The PNM is not afraid challenge itself. I love that idea.

Felix's allusion to being "too clean" for the PNM party (from an earlier section) suggests a similar exercise in anthropomorphizing political parties. By invoking morality and multicultural tolerance, party identity becomes bigger than race or politics. It becomes an embodiment of good character, a psychological extension of self. The construction of such political subjectivities speaks to the ability of party (or clan) culture to supersede the messiness of race talk in spite of the latter's ontological stickiness and situated "viscosity" (Saldanha 2007). It makes the exercise of party identification an indispensable, and more acceptable, extension of one's sense of self, and one's place in Trinidadian society.

### *Musings on generational differences*

The economic reliability of party affiliation was part of the PNM party's appeal for poor voters like Aletia. Her parents had benefitted from party largesse; Aletia had benefitted from it herself; it was logical that she expected her children to reap the benefits too. Political scientists who have studied partisan behavior have pointed to a strong correlation between party identifications of parents and their children in the context of stable party systems (Allerbuck, Jennings, and Rosenmayr 1979; Dalton 2016; Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers 2009). This reasoning is based on the premise that if parents are a dominant influence in their children's lives, and parents align with parties that reflect their own values and needs, then that party comes to reflect the value system of the family unit that gets transmitted to the next generation.

Social learning theory in political science literature emphasizes "observational learning" (Gidengil, Wass, and Valaste 2016:375). Human behavior rests on observation that gets coded into future action (Bandura 1977). Anthropologists simply call this "culture." In their study of

Peronist loyalists in Argentina, Stokes et al. (2013:63) noted that “social images and family socialization” had an “enduring” effect on how party identities were formed. Proponents of this theory have used it to explain why some voters approach new elections “with a predisposition toward a favored party already in place” (Dalton 2016:3).

Indeed there was a generational pattern to the PNM loyalists I met. Forty percent of those I interviewed after the consultations were over 55 years old; 58 percent identified as PNM partisans. My older participants were born and raised in the wake of the country’s freedom from British imperialism. Their loyalty was cultivated through Williams’ concerted efforts to amass support through the selective disbursement of political largesse through the control of state institutions. Race-based patronage flowed freely and thickly to its core made up of the African petty bourgeoisie and the African working class in order to maintain party stability (see also Dalton and Weldon 2007; Stokes et al. 2013). For a political party, nurturing a strong base of supporters allows for the possibility of renewed support in the future through habit forming tendencies to make it to the polls (Aldrich, Montgomery, and Wood 2011; Cutts, Fieldhouse, and John 2009; Green and Shachar 2013). In other words, the effects of past voting behavior significantly affects future voting propensities.

Yet, this explanation of loyalty based on family socialization does not speak to the intensity of such affinity. It does not fully appreciate the weight of emotional ties that *keep* loyalists loyal even in moments of rupture like the PNM party failing to help Aletia’s daughter, Jacqueline, secure a temporary job. As I mentioned in the previous section, older party loyalists I met articulated a deeply affective and emotional bond with their party’s first leader. By the time their children were born, however, Williams’ reign was over. The handful of 18 – 35 year-olds I met through the consultation format represented that group that was born and raised after 1981 -

when Williams' two-decade long reign had ended. Their political identities were not stoked through fervent speeches of Independence, or the cumulative desire to partake in coherent political organization and reap the bounties of proliferous oil revenues. As a result, I did not encounter articulations of party loyalty that were borne out of generationally incubated love, hope, and aspiration.

Yet, I make this claim hesitatingly. In truth, my research did not systematically account for generational differences between different sets of voters – I did not ethnographically examine the lives, desires, and entwined social and political identities of younger voters in the way that I did with some of the older protagonists in this research. As a result, my findings at this point have more value as markers for future research than rigorous extrapolations.

Felix, who I introduced earlier as an ex-official of the PNM party, said this of his understanding of generational politics -

I'm giving them [people] one generation<sup>44</sup> to see if people will still talk race in politics. Young kids<sup>45</sup> are a volatile generation. They don't hold allegiance to any party. The only people who hold allegiance are dying out. Young people have seen that their parents [who supported the PNM] got no benefits from them [PNM party]. On the UNC side, their die-hards start in the middle 30s, the older ones are not die-hards – they may change loyalty.

His understanding of PNM party loyalty is premised on the negative impact of weakened patronage ties between the party and its loyal supporters.

Thirty-three year old Vidya is an East Indian male. He told me he voted in 2007 for the first time, and voted UNC because his parents were UNC supporters. However, he didn't like UNC's "politricks" so easily switched to a third party, the COP, in the 2015 general election because he wanted "something different." Angela, a 29-year-old African nurse, similarly admitted she voted for the PNM the first time in the 2015 general elections because the candidate was her father's cousin but "the culture of corruption is everywhere, so PNM isn't any better."

Even though both Vidya and Angela voted based on familial enculturation, their articulations lacked the intimate, psycho-social subjectivity than indexed the devotedness of the older PNM voters I encountered.

Both individuals exhibited a more trigger-ready tendency to vote anti-establishment. Noticeably, Vidya switched over to the COP party only after a single election versus years of devoted loyalty shown by older PNM voters I met who had voted only once or twice for a different party. Their loyalty, or lack thereof, needs to be contextualized also by their level of economic dependency on the party. Both Vidya and Angela are not “poor” – they are educated, have educated parents, steady incomes, and both lived in SFCC – a city with higher than average costs of living comparable only to the capital city of PoS.

However, even for those younger voters who are dependent on non-programmatic benefits, partisanship was sometimes articulated as a transactional exchange rather than an impassioned expression of devotedness. Thirty-one year old Karlene, an African mother of four children who voted for the first time in 2015, said she voted for the PNM party because she thought the PNM candidate, Rowley, was “different.” She said to me agitatedly,

I never voted in my life. Never. I realize that the PNM going to do something for me, that is why vote for them this time. And still nothing. I vote this time because I hear that this time will be different. I hear that Rowley would be different. That is why I voted for him. But I choose to vote this time as the new Prime Minister, and after hearing how Rowley does speak, that he is going to help. That he will give poor people and as single parents a chance to live.

Karlene and her “roommate” were illegally squatting in an apartment in a semi-abandoned housing project just outside of SFCC<sup>46</sup>. I was very nervous during our interview because Karlene admitted she expected “Security” to knock on the door anytime to kick them out – they had come by just the day prior and threatened the two ladies. A broken window in the room we were in spoke of a story I did not want details of. However, the two women were taking their chances



with squatting. They had nowhere to go and in fact had attended the SFCC consultation to beseech Khan to allot them housing through the state-run Housing Development Corporation (HDC). They fervently hoped Rowley would “deliver.”

Like them, Aletia’s family’s lived reality of chronic poverty made Jacqueline also accustomed to the obvious logic of chasing patronage herself. Jacqueline identified as a PNM supporter. She sought PNM-sponsored housing so she could live independently with her kids. She was also waiting for her mother to pull strings to get her a job at SGRC headquarters. Her brother, however, was a different story. Aletia agitatedly admitted that he was pressuring her to vote for a different party based on who could assist her – “Mommy, we need a change!” he had pleaded with her. She refused. (In Chapter 6, I dig deeper into how Aletia’s desire to wait out her request for patronage is characteristic of a “good loyalist.”)

Mannheim’s (1972) influential work on generational analysis suggests we examine generations as social actors. Specific generations engage with their social environments differently on the basis of their situatedness within a particular confluence of time and place. Those born and raised during the reign of Williams cultivated and so perpetuated spheres of practice that conjoined race, politics and patronage. Such a system of benefits cultivated over decades has lent a socio-political dimension of expectation tied to the client-patron nexus (see also Dalton 2016). So, unlike younger voters, the affinity of older African voters to the PNM party slid across a scale of dependency at one end, and entitlement at the other, fostered by emotional bonds that gave them a sense of party ownership cultivated over decades.

## *Conclusion*

The multiplicity of racial identities in TT combined with the upward and downward mobility of different blocs of social classes has led to a state of affairs where the fight for control over the state apparatus manifests significantly through race-based politicking. In the shadow of Independence in 1962, racial identity came to be aligned with party politics so reinforcing the ideological differences between the two parties. Ethnic mobilization keeps these boundary lines intact especially as state-sponsored patronage starting with the era of Eric Williams has historically traced its lineage along the same markings.

Yet, we know that identity making is a messy, fragmentary process that is responsive to the structure within which it is being enacted. In TT, ethnic groups conceal processes of atomization that have forced me, as a researcher, to remain agile to the various permutations of race as a potent and binding social identity. Trinbagonians are both tolerant, and cautious. Even as race impacts notions of both partisanship and the expectation of patronage, the race card was actively rejected by many participants who found it incongruous with their egalitarian ideals nurtured in the context of a multicultural society. So Aletia articulated her loyalty to the PNM party through the personalization of politics instead. In other words, she rejected a race-based narrative and instead emphasized her emotional attachment to Williams. Like her, others too self-identified with the PNM party through ideological, moral, and personal affections instead of race-based affinity.

The tenacity by which race continues to rear its head in socio-political dialogue in spite of its formal rejection in everyday rhetoric reveals an ontological dilemma in how racial subjectivities are formed, maintained, and negotiated. Party identification offers much-needed respite for those seeking to reconcile their multicultural ideals with a desire for groupness within

such plurality. Aletia and John selectively incorporated their ethnic identities into the creation of their socio-political selves, revealing how the deployment of the race card was something “socially effective” (Barth 1969) in the midst of creolizing tendencies. As such, through a simultaneous interplay of ethnic differentiation with political cohesion, race remains a socio-political identity that has “died yet live[s] on” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002:27).

## CHAPTER 4 THE SUBJECT OF PATRONAGE

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### *Introduction*

In the previous chapter I traced the linkages between race and politics within the context of Trinidad's party culture. In this chapter, I examine another historical aspect of party partisanship – the role of political patronage. Entrenched economic dependencies cultivated through the generous disbursement of non-programmatic benefits to select populations has created generational loyalists of the PNM party, the likes of which I met through the reform consultations. As I alluded to earlier, most of the public comments at these events hinged on material benefits – drainage, jobs, electricity, roads, etc. - that are traditionally matters of local governance. The consultations, instead, were designed to reintroduce national-level politicking at the local level. In the absence of decentralized governance and accountability measures, public requests for assistance in these spaces were also demands for political patronage from state-level leadership.

Yet it would be myopic to view these public expectations as part of an exchange transaction. In other words, this wasn't a simple case of "you support me, I support you." Participants like Aletia, whose desire for "gridding" and need for patronage I outline in this chapter, affirmed their loyalty to the PNM party irrespective of tangible benefits. This is because her economic dependency was enmeshed in hyper-local networks of political kinship encompassing her local government Councilor as well as her PNM party group leadership, both of whom were positioned as political brokers for their highly centralized party. Temporary gestures of patronage in the form of job contracts and financial assistance combined with the intimacy of personalized politics as played out on the ground has all but ensured Aletia's

continued dependency on party patronage while transforming her political identity into, also, a supra-identity of belonging.

### *An ethnography of dependency*

Aletia is a 53-year-old petite woman of African heritage. Her signature outfit is a pair of skinny jeans, a frilled or sequined T-shirt and shoes that threaten to fall apart. She carries her phone in a pouch that hangs from a neon green strap around her neck with the words “B-mobile” printed on it - no doubt, a freebie distributed during a promotional event. In spurts over the years, she has worked in the “front” and “back” of various erstwhile fast food chains – Calypso Chicken, Texas Style, Tasty Inn, Pizzaberg – that are now relegated to her generation’s memory alone. Aletia and I met often during my stay in Trinidad. Even though she owned a phone, she almost never had enough phone balance to call or text me. She could, however, send me an automated “top up” request to credit her account with money. That was my cue to call her back – incoming calls were free.

Aletia was one of the over 250 attendees at the Grande consultation. She sat in the audience with friends from her community – they belonged to the same local PNM party group. Her attendance at the consultation was passive but strategic – she didn’t participate in the question and answer session, she could hardly recall much of what was discussed other than the fact that her local government would have more money to manage its affairs. She patiently sat through three hours of talk, debate and discussion in order to show her support to her local Councilor, Dennis, hoping that he would speak to the MP about getting her daughter, Jacqueline, a job.

For months, Aletia lamented about her living conditions and I could understand why. Aletia, Jacqueline and Jacqueline's three kids lived in a single room that was crammed with stuff. Inside her abode, like a fleeting afterthought, a single stroke of blue paint broke the monotony of four grey walls of concrete. Two clothes lines hung inside the room – they served the dual purpose of storage and drying. There were two decrepit double beds pushed against opposite walls, and two smaller cots lodged near the entrance to the room. All pieces of furniture were strewn with clothes, broken plastic toys and other knick-knacks haphazardly discarded. Once it took me 15 minutes to realize I was sitting on the hair brush that Jacqueline was desperately searching for as she got ready to go out.

There was one floor fan in the room that was generously shared between those who sweated the most. Barring two cellphones I saw no other gadgets - not a fridge, radio or television set. Often, Jacqueline used a rusty four-burner gas stove to cook food for the kids - this was almost always pasta and corned beef from a tin, with chocolate biscuits for dessert. The long table by the stove was similarly cluttered with cheap aluminum and plastic utensils. Everything was in a disarray. As though taunting fate, a broken piece of thick mirror lay half hidden amongst the utensils. I thought it was a safety hazard till I noticed Jacqueline lean over it to make up her face and do her hair. The broken mirror was redeemed.



*Image 10: Aletia's one-room home*

Aletia was part of a tiny commune of squatters in this neck of the woods. A flapping red curtain is all that separated the people inside the house from those outside. Neighborhood kids made merry running in and out through the flapping red curtain. Sometimes a neighbor would loudly beckon Aletia or Jacqueline from the other side of the curtain – a formality that belied the fluidity between the indoor and outdoor spaces. Aletia had moved to this patch of land in 1988. She used to live in a wooden shack which she only recently had converted into a concrete room, breaking state laws governing squatting in the process. Now Aletia wanted to move out entirely.

Her home was but a few feet from the edge of a crumbling embankment. The outhouse along with another smaller shack, or “board home” as Aletia called it, were perched precariously close to a small, smelly stream. Natural erosion combined with the lack of land use planning meant that the embankment would first devour her board home, then compromise the foundation of her one-room dwelling. She needed to move quickly. I visited Aletia at home many times but that did little to assuage my nervousness about just getting *to* her place across a one-foot disintegrating mud bridge.



*Image 11: (L-R) The way to Aletia's home; close-up of the disintegrating mud bridge*

Aletia joined the workforce at age fifteen, starting with a temporary job at a government-sponsored employment program that eventually became known as the URP. When she was a child, her parents too were temporary workers employed in the public sector, at WASA. They were both PNM loyalists; their jobs were manifestations of political patronage. Aletia was also a PNM loyalist. Additionally, she was a member of her local party group, an active party volunteer, and an active voter in local and general elections. Like her parents, she had received patronage in the form of contract work at the SGRC headquarters. So Aletia understandably assumed Jacqueline would be accorded the same opportunity. When I met Aletia she expressed sore disappointment that since the PNM came to power in 2015 they had not been able to offer Jacqueline any work at the SGRC headquarters or the URP, both managed by political appointees of the ruling PNM party.

On face value, it would appear that Aletia viewed a job with the URP as a straightforward form of exchange - economic assistance in return for political fealty. She said, "What I want them to do is to put people who were the foot soldiers [for the PNM party], find something for them to do. Even if it's 10 days. I just finished work in the corporation. I was doing street



cleaning. Cleaning up paper and all of these things in the street. I just finish that for three months. I am 53 already. I looking for something for my children and them now.”

Aletia revealed an acute understanding of how access to patronage could help her navigate the stresses of everyday life. It had become part of her “stock of practical knowledge” (Auyero 2001:160) that reduced the metaphoric distance between the all-encompassing, all-powerful party as patron and her as a client. She also, interestingly, articulated her desire for assistance as a type of entitlement owed to her (see also Gay 1998:15 and Chapter 3 of this dissertation). Notice, she began her sentence above with “What I want...” Yet her expectation that party loyalty would be rewarded, that she was entitled to such patronage, and her subsequent feelings of betrayal did not contradict her feelings of utmost loyalty towards her party. To understand the importance of patronage as an economic benefit for the poor but also as a form of relational exchange, I begin with some theory on political patronage to ground my thesis.

### *Clientelism and patronage*

Experts on patronage differ amongst themselves on the nature of patronage versus clientelism. Some categorize patronage and clientelism as the same, viewing both through the theoretical lens of a power differential, a.k.a. the dichotomy between those with access to resources and power, and those without. Robinson and Verdier (2013:262) acknowledge these overlaps in anthropology and political science where clientelism tends to be defined as “a political exchange: a politician (i.e., a ‘patron’) gives patronage in exchange for the vote or support of a ‘client.’” Hicken (2011:295) defines patronage broadly as “the use of resources and benefits that flow from public office.” Weingrod (1968:379) defines it as “the way in which party politicians distribute public jobs or special favors in exchange for electoral support.”

Other authors like Stokes et al. (2013:10) offer a more elaborate distinction between the two. They club, both, patronage and clientelism under a broader category of “non-programmatic distributive strategies” determined by the absence of public criteria for distribution and/or the aura of secrecy surrounding the actual type of distribution to recipients. For them, clientelism is a form of non-programmatic distribution combined with conditionality or the assumption of *quid-pro-quo*<sup>47</sup>. When clientelism is targeted towards registered party voters, it is called patronage; when the incentive of rewards is to cultivate new supporters or drive them to the polls it is called “vote buying” and “turnout buying” respectively (Stokes et al. 2013: 16-17). So patronage is but one type of clientelist exchange between those with access to power and resources and those without. In this dissertation, I have adopted Stokes et al.’s (2013) distinction between clientelism and patronage, and consequently use “patronage” as a specific reference to intra-group political favors/benefits.

One thread of scholarship on clientelism, broadly, privileges the actions and motivations of the patrons, and so also the impact of political clientelist practices. For example, researchers have highlighted its role in eroding the democratic functioning of government (Fox 1994; O’Donnell 1996; Puhle, Diamandouros, and Gunther 1996). Breeding (2011:71) examines the patron-client nexus, called “vote banks” in India, as symbolic of the “conspicuous consumption” of political parties to amass supporters. She interprets the extension of patronage to party supporters as “symbolic gestures” (Breeding 2011:73) to retain poor voters within the fold of the party machine. The party hasn’t forgotten about you is the message at hand.

Scholars generally concede to the context of high inequality that allows clientelism to thrive. Poor voters are easily placated and a significantly cheaper target for political benefit (Auyero 2000; Brusco et al. 2007 cited in Stokes et al. 2013; Robinson and Verdier 2013). In

economic terms, the diminishing marginal utility of income or the satisfaction or happiness (“utility”) gained from even a slight (“marginal”) increase in income (through clientelism) is much higher for poor people. In blunt terms, they can be cheaply “bought.”

Another line of inquiry prioritizes the role, the worldview, and the practices of the recipients of clientelism – a study from bottom up. One theory in this direction is that of risk-aversion. Stokes et al. (2013:156) point out that those in poverty tend to be risk averse. The simple reason being that income fulfils the most basic, urgent needs like access to meals, paying for rent, medicines, etc. Clientelist distribution by its very nature of being independent of formal processes of debate, deliberation and disbursement appeals very much to those who are risk averse. It is a product of the lived reality of the disenfranchised who face limited political options while grappling with the urgency of day-to-day living. Clientelism allows them to “bypass traditional mechanisms of political co-optation” (Cardoso 1992:292). It also acts as a hedge against “bureaucratic indifference and exclusion” (Gay 1998:16). In other words, maintaining client-patron relations become a type of “problem solving” mechanism deployed by the poor as a hedge against “the risks of everyday life” (Auyero 2000:2; see also Lazar 2004).

So clientelism can ironically be more dependable than programmatic benefits (Keefer 2007:804). Stokes et al. (2013:163) put forth the syllogism that if the poor are risk averse, and clientelism appeals to those who are risk averse, then logically clientelist distribution is most appealing to and sought out by the poor. There is well-documented literature on the anthropology of the state that incorporates the reality of the poor “chasing” political patronage (Jansen 2015; Ragoonath 2000; Sudama 1983; Riggan 2013; Jakimow 2014b). In his research in Malawi, Anders’ (2009) emphasized the pivotal role of the “bwana” or boss that precipitated a parallel system of governance based on patron-client relations over and above the formal

hierarchy of the state system. In India, dependency on patronage is institutionalized through “vote banks” reflecting the socio-economic bonds linking patron, broker, and client (Srinivas 1955). Williams (2004:576) acknowledges the “strategic value of routinized power” where reliability of access to power brokers can be a welcome compromise for politically weak citizens.

The link between poverty and clientelism supports development theory in the political science discipline that explains why modernization and economic development generally portend the end of clientelism (Hicken 2011; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007). Scholars like Cox (1987:57), O’Leary (1962:231) and O’Gorman (2001:67) offer historical accounts of the transition from clientelism to programmatic benefits in the European context. Stokes et al. (2013:215) situate this burden on the shoulders of brokers (I discuss brokers in a different section) who mediate relationships between patrons and clients.

No doubt, this relationship between client and patron is functional and dependent on both sides comfortably fulfilling their end of the bargain. The expectation of reciprocity can be understood as a “scheme immanent in practice” (Bourdieu 1977:38) meaning they are routinely “practiced, kept up, and cultivated” in the form of an exchange. Gay (1998), however, suggests looking beyond the functionalist argument for clientelism, namely the exchange of goods/services for votes/support, to the realm of ideology that makes the practice of clientelism an emotional and messy type of relational exchange. Contemporary modalities of clientelism are congruent with confrontational labor movements, “oftentimes disloyal and committed to the ideal of rights” (Guy 1998:17). The exchange of votes for benefits can be rearticulated as entitlements by the poor who understand their part in the larger political process. As such, political agents and brokers have to work doubly hard to retain their voter base (Guy 1998).

Gay (1998:12) puts forth the claim that the success of a clientelist enterprise rests on the “selective and highly personalized exchange of goods, services and employment opportunities for the vote” (see also Hagopian 1996:16; Schmidt et al. 1977). This explains why, even in the absence of mechanisms for legal enforcement, politicians are generally motivated to keep their end of a clientelist bargain. The theory of social affinity underwriting the patron-client nexus helps explain a wide range of inter-personal relations between civilians and their political patrons. Patronage of this kind is also a form of cultural domination through its nurturing of a habitus of dependency amongst clients (Scott 1977). It is in the interstices of cultivated dependencies and social bonding that my research on party partisanship in Trinidad is situated. To understand the pivotal role of patronage in the lives of poor partisans like Aletia, we must now turn our lens to the limitations of the dispersed state.

### *The dispersed state*

In Trinidad, centralized governance has, in effect, created circuitous capillaries of public administration leading, in effect, to the perception of the “structural dispersion” of the state wherein the state is “simultaneously excessively present and absent...” (Jansen 2015:144). Consider this example: The URP, that is central to Jacqueline’s (Aletia’s daughter) chances of getting temporarily employed, is a social safety net program that was spearheaded by the Patrick Manning administration (read: PNM) in 2001. Along with the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Program (CEPEP), the URP artificially lowered the unemployment rate by providing temporary jobs with no prospects for future growth (Moonilal 2006:7). These projects were managed by pro-PNM “community leaders” (Griffin and Persad 2013:183) who, not surprisingly, displayed a blatant disregard for East Indians over Africans. The Opposition

Leader in 2006, Kamla Persad Bissessar, publicly alluded to the cycle of dependency nurtured through the interplay of patronage and loyalty through such programs – “The PNM has introduced a backward and archaic labor strategy of shoving the low-skilled into a dependency syndrome and therefore presiding over the inter-generational transfer of poverty and dependency. They should take a bow! Very few governments have destroyed their own supporters in this way” (Bissessar 2006).

The URP is formally governed by the Ministry of Works and Transport (MoWT) and is, therefore, technically a state-run welfare program. Like the public consultations on reform, however, the URP’s mandate is embroiled in a labyrinth of overlapping agendas revealing the complex interplay of patronage with a highly consolidated, centralized administrative system. URP’s core department looks at local issues like drainage, road cleaning, and sanitation – services that should have been under the purview of the local government. In addition, it also has a women’s department that caters to the employment needs of single mothers. A ministerial-level public servant is embedded within its administrative structure who acts as a liaison between MoWT and the URP.

If someone comes to the URP with a drainage issue that request first gets registered with the URP’s engineering division. An engineer will visit the site and draw up an estimate which is then shared with the aforementioned public servant who is also embedded into MoWT through the Special Works department. Once the public servant conducts another internal feasibility study and confirms its viability and impact on the larger community, the project is undertaken by the URP (pers. comm., Aug 10, 2016). To complicate matters, the construction and maintenance of drains also falls under the purview of local governments, as per MCA 1990 (GRTT 1990a:128). The division of labor between the URP and the local government is based on

whether the drain is a major drain or a minor drain. Unfortunately, an ordinary citizen needing a drain fixed outside her house would hardly know this distinction or care for the administrative overlaps.

When I asked two URP employees about the confusing system of service delivery, they themselves held divergent viewpoints. Eltina, a URP supervisor, emphatically denied any overlap while Dave, a manager at the same URP office, vigorously nodded his head in the affirmative – he pointed out that there was supposed to be a stakeholders’ meeting every month between the URP, MoWT, the municipal Council and perhaps CEPEP (that also does some of these tasks) to prevent operational overlaps. Unfortunately, this wasn’t happening.

For the general public, the search for civic solutions can be exhausting and tediously frustrating. Peter, a 67-year-old resident of Moriah Hills in the western part of the country, had a lot of experience in this regard. One afternoon, he and I were sitting on the porch of his pink colored house with a child’s bicycle, an abandoned plastic desk and chair, and a couple of full cement bags for company. “You see this kind of stupidity?” He was pointing to a pile of red mud that trickled to the middle of the street in small rivulets caused by the rain the night before. Civic contractors had brought the mud to fix the box drain in front of Peter’s house but hadn’t returned to complete the job because they didn’t have the steel to build the drain. That was in April. It was now June. “I can’t do nothin’, they waitin’ on steel,” he said.



*Image 12: Construction material for the drain outside Peter's house*

Peter's raspy baritone voice rose a notch, making his thick Trinidadian accent doubly hard to decipher. I persevered. Why couldn't he just go to his local government and get the situation clarified? He explained that because his street was on a main road, the responsibility for fixing the drain came under the purview of MoWT. The Ministry has carved out "work zones" independent of electoral boundaries. So even though his area technically came under the jurisdiction of one municipal corporation, it fell under the "work zone" of another municipal corporation. Which corporation's door was he supposed to knock on?

I wondered incredulously how community residents could keep track of such a convoluted governance structure. Even Peter seemed confused during our conversation – at one point he concurred that drains could also come under the purview of MRDLG. He was right – the construction of drains along "main roads" (like where Peter resides) is the responsibility of MoWT while those on "minor roads" are managed by the municipality whose jurisdiction the minor road came under. All municipalities are overseen by the Minister of MRDLG. So the institutional dispersion surrounding drainage encompasses a bricolage of local and state authorities, as well as special purpose entities like the URP and CEPEP. Suddenly I wasn't so



surprised that the issue of drainage had been a regular theme at the reform consultations. Bad drainage affected individual and community health, threatened foundations of homes, and was a nuisance in a tropical island characterized by heavy rain and peripheral hurricanes (Trinidad and Tobago Meteorological Service 2019). Addressing state/political leadership (Jakimow 2014b) at a reform consultation is a prudent move to draw attention to this very local and ubiquitous issue.

In Trinidad, vernacular narratives of political patronage and corruption, writ large, serve as a commentary on the failing state susceptible to the machinations of party politics. The truth might be more complicated than that. In his quantitative study of 14,000 small development projects in Ghana, Williams (2017) studied the implication of patronage, corruption and the failure of local-level collective choice on project completion. In effect he asked, “Conditional on a government having started a project, why would the same government subsequently not finish the project” (Williams 2017:705)? Williams found that especially in Ghanaian districts with tumultuous partisan and ethnic composition, it was more likely the failure of “intertemporal bargaining over the delivery of public goods” (Williams 2017:710) across the local decision-making collective that contributed to completion failure. In other words, there were time inconsistencies that coincided with election cycles and budget allocation timelines that affected project delivery. Those places with tumultuous local politicking (read: swing districts or those with strong opposition governments), like Moriah Hills where Peter lived, so lay bare the unproductive maneuvers of party politics in matters of local governance. Moriah Hills residents, who were homogenously branded as PNM supporters, were dependent on the unstable assemblage of a UNC MP, UNC Councilor, and the PNM-led MoWT to release funds and resources for “the commons” like working drains.

In the diametrically opposite part of the country, Winston pushed back against SGRC's similar excuse of having "no material" for local construction needs. "This morning, the Chairman's office called to tell we gettin' new uniforms *but you don't have material?* I have my clothes [implying he didn't need a new uniform]. Tractor, truck breakin' down, no cement. The regional corporation will get billions to spend but 'we spend with friends and family,'" he retorted and steupsed. What is telling here is that irrespective of the actual reason for having "no material," the failure of the state to, quite literally, deliver public goods became easily assimilated into commonplace discourses on corruption and clientelist malfeasance.

The sheer presence of the MRDLG at the local level so fed into institutionalized expectations of how the Trinidadian public interacted with state-level political leadership. The reform consultations, while advertised as local events, were anything but that. In addition to local politicians like Councilors and the Chairman<sup>48</sup> of SGRC, the consultation importantly brought together state-level Ministers as well as MPs from surrounding constituencies. Jakimow would call these events "sightings of the state" (2014b).

The practice of seeking out the state at state-sponsored events like the reform consultations has its rewards. Catch a Minister on a good day and that stray shot in the dark can hit its target. At one reform consultation, Ira, a 60-year-old resident pleaded with Khan to do something about a drain built by the local government that emptied itself in front of her house, thus compromising its foundation: "So I want to know if the administrative authority... how it will give the administrative people - which are the public servants - the say as to which work is done where, and not the Councilor? If the Councilor, if he hasn't found you in favor with him, you will be left behind. That is why I am here tonight..." Khan listened patiently and subsequently confirmed to the packed hall that it is indeed the responsibility of the local

government-appointed civil engineer to ensure all built drains have an “outfall” design in place before the drain is dug. “That is simple basic engineering,” he concurred with the desperate woman. “So ma’am, I would probably take a personal look at this.”

As such, the reform consultations carried the immense weight of the possibility for “gridding.” Jansen (2015:81) defines gridding as “...a social configuration in which certain structures of expectations were made regular and ordered in an institutional manner.” “Grid desire” bears witness to a dispersed state and an under-responsive government. The desire to be gridded is a yearning for predictability and routine in one’s engagement with state systems. Ira’s desperate request for assistance was littered with pleas, threats, and even conspiracy theory –

Ira: Penal/Debe Corporation built 100 feet of box drain two houses from me at #107 and #109 and I am #111. We lived 25 years there. We had no water problem, no box drain problem. They decided to build 100 feet of box drain #107 to #109 and the way the contractors... I know it is not Penal/Debe Corporation who actually did it but they are the people in charge. The Contractor build it and send all the water in front of me. I have no box drain, the water settle in front of me and it is seeping underground and it is eroding my property.

When I realize that Mr. Stuart Young would have been here tonight, I didn’t realize he was here for the plans and to draw the legal plans for the reform. I said, “He will come and help me sue Penal/Debe Corporation for my property.” I wrote that letter to Penal/Debe Corporation that water is seeping underground and it is eroding my property foundation. When I go to Mr. Hall, Mr. Hall say go to Stacy Roopnarine. That was before September 7<sup>th</sup> [2015 general elections] because it is since 2012 I am having this problem. Go to Stacy Roopnarine, he say. He has no money yet I see the work is being done in my area at other houses. As I said, I have my reasons believing why my property is being eroded.

Penal/Debe Corporation built 100 feet of box drain and sent all the water in front by me. When I went to the corporation last month, the customer representative, as you said, very pleasant young lady, she tried to help me. She sent me to a supervisor and the supervisor said to me, “All decisions the Councilor will decide which works to be done where.” So if I want to know if the administrative authority with your reform, how it will give the administrative people - which are the public servants - the say as to which work is done where and not the Councilor? If the Councilor, if he hasn't found you in favor with him, you will be left behind. That is why I am here tonight and I am so happy to hear all that you have said Mr. Minister and I thank you for your time with us. Thank you.

Khan: Did you write me a letter on that matter? I think I saw a letter on something like that, you know.

Ira: No, but I have a letter addressed to you, Mr. Franklin Khan. [Minister receives the letter] [Consultation event, Apr 13, 2016]

Most attendees of the SGRC and SFCC consultations who I spoke with did not care, or simply hadn't paid attention to, the glossy show of statecraft on the day of the reform consultation. They were more focused on *what they wanted done* by the Minister as an empowered member of the PNM Cabinet. The consultations held material value through the public's desire to demand tangible outcomes like infrastructural fixes and better service delivery.

The desire to be gridded fits hand-in-glove with the country's history of political patronage. While the ideological push of the Trinidadian state has been to vertically encompass the social, economic, and cultural spheres of TT society, in praxis it has created a dispersed state that exists in the forms of overlapping spheres of political influence and nested hierarchies ending somewhere near the top. The 14 consultations were an act of consolidated messaging, not by the Trinidadian government, but the PNM party that led the government. Consequently, for the attending public the consultations were also political events.

In SGRC, the poorest municipality in Trinidad, public turnout for the consultation was amongst the highest. Some came because they were curious about state-level politicking in their neighborhood. Many of the people I spoke to were government contractors, part-time and full-time workers associated with the local government who attended because they were asked to by their supervisors in exchange for the day's paid leave. Their reason for attending was not necessarily to be gridded into the state system through an employment contract or social service benefit but rather to *stay* gridded by appeasing their PNM-installed employers. They showed up, made sure to sign their name at the registration desk and sat through the whole session because their peers and bosses were in the audience. Then they went home, and for the most part didn't

think much about it again till an anthropologist came knocking on the door. For those who desired to be seen by their party, the existence of the consultation was valuable enough (see also Lambek 2013:167).

Aletia attended the consultations as part of the entourage of her local PNM party group. However she harbored a desire for gridding that was related to her daughter's chances of getting temporarily employed by the URP. For this, she sought gridding from her political patron rather than the elusive state. This patron was her local Councilor, Dennis, whose networked connections to the state-run (read: party-run) URP program could get Jacqueline that coveted job contract.

### *Aletia's desire for gridding*

In the context of patronage, Robinson and Verdier (2013:261) point out that the promise of employment is “a credible, selective, and reversible method of redistribution, which ties the continuation utility of a voter to the political success of a particular politician.” Unlike the distribution of a public good, selective disbursements of public works projects and job placements “has the political advantage of allowing the benefits to be selectively apportioned” (Bates 1981:114). Paradoxically, the poor tend to view such non-programmatic benefits through clientelist practices as more stable than the public and publicized promises of programmatic benefits that can get mired in policy debates and bureaucratic laggardness (Kitschelt 2000).

Dave, the URP manager I alluded to in an earlier section, agitatedly told me that he took issue with people “who hold on to the URP as a career... URP's mandate is to get 18-25 year-olds placed outside of the URP after they have worked for us.” Aletia told me that this had not been her experience at the URP. As a recipient of state-sponsored patronage she had continued to

work with the URP on a contract basis for almost 15 years till 2016 when she had to give it up because of health issues. Now she wanted a job for her daughter – also a PNM loyalist – within the URP. Without divulging details, I shared this information with Eltina, the URP supervisor, one day. “People settle for mediocrity,” she said agitatedly. “People should not want their children to work in the URP!”

As of 2019, the World Bank classified TT as a high-income country<sup>49</sup> yet poverty has remained a “persistent problem” (Kedir and Sookram 2013:522) within Trinbagonian society. Twenty-two percent of the nation’s population are poor – Kedir and Sookram (2013) attribute this phenomenon to state-led derelictions in redistributing oil monies and monitoring their proper usage (see also Blandau 2017; Clyne 2016). The socio-economic conditions in SGRC epitomized this dismal state of affairs. Aletia’s efforts to seek political patronage is fundamentally shaped by her structural limitations of being poor. Aletia’s family lives in chronic poverty, the type that is transmitted across generations (Hulme and Shepherd 2003). Hulme and Shepherd define “chronic poverty” as that exhibited by “people who remain poor *for much of their life course*, and who may ‘pass on’ their poverty to subsequent generations” (2003:405, original emphasis). According to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS), the poverty line in TT is determined at 1,230 TTD a month (181 USD) (Clyne 2016). By this standard, Aletia’s family is actually “ultra-poor” or far below the poverty line (see also Kedir and Sookram 2013). I remember when Jacqueline once found work with a local pizza joint but was required to purchase her own uniform. At that time, Aletia was working two jobs – as a dishwasher at an Asian restaurant and as a temporary street sweeper through the corporation. She was saving money to get Jacqueline that uniform.

When Aletia got diagnosed with a failing kidney, Jacqueline became her mother's primary caretaker. As a URP worker, Jacqueline would have probably gotten a short-term contract which would have been ideal for her living situation because URP workers are infamous for working much fewer hours than their stipulated shift time. This flexibility in work hours would, in turn, have fit seamlessly with Aletia's medical needs – her daughter would bring in additional income while working fewer hours, and so have time to take her mother to the hospital. Unfortunately, the URP job never materialized.

What Eltina and Dave did not understand when they dismissed those seeking URP employment through patronage was the historical logic of reciprocity that on the one hand adhered voters to the PNM party and on the other hand cultivated an expectation that their loyalty would be rewarded through non-programmatic benefits. Aletia represented the bulk of Africans who are more likely to be represented in the lowest quintile than any other ethnic group in TT (Henry et al. 2006:73).

For as long as I interacted with Aletia, Jacqueline mostly stayed home with the kids. A few weeks after Aletia's health began deteriorating, Jacqueline found a job at a clothing store. The timing was crucial because Aletia's bad leg and her dialysis would eventually force her to stop working. She confided in me that she'd rest easy when her unemployed son (who was, at the time, babysitting his three nieces and nephews) would also bring in income. A month later, Jacqueline lost her job because of a tiff with the owner. Her brother fortunately found a temporary job at this juncture. The mantle of sole breadwinner had tentatively transferred on to him.

### ***Broker-mediated patronage***

One day, two and a half months before local government elections, I met Aletia in an agitated state. She spoke rapidly, peppering her sentences with the word “vex” and simultaneously wiping down her whole face with her right hand, from forehead to cheeks and chin, in one fell swoop while shaking her head worryingly. There had been some miscommunication between her and Dennis, the PNM Councilor for her area, who was up for re-election. Aletia’s party group had put its weight behind Dennis’ competitor in the upcoming elections. Aletia’s voice quivered as she tried to convince me that that she wasn’t even actively involved in the party’s activities and so knew nothing of these developments.

One day she was offered a ride by a gentleman she knew from her area, and she took it. She didn’t know then that this gentleman was to be Dennis’ political contender. Dennis saw Aletia and the man together, and quickly tagged Aletia as being an accomplice to his potential ousting. Since then Dennis had been giving Aletia the cold shoulder. Stress showed on Aletia’s body; her shoulders drooped, she kept shaking her head, her eyes looked very worried. She was desperately dependent on Dennis as her only source of access to political patronage. This is because Dennis had been instrumental in helping Aletia find temporary work at the SGRC headquarters. The lived reality of seeking relocation, of getting Jacqueline a job, and the fact that Dennis operated out of the same neighborhood as Aletia made him an indispensable resource.

In fact, this is why in January, Aletia had attended the SGRC consultation as part of the “turnout” from Dennis’ jurisdiction. It was imperative that Aletia be in her Councilor’s good books – “You never know,” she had once said sagely. It was a strategic decision to keep all avenues of assistance open – a safeguard against disruption. In other words, her reason for



attending was a political one. Now her state of despair over the misunderstanding revealed the tenuous nature of such inter-personal networking.

Dennis was more than the local Councilor for his area. His ability to “work the system,” to pull the right strings and secure, for example, jobs for his constituents also made him a broker of his party. He was able to leverage his own politically-networked access to directly connect Aletia (a.k.a. client) to PNM leadership through the PNM-appointed job supervisor at SGRC (read: patron), and so circumvent the formal bureaucratic process governing temporary job placements at his corporation. Aletia’s situated practice of seeking employment for Jacqueline through the URP and Dennis’ connections to the SGRC supervisor reveals a highly localized understanding of the avenues through which party loyalty can be rewarded.

Local political representatives with their non-elected operatives can sometimes achieve more outside of formal institutions than from within the system. In her analysis of decentralization practices across thirty municipalities in Mexico, Grindle (2009) studied the inter-linkages between decentralization and democratization of the government through four parameters: competitive elections, civil society engagement, modernization of the public sector and leadership of elected officials. Her research shows that decentralization and democratization shared a strained relationship; for example, local government officials were able to access more power and authority but they resisted strong institutional measures to check their exercise of power (Grindle 2009:120).

In other words, the sharing of power between central and local government bodies did not necessarily lead to new intimacies with local communities; decentralization was just as likely to reproduce the same political matrices of centralized power, albeit now inclusive of local power brokers. Grindle’s (2009) research revealed the irony, for example, of a weak local government

system with a politically powerful Mayor. As an appointee of a centralized state, the Mayor becomes a critical point of contact (read: broker) between his constituency and the central government. Grindle (2009) points out that the lack of budgetary power at the local government level ironically makes the Mayor an important game changer in local government affairs. His job of “liberating funds” (Grindle 2009:93) from the central government gives him symbolic authority amongst his peers and constituency.

In their cross-national examination of clientelism, Stokes et al. (2013) put forth a broker-mediated theory of clientelism premised on the fact that brokers are deeply inserted into local knowledge networks so as to facilitate better linkages between patrons and clients. Political brokers are often constitutive of the very network of voters whose responsibility they are enlisted with. Thirty seven percent of 2000 Argentinian voters interviewed by Stokes et al. (2013) in 2003 agreed that brokers could find out how they voted<sup>50</sup> even in the event of a secret ballot, of which majority conceded they didn't know how brokers had such an ability (101). Correspondingly, 80 percent of 773 Argentinian brokers interviewed by the authors acknowledged their ability to know how people in their local networks voted (Stokes et al. 2013:100-101). These brokers relied on their “social embeddedness” rather than “the quantity of votes” tallied at a polling booth to make calculated guesses of their clients' political affiliations (Stokes et al. 2013:104). On the one hand, this is astounding information but on the other hand it also reveals the intimacy inherent in such locally situated networks.

Centralized governance, like in Trinidad, is only sustainable when agents of the state can carry on the state's work at the local level through formal or informal means. Brokers' embedded networks are a product of and response to this structural dispersion of the state (see also Auyero 2000:4). The absence of professionalized local governance and the high dependency on political

favors has spurred multiple personifications of the state such that for many of my research participants finding a job, getting electricity, fixing a drain, etc. has to be cajoled out of state-level Ministries through local power brokers.

The history of clientelism, authoritarian government and partially decentralized local governments has given birth to a weak periphery wherein “little PMs” (Consultation event, Apr 26, 2016) in the form of local elites, enterprising local politicians, party groups, and networked civilians proliferate to fill the gap between an unwieldy core and its flimsy fringes. Big and small brokers operate in overlapping spheres of power and influence, able to spawn their own little chiefdoms because they operate in a party-centric political system. They exchange information with party machines for their own shot at a political career or even perhaps to maximize rent extraction for as long as they play the game (see also Stokes et al. 2013).

Dave, the URP manager mentioned earlier, referred to himself as a “shadow MP,” implying that he had the ability to bridge the gap between dependent clients and their political patrons through jobs at the URP. His comparison of his own positionality to that of an MP rather than a Councilor or even Mayor/Chairman is telling – MPs are formally closer to the ultimate circle of power – the PM’s Cabinet. Dave’s self-proclaimed status as a “shadow MP” fits into narratives of corruption that are rampant alongside the perceived structural dispersion of the state. Griffin and Persad (2013) accuse state-sponsored social welfare projects as well as community-based organizations (CBOs) of exploiting the gap in service delivery created by weak governance structures. They note that drug and organized gang monies have largely financed CBOs in Trinidad wherein “community leaders” helped politicians secure votes in marginalized communities in exchange for financial incentives and social capital (2013:89, see also Velez-Ibanez 1983). As such, the structural relationship between political parties and gangs

(covertly operating as CBOs) reveals the “un-civil” nature of social welfare initiatives that have operated under a “veneer of legitimacy” provided by the state political system (Griffin and Persad 2013:87-90).

The lived anxiety of managing these localized infiltrations of arbitrary power and influence manifested in a conversation I had with Winston, a mason and permanent contractor with a local government office. “Where is the fairness for a small man?” he asked me rhetorically during our meeting. He told me of his experience visiting HDC – he went there to submit an application to work on a housing project. “He [HDC personnel] tell me it is 500 dollar to fill in the form ‘to keep in the drawer,’” he recounted angrily. “How do you pick five contractors? What is the requirement? Nobody tell me. Do they pick up five randomly from drawer? I know, if they know me, they will pick up my form.” On the one hand, given the history of centralized power, corruption is accepted as a necessary evil to getting things done. On the other hand, it is continually evoked as “an abdication of the social contract and a cause célèbre of disenfranchised classes and the political opposition” (Jobson 2018:462). Corruption charges are, thus, both a commentary on the failing state and an exercise in demystifying the informal networks within which the dispersed state operates.

Brokers are able to tap into the precise needs of the community they service. As a result they can economically secure voluntary compliance in the form of turnout at a rally or volunteers for an election drive, for example. The role of brokers becomes paramount in maintaining party stability because knowing what will keep loyalists loyal demands cultivating extensive social networks to first tap into the world of loyalists, and then fulfill needs and benefits just enough to maintain the network status-quo. Ultimately, the role of the broker is to maximize the utility of patronage across the widest net of loyalists even if their individual contribution to the “building

of electoral consensus” might only be mildly significant (Auyero 2000:11). As poorer voters derive the greatest marginal utility of income, this demographic is the easiest and most lucrative target for party brokers (Brusco et al. 2007). Consequently, Carlos and Anderson (1991:172-73) also acknowledge the power of local brokers to “either obstruct or facilitate the flow of demands, favors, goods and services to or from some constituency.” Aletia’s anxiety over the miscommunication with Dennis is completely understandable in this context. Dennis was indispensable to Aletia. He had represented Aletia’s area since 2013 - that was three years of precariously nurtured social bonds of reciprocity that conjoined livelihood and trust to party loyalty. Now the chance for another three years of this courtship instantly seemed tenuous.

### *Networked dependencies*

The entrenched nature of client-patron relations in Trinidad has enabled people like Aletia to subvert formal channels of (weak) governance and directly access political leadership to get things done. It’s about “who know who,” making dons out of enterprising Councilors and minions out of Mayors. The highly centralized and controlled nature of Trinidadian party politics has led to a proliferation of brokers formally and informally networked into the party system. Councilors, Mayors, “community leaders,” party group members, are all positioned to cultivate their own political capital by promising access to the obscure networks of party patronage. The bigger their web of influence, the more likely these situated power brokers are to cultivate their own political capital. Knoke (1990:10) alludes to such a phenomenon as having “positional power.” For the desperate and poor public, accessing government services becomes an ad hoc game of chance and the right connection.

Dennis, whose political connections Aletia desperately sought, was himself on the radar of a more powerful local broker named Elizabeth. Unlike Dennis, Elizabeth was not formally involved in politics. Elizabeth's situatedness outside the realm of formal politicking represents another manifestation of state-ness through local networks of sociality (see also Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:155). My access to the inner workings of this type of networked dependency happened quite by chance. At that time I was still living in PoS. When it came time to move to SGRC, my landlady offered to reach out to her own network to find me a place to stay. She inadvertently introduced me to Elizabeth. Of course, I didn't realize Elizabeth was a political broker until a few weeks later when I could contextualize her "community" activities through her deep political roots. Indeed, Elizabeth introduced herself to me as a community activist. During the three months I stayed with her, she was almost manic in her involvement in civic projects. She is a workaholic and deeply vested in local issues affecting SGRC residents. People dropped by during all hours of the day, sometimes starting at 8a.m. and ending at 11p.m. at night. Her phone was her best friend and also my worst enemy. Our interviews were almost always cut short by a phone call or text message.

Once a week, Elizabeth's family gathered from around the country to discuss the state of affairs, peruse candidate lists, and make and break careers over chicken curry and rice. As a PNM representative in a swing municipality, Dennis' value to the party, and so also to Elizabeth, was imminent upon winning again. If Dennis did win re-election then Aletia's fervent desire to get back in his favor would be well placed - especially as her health was deteriorating.

I asked Elizabeth why she attended the reform consultation. Her response was predictably performative and self-aggrandizing –

First of all, I agree with this reform. Second, my presence there is very good for society because I want them, all my friends and colleagues, the average man on the road to

understand that we have all been supporting and buying into this program. Third, I would like to say that knowledge is never limited and I would learn something every time I would go to a different event because what I did not pick up in one I will pick up on the other. Understanding it, I would be able to transfer the knowledge to the average man on the road who have [sic] not been there. I worked on committees who have [been] understudied over the years. But working and storing it inside is one thing but not being able to transfer it means I'm nothing.

Elizabeth viewed herself as a conduit of knowledge and information within her community. She justified her involvement in politics as an offshoot of community work – “we [my family] got involved through service with the [sic] politics because it gave us an opportunity to serve at a different level.” Elizabeth represented power without public accountability. She was the quintessential go-between for civilians searching for their state. Her access to the PNM party network allowed her to repurpose the flow of patronage as community assistance, and she could make it happen in less than 20 words over WhatsApp. She became a “quasi-monopolist” in solving local problems (Auyero 2000:8; see also Stokes et al. 2013).

Elizabeth's embeddedness between the civic and political suggests that state-ness was being fostered through party politics as well as charismatic authority figures like herself. This occurs at the national level but also at the local level through hierarchies of political brokers (Stokes et al. 2013:92). Elizabeth's importance as a political broker became painfully evident through my interactions with other research participants from the area. If Trinidad exhibits the geographical intimacy of a small island then living in SGRC is like living with family. Everyone knows everyone else's business. When people asked me where I was staying and I said “Elizabeth's,” the dramatic change in their disposition was impossible to miss. Eyebrows went up, I was asked if I was a close friend of hers, others requested that I convey a hello from their side and ask after her family. My connection to Elizabeth was also instrumental in getting in the

good books of the Mayor of another city – he even arranged for a rental apartment and car at my disposal which I promptly but courteously refused.

In his study of clientelism, Auyero (2000) points to the fall-out of clients perceiving their brokers as the distributing agency rather than the state. A member of a broker's inner circle said to him during research – "People think it's her [broker's] obligation to give out things, and it's not an obligation. She does it because she wants to. What's her obligation? Who is she? Is she your mother? People get confused a lot. You do them a favor, and it seems like it is an obligation. And it is a favor" (Auyero 2000:9). Auyero's findings suggest that brokers can become imbued with a moral responsibility to "take care" of their people in a way that is almost impossible to demand from a dispersed state. Until the state presents itself through a forum like a local consultation, brokers are often the only means of bringing the state into sharp relief.

Familiarity with a broker combined with the latter's positionality as an interlocuter of their party can transform a transactional relationship into an emotional one. Across political and anthropological literature on clientelism, scholars have emphasized the social dimension of the client-patron nexus. For example, Turner and Young (1985:158) suggest that the relative importance of strong kinship and ethnic ties in the developing country context supplies a "social logic" to patron-client networks. For the urban and rural poor, their social networks are a type of security net against the financial vicissitudes of everyday living (Lomnitz 1988). Critically, these are "mixed networks" premised on the logic of reciprocity that encompass but also significantly extend beyond kinship ties (Lomnitz 1977). Informal alliances forged out of family and neighborhood networks are survival strategies which "have always made it possible for [] various activities to coagulate into a poor but socially protected way of life" (Mingione 1991:87). Rubinstein (1975) puts forth a "resource-deprivation theory of exchange behavior" that draws



attention to the literal (biologically) adaptive function of social exchange – mixed networks of reciprocity allow for the “maintenance of the ‘critical fraction’ of its population” in high resource-deprivation contexts like those experienced by the urban poor (Rubinstein 1975:261). The creation and maintenance of political networks reinforced through the practice of patronage offers poor voters another avenue to secure their future needs (Conniff 1981; Knoke 1990). Such voters are already immersed in “deeply networked organizations” (Stokes et al. 2013:288) of the party machine that extend from national offices to working class neighborhoods. In this context, political brokers personify their parties at the local level. They are anchored in the immediate lived reality of temporary jobs, weak infrastructure and an uncertain future.

A simmering skepticism on the sustainability of well-publicized, sometimes well-intentioned, state initiatives that may or may not last through the next political cycle had beget in Aletia a temporary, unsustainable desire for short-term patronage as and when she encounters political leadership – be it in the form of her Councilor or party group leaders. Other participants expressed similar short-term desires. I heard phrases like “Maybe *this* Councilor can get my drain fixed,” “Maybe my housing application can be fast-tracked *this* time.”

A few months after we first met, Aletia told me she was suffering from a failing kidney for which she needed dialysis treatment. A state-sponsored medical welfare program was paying for 12 rounds of treatment. Aletia had to cut down on her work days as a result of her illness. In the midst of Aletia’s anxiety over alienating Dennis she got an impromptu call to meet her party group’s leader one day. This was the same group that had thrown its support behind Dennis’ contender for the upcoming elections. Wary of being dragged into another political battle, Aletia expressed her hesitation to me to meet with her group but she eventually capitulated. Later that hot afternoon in the neighboring town of Arima, Aletia and I stopped by the cool, sweet-smelling

Asian restaurant where Aletia occasionally worked - she was meeting the Vice President (VP) of her group here. Like a fly on the wall, I watched and appreciated the camaraderie with which Aletia, the VP and one other woman met, hugged and shared prayers for Aletia's health. Then the VP handed over some cash to Aletia and told her she'd work with the group to get Aletia monetary assistance outside of what her social welfare package provided. "Yah mus take care of yahself," the VP insisted to her.

In his research on clientelism in Bolivia, Lazar (2004:232) notes the importance of "aval politico" - a record of one's involvement in a party - that helped clients accrue patronage at a later stage. Temporary gestures of patronage shown to party partisans can have a powerful "demonstration effect" (Auyero 2000:6) of showing that their loyalty and patience could pay off. Even if short-term benefits are wanting, expectant clients rely on the import of their proven track record with parties to accrue long-term advantages - hence Aletia's assertion of being entitled to patronage in Chapter 3 - "I want PNM to not forget the foot soldiers. I want to see them get something."

Yet, here I was in the company of a vulnerable loyalist. I watched my usually strong, happy companion come awash with emotion. All of a sudden Aletia looked exhausted. Hard cash and the promise of more assistance had eased the burden of her having to figure it all out. We walked in silence to the Republic Bank a stone's throw away - she needed to get a printed bank statement for one of the public assistance forms she was submitting to the hospital. I felt a light drizzle on my skin. Like the heat, our spirits were instantly lifted. I bought three apples as we crossed the shacks of Arima market to get to the bank. I felt an urgency to give Aletia something, anything, in that moment to signal to her that I too wished to help.

In their ability to render services locally and get things done outside of formal state processes, socio-political networks between patrons, brokers and clients sustain a party's core group of supporters through personalized politics so ensuring the convergence of social and political identities. Elizabeth, Dennis, Aletia and Aletia's party group members were all present at the SGRC consultation. Aletia's desire at the consultations to *confirm* her situatedness within the PNM party reveals the tenacity and frailty of socio-political matrices of power that enfold poor voters and brokers into the same political system. These relational networks that are hyperlocal, personal, and opportunistic work because of cultivated dependencies – for votes, patronage, positional power, and political careers. They are also not mutually exclusive which explains Aletia's continued relationship with her party group while also personally inserting herself into her Councilor's network of influence. These were all contingency plans that not only spoke to her creative strategies to access political patronage but also to her embeddedness in social networks of belonging.

### ***Conclusion***

The phenomenological impact of state-sponsored public consultations on the attending public is one of "sighting" (Jakimow 2014b) the dispersed state. The inability of civilians to trace the path of accountability for local issues affecting everyday life like drains, potholes, and electricity reveals the potency of seeking out the state at such events. Yet the reality of the Trinidadian electoral system that has prioritized party politics over constituency representation means that desperate voters are likely to seek out assistance as party loyalists rather than normative citizens of the state. The consultations which were publicized as forums for public input towards reform

policy were instead interpreted by many as opportunities to secure material gains from party leadership.

In this chapter I have shown how the plethora of possibilities to access political patronage flourish in the shadow of a pathetically weak local government system. Councilors and Mayors, along with other networked unofficial brokers, have become proxies for the state precisely because the dispersed state is simultaneously all-encompassing and amorphous. These individuals inhabit overlapping spheres of political influence, reflecting shared dependencies towards personal and political gains.

Aletia is an ultra-poor loyalist of the PNM party who was raised in the shadow of political patronage. Consequently she expected the same for her children and so articulated her political subjectivity as that of a deserving, entitled “foot soldier” of her party. Her lived reality was different. Her party had not provided for her daughter the way it had for herself and her parents. I contextualize her search for patronage through the intertwined networks of influence that take her from her local Councilor to her PNM party group and even to the state-run URP agency where she sought to get her daughter a job. I make the case that loyalists like Aletia are immersed in deeply personalized networks of access that reassert the importance of party affiliation if only in an ad-hoc manner borne off the conditions created by a dispersed state.

## CHAPTER 5 THE POLITICS OF EVERYDAY SOCIALITY

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### *Introduction*

In Chapter 4, I briefly introduced Peter as someone who has encountered first-hand the structural dispersion of the state through an incomplete drainage project outside his house. He is a 67-year-old African man who, at the time I met him, was recently retired from working at the oil rigs in South Trinidad. His pockmarked face and white scruff conspire with his slight hunch to reveal a man who has “been around de block.” He has a raspy baritone voice – one that endeared him as a Calyposian singer amongst his peers. I, however, struggled with his gruffness for it exacerbated his already thick Trinidadian accent. At our first rendezvous, I was so unsure of the directions he gave over the phone that I just stood on the main road and asked him to find me rather than the other way around.

He spoke at the consultation representing the shared woes of his community, Moriah Hills. The client-patron nexus that defines Trinidadian politics at the local and national level is sharply severed in this community that seems to have no formal route to the country’s PNM leadership. This is because Moriah Hills is a PNM bastion in a majority UNC constituency. So his area is in a political checkmate. It bears the brunt of bruised egos of the UNC party that lost the general election; it simultaneously remains inaccessible to the ruling PNM party because it falls under the jurisdiction of a UNC-stronghold. In a country where apolitical governance is sorely lacking, falling through the cracks is as good as not existing at all.

However Peter’s normative claim to public accountability clashed with the cultural logic of chasing patronage when the government underperforms. While on the one hand he

participated in the consultation as a citizen demanding the state reveal itself, he also harbored an unambiguous political identity – that of a member of a local PNM party group.

A few months after he attended the consultation, I found myself sharing lunch with Peter on his now-familiar pink porch. After a sumptuous meal of chicken barbeque, he lit up a smoke and pulled out a document from the top drawer of a chest by the porch entrance. It had the words “Moriah Hills Party Group 6” printed on top. Below the heading was a neatly typed out table of “issues” on the left and corresponding addresses on the right. I realized this was a comprehensive list of the local infrastructural needs (mostly around drainage) of the community, including his. Even as Peter bemoaned the failure of his government to fix his drain, his immediate desire was for political patronage to fill the gap. The list that Peter shared with me bore witness to the deep play of patronage infiltrating community life in Trinidad. Peter was sitting on a litany of local development projects that technically fall under the purview of his local government, the Princes Town Regional Corporation, but he would rather tap into his own party group for procuring the resources needed.

In this chapter, I situate Peter’s request at the consultations that the state reveal itself (“... I would like to see [] the government”) within the destructive force of geo-politics, and the subsequent apathy of the PNM party to take care of its own in a “weak” electoral district. Moriah Hills represents a community of political “leftovers” who have been sidelined by their own party. Yet this community continues to vote for the PNM party even as the politics of place creates fissures of discontent amongst party loyalists.

In the earlier chapter I highlighted the situatedness of party loyalists like Aletia within hyper-local networks of reciprocity that are cultivated and run by formal and informal political brokers of the PNM party. Consequently, Aletia’s narratives of entitlement (see also Chapter 3)

and her understandings of her political self emerged from her ad-hoc pursuit of assistance primarily through her Councilor and her PNM party group. For Aletia, access to patronage was a matter of “who know who” within existing and thriving channels of clientelism in SGRC.

In Moriah Hills, to the contrary, these access points are glaringly absent. Here, more than anywhere else, relational networks between PNM voters, PNM party group members, PNM state leaders, and UNC local and state leaders in the area reflect multiple possibilities for political imagination and subject formation in the midst of a strong history of party identification. In the following sections I ask, how are party identities strategically negotiated and enacted in the liminal spaces carved out of the phenomenon of geo-politics itself? What permutations of power and access thrive in the gap created by a dispersed state that feed into the party culture I have alluded to earlier?

### *“We in the middle of nowhere”*

Moriah Hills is a beautiful, idyllic hamlet outside the city of San Fernando. It is perfectly carved into small rolling hills that on a cloudless night offer glimpses of twinkling lights from the surrounding neighborhoods of the Princes Town Regional Corporation and the Penal-Debe Regional Corporation. The roads are paved, clean and wind around soft bends as far as the eye can see. In true “Trini” style, houses are all architecturally distinct and adorned with bright paint and plants and trees all around.

Behind the veneer of its idyllic beauty, however, Moriah Hills is marred by local and national-level politicking that has everything to do with its physical location. Geographically, it is considered an extension of the San Fernando City Corporation. Administratively, it is part of the local government of the neighboring Princes Town Regional Corporation that is considered a

UNC-stronghold. For general elections, Moriah Hills falls under the jurisdiction of the parliamentary electoral district of St. James. St. James has historically been represented by a UNC MP.

In the 2015 general elections, Moriah Hills predictably voted for the PNM candidate for the MP seat who eventually lost. Moriah Hills' renegade politics as a PNM bastion in a UNC-dominated area is public information – how this constituency swung in the last general and local election is easily available through the website of Trinidad and Tobago's Election and Boundaries Commission (GRTT 2019a). Consequently, PNM loyalists with whom I interacted in this community believe the area is being penalized by the opposition party for its political allegiance. In practice, penalization meant the restricted ability of Moriah Hills residents to demand the timely acquisition of civic benefits like a fixed drain, paved roads and electricity.

Peter's demand that the state reveal itself was a pragmatic one. "To fix anything the most important thing is to know where we stand. And we don't know where we stand... till they don't fix that [through reform], we in limbo," Peter's voice trailed off during our interview. As I showed in Chapter 4, the search for accountability regarding drainage outside his house had taken Peter to the doorsteps of two Ministries and two local governments. Local government reform would ease the community's woes by transforming the issue from a political one to a bureaucratic one. Local governments would collect taxes from residents who can claim accountability for issues of governance and service delivery. As Moriah Hills comes under the political jurisdiction of the Princes Town Regional Corporation, tax revenue would flow to this entity and it would be a straightforward matter that drainage would be handled by them as well. So he attended the consultation to seek clarity from Minister Khan who managed the portfolio of all local governments.



The historical segregation of labor in colonial Trinidad has allowed racial groups to congeal behind geographical boundaries creating what Khan (1997) calls “racial landscapes” across the country. A single representative for each electoral district<sup>51</sup> almost guarantees the essentialization of race with geography; only one social group can take the spotlight at a time. Trinidadian politics has percolated into physical geography creating “political fiefdoms” (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:121) that symbolize political monopolies. Tracing the path of racialized self-segregation, the PNM party with its core voter base of Africans considers the municipalities of Port of Spain, Diego Martin and San Fernando as “essential seats” (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:106) while Central and South-Central Trinidad is by extension UNC-favoring. So patronage flows along already established channels of political favoritism also bound by geography.

Today, it is not uncommon to see large state projects left incomplete or government policies instantly overturned after a political change of guard simply because they had the stamp of the previous administration. On my way to Moriah Hills from PoS, I would often pass a big beautiful building built along the Sir Solomon Hochoy Highway linking North and South Trinidad. An elaborate winding driveway and flickering tube lights bespoke of an ambitious project - The Children’s Hospital - commissioned by the PP administration in 2012. Alas, it didn’t last through the election cycle. Like other failed projects over the years including the Brian Lara Stadium in the south and the National Academy of Performing Arts in the north, the hospital project became a talking point for failed governance linked to the extractive ambitions of those in power.

In Moriah Hills, Madan, an East Indian participant and a dear friend once took me on a drive-along during which he pointed out a cluster of well-maintained but abandoned houses a

few miles from where he and Peter lived. The housing project was an eye sore – a reminder of another failed initiative of a past government. Then Prime Minister Manning (read: PNM) had promised low-income housing but, come distribution time, not only had the government changed hands but the new UNC government almost doubled the qualifying income bracket for home applicants (Baboolal 2015). In other words, they eventually capitulated to the lure of the deeper pockets of the middle class. A few miles down the road another half-occupied housing project, this time a UNC initiative, wreaked of political showmanship that rejected the laws of supply and demand. Like discarded trophies, these projects remind residents of the fleeting yet tenacious presence of politicking in their neighborhood<sup>52</sup>.



*Image 13: A largely abandoned housing development project in Moriah Hills*

In examining the clientelist motivations of politicians to make inefficient public expenditure decisions, Robinson and Verdier (2013:261) note that these choices are often tied to “the continuation utility of a voter to their political success.” Before her party (UNC) formed a coalition government in 2010, Kamla Persad Bissessar had voted against the PNM party’s proposal to build a major highway near Moriah Hills that would connect San Fernando to Point

Fortin (where many oil workers living in Moriah Hills commute to). She was heading to her own East Indian constituency in South Trinidad that would be directly affected through displacement along one section of the road. That year, she won the general election and became the country's first female PM.

By 2011, however, as PM she rescinded on her promise, signing a \$5.2 billion TTD (approximately 767 million USD) contract to commence the highway project that was now rearticulated as necessary in order to “alleviate traffic and bring spectacular development to an underdeveloped region of the party stronghold in South Trinidad” (Jobson 2018:467; see also Trinidad Express 2012). During her reelection campaign in 2015, Kamla inaugurated a tiny completed section of the highway to much fanfare - it was the part that ran through her constituency. By this time, \$5 billion TTD (over 700 million USD) had already been spent towards the project (Jobson 2018) that was nowhere near to complete. The road, like other incomplete infrastructural projects, had been fetishized – “the calls for ‘more road’ privilege[d] the spectacle of building works above the technical attributes of the roadway (Jobson 2018:460).

The etched landscape of half-revived communities in Moriah Hills was testimony to the tug of power between Trinidad's two dominant parties that directly affects the living situation of hundreds of citizens clamoring for gridding in state-sponsored housing. However, getting a house was only the beginning of the battle. A community of houses is only legitimized when it comes with other infrastructural fixes like electricity, drainage, a water connection, maybe even a community center and a playground. Many PNM supporters I spoke with in Moriah Hills believed that their civic life was hampered by misaligned politics. Moriah Hills was literally playing from the wrong side.

Yet devoted PNM loyalists like Peter continued to vote for the party in spite of having no formal representation at the local government or state level. The loyalty of PNM supporters in Moriah Hills was a deep-seated, long-established kind of partisan loyalty, the kind that Dalton (2016) alludes to in the American South - he found the phenomenon of party partisanship so entrenched there that he often heard the phrase, “They [Southern Democrat voters] would vote for anyone, even a yellow dog, if they were a Democrat,” (2) in reference to such consolidation of party identities. I encountered an uncannily similar articulation of party loyalty in Moriah Hills - “Put a crapaud<sup>53</sup> in a suit and people will vote for the PNM,” I was told<sup>54</sup>. So what gives?

I discovered that the distraught, fatigued, yet consistent display of loyalty by PNM voters I met in Moriah Hills had as much to do with a supra-political identity of PNM partisanship as with the politics of everyday sociality nurtured through the slippages between civic and political life that become acute in geographically intimate settings where politicians and political brokers are also neighbors, friends, and family. In this context of dense social bonding, there is very little scope to hide one’s political affiliation. To the contrary, it is openly embraced and even strategically negotiated as a type of peripheral politics to get things done in the absence of formal representation. Political subjectivities forged in midst of these ambivalences are a testimony to both the stickiness of party identification and civilian strategies to mitigate the effect of lacking formal political representation.

### ***Community councils and public organizing***

During our second rendezvous, Peter invited me to a meeting of the Moriah Hills Community Council. This group was led by a woman named Natalie who had also attended the reform consultations. The community council meeting took place in the evening, in the patio of

someone's house. The compound was painted a light baby pink and was open to the street on one side. Folding metal chairs were laid out haphazardly around a wooden table at which sat the community council President, assistant secretary and accountant. The mood was casual with a wailing baby from the host's house occasionally breaking the drone of business talk. The group was deliberating details for the upcoming Sports and Family Day.



*Image 14: A community council meeting*

As one of its highlights Natalie wanted to invite representatives from two Ministries to have booths to discuss issues like disaster preparedness with the community. She had received second-hand information that neither Ministry would be able to send representatives but would provide flyers and pamphlets at most. Her frustration was palpable. She was instructed by the Ministry of Sports to “keep things simple” and route requests for *any* Ministry’s involvement in the celebrations through the former. There was to be no direct line of communication between the community council and the Ministries they wanted to invite.

Having interacted with other community and village councils, I knew that it was not uncommon for at least the President of such a group to have direct access to either a Councilperson, the Mayor or MP of the area for community events and planning. This was not

the case in Moriah Hills. In fact, this group did not even control access to its own community center. Natalie was not given the keys to physically enter the venue – for that, she required permission from either the St. James MP or from an elusive “somebody” at the Princes Town Regional Corporation.

A few weeks prior, Natalie had attended a large meeting of the prevailing Trinidad and Tobago Association of Village and Community Councils (TTAVCC). She called it the “Council of Councils” meeting where she learned of other community groups in a similar plight. She was bluntly told that access to a community center depends on the tenacity and voracity of the MP championing their cause. “Well, I said then,” she told us all conspiratorially on the pink patio. “We in [Moriah Hills] are not getting anything then because we can’t meet our MP!” The audience burst into snickers. The Vice President said seriously, “Our MP is dormant. Maybe we really have to get serious, have some press conference, something, something that is organized properly, where many people show up... people should have prepared speeches so that emotions don’t get over us.” One man chuckled and said contrarily, “Maybe we should burn some tires.”

Public organizing has a vibrant history in Trinidad. Starting with the era of the Crown Colony system, participation in grassroot organizations in Trinidad became the only viable alternative to having a collective voice when political franchise was lacking at the local level. In 1919, poor working conditions instigated oil and dockyard workers, city Council workers, and electricity and telephone workers to go on strike against American and French Creole industry owners in the country (Crichlow 1998:70-73). In the 1970s, the Black Power movement reaffirmed the power of public organizing. The movement’s leader, Geddes Granger, with the support of revolutionary student organizations from the University of West Indies, Augustine, under the banner of the National Joint Action Committee (NJAC), led 250 people in protest

against the government. The movement morphed into a crowd of 10,000 when the PNM government arrested Granger and his political supporters the next day. In January 1987, just weeks after the multi-racial NAR party was voted into power, public servants unhappy with the removal of the Cost of Living Allowance led the first wave of demonstrations. Within the next two years, the Joint Trade Union Movement, oil workers, and nurses also went on strike to protest against the retrenchment of workers, the imposition of 15% Value Added Tax, the scale back of health services, and the privatization of state enterprises, amongst other concerns (Abdulah 1991:85).

Moriah Hills on its own has attracted oil workers and their families on account of its proximity to the Petrotrin oil fields in south-west Trinidad. Peter and his East Indian neighbor, Madan, who showed me the abandoned housing projects, both worked at the oil fields. Peter was now retired but Madan had continued working. The Oilfields Workers' Trade Union in Trinidad is a robust collective that has displayed the might of collective organizing as recently as September 2018 (Hunte 2018). A month after its latest protest, Madan sent me YouTube videos and screenshots via WhatsApp on the imminent closure of the oil refinery where he worked.

CSOs like village councils and community councils are birthed out of such a rich history of civic engagement and organizing that the public deems necessary to keep the state's political machinations in check. They challenge "elite-dominated governance" through their potential to consolidate social capital by building horizontal alliances that cut across community segments (Lemmie 2008:47). The comment, "Maybe we should burn some tires" reflected an overtly political turn in the conversation amongst Moriah Hills community members. At this juncture of my relationship with this community, I knew nothing of the political affiliations of the people

sitting around me. I later learned that in the truest sense of a civic gathering, those present represented political affiliations from both sides of the aisle.

Sports Day was scheduled for June 5<sup>th</sup>, three weeks after the aforementioned community council meeting. During this time, I forged close friendship with both Peter and Madan whose endearing friendship was characterized by lots of friendly banter and political jibes. Madan would joke about Peter taking his job as party group member too seriously; Peter would quip back with something about Madan talking too much. By way of introduction, Madan suggested I join some of the community women as they made snacks on the day of the Sports Day event. That afternoon he picked me up at 3:30 p.m. from the Ahimsa Habitat and dropped me off at Neeta's – the woman at whose house the cooking was happening. There were three women and one man at this backyard "lime" or hangout; they all identified as East Indian. I equated this joint activity to the groupness exhibited by the African Sisters at the Habitat (see my discussion on the "viscosity" of race in Chapter 3). All four individuals were busy in conversation when I arrived, talking away while expertly preparing and cooking *pholouries* (fried dough) and *sahina* (spinach cutlets) in an assembly line format. The snacks were being deep fried in giant cauldrons on an old, rusty three-burner stove attached to an exposed gas cylinder. In spite of the cool breeze that rustled through the cluttered backyard, drops of sweat were already dripping down my shirt. For two hours, I hung out by the stove, sometimes rolling the dough into small balls in between my palms, sometimes frying the balls till they turned the right shade of gleaming gold.

When the spotlight eventually turned to me and my research, I found three of the four individuals very willing to talk politics. Not only did they reveal how they identified ethnically and politically but one woman revealed a political strategy that spoke to the intertwining of civic and political agendas in the context of Moriah Hills – she openly admitted to voting for the PNM



candidate in the 2013 local government elections based on what he promised to do for the community through political patronage but swore her loyalty to the UNC in general elections. This phenomenon of strategic voting was reiterated during a drive-along with Peter a few days later.

Peter had wanted me to see a nearby playground whose beautification he earnestly wanted to bring under his party group's purview. The ground was nestled in a valley-like depression at the base of one of Moriah Hills' hills, encircled by a tar road with well-maintained, colorful houses dotting the perimeter. A spectacularly large tree with wide branches marked one end of the field. The ground was muddy but the grass was manicured. A neighbor waved to Peter and walked out with a hot cup of tea in his hand. He introduced himself as Ali and, upon learning why we were there, quipped that he had loaned his grass cutting machine for free to the PNM party group to clean up the ground.

Ali insisted that fixing the playground was a "community ting" – not a UNC or PNM matter. "Look at me," he said eagerly. "I a Muslim Indian. Last [local government] election I voted UNC but I don't like their work so I votin' PNM now. Nobody aks [*sic*] me to help based on my voting record. This is a mixed community." I asked him if he knew others who swung their vote like him. He said, "Everybody gettin' a little smarter... They know how the system work[s]. Many people vote strategically, they will vote for a PNM Councilor because the government in power is PNM." Voter intent or voting behavior in a single election did not index partisanship.

Peter had floated the idea at his party group meeting of using a couple of volunteers to help him collect donations from the community to also pay for the leveling for the jogging path surrounding the playground. His PNM seniors had categorically refused. With local government

elections looming around the corner, the party's Executive body wanted to project the playground as a party group initiative. So other than an arbitrary session of grass cutting, the park had remained untouched at the time I visited the site. This push for party branding at the expense of civic utility was a blatant effort by the party leadership to amass political capital in the community. By being a strategic conduit for the community of mostly PNM supporters to directly access their party's leadership, party groups claimed their discretion to reinforce the primacy of politics in matters of civic life. "Who fixed the playground? The PNM party did!" is a potent marketing strategy. In the tug of war characteristic of party politics in Trinidad, tangible forms of party "branding" become a potent reminder of the party's footprint in one's backyard.

### *Building solidarity through party group politics*

Close to elections, I accompanied Peter and his PNM party group members one day as they made their rounds of Moriah Hills introducing their candidate, Phil Atherly, to the community. It was 5:30p.m. Two cars accompanied us, one was outfitted with two microphones for making announcements, the other car was a black Land Rover that stayed to the back of our walking group. From it, volunteers supplied us with bottles of water, juice, and snacks during our walk. We were nine people who took to the streets of Moriah Hills. Everyone in the group wore red - the color of the PNM party - except me. In a classic case of political faux pas, I was wearing yellow - the color of the opposition party. I decided it was best to own up to my folly. Thankfully, all I got in return were laughs and consolation that color didn't matter.

The air was cool because the sun was setting behind us. I-Sasha's hit PNM anthem, "Let's do this," blared out of the microphones of the micman's car<sup>55</sup>. I almost couldn't stand it.

An hour later, the anthem was replaced with Peter taking the role of a micman, urging

community residents to come out of their houses to say hello to the PNM candidate. “Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen,” he said over the car’s loudspeaker, and then stumbled over his words, speaking off the cuff, freely intermingling “local government reform” with “local government elections” as he also reminded residents to attend the PNM cottage meeting scheduled for the next day. They would be deliberating the impact of reform as it affects the role and responsibilities of the newly elected Councilor.

We ventured further into the community just as dusk was hitting the rolling hills. Everything looked pristine and quiet, barring barking dogs and the loud music of our entourage. Around many a corner mammoth houses jutted into the skyline like swollen thumbs. Most houses were gated. Not everyone came out to greet Atherly. Sometimes residents stood in their doorways, watchful in the darkness, responding courteously to his calls but not moving an inch. Other residents came up to their metal fences and reached out through the railings to shake Atherly’s hand. “Don’t forget to vote,” he shouted to a lady standing 15 feet away, in the awning of her house. “Fix my drain!” she quipped back. Atherly would spend about 50 hours over the next two weeks on similar walk-about around other parts of his constituency.



*Image 15: Canvassing the neighborhood before local government elections*

The importance of party groups at the local level underscores the entrenched problem of civic accountability in the absence of strong local governance. The Moriah Hills party group embodied the schism left by boundary politicking. Through party groups favors are routed, interests are negotiated, and social bonds are forged. For those seeking the ear of their party, or looking to stoke their own political careers, membership in a party group opens up the playing field significantly. The intrusion of party culture into the fabric of everyday life has transformed patronage into a form of political and social control (Fox 1994; Mouzelis 1985; Wolf 2004). Party groups are made up of core party supporters who exchange their time and effort for various benefits – a chance to be political engaged, contribute to group welfare, and accumulate political capital for the future (Scarrow 2017). At the same time, local party groups lend themselves to maintaining intra-group cohesiveness and, more importantly, nurturing a sense of bonhomie amongst its members.

Emotional relations are heightened through a shared social identity that allows partisans to “bypass self-interest calculations and take actions that might appear ‘irrational’ from an individual-level perspective” (Groenendyk and Banks 2014:375). Stokes et al. (2013) suggest that indulging core supporters has many benefits for a party. They “are more likely to be energized and become activists” for the party, volunteer their time to hold party meetings, assist during the polls, and engage other voters (Stokes et al. 2013:72). In fact, based on extensive research across four developing countries, the authors point out that contrary to most theoretical models, patronage, in fact, flows *to* loyalists instead of “the loyal-voter result being an artifact of past receipt of rewards” (Stokes et al. 2013:58). They based their conclusions off triangulated data from surveys, existing data sets, interviews and secondary literature in Argentina, Mexico,

Venezuela and India where the authors questioned if party loyalty was an endogenous trait, meaning if it was dependent on one receiving gifts, subsidies, and other benefits from her preferred party. Instead they found that “loyalty attracts largess, rather than largess inducing loyalty” (Stokes et al. 2013:66). Indeed, this was the case with Aletia (Chapter 4). Her devotedness to the PNM party had instigated party group members to contribute towards her health expenses so reinforcing her ties to the party in the process.

In political psychology, social identity is defined as a subjective expression of belonging to a group, exhibiting a desire to protect group cohesiveness and subdue “individual differences in identity strength” (Tajfel 1981). Cohesiveness of groupness explained through social identity theory depends on an assertion of shared identity across group members. Huddy and Bankert (2017) use social identity theory to explain how the sense of groupness keeps partisans attached to their political group. They claim that the “the motivation to protect and advance group status” is a primary driver of maintaining group solidarity in politics, and this motivation is “expressive” in nature (Huddy, Mason, and Arroe 2015:4). A number of quantitative studies in political science have attempted to capture the subjective underpinnings of group formation and the affective responses towards changes in political group status (Ellemers, Kortekaas, and van Ouwwerkerk 1999; Leach et al. 2008) suggesting a new direction in political theory that prioritizes the emotional bonds that connect individuals to a shared group identity. Informal political alliances nurtured through local party groups activate a type of political socialization that, through actions and access to leadership, stabilizes one’s social identity as a party partisan.

Social identity theory can be distinguished from identity politics theory in anthropology through its emphasis on maintaining intra-group cohesion rather than emphasizing inter-group differentiation. It explains why partisans or loyalists will continue to participate in political

rallies, volunteer at election campaigns and tout the horn of their party even if the chances of winning are slim (Huddy and Bankert 2017:3), as in Moriah Hills. In fact, “prototypical” group members, or those who share the most common traits of a group, tend to practice ethnocentrism to a greater extent and display fierce group loyalty when provoked (Hogg and Hardie 1992).



*Image 16: A local government election rally of the United National Congress*

In Moriah Hills, the actions of PNM party group members expanded the political into the social. The “imagined community” (Anderson 1982) of PNM supporters and loyalists manifested through prosaic undertakings of shared car rides, greetings, and playful banter. This group was made up of neighbors, family, and friends – people who knew exactly who lived in which house, who had likely not updated their voter address, who was out of town, and which houses needed to be revisited – so enacting politics within already established forms of everyday sociality. In fact, regardless of formal membership in the party group, PNM supporters volunteered to take care of their own come election time. As such, party groups institutionalized the relational nature of a political party to its voters (Gay 1998).

### ***The culture of acknowledgement***

Community residents of Moriah Hills, however, were also seeking *actual assistance* – the kind they were not getting from their elected UNC representatives, and the type they sought from the PNM party instead. Given its status in-between the formal party machinery and local partisans, Party Group 6 also came to bear the burden of expectations linked to their performative promises. The group was putting up Atherly as the PNM candidate for the area yet it had not been able to procure the keys to the community center or fix the playground. To the contrary, the party group Executive had purposefully stalled the development of the public playground, waiting for the opportune time to brand it as a political initiative.

Consequently, the group's inability to deliver on its promises made Natalie, herself a PNM loyalist, wary of lofty promises. We met again at the cottage meeting hosted by Party Group 6 a day after Atherly's community walk. The meeting was held at the ground level of a house at the intersection of two streets a stone's throw away from where I was staying. Food and drinks were laid out to my far right, then came a sprinkling of chairs, bags and drink coolers. Unfortunately, to my left and driven right up the lawn was a sedan with its trunk popped open to reveal a massive audio system. The ubiquitous I-Sasha song on local government reform blasted from the single industrial-size speaker on the floor into my poor ears while my neighbor complained that the music was too soft to be noticed by community residents.



*Image 17: A cottage meeting of the People's National Movement party*

Natalie sat to the other side of me. She was fidgety, clicking her tongue when Atherly spoke about the PNM party's plans for the community. When the floor opened to public comments, she unabashedly reminded everyone that Moriah Hills had voted for the PNM candidate in the 2013 local election knowing very well that he might lose<sup>56</sup>. The community had still hoped that the show of allegiance to the PNM party would maintain the pulse of patronage that resounded through other PNM supporter groups. It also explained why, at least in part, the aforementioned East Indian woman from the *pholourie*-making session admitted to voting for the PNM candidate in the 2013 local election. Unfortunately, three years on, PNM Party Group 6 had failed to garner favor from its national leadership. Come the 2016 local elections, and it would be history repeating itself, or as one community resident put it, they'd be stuck "on a bridge to Promise Land again."

Now Natalie wanted clarity from the PNM party. Subsequently, she asked the Chairman of the group, "Will the party group help us if we vote for them and they don't win?" Nobody sitting on the raised platform before us assured her of guaranteed support or even access to leadership through the party group. On our walk home half an hour later, she said to me, "I came



to see why I should vote for them now.” She did not seem convinced. The PNM party’s disregard of its voter base in a politically split jurisdiction had become both a private and communal matter for Natalie. Her experience of struggling with political representation for Moriah Hills had unavoidably shaped her own subjectivity as a dejected voter, and a conflicted PNM supporter.

In Moriah Hills to be acknowledged as a party partisan was about assigning political personhood at the fringes of formal representation. So, similar to the contextual performativity of the reform consultations, I suggest that we view the activities of the Moriah Hills Party Group 6 as performative exercises of solidarity that reinserted the PNM party into local affairs through the promise of tangible outcomes.

Election time is a moment of extraordinary camaraderie; a liminal phase “betwixt and between periods of social time” (Mukulika 2011:85). Through the structure of give and take, individual identities congeal around common expectations of reciprocity. As a result, during election time traditional rules of engagement between elected leaders and their support base are transgressed, even flouted. The citizen-state complex is at its performative height: “Laundered clothes of elite politicians are sullied by dusty campaign journeys; their well-groomed and arrogant heads are bent low to enter the humble dwellings of voters; and their hands seem perpetually folded in their plea for votes” (Mukulika 2011:85). It is a strange type of *communitas* – both groups (voters and candidates) know the moment is an aberration in the power dynamic that binds expectant voters to their elected representatives. Till the dust of an election cycle has settled, voters enjoy this “levelling effect” (Mukulika 2011:85) because the rules of reciprocity are set into high gear.

In Trinidad, the desire to be *acknowledged* is part of the Trinbagonian cultural ethos. It is the bedrock of social interaction. To be acknowledged, to belong, to be gridded, are extensions of how one is assigned personhood. Trinidadian culture is saturated with acknowledgement in the form of greetings, gestures, and symbols. No matter one's class, ethnicity, gender or age, Trinidadians greet each other on the streets. In fact, to not do so is considered rude. Even when I would step into a completely packed maxi (bus) or a doctor's waiting room spilling with strangers, I was expected to holler, "Good morning, everyone!" to no one in particular. In high schools, to get "blue tick[ed]" means that a Whatsapp<sup>57</sup> message sent by a boy to a girl had been opened and read by the girl. The boy's "move" had been acknowledged. In other quotidian corners of Trinidadian society, like public transportation, it is hard to miss car honks that are used less to display road aggression or impatience and more as communal gestures of acknowledgement – "Thank you for letting me through," "I know you!," "See you around!"

This universal display of camaraderie is what influenced the red location pin of the consultations. In no less words, a member of the consultation-campaign team said of its symbolism - "We are here, where are you?" Personalized attention also manifested through the "universal prayer" at the commencement of each consultation that included salutations like "Oh Lord, please bless the Minister who is here to share his views with us" or "Oh Lord, please bless the members of the public and we hope they get their questions answered today."

Breeding (2011:73) notes that in the context of India, the introduction of the secret ballot altered the purpose of clientelism as citizens could receive benefits and still vote their mind. In this context, the political disbursement of non-programmatic benefits has less to do with providing welfare support. Instead these forms of largesse function as "symbolic gestures, a way of communicating to low-income citizens that the party cares about them and has their best

interest in mind” (Breeding 2011:73). However, what their theory undermines is the social weight of inter-personal relationships that reinforce ties of party partisanship. To this effect, Auyero (2000:4) points to the lack of substantial research linking informal social networks with political alliances that are undergirded by the expectation of reciprocity like that I witnessed in Trinidad.

Elaborating on their theory of broker-mediated patronage, Stokes et al. (2013) examined the non-discretionary nature of the secret ballot in some communities where political brokers and voters concede to the former’s ability to correctly predict how the latter would vote. This is because in tight-knit communities, to publicly embrace one’s political identity becomes an extension of how politics is already woven into social life. On the basis of 20 years of data on American voters, Groenendyk et al. (2014) put forth a hypothesis that “[a]nger and enthusiasm (and not fear) mediate the relationship between party identification strength and participation” (363). Referring to mid-nineteenth-century America, Bense (2004:xii) noted that rural voters used to carry “their social and political histories to the polls with them” making it very likely that neighbors and friends knew before-hand how their vote would swing. In the Trinidadian communities I lived in, this practice still persists. I witnessed an unabashed acknowledgement of friends and neighbors knowing how each other voted, in the process rejecting the discretion of the secret ballot for enhanced conviviality.

Nov 28, 2016 - local government elections were finally upon us. I hitched a ride with a friend in order to meet Peter directly at a polling station located in a neighborhood school. After he voted and exchanged greetings with a few people, I hopped into his car and we went towards Moriah Hills. Peter and his friend LeRoy, who was driving the car, were wearing the same maroon T-shirts signifying their affiliation to the PNM party<sup>58</sup>. Peter told me his job that day

was to ferry party supporters to the polling station. He showed me a white printed list from his pocket – it had names of individuals, their phone numbers and addresses, and “X’s,” tick marks and “?”s” next to certain names. These were PNM supporters within his party group’s jurisdiction. He was entrusted with making sure that all those who wanted to vote, particularly the elderly and sick, could be driven to the polling station. So off we went.

LeRoy would drive up to a house, honk and wait. People would come outside, wave, exchange pleasantries, confirm they were going to vote, and either accept or deny a ride to the polling station. At one of our house calls two women said they were going to vote later in the day. Peter made small talk with them and then we drove on. In the middle of our run, we met two men near the corner grocery store where we stopped to buy water. “Your party lost the seat or what?” joked Singh, an East Indian, who was watching Peter loiter about in the aisle. They both chuckled. We got back in the car and drove on.



*Image 18: A voter on election day*

### *Peripheral politics*

From a formal Western standpoint of participatory democracy, civil society is reflective of associational life – voluntary, pluralistic organizations of ordinary citizens who use their social capital to hold their government accountable (Edwards 2009:13). It is representative of “good virtues” and a “desirable social order” (Edwards 2009:46) that, as a signifier of the public sphere, is made up of “active citizens” who engage with various social, political and economic institutions that affect the lives of its members (Edwards 2009:68-69). From a non-Western standpoint, Comaroff and Comaroff (2000) and Sampson (2002) have examined civil society through its linkages to informal kinship ties, clan politics, patronage, and even different moralities that precipitate different types of group formations. Inherently, the analytical concept of civil society encompasses a dynamism, a fluidity that makes defining it a problematic endeavor.

In response to the definitional limitations of what civil society is and isn't, scholars like Anders (2009), Ferguson and Gupta (2002), and Riggan (2013) offer a conceptual breakthrough through their study of state-ness as a type of self-representation. They examine the state as a category of practice where state-ness includes more a type of self-representation than a categorical separation from civic society. In other words, they suggest we examine how ideas around “state” and “civil society” are created, legitimized and perpetuated. For example, Anders' (2009:150) studied good governance in Malawi wherein he examined civil service reform in Malawi as “a study of the state *in* an African society rather than the modern state *and* African society” (original emphasis). In his case, change in government salaries was not just about state reform; it tangibly affected home ownership, funeral costs, and the consolidation of patron-client relations, making it hard to distinguish the line between the public and private lives of civil

servants. Jeffrey (2010:182) similarly points to the “permeable” nature of the civic and political in Meerut, India where middle-class Jat students emphasized the “civilized” nature of their collective mobilization against the state while simultaneously resorting to illegal and violent tactics towards political ends. Consequently, people in Meerut often debated the usefulness of labeling their protest movements at all.

Time and again I found that my participants’ articulations of civil society forcibly unmoored civic engagement from political participation even as they circumvented those categories in practice. Civilian priorities got entangled with political exercises as civilians participated in political activities like state-sponsored consultations, rallies and canvassing trips while simultaneously negotiating civic agendas like building a new community center or demanding increased police vigilance.

As the current community council President, Natalie herself encouraged peripheral politics while simultaneously admitting to me that she found Peter as a PNM party group member “too political.” She was referring to his foray into politics after a stint in the same community council a few years prior. Her comments reminded me of my research with another village council, the Buccoo Gardens Village Council in SGRC, that was also a launchpad for political careers-in-the-making. For the 2016 local government elections, the current and past President of that council along with two members had all run for office and lost.

The playground that Peter had taken me to was also on Natalie’s radar as a community project. Interestingly, she had reached out to Clevon, a PNM political appointee based out of the neighboring city of San Fernando, for patronage. Her logic was - Clevon had the ears of the PNM party; he knew Moriah Hills had voted for the PNM even though the party lost in the larger electoral district; perhaps the party could circumvent the formal jurisdiction of the UNC

government in Princes Town and exert its influence directly at the community level. Alas, this was not to be.

Clevon made it clear that his hands were tied; Moriah Hills was out of the jurisdiction of the presiding Mayor. “Rowley said government for everybody. Then why is it outside of Hosein’s [San Fernando Mayor] jurisdiction?” she asked us rhetorically. By bypassing both the elected UNC Councilor and the elected UNC MP and instead imploring PNM leadership from a neighboring municipality, Natalie embraced the tension of being principally apolitical but tactically political. In doing so, she reinforced the status of the Moriah Hills Community Council as a demanding “client” of the PNM party.

At an individual level, Natalie urged her community members to open themselves to luck and happenstance: “It has to be everyone’s business. Talk to people, build a conversation. When you stand at the bank, say hello to your neighbor. You never know who can help you!” She told me animatedly that in spite of being a PNM supporter, she was more than willing to work across the aisle in a tit-for-tat. And indeed she had. The incumbent UNC Councilor for St. James, Sheila, had agreed to purchase 20 raffle tickets for the Moriah Hills Christmas Raffle to be held later that year. In exchange, she asked for Natalie’s help selling 20 tickets for her own fundraiser for the upcoming local government elections. Natalie had managed to sell 12 tickets, she bought the rest herself to keep good faith with Sheila. “If Sheila helps us, we can’t reciprocate?!” she loudly justified her actions at one community meeting.

In her examination of citizen action within Mexico’s post-authoritarian context, Merilee Grindle (2009) questions the discourse of civic engagement that emphasizes public desire for better governance. Instead, she asserted that “[i]n a country that had, through many years of authoritarian government, encouraged clientelism in the distribution of public benefits, it is

perhaps not surprising that much citizen activity under more democratic conditions mimicked previous mechanisms of making connections and presenting petitions” (Grindle 2009:174). Chasing grid desire through the route of political patronage becomes a type of habitus perpetuated through hegemonic social processes (Bourdieu 1977).

Natalie was upset that some community council members had disapproved of her tactics even as they acknowledged that the incumbent UNC MP Baboolal had also bought 25 tickets towards Moriah Hills’s annual Christmas party. “I don’t want to knock glass for nobody,” she said pragmatically, meaning she didn’t want to go to offices and knock on doors and wait. “I want a meeting and to get something from you. You wanna put my name for *parang* [folk music event]? Sure! Maybe along the way, I’ll get to talk to them.”

Natalie knew that as brokers of their party, Councilors, Mayors/Chairmen, and even an MP primarily served as a conduit of information between the PNM party Executive and wanting party partisans like herself (see also Stokes et al. 2013:95). A few months later, when the Mayor of San Fernando was appointed the Minister of MRDLG by PM Rowley, its implication rippled through Moriah Hills. Suddenly a local-level broker of the PNM party had come to embody the party himself. Natalie urged her fellow members to write another letter to him, this time addressing him as “Honorable Minister.”

At a TTAVCC meeting I attended, a member acknowledged that in the context of politically sidelined communities like Moriah Hills “[w]hatever you get from a politician, you take it.” A few seconds later she added, “You can take political assistance but politics must not be an influence.” Her statements revealed the ambivalences inherent in negotiating civilian agendas in a politically contested neighborhood as Moriah Hills. Here, what separated civilian from political intentions was continuously being redefined. Like the postcolonial experience in



Malawi, Moriah Hills was made up of “not one ‘public space’ but of several, each having its own logic yet liable to be entangled with other logics when operating in certain contexts” (Mbembe 2001:104).

As a result, the Moriah Hills community not only represented the fallout of geopolitics in a plural society but also concealed everyday situated practices to manage and mitigate this lived reality. Rather than conform to normative assumptions of “community” as comprising of apolitical actors, networks and processes, the stratagems of Moriah Hills residents reveal the politics inherent in forms of everyday sociality.

For Natalie, a PNM loyalist and leader of the Moriah Hills Community Council, the necessity to work across the aisle in the absence of political support from her party nurtured her identity of an unhappy PNM partisan. It was precisely because she was having to confront the limitations of her own party “to deliver” on matters affecting civic life that she was reminded of her structural dependency towards it. Her subjectivity as a PNM supporter combined with the exigencies of the present incubated in her “rival forms of political imagination” (Kurtović 2011:249) such that she not only justified her initiative to work with the “other” (read: UNC leadership) for the benefit of her community but also expressed her ambivalence with supporting the PNM candidate, at least at the local level.

### ***Conclusion***

In this chapter I have shown how slippages between civic and political life are most acute when PNM loyalists are minorities in their own constituency. Within the marginalized community of PNM partisans in Moriah Hills, the role of its PNM party group is to retain solidarity amongst its members against all odds. This is possible because political and social lives are deeply

intertwined at the local level. Local party groups contribute to building intra-group cohesiveness amongst party partisans by reinforcing social bonds and a shared identity that is enacted through the display of genuine bonhomie amongst group members. Civic organizations like community and village councils often count local party group members in their own membership. In Moriah Hills, community life is represented by a vibrant sociality that is nurtured through neighborly intimacy, the spirit of volunteerism, and also political performances.

However, I also bore witness to the simultaneous clash of civilian and political subjectivities as Natalie grappled with multiple contesting identities in her attempt to make sense of her contradictory positionality within and outside the political sphere. As a socio-politically networked civilian, she had transformed into her community's own political agent, working across the aisle to claim various benefits. In Trinidad, any theoretical separation between the civic and political sphere is therefore blurry at best, artificial at worst. Instead, understanding the slippages between the civic and the political in the local context offers a critical perspective on how political identities are forged out of ruptures in community life.

## CHAPTER 6

### “I AM VERY DISHEARTENED AND DISENCHANTED”: SUBJECTIVITIES OF AFFECT AND EMOTION

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#### *Introduction*

So far in this dissertation I have highlighted how political subjectivities cultivated in relation to the party paramount are at once structural and agentic, personal and political, public and private. Aletia, Peter and Natalie attended the consultations seeking out their party for political intervention in their daily matters. However, their expectation of reciprocation in exchange for fealty was not steeped in a transactional logic but rather a cultural logic fostered through relational, personalized politics. Encounters with their party’s ultimate leadership – the PM and Cabinet Ministers – made possible through the event of a consultation so morphed into an extension of political networking that is intensely intimate.

This chapter opens with the physical manifestations of this intimacy by coming back to the sites of the reform consultations. I hone in on the emotional and visceral reactions of the attending public that can now be contextualized as ardent, ambivalent, anxious, furious, passive, and excited negotiations and reenactments of political subjectivities caught in the structuring force of ethnic mobilization, economic dependencies and socio-political camaraderie. My aim is to situate (political) subject making within the larger framework of citizenship in order to examine the productive spaces in which ambivalent subjectivities of being and belonging operate. To do this, I introduce another key participant, Vera - an emotionally invested party loyalist who reimagined herself as a demanding, deserving member of the Trinidadian nation-state, and articulated this as an extension of the power of her franchise.

### *Encounters of the body politic*

In Trinidad, the government requires that all Public or Government bills, defined as those that “deal with matters of general, public interest affecting the entire citizenry,” seek “suggestions from the public, with a view of development and reform” (GRTT 2019c). In other words, the reform consultations were mandatory before the PNM administration could introduce a Bill to amend the existing Municipal Corporations Act of 1990 in the name of decentralization. As I have already mentioned, these sites of state-civilian interactions were also performative exercises of political showmanship that brought together PNM party leadership and its voter base.

Public meetings and consultations are notorious for “fake public participation” made possible by inconvenient venues, selective publicity, intimidation, and timed control of the discussion format (Snider 2010) by the event organizers. However to reduce the functionality of consultations to “fake participation” ignores the creativity of engagement through means other than formalized participation techniques<sup>59</sup>. Going beyond their publicized aim of participatory democracy, such public events are also incubators of social collision and collusion, assemblages of multiple interests and agendas clashing and co-existing with one another. I witnessed as much through the divergent agendas of the consultation-campaign team organizing the public consultations and members of the public attending them. Trinidad’s 14 replicated consultations revealed an agility of state-civilian interactions that was a far cry from the structuring intent of the consultation format.

The consultations mobilized three major interest groups - national-level politicians, local politicians, and civilians - who were looking to negotiate their own agendas through a very public and publicized forum. They set the stage for the enactment of social relations within the reform framework. The ritualistic trappings that were undergirded by a urgent desire for gridding

“exemplif[ied] the working of society or sociality” (Lambek 2013:147) and so became “necessary to—indeed constitutive of—society” itself (Lambek 2013:147). The confluence of bodies became a social organism that experienced, interacted, and negotiated the rules of the game as the game unfolded.

Each consultation, with an average attendance of 200 persons, revealed opportunities for creative verbal and non-verbal communication, and impromptu and planned speeches targeting the Ministry and also local government officials. The consolidated message of the state on reform crumbled before misplaced pleas for individual assistance, belying the lofty jubilation with which reform was promised. At a collective level, the reform consultations became a mirror to the body politic heaving under the weight of broken political promises for change. Such was the power of the congregation.

A century ago, sociologist Emile Durkheim drew our attention to the transcendental power of assembly that he called “collective effervescence” – the heightened state of shared emotions that is larger than the sum of its parts. Sometimes uncontrollable, this shared affect takes the form of an “initial impulse [that] is thereby amplified each time it is echoed, like an avalanche that grows as it goes along” (Durkheim 1965 [1915]:217). Kathleen Stewart (2007:40) expands on the intangible yet palpable strength of the “we” effect by proposing we examine it not as a form of signification (precisely because it cannot be reduced to the structure of a narrative or overt symbolic act) but rather as “expressions of ideas or problems performed as a kind of involuntary and powerful learning and participation.”

I witnessed this assemblage of ideas and souls become a force multiplier through the “welling up of energies” (White 2017:178). There was an audio and visual intensity that seemed impulsive, sometimes uncontrollable as members accepted and others resisted yet another

promise for reform from a new government regurgitating old ideas. I watched as the joint exercise of contorted vocal cords and facial muscles amplified the involuntary howls, gasps and shouts from the public that seemed unhinged from individual consciousness. In the sea of faces around me, I saw public participation take many avatars as emotions and opinions clashed over well-rehearsed lines of Minister Khan. The air convulsed with frustration – “When will my drain get fixed?” “When will you increase the number of public taxis on my road?” “What about fixing the school building?” The anxiety was palpable. This was one of the main outcomes of attending the unspectacular consultations. The public continued to exhibit powerful, un-meditated urges to react and comment on the state’s promise that was as old as the free country itself. The consultations offered a liminal space for emotions to escape to the surface unfettered from the clutches of disciplined waiting.

For the attending public, spontaneous public vetting allowed for certain issues to gather traction over others, thus symbolizing their public value to the state. The social collective of “the public” itself differently enabled, encouraged, and thwarted civic dissidence over economic mismanagement and weak state accountability at these sites. The audience engaged in its own self-governance: claps, hisses, steups, cheers, mutterings and hand gestures were new, unexpected and infused with potential for action and reaction. Some aired well-rehearsed rebuttals, others spoke off the cuff; there were charismatic speakers and digressing speakers – all were subjected to public judgment, sometimes even before state representatives offered their responses. Once I could not tell if the claps erupting from the audience were because of a point a speaker made or because they were glad to have him go – the aforementioned speaker had promised to address only two of his six talking points written on a long sheet of paper but ended up touching upon all six over the span of seven excruciating minutes. I joined in the vigorous

clapping. Through their reactions, this 21<sup>st</sup> century audience demanded attention towards the necessary intertwining of reform as a policy initiative and its urgent implications for local residents.

In light of past failed attempts at devolution (Schoburgh 2007) combined with the context of race-based patronage (Munasinghe 2001) and limited opportunities for civic participation (Ragoonath 2000), Trinidad's consultations incubated public resistance as "a form of public action that welcomes participation" (Duvall 2013), revealing the desperation of a citizenry largely under-represented and left out of local development planning. The presence of such attendees who have already knocked on numerous doors, beseeched various political heads, attended rallies, and placated egos before patiently waiting their turn at a consultation revealed a "steadfastness," a resoluteness, to navigate the extraordinary demands of everyday living (see Richter-Devroe 2011).

No matter their motives, the audience at the consultations was wrapped together in "textures of knowing" (Stewart 2007:129). Public speakers came armed with scripts, photographers, and folders of information to present to Khan after they had taken the mic. These events drew attention to the symbolic difference between "being public and being meaningfully public" (Snider 2010:94). At the final consultation in the Diego Martin Regional Corporation where the PM was also present, a female speaker raised her right hand to show two letters she had brought – one for her Councilor and the other for the PM – that outlined specific concerns she had regarding her neighborhood. She refused to leave the mic, invoking her right as a citizen to demand access to her elected leader - "Can't I take a letter to my Prime Minister?! I am a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago!" Fearing escalation, the consultation moderator quickly took the

letters from her and gave them to PM Rowley seated on stage. The latter thanked the speaker and said he would look into the matter. The woman sat down.

MRDLG came to the public 14 times with a consolidated message of reform; every time, this state prerogative was disrupted with creative, not necessarily subversive, tactics to redirect the state's focus towards the everyday anxieties of the attending public. In these spaces, state-civilian interactions could not be taken for granted. Needless to say, the consultations were both functional and cathartic. Ignored pleas and unclaimed promises lent themselves to a heightened sense of awareness; that which remained unspoken and unaddressed resonated in people's minds and was brought to my attention during follow-up interviews later.

### *Affect theory*

In differentiating between feeling, emotion and affect, Shouse (2005) refers to affect as “a non-conscious experience of intensity.” Affect is un-meditated, visceral, and importantly outside of conscious thought or intent to act. It is spontaneous yet imbued with potential for action/reaction precisely because it remains untethered from the constraints of deliberate response (Gilles and Felix 1987; see also Hogan 2016). It is unconsciously social; like a virus it has the potential to pick and choose bodies ready for transmission. Emotion, on the other hand, is a social projection or display of feeling in response to external stimuli (Massumi 2002). Frijda (1986:71) similarly classifies emotions as an “inner experience” that portends “tendencies to establish, maintain, or disrupt a relationship with the environment.”

Affect theory has found strong support amongst feminist activists and scholars who give the affective or experiential the same degree of acknowledgement and integration into qualitative research as narrative inquiry, for example (Berlant 2008; Skoggard and Waterston 2015; see also



Beatty 2010). However, scholars have also pointed to the theoretical limitations of conceptualizing something that is “felt” and that nests in the subconscious. How does one talk about affect without paradoxically giving it a conceptual framework? Brown (2014:23) similarly warns of the fate of affect theory mimicking that of “the social” – all-encompassing yet lacking a sound theoretical constraint.

Instead of examining emotions as either an internal subjective state that is projected outward or an external influence that is internalized, Sara Ahmed (2014) problematizes the inside/outside distinction between emotions and affect itself. She takes the feminist stand that separating affect from emotion necessarily invites a gendered distinction that pits “a mobile impersonal affect and a contained personal emotion” (Ahmed 2014:207). She asserts that emotions in fact *create* bodies, they manifest the dichotomy between inside and outside (Ahmed 2014). Emotions, in other words, are spatial and their selective flow and management is what boundary making is all about. In doing so, Ahmed thrusts the analytic of emotions into identity making. I build on Ahmed’s conceptualization of emotions creating bodies to examine how the attending public’s felt and articulated responses within the context of Trinidad’s party culture *reproduced* conflicting subjectivities around loyalty, dependency, entitlement, and normative citizen rights.

In the next few sections, I offer an ethnographic account of the experience of another PNM partisan, Vera, chasing political intervention for an electrification project in her neighborhood. Vera’s positionality is a culmination of all that I have discussed so far – she is an ultra-poor, African, generational PNM loyalist who lives in a dusty neighborhood of mostly UNC supporters in the Toco/Sangre Grande electoral district (see also Table 2). Her desire that the party reveal itself reflects the acute exigencies of day-to-day survival. However, unlike Aletia

or Peter, Vera's sustained yet futile interactions with her party led her to entertain the very real possibility of renouncing voting altogether. In that sense, she was like Natalie – rethinking her political identity through emotions of betrayal. In this chapter, I take this conflict to its natural end – the ballot box. I highlight the breaking point of harboring conflicting political subjectivities, and with it Vera's situated understandings of citizenship borne out of political rupture.

### *A community of daring squatters*

Vera had been unemployed for two years when I met her. If dreams came true, Vera would have been a Physical Education instructor at a public school. Since 2010, she and her husband have been squatting on land that was “given” to them by a fellow Seventh-day Adventist practitioner<sup>60</sup>. Her husband lives and works in the capital city of Port of Spain two hours away, visiting her only on the weekends. He also suffers from serious health ailments. He had a life-and-death episode with two failing kidneys a few years ago so Vera took it upon herself to metaphorically and physically do the heavy lifting around the house. She and a fellow squatting handyman built their two-bedroom brick-and-mortar house one wall at a time. It was a huge undertaking - and still is - because lashing rain and tornado winds make regular visits to her neighborhood, threatening to pull apart her home's galvanized roof, and seep in surreptitiously through bedroom and living room walls.

August 13, 2016. I was spending another night at Vera's. I was there in the name of research, grateful for her hospitality but I dreaded the nights. For the two weeks I stayed with her, I felt suffocated by the thick blanket of humid air that lingered on my body, taunting me to try and get some “shut eye.” Vera hadn't had electricity since 2010; the stillness of the night

amplified the taunts of a thousand mosquitoes hovering over us. Her two dozen neighbors who lived along the same potholed road called La Canoa suffered the same plight. Every night, I craved for the whirling sound of a fan on my bitten face and body. This dreadful experience did its job of making me immensely empathetic to Vera's mission of securing electricity for her community which she articulated at the reform consultation.



*Image 19: Vera's neighborhood*

Vera is an exceptionally trusted member of her group. She regularly organizes Saturday School for the kids in her community, actively participates in Seventh-day Adventist Church events, gives free maxi rides to her neighbors, and speaks on their behalf to bureaucrats in air-conditioned offices. She spoke to me often and loudly about the normative rights of squatters to be inserted into the state's electricity grid, to have paved roads, and quality of life. In 2015, the year of general elections in Trinidad, Vera reached out to Barbara, the aspiring PNM candidate for the MP seat. She brought up the delicate issue of legitimizing the squatter land through formal gridding into the state's power supply. La Canoa residents had gotten running water only during the last election cycle (under the PP administration). Electricity would literally put them

on the grid. It would lend physical and emotional stability to their status as squatters (see also Lakha 2009:122).

In fact, Vera and Barbara spoke for an hour outside Vera's house discussing the electricity issue before the 2015 general elections. So the La Canoa community voted for Barbara – and she won. After that she simply disappeared. “Come back!” Vera flared her nostrils affectively as she told the story. She asked me hypothetically why Barbara didn't hire some micmen and publicly convey her thanks to the community that voted for her - why didn't she show she cared? Pulsing with indignation, Vera went to Barbara's office. She wanted to remind her about her promise but Barbara apologetically dismissed Vera's plea citing budgetary constraints.

Mauss' (2012) seminal work on the social relevance of gift exchange has formed the bedrock of scholarly work on kinship ties, economic exchange, and social cohesion (see also Gouldner 1960; Savage and Sommer 2016). The act of gifting is a type of “social credit<sup>61</sup>” that presupposes reciprocity within a timely fashion. In Chapter 4 and 5, I have shown how, especially in the context of patronage, a vote is viewed less like the exercise of a “depersonalized right” (Koch 2016:291) than “a more relational view of political agency centered on reciprocal relations between people and politicians” (Koch 2016:291). In that sense, La Canoa's votes for Barbara more closely align with the phenomenon of gifting in that a gift comes “with a burden attached” (Mauss 2012:53).

So not surprisingly Vera took Barbara's dismissal as an affront to her community. Vera had had faith that the PNM party through Barbara would help loyal voters like her. During one of our sessions, she evoked the extraordinary example of how a UNC Councilor had helped her neighborhood get water under the previous PP administration, and La Canoa residents hadn't

even voted for him! Surely Barbara would help her own. It was Vera who had convinced her community members to vote for Barbara. They had kept their end of the bargain but Barbara hadn't. Vera was visibly angry with Barbara after the 2015 elections. "We fall for 'we in it together' all the time because we are dumb! Now I realize it's not worth it," she blurted. Her people had put their faith in a political leader who lacked even the basic courtesy to convey thanks after she won her seat.

Like Moriah Hills, the La Canoa community then also tried organizing itself into a village council hoping that a more formal governance structure would lend weight to their plea. Like Moriah Hills, the group got nowhere. So Vera took a radical decision. She presented the squatters of La Canoa with the option of paying for the electricity poles as private consumers. The cost of doing so was 99,468.21 TTD (14,758.01 USD) – no small feat for a community that doesn't even own the legal rights to their land. The community agreed and Vera put in an application with the public sector company, the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (T&Tec) for installing the poles. Vera's eyes light up with the possibility of having electricity. "I'll put on the radio, put on the lights, and watch the bulb! I'll take out all the clothes I own and dedicate a whole Sunday to ironing!" she said to me gleefully.

Weeks later Vera discovered the community's application was now mired in a technical matter – that of land zoning. To which neighborhood should the squatter land be assigned? The road along which Vera built her house is formally referred to as Montrose/La Canoa/Tortuga<sup>62</sup>. This three-part name confirms the status of a community in limbo. Indeed, this squatter land had been carved out of three different neighborhoods. To be formally gridded, T&Tec required a written affidavit from the community confirming that they had been living at La Canoa for a certain amount of time. This letter had to come from the Commissioner of Affidavits that was

itself in a bind about how to recognize the squatter land. This problem is a product of the structural dispersion of the state.

For their water connection, WASA had formalized Vera's area as La Canoa – this is because the actual La Canoa neighborhood is nearest to the main water pipeline. For electricity, the area could potentially be referred to as Montrose Extension because it was closer to the electricity grid at Montrose Road which lies at the other end of the land. Currently caught between two agencies, T&Tec and the Commissioner of Affidavits, Vera was compelled to seek political assistance through Khan's intervention at the SGRC consultation, despite having sworn off it in principle. As the Minister of MRDLG, he might be able to pull the right strings to get their application through the system.

At the SGRC consultation, the 51-year old PNM loyalist stood patiently in the line of 31 individuals waiting their turn to address Minister Khan. A few feet behind her sat her fellow La Canoa residents/Seventh-day Adventist followers/PNM loyalists. They had traveled to the consultation in Vera's beat-up van that she used to once ferry school children in. When she got to the mic she said -

Vera: I was asked to come here this morning to talk about the woes of our problems in [La Canoa] but I realized from the information I got it is more for local development but I would still like to mention that I have been living there since from the previous government [read: UNC] and even before that when PNM was there and we have no electricity. Last year a girl was raped repeatedly, children going to school without school clothes being ironed, you cannot get up in the morning and prepare breakfast in the darkness. So we have an electricity problem that we would like to have it addressed... Someone was telling me this morning that when you go to Land and Building Survey they are saying that our land is agriculture land which we did not know at the time as they were telling us that it is domestic land and now they are saying that it is agriculture land...

Khan: That is a Land Settlement Agency matter. Exactly what area you said again?

Vera: [Montrose/La Canoa/Tortuga]. We do not even know our address. Imagine you are living at an address and you do not know what address to put. We need that address to be addressed.

Vera was in no mood to beseech Minister Khan to notice her. Instead she demanded attention to the woes of La Canoa. Vera's invocation of the time "even before that when PNM was there" was a reminder to Khan that this group of party supporters have been left out from the state's development agenda. They were entitled to their party's consideration ("we would like to have it addressed"). Barbara's dismissal of the community after her election win had jarred La Canoa residents. In the wake of the erosion of her trust, Vera's identity as a forgotten, betrayed PNM supporter took shape. La Canoa residents shared her woes that were saturated with anger and a sense of betrayal. She said of her decision to speak at the consultation -

Just imagine a poor community raise, in the account they have TTD 66,830 [so far]. Imagine a poor community raising 66,000 dollars [TTD]! And all we asking is meet us half way to finish up. Someone said to take it to Ian Allen, some people said take it to the press. I have been pondering that in my mind. Whether I should do that. I don't know, I don't want to make it worse for us. I have been asking the Lord on whether to go to the press.

Ian Allen is an infamous television presenter who built a dubious reputation as a self-made investigative reporter. Before his show was cancelled in 2016, people watched it for its sensational and grisly content replete with real-life murderers, rapists, and thieves. In effect, Vera was threatening to take her community's dilemma to the most aggressive public platform available if Khan did not help the residents of La Canoa.

### *Affective citizenship*

In this dissertation I have already alluded to the centralizing tendencies of political parties to retain control at the expense of an emaciated local government system. In practice, the reform consultation sites that enfolded carefully orchestrated state performances into deliberately "casual" political speeches so expanded the "political space" (Webster 2002) between a voter and her elected representative. The consultations offered attendees like Vera and Aletia

opportunities for “sensing the political” (Jansen 2015:192) - a subjective engagement with political activity as it unfolds on the ground, different from the etic definition of politics “as an ideology or transformative collective practice.” It was a testing ground for citizen-state as well as voter-party relations to be enacted and contested.

All my participants are voting members of Trinidadian society. From a normative legal standpoint, they are citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Yet in interviews, participants rarely invoked the word “citizen” to describe their relationship to the state; they used “government” to describe their encounters with party leadership. Consequently, their engagements with the oftentimes underperforming, unresponsive PNM party shaped subjectivities around citizenship however that is individually construed (meaning, exercise of one’s franchise, membership in the nation-state, display of political agency, etc.). For example, Vera tried to explain to me why she thought her community of squatters was being ignored -

The lady who works for the counselor, they would know the list of the votes. She said that the people in our area wanted the electricity, they vote for UNC<sup>63</sup>. I wondering now if we are paying the price for that because the PNM government knew that our area voted UNC because PNM win the overall seat but they lose in our area. So I don’t know. I am very disheartened and disenchanted with the whole government.

Vera harbored conflicting subjectivities of being a “disheartened and disenchanted” citizen and an entitled PNM loyalist living in the midst of neighboring UNC supporters. Her internal struggle of reconciling the two subjectivities resulted from an innate expectation of reciprocity from a party that has served as a proxy for the state (“the whole government”) since the country’s Independence.

“Citizen” however was used often by political parties and especially during the reform consultations. In fact, the word “citizen” is reduced to such technicality that when San Fernando changed its administrative status from a Borough to a City in 1988, the subsequent City of San



Fernando Act explicitly defined “citizen” as formal membership in a city rather than a borough (read: municipality)! – “Upon the commencement of this Act the Borough shall be known as the City of San Fernando, the Borough Council referred to under the Ordinance shall be known as the City Council and the burgesses of the Borough of San Fernando shall be known as the citizens of the City of San Fernando” (GRTT 1988:3).

The concept of citizenship ranges from a definition of membership in a nation-state to the exercise of rights, and participation in civic life. T. H. Marshall (1992) uses the term “social citizenship” on the basis of one’s access to social benefits accrued through the state (see also Sassen 2003:47). Archer (1998:101) situates citizenship in the realm of praxis, defining it as “people’s ability to participate in civic society, enabling them to effectively assert their rights and assume their responsibilities.” It is also the sum of “practices through which individuals and groups formulate and claim new rights or struggle to expand and maintain existing rights” (Isin and Wood 1999:4). Mohan (2007:791) offers a more processual definition of citizenship as “organic, claimed and insurgent forms of political agency alongside the more state-based and institutional forms of political representation.”

In citizenship studies, “emotion” and “affect” are often used interchangeably to describe how governments “acknowledge, harness, and try to influence citizens’ emotions and intimate relationships within the construction of citizenship” (de Wilde and Duyvendak 2016:975; see also Mookherjee 2005; Muehlebach 2012). Scholarship points to the emotional regimes of governance wherein affective citizenship “involves which emotions citizens are encouraged to feel about themselves and others in more public contexts” (Johnson 2010:500). In Trinidad, formative attachments of my participants to their communities, ethnic groups, local party groups, and class groups imbued them with shared affects, subjectivities and a sense of personhood that

made the exercise of citizenship an emotional and affective one (Johnson 2010; Plummer 2003; see also Fortier 2010). Citizenship is organized around “an economy of feelings” (Fortier 2010:27) that acknowledges “the emotional relations through which identities are formed” (Mookherjee 2005:36).

This aspect of citizen making is situated in theory that emphasizes citizenship as a type of “self-becoming” (Jakimow 2014b). It is premised on individual subjectivities of belonging and rights *created* through processes of interpellation with the state. So understanding the role of emotions and how emotional reactions and relations mediate formations of self becomes critical to such examination. In Russia, Krupets et al. (2017) noted how young adults distinguished between citizenship as loyalty to the state (“patria”) versus affective love for the Motherland. In Eritrea, Riggan (2013:738) examined how the state was viewed personally and intimately as one “borne of jealousy, grudges and ambition” rather than a homogenous, reified supra-institution of power and authority (see also Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001:20). Citizenship through the lens of belonging can be construed as a subjectivity “that is sensually experienced by attachment” (Krupets et al. 2017:259).

This “refashioning of self” (Jakimow 2014b:4) is also critically a socially situated one. The enactment of voter/party, state/civilian relations at the consultations were public events, extensions of socio-political encounters that were already networked into village council meetings, church groups, youth camps, and mundane taxi rides (see also Johnston and Mueller 2001). Vera went to the consultation with other members of La Canoa as the neighborhood spokesperson (“I was asked to come here this morning”). Aletia showed up at the same event with her local party group members – the same people who would eventually help her with cash when her dialysis got worse. Her party group members were led by Councilor Dennis, also in

attendance, in whose good books Aletia was desperately keen to remain. Peter showed up to the San Fernando consultation as a member of his party group – “Since I am a member of the party group in my area, anything happens from the central Executive comes pass through the office, so we knew about the consultation in our area. And since it was San Fernando, I wanted to go and articulate the problems in [Moriah Hills].” In each instance, individual desires, demands, and entreats were enmeshed in public and communal networks conjoined by shared political affiliations.

In Trinidad, the daring demands that the state/party reveal itself live synchronously with patience for the wheels of patronage to turn; public displays of affect and emotion co-exist peacefully with zealous fervor towards a party and its leadership. The manifestations of “active participation” and a “passive sense of entitlement” (Holston and Appadurai 1999:5) reside on a spectrum of meaningful relationships forged with one’s party under the structural constraints of a patron-state. Outside of formal membership in the nation-state then, one’s relationship to one’s party has become the type of “substantive citizenship” (Holston 1999:168) produced by the contradictions and ambivalences of being a daring citizen and a good loyalist.

### *The daring citizen*

Unfortunately for Vera and the squatters of La Canoa, nothing of use came out of their public appeal at the SGRC consultation. In dismissing the case as a Land Settlement Agency issue, i.e., another Ministry’s concern, Khan’s response was classically symptomatic of a dispersed state where issues of local governance are outsourced to different state ministries rather than kept within the jurisdiction of a single local government. Six months after the public consultation in

Grande, and nine months after the community voted for the PNM MP, there was still no power in the poverty-ridden strip where Vera lived.

Vera admitted that “growin’ up it was always PNM, PNM, PNM.” She was a poor African who, like Aletia, was nurtured under the benevolence of an expanding state. Her parents are PNM supporters, her husband is a PNM supporter, her neighbors and fellow churchgoers, with whom she broke bread every Saturday, are PNM supporters. Now she was having an identity crisis. Like Aletia, her fealty to the PNM was largely a structural one. Her African identity, the historical benefit political partisans have accrued under the welfare state, and her synergies with her own family’s voting history had congealed her political fealty to the PNM. It was her default choice. To opt out of this allegiance would require a mental reconfiguration of where she’d now fit in the social strata of Trinidadian society.

To reject her political identity was an intimidating prospect that pitted its attached sociality against individual agency. And yet, she and her community desperately needed electricity. One day I asked Vera if she would vote for the PNM again. She said angrily -

*I was a PNM supporter. Now, I seriously tellin yah, I don’t care for UNC, I don’t care for PNM. Sometimes you have to take a look at your situation, you say you voted for a party, you are a diehard PNM. Watch at your condition. Watch at your life. How is your life improve since PNM has been in government? What has been done for you to move you from this stage? Where were you before and where are you now? If you have gone nowhere, then what all this loyalty for? You must be benefiting.*

Vera’s relationship to the PNM party became an introspective exercise of questioning the utility of being a party partisan. She grappled with the contradictory positionalities of being a dependent client and an agentic citizen. She had never voted in local government elections before but the failure of her area MP to get electricity to this neck of the woods compelled her to seek alternative routes to patronage. Local government elections offered her an option, especially as Mishka, the PNM candidate running in 2016, also lived on the same squatter land.

While at the level of national elections, Vera's partisan identity convulsed with compulsion, agony and affect, at the level of local elections her choice was suddenly much clearer. Mishka lived on Vera's street. She was best placed to advocate for La Canoa residents. In exchange, Vera would give Mishka what she desperately needed – votes. Unbeknownst to Vera, Mishka was also being groomed by Elizabeth, the well-networked political broker I alluded to in Chapter 4. Elizabeth was the same person also monitoring Dennis' (Aletia's Councilor) political arc. In the run-up to elections, Elizabeth guided Mishka on political protocol and election time swagger to win over her community's votes in a crucial swing municipality. When Mishka and Vera came to Elizabeth's home to request her intervention in their local electricity matter, the latter connected them to her "local contact" in T&Tec to get the application fast-tracked.

Vera's decision to vote for Mishka fell on a spectrum between subjective and instrumental decision-making. In political science, voting behavior premised on needs versus values has spawned a whole body of literature. "Specific" support for a party is driven by short-term needs, it is "content driven" (Easton 1975:447). "Diffuse" support is affective, long-term, and founded on ideological and emotional synergies (Easton 1975:447; see also van der Meer 2017). Similarly, instrumental motivations are those "based on the protection and advancement of valued public policies and political ideology" (Huddy and Bankert 2017; see also McGann 2016) while subjective motivations are "grounded in partisan loyalty and the protection and advancement of the party independently of policy issues" (Huddy and Bankert 2017:18; see also Groenendyk and Banks 2014; Valentino et al. 2011; van Zomeren, Postmes, and Spears 2008). In political science literature, little to nothing is said of the impact on voters' subjectivities of negotiating these priorities.

Vera started advocating for Mishka amongst her friends and fellow churchgoers. However, not everyone in Vera's community was on board with voting for Mishka. As loyal partisans, they weren't sure about Mishka's political integrity. This was because in 2013, Mishka had campaigned with a third party that was an offshoot of the dominant UNC party. In 2016, Mishka returned to the fold of the PNM. Vera remained adamant about her political choice. By voting for the PNM candidate (and not the opposition party) in the local government elections, her vote acknowledged the oily corridors of political patronage that continued to entrap residents of La Canoa even after they had decided to get electricity as private consumers. Yet she extolled her decision to vote for whoever could "improve" her life. She told me emphatically that her decision to vote for Mishka had less to do with party partisanship than astute decision making anchored in the present - "If you put a black dot on a page and ask people to write about the page, people will only write about the black dot and not what you could do with the page, and the patterns you could draw and the colors you could use," she explained. She was focusing on the big picture. "Look at the now, now, now!" she said.

Vera's articulated her decision to vote for the PNM party in the 2016 local elections not as a display of political solidarity but rather "voting [her] conscience" (Gay 1998:15) linked to mitigating urgent livelihood concerns. Her vote was the weapon of the weak. Why would anyone want to help the poor?" she asked me rhetorically one day. "They have nothing to get back. They don't realize that what we give them is this (she shows her voting finger) but they don't appreciate it. If everyone decide to hold up, not to vote for them, how will they get in?" Vera inserted herself into the project of democracy by transforming into her own political agent. Her exercise of franchise was a "'creative,' 'expressive,' 'personalized,' and 'individualized' mode[] of participation" (van Deth 2016:11). Vera's is an ambivalent tale of empowerment within which

she had some power to affect her own life. In settings of ambiguous, ad-hoc promises and political performativity like at public consultations, cottage meetings, town hall meetings and private conversations, active voters like Vera have no choice but to engage in a type of “infrapolitics” or everyday resistance (Scott 1997) that prioritizes actions in the temporal present that may or may not translate into mobilized action in the future. So in her decision to vote for the PNM candidate in the local government elections, Vera emphasized the disjuncture between her voting intent in one election (“Look at the now, now, now!”) and her strained partisan relationship to the PNM party (“If you have gone nowhere, then what all this loyalty for?”).

### *The good loyalist*

In this section, I come back to Aletia to show how the exercise of one’s franchise can also be a type of “antipolitics” (Ferguson 1994) that reenacts the structural constraints of being psychosocially bound to a party. While on the one hand, Vera dared to rethink her partisanship based on an urgent desire for gridding into the state’s electricity network, on the other hand, Aletia had cajoled herself into staying within the party fold in spite of her unreliable ties to party patronage. In doing so, her story builds on my case of contradictions and contestations hidden in partisan behavior.

In Trinidad, party patronage has created entire communities and generations of “waiters,” bound together by the expectation of reciprocity in exchange for political fealty. For Aletia, passive activity in the form of “sticking it out” held promise. Aletia and her parents were both beneficiaries of party patronage; it was now time for her children to reap similar benefits. Anthropological literature is replete with examples where waiting dissipates individual agency. Scholars like Mathur (2014), Auyero (2012) and Harms (2013) have studied waiting as a mode

of existence that strips those waiting of agency like when encountering the monolithic machine of state bureaucracy. Crapanzano (1985:44) views it as a “passive activity” (44) leading to the “de-realisation of the present.” Greenhouse (1996:82) suggests we view the temporality of waiting as the “nature and distribution of agency across social space.” Gupta (2012) examines waiting under the conditions of government “red tape,” referring to it as a form of structural violence against those engaged in it. Mathur (2014) subsequently calls it “disempowered waiting.” O’Neill studied the “brutal kind of boredom” amongst homeless men in Romania as a type of “social suffering” (2014:15). Waiting is frustratingly “self-producing” in that “the more one waits and invests in waiting, the more reluctant one is to stop waiting” (Hage 2009:104). So the act of waiting becomes infused with anticipation (Das 2007).

When Aletia was 18 years old she had submitted a housing application as part of a state (read: party)-sponsored lottery for free housing. To date, she did not know the status of that application. Like her mother, Jacqueline was similarly stuck in a mire of uncertainty surrounding yet another housing application. A friend once thought she had seen Jacqueline’s name in the housing lottery winners printed in a newspaper. When Jacqueline went to the Land and Housing Authority (LHA) days later to inquire, they weren’t able to confirm this. Jacqueline spoke elusively of her experience with the LHA – perhaps she missed the window to claim her “prize,” perhaps she needs to come back another day to inquire, perhaps she needs to keep checking for her name to show on the list. She seemed nonchalant, almost indifferent to this alleged missed opportunity and the lack of information surrounding it. Life goes on, her shrugging shoulders seemed to imply, mimicking her mother’s. Aletia and Jacqueline were chronic waiters. They waited often, patiently, almost too placidly. Their waiting was a product of bureaucratic laggardness, misinformation, ignorance, and anticipation.





*Image 20: People waiting for their token numbers to be called outside a government office*

Aletia's expectation of reciprocity hinged not on the normative expectation of a voting citizen invoking representation and accountability but rather an emotional appeal for the validation of her trust that is exhibited through her willingness to wait. Her vote is fundamentally a trust vote, a gesture of conviviality, of brotherhood and affection. I take inspiration from Hage's (2009) notion of "stuckness" to understand how loyalty as an expression of devotion transforms into a habitus of existential waiting for reciprocal affection and consideration. Hage uses stuckness to describe a form of "existential immobility" (Hage 2009a:97) like, for example, feelings of job insecurity linked to neoliberal globalization that is distinct from the lack of actual social mobility. Stuckness is about *perceived* immobility.

Aletia's waiting for patronage from the party she was loyal to had transformed from a "situational" exercise grounded in the present into a type of "existential waiting" that was "removed from time or, rather, from the meanings—linear and repetitive, yet endlessly consuming, consumed and irreversible—accorded to time in conventional Western settings" (Dwyer 2009:20). This type of waiting as a type of non-linear time-space continuum makes it part of a "symphonic whole" (Tan 2009:67). It fits seamlessly with "the necessary pauses and

breaks in the general movement of life” (Tan 2009:67), lending a fluidity to it. Waiting shaped Aletia’s “orientation to the world” (Pardy 2009:201) and “settle[d] on the body, thus transforming (or making) that body-self” (Pardy 2009:200). At no point did Aletia ever say anything to the effect of “I’m fed up” or “I can’t support the PNM anymore.” In fact, when I pressed her on this issue she admitted that her son had asked her the same question - “My son says to me, ‘Mommy, we need a change!’ I say, ‘We don’t need no change. I don’t want to change. I staying right here.’ My son say, ‘What PNM do for you?’ I say, ‘No, I’m not fighting for nothing. I not fighting for nothing. I just vote for the party. I not into the politics.’” By separating voting from politics (“I just vote for the party. I not into the politics.”) Aletia revealed a logic of party partisanship premised on trust in future action. To trust became a type of “antipolitics” that “limit[ed] the possibilities of debate and confrontation” (Coles 2004:574; see also Ferguson 1994).

Waiting became a form of endurance, and to endure became a type of “heroism of the stuck” (Hage 2009:99) that “seem[ed] to signal a deeper form of governmentality...” (104). In Jansen’s research in Bosnia-Herzegovina, even as citizens criticized the state for underperforming, they “... placed the key responsibility for providing a ‘normal state’ in... the state. The state, in other words, should institute itself” (2015:196; see also Taussig 1992). Waiting on the basis of trust becomes a characteristic of a good citizen (Hage 2009), which given the ambiguity between centralized state and consolidated party culture in Trinidad, also implies a good loyalist. “Structures of feeling” (Williams 2011) incubated through this modality of trust-based waiting transform into a subjectivity that is centered on “get[ting] stuck well” (Hage 2009a:99).

Peter's attachment to the PNM party was as stoic as Aletia's. In Chapter 4, I described Peter's frustration with waiting for drain material; in Chapter 5 I noted how he was waiting for his party group to help with the local playground. Yet, like Aletia, his faith in the PNM party was unwavering. He muddled through a new logic that allowed him to reconcile his faith in the party with the reality of courting unresponsive leaders. "We must have a direct voice from the constituency," Peter said to me urgently one day. He was referring to there being no PNM representation on the local Council of the Princes Town Regional Corporation. Indirect democracy through formal political representation was not working for Moriah Hills residents whose elected leaders did not represent the political choices of most of the community. Even as he sought patronage, Peter ignored his party's politically strategic yet blatant disregard of his community. Instead, he entertained a new imaginary of local governance, one that incorporated the necessary nexus of patron-client relations. He explained it like this –

So let's say, you have a scenario ... you don't even see the Councilor. He doesn't partake in the activities. If there is anything wrong in the area, who is you going to? I was trying to get out at the consultation that there should be somebody, a caretaker, or a street captain, or somebody who people could go to if there is a problem who could take it to the Corporation.

Peter, once a community leader and now a party group member, saw this an opportunity for the "refashioning of sel[f]" (Jakimow 2014b:4). *He* would be that appointed "caretaker" of his people. For PNM loyalists in Moriah Hills who were searching for their party, he would come to personify it through a (yet another) form of political brokering. In the process, Peter absolved his party's leaders of their responsibility to the PNM voter base in Moriah Hills. It was a type of self-preservation that allowed him to "maintain the ideal through its deferral into the future" (Ahmed 2014:131). He was a waiter and a good loyalist.

Be it the tempestuous nature of Vera's or Natalie's daring claims or Aletia's endurance or Peter's ambitious desires through his party group, these "processes of self-making" (Jakimow 2014a:170) emerge through a complex, intertwined network of emotional alliances "centered on politicians' involvement in localized acts of support and the logic that governs them" (Koch 2016:283, see also Gay 1998). Notional ideas of citizenship get incubated somewhere in the midst of the ambivalences of claiming entitlements, participating, and waiting.

Vera got electricity a month before local government elections. Regardless, she went out and rallied her community to vote for Mishka; she even offered La Canoa residents free rides to the polling station. All the while she harbored her own misgivings about Mishka's intentions to stand up for the community but at the same time she wanted Mishka's assistance with another pending issue – getting the main road on their squatter land paved. On Nov 28, 2016, Mishka won her seat on the local government Council. One evening, after the dust of elections had settled, Vera and I sat in front of her vegetable garden lit by a single 40-watt bulb. Vera confided that if Mishka hadn't won her seat, she was planning to give up voting entirely. "There would be no point," she said. Vera was emotionally drained. She was at breaking point. Consequently, she offered a more humble understanding of democratic governance – "Now I sit down and I study and now I realize it is about somebody who can govern this country right. It not matter if it's Chinese, Indian, Negro whatever. If this person have the country at heart and doing it for the country, they should be in power. It does not matter what the color of his skin, the texture of the hair is."

## *Conclusion*

In this chapter I come back to the sites of the consultations to examine “the rules of political engagement as actually played” (Whitehead and Gray-Molina 1999:7). State-regulated opportunities for public participation can be transformative by cultivating strong political subjectivities around interaction, inclusion, and civic agency, suggesting a more complicated relationship between public participation and formations of the political self. The reform consultations I attended represented the heaving body politic that could make, break, and sustain the powers that brought it to that juncture. Aletia, Peter, Natalie and Vera who attended these events were already networked into their party machinery through formal and informal partnerships at the community level. Their presence at the consultations revealed an urgency to seek party intervention in matters of everyday urgency. This is because at the level of local governance the stakes of the game are different. Here, jobs can be freely given (and taken), policies impact lives, and promises become personal.

Across the eight events I attended, the state’s prerogative of presenting and discussing local government reform was continually thwarted by the attending public desperate to redirect attention towards more pressing matters at hand. These interactions I witnessed between civilians and political leaders were colored by the interplay of race-politics, historical dependencies and an inherent struggle for civic agency. Lived concerns around job applications, food cards, water connections and squatting rights together sloshed in the crummy reality of bureaucratic dispersion, loyalist waiting, and political careers in-the-making. They hovered somewhere in between the conceptual obscurity defining citizen/state and voter/party relations.

The daring demands of many participants that the state reveal itself, and that it fix issues of governance and administration, in fact, belied a vulnerable core of emotional courtship with

the PNM party. Muddied by the rusty chains of race politics and the dependency-entitlement complex, the political project of self-becoming in Trinidad came to reflect a type of voter/citizen whose relationship to the party/state was both sycophantic and bold.

Aletia and Peter are unable to break away from the PNM party, their default choice. Aletia chose to continue waiting while Peter entertained a new modality of local governance that allowed him to reconcile his loyalty to the PNM party with their disregard for his and his community's woes. Vera, on the other hand, chose to invest in a more strategic exercise of her right to vote. She construed her vote for the PNM candidate for local elections as a strategic pact – votes in exchange for community development. Her self-justification regarding who to vote for reconfigured her vote from a normative ideal of good citizenship into an exercise of agentic subject-creation. For all the individuals in this study, their search for gridding, their desire for acknowledgement, and their demand for material benefits were emotionally taxing exercises that forced them to reconcile their structural dependencies on the PNM party with psycho-social subjectivities linked to personal choice, community affiliations and family practices.

## CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

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### *Fractured loyalties*

“The loyal man serves,” wrote Royce in his book, *The Philosophy of Loyalty* (1908:18). “That is, he does not merely follow his own impulses. He looks to his cause for guidance. This cause tells him what to do” (Royce 1908:18). This expression of loyalty is infused with zeal, and is purposeful in nature. It offers direction and the opportunity for unilateral dedication. As an actionable, “outwardly” manifestation, loyalty becomes something that is exhibited, on display, projected towards a group or person.

In this dissertation I have examined how the People’s National Movement party was able to cultivate partisan loyalty through a confluence of historical and social processes of becoming and belonging. In Trinidad, a conversation on building partisanship necessarily hinges on the role of patronage to award fealty from amongst a party’s core voters (see also Stokes et al. 2013:66). Access to and the expectation of receiving patronage is thus a running theme in this dissertation. On the one hand, the disbursement of patronage has strengthened relational ties between party and voter; on the other hand, the expectation of reciprocity has birthed narratives of entitlement that live in parallel to an entrenched habitus of dependency.

Following independence from the British Crown, the People’s National Movement party under the leadership of Eric Williams embarked on an ambitious mission to consolidate power through race-based patronage under the garb of social welfare. In Chapter 3, I showed how the distribution of political largesse has historically been determined along racial or ethnic lines. The politics of race harks back to the divide and conquer practices of British colonizers from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Trinidad is a nation made up of “living ancestors” defined by Khan (1997) as

“categories of person created in plantation political economy, the colonial moment that both enraced and socially positioned particular constituencies who retain their ancestral identities today... ” (44).

Race has continued to remain an organizing principal upon which the two major political parties, the PNM and the UNC, operate in TT. Race-based politics offers a “low-information rationality” (Just 2017) that has strengthened loyalties over time. Party loyalty is cultivated on the back of history that “remains a vital part of the present, rather than simply a background or a precondition” (Khan 1997:44). Even when race is not explicitly acknowledged, it remained a structuring force in everyday articulations of morality, place-based politics, the desire for “gridding” (Jansen 2015), and identity formation (Khan 2004; Singh 1994).

On the surface, the deep infiltration of political patronage may be viewed as an erosion of the democratic process by prioritizing non-programmatic benefits over the equitable distribution of social welfare benefits. Patronage thrives in Trinidad because the responsibility for governance is dispersed. In other words, accountability through representation has taken a back seat. The practice of politics is emotionally charged because the “solution” to most civic problems depends on individual abilities to make the right connection. This dependency has nurtured a more dynamic political subject who actively engages with the dichotomies of waiting and acting, depending and demanding. When I began in-depth fieldwork in January 2016, the country had elected the PNM party a mere three months prior. As a result, I was perfectly situated to encounter emergent forms of social networking by PNM supporters eager to capitalize on their party that was once again forming the government after a five-year hiatus. The reform consultations offered the perfect backdrop to encounter state-civilian relations that were really



about party consolidation on the one hand, and grid desire by party loyalists encountering their political patrons on the other hand.

My analysis of party partisanship goes beyond a myopic focus on the impact of patronage alone. I have consistently and continually made the claim that politics in Trinidad is utterly personal, geographically intimate, and resonant with emotional and affective projections. The “personalization of politics” (Karvonen 2010) was stoked by the country’s first Prime Minister, Eric Williams whose charisma and selective disbursement of patronage kept him in office for nearly two decades. The party was personified through the enigmatic appeal of its leader; party partisanship became an emotional bond between loyalists and leaders. In Chapter 5, I elaborated on how political identity is also nurtured through processes of socialization cultivated by local party groups and CSOs that are emblematic of the slippages between civic and political life in Trinidad. These networks operate on an unspoken code of reciprocity (Friedman and Mauricio 1988) that is as much a barometer of trust as it is rooted in the exchange of material benefits for votes. The confluence of a strong party culture, the phenomenon of a centralized yet dispersed state, and an emaciated local government has so spurred an intricate network of associational ties that manifests through a myriad of inter-personal relations linking a voter to her party.

In Chapter 6, I leverage such type of passionate politics within scholarship on affective and emotional citizenship. Citizenship can be many things – a legal claim, a representation of active public engagement, and also a type of “self-becoming” (Jakimow 2014b) through processes of interpellation with the state. It is the last definition of citizenship that I am most interested in. Notional ideas of citizenship birthed out of impassioned interactions with the state which, in the case of Trinidad, is governed almost exclusively through party politics, reveal “a complex terrain in which identities, ideologies, and structures shape, and are, in turn, shaped by

emergent selves” (Chandra and Majumder 2013:5). Pragmatic dependencies and the deep associational ties that transgressed the boundaries between civic and political life made it almost impossible for my participants to reject their party affiliations that are also socially networked. Such is the tenacity of a historically and socially cultivated political identity. Consequently to reject one’s political identity required a radical reconfiguration of one’s accumulated social, moral and emotional sentiments that most of my participants, who were also generational PNM loyalists, were unable or unwilling to undertake.

Aletia justified her continued support for the PNM party by distinguishing politics from party identity. Even as she made an impassioned pitch for the party to take care of “foot soldiers” like herself, she insisted her vote for the party was about loyalty (read: party identity) and not race (read: politics). Peter was able to reconcile his fealty with disappointment through a new imaginary of local governance itself. This future orientation permitted him to overlook the party’s present and past transgressions, and so legitimize his own political identity. Vera and her community of squatters had tried to reject patronage entirely but still found themselves caught in a quagmire of bureaucratic hurdles that required political intervention. Exhausted and “disheartened,” her only recourse for self-preservation was to threaten to stop voting entirely if her tactical gamble to support PNM candidate, Mishka, in the local government elections backfired. In essence, the only way for Vera to opt-out of her status as a PNM partisan was to reject the system entirely. There was no in-between. By articulating as much, Vera desperately sought to retain some semblance of civic agency over her political dependencies. Like Vera, Natalie’s dual positionality of being an impassioned civic leader and a disgruntled PNM party partisan spurred her to reevaluate the power of her franchise as well.

Through this dissertation I have shown how the negotiation of one's racial identity, the lived egalitarianism of community life, and the logic of political reciprocity are precisely the stuff of affective citizenship in Trinidad. Through the subjectification of their political selves, all four participants were also inadvertently re-framing their identities as demanding, deserving citizens of the state. By giving primacy to the emotional undercurrents that shape the formal and informal relationships between voters and parties, voting behavior can be viewed as a transformational, processual exercise in subject-creation that "is formed not through one set of affective bonds, but rather through their commitments to multiple, intersecting communities" (Mookherjee 2005:37).

To appreciate the subjective dimension of party partisanship, I acknowledge loyalty as an unstable category. Even as party partisans reaffirmed their loyalties to me or at the ballot box, they articulated a relationship with their party that was premised on pain, anger, and a sense of betrayal. At the consultations, my mostly PNM participants reflected the accumulated historical consciousness of a people suspended in a continual cycle of state consolidation and party politics. Angry outburst like the man who pointed to his MP at the event and said loudly, "We see more of him on television!" had bodies leaping out of chairs accompanied by frantic clapping. These affective responses fermented in the combustible stress of party partisanship.

The waves of emotions that ran through the attending audience surged to form a type of reactive mobilization (Moore and Putzel 1999) born out of desperation to reconcile multiple socio-political identities. In private conversations, participants used words like "vex," "stupidness," and "dumb" to describe their vulnerabilities embedded within party identities. Behind Vera's resoluteness of action and purpose, her vote for Mishka concealed deep-seated fissures of discontent. I am calling this fractured loyalty. Fractured loyalty settles on the body

through an inward-facing stasis because it involves internal conflict and reconciliation.

Paradoxically, Vera's vote for Mishka symbolized her crisis with her under-performing and over-promising party – it was a decision born out of rupture. It was grid desire in action. Like Vera, Aletia, Natalie, and Peter also carried their splintered political selves to the polls, to community meetings, and to interview sessions with an anthropologist. Loyalty was a burden to bear.

The work I have presented here is an inter-disciplinary endeavor that stitches together scholarship from anthropology, political science, political psychology and public administration to present a situated ethnographic analysis on formations of the political self. I focus primarily on the civilian actors in the structure/agency dialectic, examining how the structural conditions of the dispersed state and the absence of decentralization have incubated new and contested spaces for self-transformation. In doing so, I situate my study in that branch of anthropology of the state that is focused on post-colonial subjectivities and subject formation in the midst of discourses on democracy and good governance. At the same time I problematize the state construct itself. While post-colonial scholars have emphasized statecraft and state-ness through the examination of neoliberal assemblages (Jackson 2005; Marcus and Saka 2006; Ong and Collier 2004), the trope of expertise (Hull 2012; Mitchell 2002), and “differential knowledge” (Li 2007), I look to the historical and socio-political processes by which the state (or “government” in Trinidadian vernacular) becomes conflated with party. By expanding the conversation on this slippage I open the field to productive discussions on the intertwining of citizen/partisan subjectivities and the necessary interrogation of political sociality in the analysis of public engagement and policy deliberations like local government reform (see also Wedel et al. 2005).

My study of formal and informal (read: relational) networks of reciprocity brings the party into sharp relief at the local level, especially for poorer clients who are more heavily reliant on the reliability of these networks to meet their everyday needs. As such, my work sits within post-colonial literature on the continued utility of examining meta-concepts like patronage (Gay 1998), ethnicity (Hromadžić 2015) and citizenship (Anjaria 2011) through hyper-local forms of sociality where these concepts are articulated, incorporated, negotiated and contested. By emphasizing the emotional and intimate dimensions of cultivating and nurturing party loyalty, I push back against any examination of voter behavior based off the simple binary of needs versus intents. Instead, I suggest that we appreciate partisan activities as a spectrum of possibilities. Through its inter-disciplinary focus, the value of my work here is two-fold – to reinsert social and cultural anthropology into ongoing conversations on politics and political identity-creation, and to offer a starting point for political scientists to critically examine voter intent also through the ambivalences and contradictions shaping political subjectivities that compel voters to vote one way or another.

All this said, there are dimensions of this study that would have made my analysis of political subjectivities stronger. The most glaring limitation is the absence of a comparative study of partisans of the main opposition party, the UNC. As I mentioned in the introduction, my decision to narrow my focus to PNM party partisans was a product of project design (I met my participants through reform consultations sponsored and organized during a PNM-regime) and access. A deep dive into the historical and social specificities of PNM loyalty made my dissertation richer in that it gave me room to unravel stories, to situate and re-situate narratives of belonging and disjuncture in order to make a more compelling argument. A different kind of study encompassing UNC partisans promises to offer a fascinating dimension of analysis that

builds on aspects of party identification already alluded to here – East Indian political subjectivities linked to “othering” (Munasinghe 2001), the negotiation of patronage amidst neoliberal market ideals (Ramchandani 2016), and the influence of geo-politics on maintaining cultural cohesiveness (Khan 1997). Identity politics, by itself, is messy and complex in the context of a plural society like Trinidad. In addition to UNC partisans, this study is also lacking in diversity in voices from within the PNM fold – I could have integrated more Mixed, East Indian and “Other” perspectives to truly enrich my analysis. I chalk it down to time constraints given my almost immediate loss of access to CARILED’s staff in 2016. In my hustle to find a related project, I went where doors opened for me most quickly, and paradoxically this Indian found most favor with African PNM supporters.

Generational analysis of PNM voters is another area that I could have better developed had I truly been cognizant of this category before I started my research. I stratified my sample size based on race because of considerable literature on identity politics in Trinidad combined with my limited experience as a CARILED consultant operating out of CBC (an East Indian enclave). It is only at the time of analysis and write-up, when I truly paid attention to partisan articulations on the personalization of politics embodied by Eric Williams that I realized how potent generation as a category of analysis might have been. This gap in my analysis is productive in that it has unequivocally situated my study on the side of historical, rather than contemporary, structures of dependency and ethnic mobilization continuing to shape Trinidadian political identities.

Given my inter-disciplinary training in economics, international studies, public administration and now anthropology, I cannot conclude this dissertation without some discussion on state and societal-level reforms to address the limitations of an entrenched party

culture that has flourished at the expense of a more representative form of government. My aim here is not to proselytize the benefits of any Western ideal of democratic governance but simply acknowledge the productive spaces within the dispersed state that are primed for change.

### *The scope for robust public engagement*

Most civilians I spoke with were confused about the delegation of responsibilities between the local and central government. This is largely a product of the structural dispersion of the state which has multiple central and local agencies “sharing” the same roles and responsibilities. This is also, in part, due to limited civic knowledge as a product of political machinations. For example, in both SGRC and Moriah Hills, I often attended town hall meetings or what are locally called “statutory meetings.” These meetings are held once a month at a fixed time and in a fixed location (usually in the main building of the regional or city corporation). In other words, they are institutionalized.

These meetings are *for* the public to learn about the government’s goings-on on a monthly basis. In fact, public involvement is so enshrined in the organizational ethos of these meetings that there was always a designated “public gallery” where members of the public could observe their local leaders debate and discuss local issues, and then comment when appropriate. At some of the longer meetings I attended, like one that included an award ceremony at the end, local governments even catered for food and drinks to tide people over. Yet, majority civilians with whom I interacted had no idea that these forums for institutionalized public engagement even existed. In SGRC and SFCC, the municipal corporations did not publicize them either. Both local governments have Facebook pages but I never saw the statutory meetings advertised through the online medium. When I asked a Mayor about the lack of publicity he said, “Here

now, my elected members of the Council are supposed to invite members of the public... Councilors are lazy. They don't do their job. The intention is very important to what you do in life." "So what happens if a Councilor did not do her job?" I asked. "What recourse do the public have to seek accountability?" He replied, "The first step is to report it to the MP. The Councilors indirectly fall under the MP. If that doesn't work, go to the party." I was not immune to the irony of an elected local representative shifting liability to his immediate leader. Participation entails both the expression and *formation* of public opinions (Berinsky 2005:485, original emphasis). A more concerted campaign promoting statutory meetings would certainly give civilians another avenue to seek accountability from those they voted into power at the local level. In the least it would inform them of the projects and initiatives undertaken by the Councilor for their area.

Even simple changes to the format of the public consultations can facilitate better dialoguing between the organizing party/state and the public. In June 2016, I was invited to a consultation in SFCC, this time organized by MSDFS on the issue of economic recession and how to manage it through "social mitigation." I witnessed a form of "direct public engagement" (Nabatchi and Amsler 2014) whereby citizens, rather than their elected representatives, were actively involved in the discussion process. Civilians like myself, representatives of community-based organizations, faith-based organizations and also local politicians were shuffled across 10 round tables. We were all given a topic and a time frame to discuss, note and then share our thoughts with the larger convened group. A facilitator was assigned to each group to maintain etiquette and redirect focus.





*Image 21: A round-table format of public participation*

This format of the public meeting went well beyond the minimalistic approach (see also McComas 2001) of the consultations on local government reform. Instead of focusing on branding to build credibility, reconfiguring public consultations to reflect a more inclusive type of public engagement would build more faith in the organizing party, and strengthen the democratic foundation of public participation itself.

### ***Electoral and constitutional reform***

Lijphart succinctly sums up the implication of majoritarian politics –

In all democracies, power is necessarily divided to some extent between central and non-central governments, but it is a highly one-sided division in majoritarian democracy. To maintain majority rule . . . the central government must control not only the central government apparatus but also noncentral, potentially competing governments. Majoritarian government is therefore both unitary . . . and centralized. [1999:185–186]

As duly noted, the FPTP electoral system, single-member constituencies, and the absence of coalition governments in TT have led to the consolidation of power in the hands of a single party, and specifically in the Executive branch of government. The Wooding Commission report of 1974 (GRTT 1974) is a critical and comprehensive document that outlines the shortcomings

of the Westminster model of governance as practiced in the country. Its message continues to be potent in 2019 because of the continued stronghold of majoritarian politics in TT's governance.

Referring to the sweeping power of the Executive as a "Cabinet dictatorship" (GRTT 1974:13), the report recommends moving away from a "Prime Ministerial government" (GRTT 1974:13) by taking a number of steps including depriving the PM of his power to dissolve the Parliament without the latter's approval. Another is to introduce a mixed system of proportional representation meaning "that party strength throughout Trinidad and Tobago should be more accurately reflected in this electoral college and that the controlling majority there should not be as foregone a conclusion as the government majority in the National Assembly" (GRTT 1974:60). Electoral reform in general elections in the form of proportional representation would encourage coalition governments that more accurately reflect voter preferences<sup>64</sup> (DeWilde 2013). A move away from the FPTP electoral system would also encourage centrist parties to enter the fray as it does away with the winner-takes-all scenario of present day Trinidadian politics.

A strong democracy is intimately tied to voter experiences. Arguably, the better the experience, the more trust circulates in the electoral system, which in turn leads to a more robust relationship between citizen and the state. An indirect democracy, as in, governance through elected representatives is premised on "an effective, robust, autonomous, responsible, conscientious, and representative national legislature" (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:34). There are only three instances in Trinidad's political history when the PNM party lost its seat of power. Two of these times, the party lost out to the aberration of a coalition government. In other words, the PNM party was defeated by a viable third option. A participant said of the PNM party's loss in 2010, "She [Kamla Persad Bissessar, the new PM] was a new face to the political party. She

was a woman. They looked at the fact that she may be a mother to the country, she may have a new vision.” For the 2016 local government elections, a third party - the National Solidarity Assembly (NSA) - decided to put up candidates for the local race. When I asked a participant why she voted for the NSA she said, “The NSA created a thought... People started feeling challenged about if they had to just choose between UNC and PNM. The NSA was responsible for the deadlock between UNC and PNM.”

Third parties offer party loyalists a moral compromise, a chance for them to reframe their socio-political identities without having to defect to the ideologically and morally incompatible opposition camp. However, participants repeated their desire to see candidates who are “brand new” or “not recycled” for them to seriously consider third party options. These assertions suggest a desperate desire to seek out an alternative. Electoral reform through proportional representation or instant runoff voting encourages representative politics and coalition building (Pillsbury 2018) that can better reflect the preferences of a multi-ethnic nation-state like TT.

Centralized governance has made local governments in Trinidad beholden to the state for administrative and financial direction. The most wholesome transfer of power and authority to local political units comes in the form of devolution that also gives local governments the authority to manage local budgets and make administrative changes (Garrity and Picard 1996:8). This is different from other modalities of power sharing that are already practiced in part in Trinidad like “deconcentration” or the transfer of responsibilities from the central government to local administrators without local authority to shape, alter or independently fund those responsibilities, and “delegation” which shifts responsibilities to CSOs and the private sector instead (Garrity and Picard 1996:8). Numerous policy documents already outline the process for such transfer of power (GRTT 1965; GRTT 1974; GRTT 1983; GRTT 1990; GRTT 2009;

GRTT 2013). The document “Transitioning of Local Government Policy” (GRTT 2016) that was released during my fieldwork is a more recent attempt outlining a reform agenda for local government. Critically, Trinidad’s local government is not enshrined in the Constitution meaning any attempt at local government reform can be rescinded by a subsequent government. Constitutional reform requires the concerted effort of both Houses of Parliament along with coordinated civilian pressure from an energized and emotionally-vested body politic. The lessons are in the history books. Trinidad and Tobago’s political party culture emerged from the embers of the fight for freedom. Now fractured loyalties signal the need for a stronger, more representative form of democracy.

## NOTES

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1 “Walk” here literally means volunteered by walking with the party group at election rallies

2 In this dissertation I do not offer date references for direct quotes from my research participants. I allude to dates only in the context of comments made at the consultation events by non-research participants.

3 The larger island of Trinidad where the consultations were held measures approximately 4,791 square kilometers. Philadelphia, PA measures 4,661 square kilometers.

4 Here “Mixed” refers to African and East Indian mixing, as well as mixing between other ethnicities.

5 My consulting work took place under the People’s Partnership administration during which time MRDLG was called the Ministry of Local Government. The current PNM administration changed it to the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government.

6 Of these five, I attended the ones that took place in Couva, Tabaquite, Talparo (one municipality), Sangre Grande, and San Juan municipalities. Having attended eight consultations in total combined with recorded YouTube videos, the released rapporteurs’ reports of the same, and my conversations with the consultation-campaign team gave me a good understanding of patterns that I could extrapolate across the entire exercise.

7 According to the Municipal Corporations Act of 1990 (GRTT 1990), Trinidad and Tobago is made up of 14 municipalities. These are comprised of two cities, three “boroughs,” and nine “regional corporations.” The municipality of Sangre Grande is officially called the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation. I use “municipality” interchangeably with these official geo-political markers for the purpose of easy interpretation.

8 In the 2010 elections, the People’s Partnership (PP) party put up a strong opposition to the PNM and won that election. It was a coalition of four political parties – the United National Congress, the Congress of the People, the Tobago Organization of the People, and the National Joint Action Committee.

9 Till 2002, the Toco-Sangre Grande and Cumuto-Manzanilla seats were a single seat, Toco-Manzanilla. Their split before the 2002 elections was, in the words of analyst Premdas (CITE), “PNM’s attempt to consolidate its power through the creation of a ‘safe’ Toco-Sangre Grande seat and a marginal Cumuto-Manzanilla seat.”

10 This group increased in size from 20.5% in 2000 to 22.8% by the 2011 household census (GRTT 2012:15).

11 I use “African” and “East Indian” as emic ethnic labels used by participants themselves. This is also the label given to the ethnic groups in official government documents.

12 They were delayed and eventually took place in November 2016.

13 The World Bank (2019) classifies TT as a high-income country with a gross national income per capita of more than 12,056 USD.

14 A maxi is the equivalent of a public minibus that can ferry between 12 – 17 passengers.

15 Callaloo is the name of a local dish made of a concoction of vegetables in coconut milk. See Munasinghe (2001) for the metaphoric significance of “callaloo” versus “tossed salad” as modalities of a plural society.

16 Unlike Trinidad, the Tobago House of Assembly Act 1996 is enshrined in the constitution. It gives Tobago relative autonomy in the management of its affairs except in the case of national security, revenue generation and international affairs.

17 Vernacular term for sound made by sucking air and saliva through the teeth usually to signal disapproval.

18 A cabildo is a Spanish municipal administrative unit governed by a Council. Trinidad continued to abide by a Spanish constitution under the British Crown. The cabildo subsequently became the Port of Spain Town Council.

19 Indigenous Arawak and Carib populations that were part of the Amerindian tribal network in Central and South American provided labor to develop the Spanish estate until the late 1770s; during this time Trinidad was deemed the “colonial slum of the Spanish Empire” (Millette 1985:1).

20 The Executive Council came to be composed of five elected officials and one nominated official (both from the LegCo), in addition to three Crown officials and the Governor himself. This made the Crown-appointed authorities a minority within the Council. The five elected officials were called ministers. Importantly, the LegCo could, by secret ballot, vote to remove any minister from the Executive Council, so making the latter more accountable to the LegCo.

21 Of the 31-member LegCo, 24 members were elected, five were nominated unofficials (i.e. not officials of the British Crown) and two were official representatives of the Crown.

22 “Labour” is the official British-English spelling of the party. In this dissertation, I have used American-English spellings unless the word denotes an official title like the name of a political party.

23 At this point in history, the Prime Minister was Grantley Adams for the whole West Indian Federation to which Trinidad and Tobago belonged. The Federation was dissolved in 1962 after which the title of the head of government in TT was changed to “Prime Minister.”

24 As a result of this power, Trinidad had three elections in three years – 2000, 2001 and 2002 as the then Prime Ministers feared a dissolved government.

25 In spite of there being numerous parties like the Democratic Labour Party, Liberal Party, Workers and Farmers Party, Tapia House Movement, Organisation for National Reconstruction and National Joint Action Committee, they remained “minorities” in terms of their multi-racial and/or economic platforms, and so were unable to form the government under the first-past-the-post and single-member constituency electoral system currently in place (Meighoo and Jamadar 2008:121).

26 The first-past-the-post or “plurality voting” is an electoral system whereby a candidate wins for having the most votes (not necessarily the majority of votes cast). This system is critiqued for its higher probability of having a minority winner in a multi-party contest.

27 For the first time since the country’s Independence, a coalition of parties won the general election in 1986 on an explicitly multi-racial platform. It was called the National Alliance for Reconstruction. The pressures of fiscal austerity and institution of neoliberal programs by the International Monetary Fund led to in-fighting amongst its different political factions. In 1991, it paved the way for the PNM party to once again ascend to power.

28 1925 was the first time that Trinbagonians could elect seven members to the Legislative Council. Those running for these seats had to have resided in their constituency for one year or own real estate valued at 24,000 TTD (3539 USD). Alternatively that asset should be able to generate an annual income of 1,920 TTD (283 USD). These posts were open to only male candidates who could read and write in English (Williams 1964:219).

29 Before some consultations began, I would notice Khan recording something in front of the camera. It was only later when I learned about the reform's official YouTube page – “TT Local Matters” – that I realized these were public messages inviting people to the next consultation on the schedule.

30 The color of the main opposition party, the United National Congress, is yellow.

31 Couchsurfing.com is a website that connects travelers with local hosts who literally offer their couches as a free homestay.

32 A common snack in Trinidad and Tobago consisting of fried split pea dough balls served with chutney.

33 “Coolie” is a Hindi word that is used in this context as a derogatory and racial term reserved for East Indian laborers (Braithwaite 1953).

34 Some of Eric Williams' other famous works are *The Negro in the Caribbean* (1942), *Education in the British West Indies* (1950), and *From Columbus to Castro* (1969).

35 In 1932, for example, petroleum accounted for 57% of the country's export revenues, surpassing the economic importance of sugar and cocoa (Abraham 2005).

36 The Syrian and Chinese ethnic groups are much smaller in number than the African and East Indian groups. They lack a unified political voice but have been able to integrate themselves into political parties through a class-based position (see also Braithwaite 1953:52).

37 An alderman is a nominated member of the local government Council. Aldermen are elected through a system of proportional representation.

38 We see this with the narrative of tossed salad over callaloo promoted by East Indian leaders, representing plurality of TT society (Munasinghe 2001:270)

39 I use Lisa Winer's (1993) definition of TEC as encompassing the language varieties of both Trinidad Creole and Tobago Creole, acknowledging that they both exhibit significant differences paralleling their individual histories as colonized islands. She contends that while TEC is not considered a standard language, it has a distinct and variable grammatical, phonological and lexical form. For the bulk of my paper, I will refer to TEC as the vernacular of the country although the focus will only be on Trinidad as it shares a more intimate history with the Indian community than its counterpart.

40 Wining is a Trinidadian term of reference for the sexually suggestive gyrations of the hips while dancing.

41 Kamla Persad Bissessar was an East Indian Prime Minister of the country from 2010 – 2015. She led a coalition of parties dominated by the United National Congress that defeated the PNM after nine continuous years in office.

42 Morality in leadership took centerstage in the 2001 general elections. Then, the two dominant parties, the United National Congress and the PNM acquired the same number of seats in Parliament following which the two party leaders agreed that the President of the country have the deciding vote. In spite of the UNC securing 49.9% of the votes against PNM's 46.5%, the President chose Manning and the PNM as the winning party. He cited Manning's “moral and spiritual values” as the deciding factor.

43 In the five years before my research in 2016, the People's Partnership party was in power. They lost the 2015 elections to the PNM, primarily because of corruption charges.

44 He defined one generation as five years.

45 For him, “young” kids in this context was between 20- 35 years of age.

46 See Chapter 5 for more on the topic of corruption linked to incomplete infrastructural projects in Trinidad.

47 An example of an unconditional non-programmatic form of distribution would be pork-barrel politics where benefit programs target geographical areas and not clumps of voters specifically (Stokes et al. 2013: 12).

48 In Trinidad, the title of “Mayor” is reserved for the head of the local government Council in the two cities and three boroughs only. The political head of each of the nine regional corporations are referred to as “Chairman.”

49 The World Bank (2019) defines a high-income country as having a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of 12,056 USD or more.

50 51 percent of voters said brokers cannot find out while 12 percent said they didn’t know (Stokes et al. 2013: 101)

51 In Trinidad, district and constituency are used interchangeably to reference the geographical area represented by a single seat in the Legislature.

52 At the time of this research in 2016, the PNM government had promised to revive some of the leftover projects from the Manning administration but Madan denied any change in status or occupancy of the aforementioned projects.

53 “Crapaud” is the French word for “toad.”

54 I heard the same comment with regards to PNM loyalty in SGRC and something similar about UNC loyalty in the St. James constituency – “You could put a crapaud [in St. James] under the UNC and they would win.”

55 In Trinidad, people who make announcements while driving around in cars are referred to as “micmen.”

56 This candidate lost the election but accumulated enough PNM votes from the area to get his deposit back. According to the Trinidad Election and Boundaries Commission, a candidate must win atleast one eighth of the votes cast in order to get his deposit back for contesting a local government seat (GRTT 2013b:331–333).

57 Whatsapp is a social messaging application owned by Facebook.

58 The PNM party’s official color is red and the UNC party’s official color is yellow. I found out on election day that party members are not allowed to loiter around polling areas wearing party signage so as to avoid coercing voters. So the PNM party handed out maroon T-shirts to all its party members – without the PNM logo or any symbol. That way, there was the “reddish” color of the PNM party, there was uniformity because all members were required to wear it, and no one could say that it was a political party T-shirt because it was, after all, a plain maroon round-colored T-shirt.

59 In a different but related context, Doughty (2017) examines the different practices and forms of sociality that exist in the midst of “enforced waiting” under Rwanda’s post-genocide legal institutions. She suggests that the “sociality of enforced waiting” has fostered “recursive connections to previous interactions and relationships” beyond the temporal dimensions of transitional justice.

60 According to Vera, the land on which her house is built once belonged to a squatter who lived on it for 50 years, giving him legal rights over it. This is supported by Trinidadian law on property rights (GRTT 2015). He then legally transferred the title to a woman who was keen on



building a community of Seventh Day Adventist followers. She “gave” the land to Vera and her husband although the title remains in her name. Vera denies that she is a squatter.

61 In fact Mauss not only warns against a priori ideas of development where sale of credit is accorded “more developed” status than gift exchange but also asserts that the act of gifting harbors economic value in that it “complements market in so far as it operates where the latter is absent” (Mauss 2012:xviii).

62 I use La Canoa as the name of the street, in keeping with how the community residents refer to it.

63 Under the People’s Partnership from 2010-2015, the La Canoa community got its water connection with the help of a UNC minister belonging to the coalition government. He promised to get working on their electricity issue next but didn’t make it through the next election cycle.

64 In 2013, the PP government passed the Municipal Corporations Amendment Bill that introduced proportional representation at the local government level. As a result, four aldermen (read: nominated leaders) in each of the fourteen local Councils are now appointed on the basis of this new system.

## APPENDIX I: LIST OF ACRONYMS

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CARILED: Caribbean Local Economic Development (program)  
CEPEP: Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Program  
CSO: Civil society organization  
CBC: Chagaunas Borough Corporation  
CBO: Community-based organizations  
COP: Congress of the People (political party)  
DLP: Democratic Labour Party  
FPTP: First-past-the-post (electoral system)  
HDC: Housing Development Corporation  
IBI: Industrialization by Invitation  
LED: Local economic development  
LHA: Land and Housing Authority  
LegCo: Legislative Council  
MCA 1990: Municipal Corporations Act of 1990  
MoWT: Ministry of Works and Transport  
MP: Member of Parliament  
MRDLG: Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government  
MSDFS: Ministry of Social Development and Family Services  
NAR: National Alliance for Reconstruction  
NJAC: National Joint Action Committee  
NSA: National Solidarity Assembly (political party)  
ONR: Organization for National Reconstruction (political party)  
PDP: People's Democratic Party (political party)  
PNM: People's National Movement (political party)  
PM: Prime Minister  
PoS: Port of Spain  
PP: People's Partnership (political party)  
SE: Standard English  
SGRC: Sangre Grande Regional Corporation  
TEC: Trinidad English Creole  
THA: Tobago House of Assembly  
TT: Trinidad and Tobago  
TTAVCC: Trinidad and Tobago Association of Village and Community Councils  
UNC: United National Congress (political party)  
URP: Unemployment Relief Program  
VP: Vice President  
WASA: Water and Sewage Authority

## APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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### Screening questions for public attendees (telephone):

1. Can you confirm that you were present at the (location name) consultation?
2. Did you speak at the consultation?
3. Would you be interested in participating in my research study?
4. How do you identify yourself? Indian/African/Mixed/Other?

### Face-to-face interview questions with public attendees at the consultations:

#### *On the consultation*

1. How did you hear about the consultation?
2. Why did you choose to attend the reform consultation?
  - a. Did the fact that this is a PNM-government led consultation affect your decision to attend? How so?
3. Is this the first public consultation you are attending?
  - a. Do you generally attend town hall meetings or any other public events organized at the central or local government level?
4. What were you expecting to hear at the local government reform consultation?
5. Did the consultation live up to your expectations?
6. Did you speak at the consultation? If so, what on?
7. Do you think this government will deliver on its promise of local government reform? Why or why not?
8. Did you share information on what you heard at the consultation with friends and family after the event?
9. Were you satisfied with the consultation?

#### *On politics/elected leadership*

10. Do you know who your Councilor is?
  - a. Have you ever interacted with him/her?
  - b. What are your thoughts about him/her?
11. Do you know who your Member of Parliament is?
  - a. Have you ever interacted with him/her?
  - b. What are your thoughts about him/her?
12. What did you feel about having your and other Councilors being present at the consultations?
13. What did you think about the PM saying that the public needs to have more civic responsibility –“take charge of its community”?
14. MRDLG says that they have been urban-centric and now want to move to rural development. What do you think about this?

*On voting behavior*

15. Do you vote in general elections?
  - a. Did you vote in 2016?
  - b. If you are comfortable sharing, which party did you vote for? Why?
  - c. Why did you swing your vote?
16. Do you vote in local government elections?
  - a. Will you vote in the upcoming local government elections?
  - b. If you are comfortable sharing, who do you think you will vote for? Why?
17. What do you expect from your government because you vote?
18. How do you feel about the political situation today?
  - a. Was it different in the past?
19. What do you think about the ILP or MSJ or other third parties?
20. You said government doesn't take care of the youth. Is there anybody they do take care of?
21. [SGRC/SFCC] is considered a swing municipality. Does it matter to you which government comes into power?

*On personal life*

22. Which part of the municipality do you live in?
23. Do you work?
  - a. How did you get your job at the regional corporation?
24. How do you manage day-to-day living?
25. Tell me about your family.
26. Are you part of any party group? Tell me about it.
  - a. Are you politically involved in any other capacity?
27. Do you participate in your community/village council? Tell me about it.
28. What does being a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago mean to you?
29. If you were the Mayor or MP, what would your future and your community's future look like?
30. Do you consider yourself to be religious?
31. What age bracket do you fall under: (18 - 35) or (36-55) or (over 55)

**Face-to-face interview questions with local Councilors:**

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and why you entered politics?
2. What does the term "public consultation" mean to you?
3. Why did you attend the public consultation?
4. How was the public informed about the consultations in your constituency?
5. What are the main concerns of your burgesses (read: constituency)?
6. Have you attended any public consultations in the past year? If so, why did you attend?
7. When did you find out about the local government consultations coming to your area?
8. Did you participate in its promotion in any way?
9. What did you think about the venue and organization of the actual consultation?
10. What did you think about the content (what was presented) at the consultation?

11. Did you speak at the consultation? If so, on what topic?
12. Do you think the current government will carry through with the proposed reform before local government elections this year?
13. Are you going to run in the local government elections?

### APPENDIX III: JAHAJI BHAI

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*Calypso by Brother Marvin*

Kumayayo Zindaweyo  
Kumayay Zindawey Ayayo

I am the seed of mih father  
He is the seed of mih grandfather  
Who is the seed of Bahut Ajah  
He came from Calcutta  
A stick and a bag on he shoulder  
He turban and he kapra  
So I am part seed of India, India.

The indentureship and the slavery  
Bind together two races in unity  
There was no more Mother Africa  
No more Mother India, just Mother Trini  
My Bahut Ajah planted sugarcane down in the Caroni plain  
Ramlogan, Basdeo, Prakash and I, Jahaji Bhai  
Brotherhood of the boat, Jahaji Bhai  
Brotherhood of the boat, Jahaji Bhai

I would be a disgrace to Allah if I choose race, creed or colour  
Bahut Ajah had to make that journey for I to have Zindagee  
So it is a great privilege to have such unique heritage  
Fifty percent Africa, fifty percent India, India  
I have "do chuttee" two holidays  
Emancipation and Arrival Day  
Since Fatel Razack made the journey  
150 years gone already  
Whether you're Hindu, Muslim or Christian  
Let's walk this land hand in hand  
We could only prosper if we try a Jahaji Bhai  
Brotherhood of the boat, Jahaji Bhai  
Brotherhood of the boat, Jahaji Bhai

Kumayayo Zindaweyo  
Kumayay Zindawey Ayayo  
Kumayayo Zindaweyo O mera dost mera saathi  
Chal tahalna ek matt  
Agal bagal....

For those who playing ignorant  
Talking 'bout true African descendant

If yuh want to know de truth  
Take ah trip back to yuh root  
And somewhere on that journey  
Yuh go see ah man in a dhoti  
Saying he prayers in front of a jhandi, jhandi

Then and only then you'll understand  
What is ah cosmopolitan nation  
There's no room for prejudice at all  
United we stand, divided we'll fall  
So to all races here in Trinbago  
Aapko kalyan ho dhaniaho  
Let us live as one under the sky, Jahaji Bhai  
Brotherhood of the boat, Jahaji Bhai  
Brotherhood of the boat, Jahaji Bhai

Kumayayo Zindaweyo  
Kumayay Zindawey Ayayo  
Kumayayo Zindaweyo O mera dost mera saathi  
Chal tahalna ek matt  
Agal bagal....

Indo and Afro Trinbagonians, we should learn to be one  
Our ancestors came by boat, is de salt water in we throat  
-----, mih great grandpa and grandmama  
One was a slave and one was indentured, indentured  
But the religion neither colour didn't interfere  
With their love for each other, Nani Nani  
I am proof of racial unity  
And that is the way everyone should be  
Everyone should have each one in their prayer  
Let's show each other we care  
As we all know -----, Jahaji Bhai  
Brotherhood of the boat, Jahaji Bhai  
Brotherhood of the boat, Jahaji Bhai

Kumayayo Zindaweyo  
Kumayay Zindawey Ayayo  
Kumayayo Zindaweyo O mera dost mera saathi  
Chal tahalna ek matt  
Agal bagal....

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

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### Taapsi Ramchandani

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#### EDUCATION

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PhD, Cultural Anthropology, 2012 – 2020

Masters, Public Administration, 2015

**Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University**

Bachelor of Arts, Economics, International Studies, 2006 (Phi Beta Kappa, Summa cum Laude)

**Ohio Wesleyan University**

#### RESEARCH SKILLS

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Stakeholder interviews

Journey mapping

Atlas.ti

Focus groups

Card sorting

Concept mapping

Ethnography

Discovery research

Affinity diagrams

Participant observation

Digital diaries

Surveys

#### WORK EXPERIENCE

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**Co-founder/CEO, Poocho, 2019 – Present**

- [Poocho](#) is a B2B conversational mobile platform on which clients can collect real-time text, audio and visual insights directly and securely from their target audience.
- My responsibilities include building our brand, acquiring clients, and hiring talent to grow the Poocho network.
- I am also spearheading our in-house consultation services that synthesizes insights to help clients build better user personas, enhance employee engagement, and strategize their product/market roadmaps.

**Civic Anthropologist, Center for Civic Design, United States, 2016 – 2017**

- Worked with the California Secretary of State's office to bring uniformity to how vote-by-mail packages are handled across the state. In addition to conducting remote usability tests with state voters on the new designs, the project was fundamentally about building consensus across the Secretary of State's office, election administrators, printing vendors, and USPS on crucial elements of the design templates.
- Did usability testing and co-authored a [report on best design practices](#) for Ranked Choice Voting ballots and instructions, voter education, and election results based on six months of user research. We used the Election Assistance Commission guidelines for accessibility to redesign and test RCV voting materials in California, Minneapolis and New Jersey. Tests also revealed civilian anxieties around “choice” and “control” in paper and digital voting experiences.
- Researcher and contributor to the Civic Engagement Toolkit developed in collaboration with the Center for Technology and Civic Life. I used digital diaries to conduct remote testing of website features with local election officials. Also co-wrote the template for the [Usability Testing Toolkit](#) that provides guidelines and templates for local election offices to conduct usability tests of their own materials and websites.
- Conducted usability tests of Participatory Budgeting ballots in 9 locations across New York City

in March 2016. Using convenience and snowball sampling, my partner and I recruited a sample of 73 voters who were later profiled as “issue”, “involved” and “captured” voters to gauge their scope of civic engagement through community-based voting. [Recommendations](#) to PBNYC included templates for updating their paper and digital ballots. Contextual analysis at voting sites shed light on other factors impacting the voter experience including role of poll workers, voting spaces and design of ballot boxes.

**Technical Consultant**, Caribbean Local Economic Development Program (DFATD/Federation of Canadian Municipalities), Trinidad and Tobago, 2013 - 2016

- 2016, I was commissioned to update CARILED's Gender Study for Dominica including highlighting gender differences in accessing MSME services, assessing the reason for existing inequalities, and revising recommendation strategies for promoting gender equality in the MSME sector.
- 2014, I updated the LAEP report with special attention to overlapping and disjointed efforts of the Ministry of Local Government and CARILED to stimulate the small business sector. In my final report, I outlined the Ministry's policy gaps and made recommendations for CARILED to implement its projects within the government's centralized administrative structure.
- 2013, I conducted a baseline study of socio-economic context of the Chaguanas Borough Corporation (CBC) that was identified as one of Trinidad's five “growth poles” for economic and social development. Methodologies included desk research, stakeholder and community group interviews, and ethnographies involving local residents. The deliverable was a local area economic profile (LAEP) report for CARILED.

**Qualitative UX Researcher**, FactSet Research Systems, United States, 2015

- Used a combination of semi-structured interviews, shadowing, and focus groups to strategize and develop user personas to inform product development and design priorities for the company. Unlike previous attempts led by the design team, I prioritized work flow over work title in developing each persona that could cut across the different user groups that consume FactSet's products.
- Using card sorting and qualitative data coding, I created personas that were inward-facing, a.k.a. customer needs and requirements were modelled through conversations with sales, product design and consultant groups of the company.
- The expanded scope of my personas drew the attention of the company's top management that was interested not only in its impact on product design but its contribution to enhanced customer interaction. Findings from this project were also delivered to FactSet's marketing team to guide outreach efforts.
- I spearheaded a departmental switch to Atlas.ti – a qualitative data software to analyze and collaborate across UX research projects.

**Country Manager**, [Mela Artisans LLC](#), India, 2010 – 2012

- I was part of the four-member team that established Mela Artisans in India in 2010. My core responsibilities were identifying capacity of shortlisted handicraft groups to sell on an e-commerce portal; procuring and shipping products to the U.S., and conducting a baseline study of collaborating groups for evaluation and social impact assessment.
- Spearheaded an online micro-lending program in the first year to help artisans with advance purchases.
- Leveraged my production and writing skills to write blogs and make fourteen “featured artisan” videos.

## **Journalist, India**

- [Co-produced and co-anchored](#) a weekly technology show, Tech Toyz; anchored the weekend news segment; hosted award ceremonies and entrepreneurship competitions for CNBC-TV18, 2007 – 2012
- Assistant Director for two documentaries on the Indian handloom industry, Surabhi Foundation/Nat Geo/UNESCO, 2010
- Wrote political and social commentary on the India blog of a UK-based company, [The Samosa](#), 2009 – 2010

## **PUBLICATIONS**

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“Political Patronage.” Oxford Research Encyclopedias, forthcoming  
“[Narratives of Development: An Anthropological Investigation into Narratives as a Source of Enquiry in Development Planning](#).” Anthropology in Action, 2016

## **PUBLIC ENGAGEMENTS/TEACHING**

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**Podcast** (host), <https://anthrotalks.org>, Ongoing

**Presentation**, “[Let’s talk about inclusion](#)”, NYC UXPA World Usability Day, 2017

**Workshop**, “Service design for the public sector”, Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, 2017

**Webinars**, “[Designing ballots for ranked choice voting](#)”, “[Designing voter education and results presentation for ranked choice voting](#)”, FairVote.org, 2017

**University teaching**, User Experience Design, Rutgers University, 2017

**University teaching**, Cultural Anthropology, Syracuse University, 2012 - 2015

**Conference**, “Re-introducing the Colonial Past: A Narrative Analysis of Indian Ethnic Identity and Local Economic Development in Trinidad and Tobago”. South Asia Graduate Conference. Chicago, Illinois, 2015

**Conference**, “Anthropological Musings on Collaboration as Good Governance: A Case Study of Local Economic Development in Trinidad and Tobago”. Society for Applied Anthropology Annual Conference. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 2015

**Conference**, “Negotiating the Future: An Anthropological Investigation of State Transformation and Local Government Reform in Trinidad and Tobago”. Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth Conference. Exeter, UK, 2015

**Conference**, “Contextualizing Inter-Governmental Interventions in the Development of ‘Market Towns’”. Society for Applied Anthropology Annual Conference. Albuquerque, New Mexico, 2014

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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American Anthropological Association (member)

Members’ Programmatic Advisory and Advocacy Committee, AAA (board member)

National Association for the Practice of Anthropology (member)

Global Business Anthropology Summit (member)

## **SCHOLARSHIPS/AWARDS/HONORS**

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Aspen Ideas Festival Scholar, 2017

First Place, Student Achievement Award, National Association for the Practice of Anthropology, 2016

Maxwell Citizenship Initiative Grant, Syracuse University, 2016

Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award, Syracuse University, 2015  
Claudia De Lys Grant for Dissertation Research, Syracuse University, 2015  
Roscoe-Martin Fund for Research, Syracuse University, 2014, 2015  
Presidential Scholarship (100% tuition waiver), Ohio Wesleyan University, 2003-2006