

# MULTIPLE TRADITIONS AND THE QUESTION OF CULTURAL INTEGRATION

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This one is based on a trial lecture (assigned topic) for my Ph D, delivered on 14 September 1991. The other trial lecture, on a chosen topic, can be accessed [here](#).

## **The problem**

This essay poses one problem and draws upon three main bodies of work in an attempt to resolve it. The problem is this. How can we study and conceptualise the relationship between interaction and symbolic integration in contemporary societies which are apparently marked by a diversity of symbolic universes and systems of practices? The empirical material is mainly drawn from Trinidad & Tobago, which is a poly-ethnic nation-state often described as a conglomerate of discrete cultural groups held together by the sheer force of the state. In order to discuss in which ways Trinidad is a society, I will look into aspects of the social and cultural integration of Trinidadians of Indian origin, who comprise some forty per cent of the population, but who have been politically and economically marginal until recently. More generally, I shall discuss the relationship between aspects of integration and aspects of segregation or differentiation in poly-ethnic societies. In approaching this question, fundamental to social theory and research, I intend to draw on theory from Continental sociology, methodology from British social anthropology, and ethnography from my own field work. I shall attempt, to paraphrase Dumont (1980: xviii), to be empirical without thereby

being empiricist. I will also suggest that the marriage between continental social theory and British anthropological methodology - which in reality is a synthesis between a totalising and an individualising perspective, as has been so splendidly achieved by Bourdieu in his best moments - may best be undertaken through field work.

There are ample opportunities for scholastic cleverness and deconstructive pyrotechnics in a confrontation with this admittedly vast complex of problems. Instead of confronting the concepts themselves head-on and thus wasting time and energy on arid and ultimately fruitless discussions of the meaning of words, I shall point at their fuzzy edges as we go along.

### **Totalising and individualising social thought**

On the one hand, I take my cue from French and German social philosophy, which tends to be totalising in nature, in that it attempts to conceptualise wholes. These traditions, themselves multiple, try to conceptualise the principles behind interaction and symbolisation, and tend to presume that such principles exist - even if they are invisible to the empiricist observer - as the necessary triggers for agency or social interaction. Conceptualisations of such fundamental principles range from Sartre's concept of the *pratico-inert*, to Dumont's *idéologie* and *valeur*, Bourdieu's *doxa* and *habitus*, Husserl's *Lebenswelt* and Schütz's *Relevanzstruktur*, and Foucault's *discours*. Just as French philosophy never seems to get over the problems posed by Descartes, it may also be said that French sociology remains committed to Durkheim's concept of social facts as something to be studied *comme des choses*, as things reflecting that totality which is society - even if, as in the case of Bourdieu, one is critical to such an idea. Within this totalising tradition of social thought, conflict and contradiction are conceived of as emerging from within society, as confrontations between its organic constituent parts, as it were. According to such a perspective, the individual may largely appear as a product of those complementary sets of abstract relations which make up society. A highly simplified, one might say operationalised, version of this kind of thought is apparent in Radcliffe-Brown's writings and in other classical structural-functional social anthropology. In dealing with the seemingly fragmented

and poorly integrated societies of Trinidad and (to a lesser extent) Mauritius below, I shall argue that their seeming social fragmentation is dependent on their cultural integration at a deeper level; that the articulation of ethnicity and conflict is parasitical on the underlying unity which, among other things, provides the language within which conflict is articulated. Such a perspective has largely been lacking in the literature on ethnicity, where the separation of ethnic groups is usually seen as more fundamental than their integration at a higher systemic or segmentary level.

A main limitation of totalising philosophies of society, as has been pointed out repeatedly from Anglo-Saxon thinkers and by Continental heretics (such as Bourdieu, 1977), lies in their inability to account for the role of individual agency and internal variation within a society; that is the inherent sociological determinism seeing agency as a response to rules, and the tendency to reify society and culture as bounded and stable systems. This was the tendency against which Barth reacted in his *Models of Social Organization* (Barth, 1966), targeting in particular Radcliffe-Brown. Barth placed the maximising individual at the centre of social theory, and argued that culture and norms should be seen as explanandum and not as explanans. He thereby reversed the chain of causality usually evoked by sociologists seeing society as being prior to the individual. So when Radcliffe-Brown writes that the individual Toms, Dicks and Harrys only interest us in so far as they may enable us to recognise aspects of structure (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952), he deprives us of the possibility to discover internal variation and innovative agency in a society. This insight is nowadays plain common sense, and it is evidently relevant in our day and age, struggling as we are to conceptualise society and culture as unbounded systems and neverending process.

### **Society and two concepts of culture**

Society, I suggest, should not be conceptualised as a noun, but as a predicate - as an aspect of, and a condition for, meaningful interaction. By implication, culture exists as a shared idiom for discourse, an inventory of ways of communicating and solving tasks. Both society and culture are dual phenomena in that they are accumulated results of ongoing action and

necessary conditions for action to be meaningful; they are not things, and they change (Giddens, 1979; Eriksen, 1991a). Culture, further, is a matter of degree. The pidgin language *Russenorsk*, used in communication between Norwegians and Russians in the border areas before the October Revolution, created a very limited field of shared meaning. Possessing a vocabulary of about four hundred words, it was definitely inadequate for a wide number of communicational purposes. Yet, it cannot be denied that the speakers of *Russenorsk* activated shared culture in speaking the language; they had a structure of relevance in common enabling them to carry on their interaction in a meaningful way, although the social field activated was narrow. Culture, in this meaning of the word, is not something which can be pluralised (cf. Leach, 1982). The current state of intellectual paralysis experienced by some cultural anthropologists derives largely from their insistence to pluralise the word culture, instead of using it in its other main meaning; namely, as humanly created, transmitted and distributed capabilities for communication and agency (cf. Ingold, 1990, for a similar point). Regarded in this way, culture is the invention of the anthropologist (Wagner, 1981), or an "analytical implication" in Hastrup's (1989) words.

Following the integration of so-called traditional peoples into nation-states, symbolic universes merge in many respects. People become more similar in terms of practices and representations; an increasing part of their learnt capabilities for communication, their taken-for-granted structures of relevance (Schütz's, 1981, concept), become shared. Simultaneously, modernity and individualism enable agents to reflect upon and objectify their way of life as a culture or as a tradition, and they become a people with an abstract sense of community and a presumed shared history. This kind of process has taken place among Trinidadians of Indian origin since the 1950s, but particularly since the economic growth associated with the oil boom of the 1970s. Many middle-class Hindus in Trinidad have, for example, in recent years associated themselves with the charismatic Sai Baba movement, which helps them to see their history as that of a dignified culture (Klass, 1991). It is at this point that culture is made into a noun, and traditionalist ideology is remarkably similar to common anthropological definitions of culture, such as

the Geertzian view of culture as a coherent symbolic system (Geertz, 1973). Like some anthropological theories of ethnicity, such ideologies are primordialist in that they stress continuity with the past as a *raison-d'être* for the unity of the ethnic group. For now, the word tradition will refer to agents' own reification of their way of life, which they regard as unique and usually ancient, which has a sacred element, and to which they are emotionally attached (cf. Longva, 1991) - in other words, as that reification of culture evoked by traditionalism. A tradition in this sense is invented - but not by the anthropologist, rather by the agents themselves.

There are thus two senses of culture which must be kept separate here; the analytical concept of culture, and the reified, native view of a culture *comme une chose*; the latter, similar to some anthropological concepts of culture, I shall call tradition. Whereas it may be said that societies like Trinidad are marked by multiple traditions, they do not thereby necessarily contain multiple, autonomous symbolic universes.

### **The Rhodes-Livingstone perspective**

Whereas the totalising view of society as a relatively atemporal coherent system of kinds of social relations tries to account for the principles for its reproduction over time, the individualising view of the person as an intentional being tries to account for the logic of flowing human action itself. Both are aspects of persons in society (cf. Holy & Stuchlik, 1983:1). In a bid to defend the totalising perspective and thereby the concepts of culture and society from the threat of total dissolution, I would now like to call your attention to the studies undertaken by the so-called Rhodes-Livingstone school, later the Manchester school, in the North Rhodesian (later Zambian) Copperbelt and elsewhere in Southern and Central Africa from the 1950s to the 1960s. These studies of urbanisation and interethnic encounters rarely deal explicitly with confrontations between symbolic systems or cultural syncretism, but rather focus on aspects of instrumental action, and situational selection of statuses, taking place between agents of diverse cultural origins, who were thrown together in a shared industrial workplace (Wilson, 1942; Mitchell, 1956; Epstein, 1958; cf. also Gluckman, 1961). This body of work, not

only pioneering in the study of ethnicity (or "tribalism", as it was called at the time), can today be read as exceptional case-studies in how new shared meaning can be developed through interaction between people of discrete cultural origins.

The most remarkable theoretical achievement of this school was perhaps their readiness to deconstruct the then dominant view of societies as bounded and stable entities. It was the nature of their field of study, which could obviously not be delineated other than in an arbitrary way, which prompted the replacement of "society" with concepts like social network (Barnes), action-set (A. Mayer), scale (the Wilsons) and social field (Gluckman and others) - all of which denote the relativity of system boundaries; which remind us that society or society-ness is a matter of degree. It should be noted, however, that Wilson, Gluckman and their successors took certain insights from Continental social theory for granted, frequently without acknowledging this explicitly. They assumed that agents were fundamentally constituted by, and acted upon premises defined within, their societies. They had internalised the premises of societal integration taught by Radcliffe-Brown, Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, and saw no reason to question it. The discontinuity between the life-worlds of agents of differing "tribal" backgrounds was taken for granted. However, in actually investigating social process and change on the Copperbelt, they were emphatically actor-oriented. Epstein and Mitchell, in particular, applied the principle of situational selection in order to explain how conflicting expectations arising from the agent's participation in different systems of relevance were reconciled, so that "the individual may behave as a tribesman in one situation but not in another" (Mitchell, 1966:59). Aidan Southall, writing on urbanisation in Uganda, remarks, in line with this idea: "The switch of action patterns from the rural to the urban set of objectives is as rapid as the migrant's journey to town" (Southall, 1961:19). Mitchell further makes the important distinction between situational and processual change. Only in the latter case do the social institutions change; in the former case, individuals adapt strategically to changing circumstances (Mitchell, 1962). In other words, to re-phrase Marx's famous statement: Agents act intentionally, but they have to act upon social conditions which they have not themselves

chosen. When a larger field of shared meaning than that immediately available is required for the accomplishment of a certain task, this is developed through patterns of interaction frequently described as negotiation. In a study of ethnicity in Mauritius, I have myself (Eriksen, 1990) described such interaction as the search for common denominators, which can be defined as the totality of rules and symbols adequate for a particular kind of interethnic encounter to be meaningful for both parties involved. These common denominators, and any disagreement concerning their content and field of relevance, are framed in a shared language of discourse, which is thus supra-ethnic. Interethnic negotiations and competition, and overcommunication of ethnic differences, can in this way be an indication of a high degree of supra-ethnic cultural integration.

Seemingly recent insights about the relativity of system boundaries were perceived as obvious facts, and were dealt with in a sophisticated way by the anthropologists affiliated with the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute. They knew that any delineation of a system is arbitrary and ultimately meaningless unless one delimits the system with a particular analytical problem in mind. Best known in some quarters for their field methods and quantitative techniques for handling data, or for their characteristic form of analysis and presentation known as the extended case-study, their contributions to theoretical ideas about society or society-ness are no less important.

On the one hand, it is abundantly clear, as has been argued forcefully by the Continental sociological school and its branches in the Anglo-Saxon world, that the person is fundamentally socially constituted and cannot act or speak in a non-cultural way. On the other hand, the actor- and network-centred studies of social change in Southern Africa indicate that persons may consciously switch between structures of relevance in such a way that they may seem to belong to different traditions in different situations. If this seems inconsistent and a likely source for cognitive dissonance, we should rather investigate how agents actually cope with such complexity than draw the conclusion a priori. In *The Kalela Dance*, Mitchell (1956) also shows how new cultural institutions are developed by agents acting upon radical social change

which they have not themselves brought about. As Wittgenstein has remarked, sometimes we even invent the language-game as we go along (Wittgenstein, 1983).

### **Multiple traditions and societal integration**

Another influential perspective on complex societies has stressed the separation rather than the interaction between members of different groups. This is the view from classic theory on "plural societies" (Furnivall, 1947; Smith, 1966), which depicts poly-ethnic societies as consisting of culturally distinctive groups which were integrated only through the limited interaction taking place in the market and through common political leadership, usually in the hands of one of the groups. Furnivall and Smith consider the cultural universes of the constituent groups of the "plural society" as being by and large discrete and autonomous, largely unmodified by the limited interaction taking place between the groups in the market-place. The metaphor describing discrete ethnic groups as "pearls on a necklace", used by a Mauritian "pluralist" of my acquaintance (Hookoomsing, 1986), sums up this position.

Multiple traditions may be conceived of as existing in an area, such as a polity or "plural society", or as impinging on a person, or both. When Redfield and Marriott spoke of "little" and "great" traditions with particular reference to India (cf. Marriott, 1955), they referred to a division of knowledge corresponding to a hierarchical division of labour and distribution of ritual purity. Redfield and his students saw a mutual interdependence between the segments, but left it to Dumont (1980) to show how they form a hierarchical totality of relations. Whereas the "cultural pluralists" in the tradition from Furnivall regard the constituent groups or segments as being forcefully integrated politically, voluntarily integrated economically and otherwise autonomous, the views of Redfield, Dumont and the Rhodes-Livingstone school would regard the role of multiple traditions as something negotiable and relative. Only the latter perspectives allow us to regard plural societies as societies (cf. Eriksen, n.d. 1)



We are now prepared to approach the question of social integration in poly-ethnic Trinidad and its relationship to the multiple traditions of the island. Let this suffice as a theoretical introduction, therefore, and let us now turn to some empirical Toms, Dicks and Harrilals in order to see how they can illuminate the relationship between similarity and difference in societies.

### **Curepe junction**

A large proportion of my field material from Trinidad was collected within a radius of two to three kilometres from Curepe junction, a major road junction in central north Trinidad. In the immediate vicinity of the road cross itself, there is a high level of activity virtually all day and night. There is a bus terminal, a taxistand, a post office, there are several rumshops and restaurants, places of worship for the followers of various religions, and an abundance of shops and stalls where a great variety of commodities are sold. Many commuters from South Trinidad change buses at Curepe. Rather than being a distinctive place with a distinctive local identity, Curepe can be described as one of several commercial and communicational hubs in the heavily urbanised East-West-Corridor where about half of the Trinidadian population of slightly over a million live.

Curepe is in no respect a bounded system. Laid out spatially, the personal networks of Curepe inhabitants assume the appearance of so many dispersed clans in the New Guinea highlands. People commute, they frequently live far from their relatives, and have local as well as non-local linkages. In addition, their social identities are partly defined through their engagement with mass media, mass political organisations and institutions of national society, which contribute to the creation of their structures of relevance.

The residents of Curepe may be divided into several categories according to different "grid" principles. Ethnically, the largest category in the area is Hindu, but there are also many blacks and Muslims. In terms of social class, Curepe displays an extreme variation, ranging from a squatter's camp near the mosque to the middle-class Valsayn estate; in the very same street just below the Eastern Main Road, there are miserable shacks immediately next to

imposing new two-storey concrete buildings with large gardens. A third dimension for social distinctions follows the rural--urban dichotomy with regards to origins, which can be important in Trinidad.

Setting out to do field work in this area, I found it useful to begin by mapping out what Adrian Mayer (1966) has called action-sets, that is the ego-centred first-order stars of linkages, to use the terminology of network theory. In other words, an important aspect of research in large-scale urban society consists, just like field work in a small village, in finding out who does what with whom and for which purposes. The distinguishing mark of the large-scale field work consists in the fact that it is impossible to cover everybody and to map out the entire network. There are simply too many people. One has to make a selection. Mine consisted in locating persons, or key informants, who covered as wide a range as possible regarding profession, age and ethnic membership. (I will be the first to admit my male bias.)

### **Curepe identities**

Anand is a middle-aged gardener of Hindu religion; he owns his house and lives there with his wife, two daughters in their teens, and an adolescent son. A pious and industrious man, he rarely goes out in the evening, except if there is a puja or a similar ritual at the local temple. His action-set has four main components, excluding his nuclear family: Kin, affines, neighbours and colleagues. His relevant kin, notably his siblings, live in the Rio Claro area in South-Eastern Trinidad; his affines live in the same region. Anand and his family visit both categories about once a month and at special occasions such as birthdays. His closest neighbours are all Hindus; he exchanges a few words with them daily. His colleagues include blacks and Muslims, and he frequently engages in lively discussions at work, concerning the state of the country, public events or the situation at work. There are certain issues which cannot be discussed in this poly-ethnic setting, such as the calypso songs of the season - for unlike many Hindus, he doesn't listen to calypsoes - or matters pertaining to religious beliefs and practices. On the other hand, the poly-ethnic character of Anand's workplace, and the lack of ethnic segregation at lunch and during breaks, indicate the existence of shared culture crossing

ethnic boundaries. When they discuss conditions at work, and when allocating tasks, their statuses as colleagues are more important than their ethnic ones. Incidentally, Anand told me that unlike his parents' generation, where marriages were arranged, he would not himself interfere with his children's choice of spouse, unless it was a black. Although the Trinidadian caste system is in many respects defunct, the Indo-Trinidadian resistance against intermarriage with blacks remains strong.

A very different type of action-set is that of Kumar, who lives very close to Anand and works only a hundred yards from Anand's workplace. Kumar is university educated and has a higher clerical position in a private company. He is married but still childless, and has a much wider range of linkages than Anand. Apart from his kin and affines, to whom he has certain strong obligations, his action-set includes friends scattered all over Trinidad and abroad, recruited on the basis of shared interests or shared past, as well as colleagues and political associates. He is politically active, and could be described as a Hindu militant, critical of what he sees as the black cultural domination in Trinidad. His action-set activates a social field of larger scale than Anand's. Kumar's action-set includes few non-Hindus outside of his workplace, but he is on cordial terms with his non-Hindu colleagues. Sometimes, he experiences role-dilemmas at work. One such event took place when his union proposed to go on strike for higher wages. This union was regarded as a black civil servant union. Kumar, as an Indian identifying with the Indian trade unions, saw this move simultaneously as promoting his interests as a wageworker and as an indication of black aggressiveness in economic matters. The strike was, incidentally, called off.

Both Anand and Kumar identify themselves as Hindus, but they stress that they are simultaneously Trinidadians. Their shared Hindu identity includes components such as religion, an ideology of endogamy, and a notion that the political party identified with the Hindus serves their interests best. In addition, despite their widely different backgrounds, both regard Hindu tradition - the mentioning of which evokes a rich and sophisticated cultural heritage - as essential for their own personhood. When they meet in the street

and quickly greet each other, their identity as Hindus in a non-Hindu country - highlighted in ritual, at cultural shows and elections - is an important aspect of the definition of the situation, however ephemeral the encounter may be. Their shared identity as Hindus has not come about through interaction with each other, but ultimately through the appropriation of information channelled through the anonymous structures of mass communication and national politics. The context for any encounter between them is to a great extent defined by a shared historical consciousness, including references to the sufferings during indentureship, the black political domination and the presumed discrimination and cultural stigmatisation suffered by Hindus in Trinidad. This knowledge is mediated by impersonal structures of modern communications and the nation-state and, of course, through the ongoing flow of interaction. But neither of them would be able to map out linkages indicating that they belong to the same system of interaction, whether that system is to be delineated as Trinidadian society or the Hindu community. Further, the Indo-Trinidadian tradition is embedded and confirmed, and to a certain extent created reflexively by the very existence of "Indian" trade unions, religious groups and parties which operate at an abstract national level, and which prove, as it were, the existence of Indian tradition. The system of parties and trade unions is constituted at the higher level of national society. Kumar's and Anand's shared identity is, in other words, conditional on their integration into greater Trinidadian society.

### **Overlapping structures of relevance**

Anand and Kumar represent very different positions in terms of education, class and intellectual orientation, but share a reflexive identity linked to a tradition. They also have a wide range of shared representations and practices with non-Hindu Trinidadians. Had they gone to India, they would have found out what V.S. Naipaul found out when he went; namely, that they and their tradition are more West Indian than Indian (cf. Nevadomsky, 1983). In terms of the substantial content of Trinidadian Hindu tradition, if we try to regard it as a habitus or a complete form of life, it has converged in important respects with practices and representations of other Trinidadians. The loss of language is almost complete; the caste system is no longer functioning; arranged

marriages are virtually a thing of the past, and it could be argued that the Indo-Trinidadian is *homo aequalis* rather than *homo hierarchicus* (Dumont's, 1980, terms as he compares European and Indian culture; cf. Klass, 1991:162) in many respects - in other words, that their culture, if not their tradition, has adapted to the demands of modern Trinidadian society. In many a regard, Kumar seems to have more in common with John, a black clerk working in the area, than with Anand. Although I never succeeded in arranging a meeting between them, it was evident that John's perspectives on Trinidadian politics, on the economy of the country, and his general orientation, were quite compatible with Kumar's, although they would have disagreed on a number of points. The main point is that they would have been able to conduct a shared discourse in fields which were closed to Anand, and which would also be closed to non-Trinidadians. This might concern the lyrics of calypsoes or the books of V.S. Naipaul, the recent public criticism against the former Prime Minister, Eric Williams, corruption, or other issues of national interest. Indeed, many of my acquaintances engaged in intense interaction with people of different ethnic background, without showing the slightest sign of doubting the exclusiveness of their ethnic identity and tradition; it simply applied in different contexts.

The segmentary and situational character of social identities should be kept in mind. The term Indo-Trinidadian, which is sometimes politically relevant, encompasses Muslims and Indian Christians in addition to Hindus, and they would normally be closer to each other on a Bogardus scale of social distance than to the "creole" groups, which are themselves segmented into blacks, "Reds" or browns, whites etc. Class cuts across this classification in a complex way. When some Tom, Dick or Harrilal from Trinidad is off to vote, he acts in an "ethnic" way; when he takes an exam, he acts in a "meritocratic" way, when he goes on strike, he acts in a "class" way, when he serves a prison term, he will have been convicted according to "nationalist" principles of justice, and when he goes on holiday to Europe, he may well take on an identity as "someone from the Third World". One may indeed ask rhetorically: Which is his tradition, or his "culture"? - It makes sense to say that Trinidadians are integrated into a Trinidadian cultural system, represented through the shared

idiom of Trinidad English or Trinidadian Creole. On the one hand, this system is segmented along various "grid" dimensions such as class, gender, regional origin, and ethnicity. On the other hand, the Trinidadian cultural system may also be seen as a segment connected with a wider Caribbean cultural system, which is frequently activated locally in discourse concerning regional politics and cricket. System boundaries are relative, and various levels of integration are activated in different situations.

### **Resistance against entropy**

Trinidadian society is integrated in such a way that interethnic avoidance and "differential integration" are becoming increasingly difficult. It is not exclusively integrated through face-to-face interaction. Infrastructural facilities, schools, mass media, the political system and the system of taxation, the labour market and, to some extent, venues for public events, are increasingly shared at a national level. A shared idiom for the articulation of interests, conflicts and experiences is continuously enacted. In some respects, the social impact of cultural variation is decreasing strongly - as is the compass of the variation itself. This process has inspired an ethnic revitalisation among the Hindus (as among the blacks), who have created a tradition to prevent the disappearance of their past and the erosion of their cultural identity. The new Trinidadian Hindu tradition is apparently being reproduced intraethnically - through religious ceremonies, cultural shows, political rallies etc. - but this happens with a continuous reference to the surrounding, black-dominated national space. Its intensity therefore derives at least in part from the increasing self-conscious integration of the Indo-Trinidadians into wider social and cultural systems. This is especially evident in politics, both party and trade union based, where organisations representing the Hindus compete with similar organisations representing the blacks. Philip Mayer's (1961) contention that trade unions transcend tribes is not evidently and always true - indeed in Trinidad trade unions are associated with ethnicity and have been instrumental in forging a coherent Indo-Trinidadian identity shared by people who will never meet.

Despite the obvious existence of shared forms of discourse in Trinidad, despite the visible process of mutual adaptation as witnessed in the development of Trinidad English and the disappearance of Bhojpuri, the shared educational system, mass media and labour market, and despite the obvious fact of divisions of representations and practices which do not follow ethnic lines, it makes sense to speak of multiple traditions with respect to a society like Trinidad. The empirical salience of ethnic self-consciousness, and the reproduction of reflexively monitored ethnic practices, demonstrate this. Such traditions, however, need not merely to be discovered. They must be invented, nursed and propagated through anonymous mass media as well as through face-to-face interaction. Thus it seems that interaction in this society is not a necessary condition for cultural integration, if by cultural integration we mean the development of shared ways of conceptualising and acting in the world. It is to a great extent through large-scale processes of communication that rivaling versions of the social world are presented, and they in turn contribute to defining the premises for the situational selection of identities.

### **Power and multiple traditions**

One of the invented traditions of Trinidad is the national one. Its potential for success, I have argued elsewhere (Eriksen, 1991b), lies in its ability to reconcile or transcend the diversity of the ethnic traditions. An important role for the state and civil society in this kind of place consists in the integration of that diversity which is evident in the reproduction of discrete traditions. At the state level, it may be said that credible institutional interfaces guaranteeing formal equality are required to this effect. At an interpersonal level, common denominators are necessary. In both cases, it may be meaningful to talk of shared forms of discourse or shared structures of relevance as constituting Trinidadian society and culture as something different from the formal structures of the state. The representatives of ethnic traditions in a state society are often compelled to move within parameters delineated by the state. Indo-Trinidadian tradition thus stresses Indian music and Hindu ritual, but has not attempted, for example, to revive the jatis or panchayats (caste councils), which would have been incompatible with the individualist

capitalist ethos pervading the Trinidadian labour market. Nor have they tried to save Bhojpuri - a despised language even in India - from local extinction, or to create their own educational system. In this way, a possible schism between social reality and cultural models is prevented. The state, for its part, is faced with the difficult task of simultaneously promoting equal rights for its citizens (similarity) and tolerating the existence of discrete traditions (difference). Discontented Indians in Trinidad may accuse the state of succeeding in neither: Indian tradition, they claim, is neglected, and blacks are favoured as public servants.

The power associated with the public social fields may contradict ethnic traditions in ways which are perceived as discriminating. I will mention two examples of presumed discrimination against Indians often quoted by my Indo-Trinidadian acquaintances. The first concerns the winner of the main calypso award in 1979, "Caribbean Unity", better known as "Caribbean Man", by Black Stalin. Its most famous lines go like this:

"Dem is one race - De Caribbean Man  
From de same place - De Caribbean Man  
Dat make de same trip - De Caribbean Man  
On de same ship - De Caribbean Man"

Many Indians were offended by Stalin's popular calypso, which defines the region as one settled by the descendants of slaves. They did certainly not come on the same ship from the same place as the Africans, and would be appalled at any suggestion that they belonged to the same race! (Deosaran, 1987) One may add that women, perhaps, would have a similar reason for grievance; this never surfaced. One might also add that many Indians would probably not have been aware of the significance of the calypso, had there not been a public debate over it at the time. Much more common than the statements made in Stalin's calypso is the implicit non-recognition of the Indian presence in Trinidad, as when the country is depicted to foreigners and in textbooks as an essentially black country.

The second example concerns the attempt, in the early 1980s, to set up an



Indian cultural centre in Port-of-Spain. The centre never materialised, and there are strong rumours - although undocumented - about sabotage in the public service, as an explanation. Some Indians claim that the failure of this project was a main reason why the black--Indian alliance government of 1986-87 dissolved.

Both of these examples are controversial and ambiguous - for example, some of my black friends held that the Indian cultural centre failed because the Indian Embassy never met their financial obligations (cf. Eriksen, n.d. 2).

In contemporary Trinidad, the public, interethnic or national spaces are important. The Furnivallian model of cultural pluralism, where the constituent groups are depicted as bounded and discrete, is not applicable here. It presupposes a nondemocratic and nonegalitarian political system and differential economic participation. When such impediments are removed, new patterns of allegiances develop, and new sets of shared representations and practices emerge due to intensified participation in the same social fields. Ethnicity, to use Bateson's (1972) terminology, becomes a symmetrical rather than a complementary phenomenon in terms of culture, although it remains an asymmetrical phenomenon in terms of power. The power to define the relevant levels of culture and society is unequally distributed, and in the presence of multiple traditions, this power asymmetry is crucial. Sometimes it may be appropriate to speak of structural power in these respects, since the strictures of discourse can only rarely be traced back to one or several persons. The power of ideology consists in its ability to convince people of the validity of a certain model of the world, and its success relies on its ability to reconcile political goals with social identities. The relationship between different forms of discourse in societies marked by a plurality of traditions, can therefore be regarded as a struggle between different versions of the world attempting to seem credible. Some such versions may be "muted" and fail to surface, and others may be framed as resistance against entropy.

### **Ethnicity and "reality"**

Before that invention of traditions in post-war Trinidad which turned the

inhabitants into peoples, Trinidadians of different ethnic membership were scarcely integrated into a uniform system of signification. Hindus were largely rural and lived in isolated villages, they spoke Bhojpuri and a little English, and they hardly participated in fields of public discourse such as mass media and national politics. In terms of politics and group consciousness, they were fragmented. In terms of culture, they were more distinctive then than they are now. Ethnicity was less important and traditionalism did not exist, since they largely lived in mono-ethnic environments with little need for demarcation of boundaries and few opportunities for cultural reflexivity. Today, the former East Indians have been transformed, and have transformed themselves, into Indo-Trinidadians, just as French-Canadians have become Québécois following a similar process of social and cultural change (cf. Handler, 1988); they are now self-conscious carriers of a tradition and simultaneously self-conscious citizens in a country they know is poly-ethnic and black-dominated. They now possess the resources to actively take issue with what they see as discriminating practices and stigmatisation of their culture. Their myth of common origin is sufficiently vague to allow membership in the Indo-Trinidadian imagined community also to those who cannot trace their descent to the Bhojpuri-speaking areas in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. As has been pointed out several times by analysts, ethnicity is not a vestige of a past, but can be an integral aspect of modernity.

One aspect of cultural homogenisation which has not spurred ethnic revitalisation in Trinidad, concerns language. At the beginning of this century, several languages were spoken in Trinidad; the majority of blacks spoke a French creole, and most of the Indians spoke Bhojpuri. Today, virtually everybody speaks Trinidad English or Trinidadian Creole. Dialectal differences in contemporary Trinidad follow class and region rather than ethnicity. It may here seem as if an aspect of Galton's problem needs resolving, namely that the variation within the taxon seems in several respects to be greater than the systematic variation between the taxa. Conversely, if the compass of shared forms of discourse is greater than the compass of exclusive forms of discourse, is it not then possible to say that the traditions have merged? - If we try to reply to this question, we shall commit the same

essentialist error as the inventors of traditionalist ideologies do when they try to measure cultural differences instead of looking at their social relevance, and we shall confound the native idea of a tradition with the analytical concept of culture. It is, however, only through the widespread belief in such essentialist ideologies, which are reflexively forged so as to fortify and even create ethnically specific practices, that multiple traditions can be maintained in this society, where tendencies toward cultural homogenisation are strong.

At this level of analysis, we see the importance of distinguishing between culture and tradition. While cultural universes and practices merge in important respects, discrete traditions are simultaneously strengthened. It is true that certain systematic differences in habitus between the ethnic categories continue to exist; the physical repulsion of Muslims against the idea of eating pork is one example, as are the differences in views on sexuality between blacks and Indians. However, as I have argued here, differences in habitus or practice cannot account for ethnicity, unlike what Bentley (1987) seems to argue in a recent bid to transcend current theorising on ethnicity. As Yelvington correctly points out in a comment on Bentley (Yelvington, 1990), it would be absurd to speak of a peculiar "white" habitus in the Caribbean, although whites are certainly an ethnic category. He concludes, as I have also done, that ethnicity is essentially a relational phenomenon. Differences in habitus do not cause ethnicity, but are themselves reproduced by aspects of ethnicity, particularly religion and endogamy. I would further like to point out that the shared Trinidadian culture is partly doxic and involves shared or complementary elements of habitus; it may be taken for granted, and it is a necessary although frequently unacknowledged condition for Hindu traditionalism. It is perhaps most easily visible to outsiders or to Trinidadians who go abroad, where they discover that Indo- and Afro-Trinidadians have a great deal in common. In this way, the national culture is discovered, and may be reified, through contrasting with others. This is the sense in which the new Indo-Trinidadian tradition may be said to feed upon an encompassing unity.

### **Case Noyale**

It might seem that the mutual indifference and anonymity encountered at

Curepe junction would be impossible in a village setting. This is no doubt true to some extent. Anonymity is impossible in a village of less than a thousand inhabitants. However, the patterns of communication of identity and difference which I encountered in a Mauritian fishing village, is in several respects similar to that of Curepe. I shall briefly remark on the similarities.

Case Noyale is a village of some 700 inhabitants. The Hindus of Case Noyale form a small minority in the by-and-large Creole village. They perceive themselves, and are perceived, as being culturally distinctive. Occupationally, Hindus tend to follow different professions from Creoles, but there is considerable overlap. As regards informal peer groups, these tend to be mono-ethnic, but this is not always the case. Besides, there are internal criteria for differentiation within the Creole community which also contribute to the definition of peer groups. All inhabitants of the village speak Mauritian Creole (Kreol). In terms of ambition and aspiration, there is continuity between the Indians and the neighbouring Creoles, although they hold strong stereotypical representations of each other and sometimes stress their mutual differences. The tradition of the Case Noyale Indians is Indian, but it is certainly not identical with that of any part of India. Their language is related to French. Their knowledge of Hindu religion is sketchy, and most will simply state that they believe in God if asked. There are Hindu women in the village who go regularly to church, and who just as regularly sacrifice bananas at the local Kalimai. Nevertheless, their commitment to their Indian identity is demonstrably firm, and the one case of Hindu--Creole intermarriage in the village resulted in very severe sanctions from the Hindu family. The Case Noyale Indians self-consciously identify with the larger Indo-Mauritian community, although their relationships with, and personal commitments to, the local Creoles are extensive, and although their language and general way of life is quite similar to theirs.

In Case Noyale as well as in Curepe, what needs accounting for is the continued or even increased importance of ethnic identity in a situation of increasing cultural integration at a national level. I have already argued that the societal wholes may be seen as integrated systems of interaction and

symbolisation in various respects, although they are also segregated and internally diversified. The mutual social interdependence between the groups is obvious in both societies. Michel, a Creole fisherman and longanist (sorcerer) in Case Noyale, exemplifies this. In his day-to-day affairs, he depends on an Indian banyan (middleman) for selling his catch, on other Creoles who are his workmates, and on Indian and Creole customers as regards his practice as a longanist. He is thus a member of several groups or quasi-groups to which he pays allegiance, and only some of them are ethnically constituted. Like the people of Curepe, Michel and his co-villagers enact action-sets committing them to crossing allegiances, some of which cross ethnic boundaries. However, his family - both the natal and the nuclear one - and his closest friends are Creoles. He also identifies with the political party believed to serve the interests of the Creoles.

In both Case Noyale and Curepe, non-ethnic bases for identification and organisation are available, and these are sometimes activated. The principle of endogamy, which is particularly strong among Hindus and Muslims in both societies, and the successful invention of discrete traditions at a national scale - as a response to the underlying process of homogenisation or cultural integration - precludes the breakdown of ethnic boundaries. In this way, ethnicity is a potential resource which can be mobilised politically under particular circumstances - however, so are nationhood and class in both societies, which recent events, such as international sports competitions and general strikes, have shown.

### **Interaction and cultural integration**

Just as concepts of culture and tradition should be kept apart, nationalist ideology, seen as a reflexive phenomenon, should be distinguished from the processes of social and cultural integration into the nation-state. Nationalist ideology in societies like Trinidad and Mauritius, I have argued elsewhere (Eriksen, 1991c), can hardly draw upon the imagery of some mythical past for its legitimacy. The goods that it is expected to deliver consist chiefly in interethnic peace, prosperity, and pride in nationhood. Its success is not necessarily conditional on the failure of ethnic ideologies, but it must be able

to reconcile them.

Cultural homogenisation, I have shown, is compatible with a proliferation of traditions. Let us now consider the question of the relationship between social interaction and cultural integration. As it should be clear from the foregoing discussion, this relationship is not easy to grasp in societies where information is disseminated in an anonymous way and where inhabitants form personal networks along several different axes, according to different "grid" principles, and involving different personnel. Of course, there is an intrinsic connection between actions and representations, but it would be misleading to say that interaction creates cultural integration without qualifying such a statement. On the other hand, Geertz's unfortunate statement that culture is integrated in a logico-meaningful way whereas society is integrated in a causal-functional way (Geertz, 1973) might deserve a confrontation with Bourdieu's (1980) concept of habitus which, while actor-centred, in a sense fuses the cultural with the social, being a concept which sums up the potential forms of action which a person is conditioned to carry out. In these societies, the global and domestic mass media and the public social fields of labour, politics and education doubtless create shared frames of reference and contribute to shaping the habitus, but they do not create social interaction. As a general rule, we may thus state that cultural common denominators are not sufficient for social integration to come about, nor do they necessary result from social interaction. They serve, however, as lubricants, and they are necessary conditions for meaningful interaction to happen. The integration into a shared educational system, and the integration into a labour market based on a monetary economy and formal principles of meritocracy are in social respects much more significant, both in the case of Curepe and Case Noyale, than the mass media. It is at school and at work that people actually meet, but it may to just as great an extent be via radio, TV and public events that their shared cultural repertoire is developed.

The difference between urban Curepe and rural Case Noyale is thus one of degree. In neither case are the actors exclusively integrated locally; in both cases, the ethnic boundaries are jealously guarded and efficiently maintained.

In neither locality is there a systematic ethnic difference between the personal ambitions and general outlook of people of different ethnic membership. The main cleavages in both localities may seem to derive from social class and educational attainments. Yet, intermarriage is very rare and ethnicity is sometimes overcommunicated - and besides, members of both the Creole and the Indian communities in both places may readily attribute class differences to ethnic differences. On the other hand, non-ethnic bases for community are available as templates, and these are occasionally activated.

The conventional distinction between societies integrated through face-to-face interaction and societies integrated through anonymous structures of communication and surveillance may be applicable here. In the case of localities in Trinidad and Mauritius, be they rural or urban, interethnic interaction is in principle not necessary for cultural integration to take place on a nationwide scale, since this integration is mediated by mass media and the anonymous structures of the state and market. In a tribal village, people may produce their own food on a household basis, and or may obtain it through barter. In Case Noyale, people buy food in the shop; in this way, their patterns of consumption become similar due to other causes than interaction. The nation is not constituted through interaction; it is defined from above, and offers opportunities to those who support it. A certain degree of cultural integration is necessary for interaction to take place, but the inverse does not seem to hold true in these societies, unlike in stateless societies.

An example of a very different "plural" social system would be that comprising the Baruya of New Guinea and their neighbours (Godelier, 1973). Contacts between groups are here limited to trade and exchange of women. This system seems to approach the Furnivallian plural society, at least as regards the preservation of distinctiveness in the face of limited interaction (which takes place in the market-place only). Many of the language-games enacted by each group are unintelligible to the other groups. Compared with such a system, Mauritius and Trinidad appear as extremely well integrated societies, at both systemic, social and cultural levels.

As I have argued presently and above, it may be meaningful to talk of shared language-games, common denominators or shared forms of discourse as constitutive of society. Crossing allegiances or multiple loyalties at the interpersonal level further integrate the system, as in any segmentary system. However, we should not forget that in these societies, there is much more "glue" than that represented in the crossing allegiances of individuals: there is the power of the state and that of the capitalist market, both of them important agents in the creation of shared interfaces, and they are both powerful instances of sanctions against unacceptable deviations.

At the level of discourse and doxa, cultural homogenisation is taking place at increasing velocity in both societies. National traditions, attempting to bridge perceived differences between the constituent segments of the societies, have been invented. A shared language - in both a literal and a metaphorical meaning of the word - for the articulation of interests, conflicts and experiences - is being developed, and is continuously enacted. Both in Trinidad and in Mauritius, for example, dialectal differentiation now follows class and region rather than ethnicity. The influence from Bhojpuri on Kreol is stronger in the Mauritian countryside than in the towns, where the influence from French is stronger, but villagers in the north-east of the island speak a similar dialect no matter their ethnic membership. At the level of self-consciousness, reflexivity and political organisation, social differentiation nevertheless tends to follow ethnic lines in important respects. The groups do not merge.

Following the lead of Park and Bogardus, we can depict cultural integration as concentric circles or as overlapping Venn circles, where each circle contains a delineable field of shared ways of creating meaning, held by a limited number of people. Such models, notwithstanding their reifying character, can be useful in descriptions of identity and differences in such complex societies as Trinidad. They are encompassed, however, by what Dumont (1983) would call the ultimate values of the societies, which enable the segments to articulate their differences.



Such fields of shared culture need not be coterminous with the system of interaction; the social and the cultural need not, in other words, be congruent. The anthropologists in the Copperbelt, working from structural-functionalist premises, assumed that there was a correspondence between the social system and the system of representations. The development of the Kalela dance, an expression of a new spirit of "tribalism" in Mitchell's (1956) view, was seen as an adaptive response to social change. Geertz draws a similar conclusion in his study of ritual and social change in Java (1973), although he stresses that representations do not respond mechanically to social change at the macro level; that there may in fact be a temporary schism between the two aspects, akin to what Ogburn spoke of as "cultural lag". My conclusion is more radical. I have argued that in a society where the state and mass media have a strong presence, changes in people's representations do not necessarily depend on changes in their immediate social environment. Feedback between the social and the cultural goes both ways, and "social lags" are just as plausible as "cultural lags". The ethnic traditions of Trinidad depend for their success upon being propagated through anonymous mass media, and preferably through state agencies of secondary socialisation, as well as through face-to-face interaction. It is to a great extent through large-scale processes of communication that rivaling versions of the social world are presented and appear as real and enduring to the target groups. While interaction requires some degree of cultural integration, cultural integration may come about without interaction. The fact that two people share models of the world is no evidence that they belong to the same social network.

### **Concluding remarks**

Culture consists of those shared ways in which life, activities and the world make sense. Society is that perceived social environment to which agents commit themselves morally and to which they make demands; and it is also those unacknowledged social processes which empower and render powerless. The power to define culture and society is unequally distributed, and in the presence of self-proclaimed distinctive traditions, this power asymmetry can be crucial. Sometimes it may be appropriate to speak of structural power in these respects, since the strictures of discourse only rarely can be traced back

to one or several persons. The power of ideology consists in its ability to convince people of a certain model of the world. The relationship between different forms of discourse in societies marked by a plurality of traditions can therefore be regarded as a political struggle between different versions of the world. Some such versions may be "muted" and will then fail to surface.

There are different levels and different degrees of both society and culture. In some societies, it is necessary that the inhabitants have very much in common in order for the society to continue to fulfill their needs and to continue to exist without changing profoundly. In such societies, the favourite laboratories for anthropologists, system boundaries, both social and cultural, can apparently be delineated easily. In the societies where I have worked, any such delineation is in some sense arbitrary. This does not mean that we should abandon the concepts of society and culture. For despite his shortcomings, Durkheim was fundamentally and intuitively correct in insisting that society, as a moral community, is a bounded system of social relations and symbolisation, and that society is necessary for human life to be meaningful. This idea is in fact compatible with that which Barth, from a more dynamic perspective, has spoken of as boundary maintenance (Barth, 1969). Our present challenge consists in looking more closely into the dual flows of interaction and symbolisation, armed with our new, processual concepts of society and culture - which relativise the boundaries between systems and which do not take for granted the congruence between the social and the cultural. So even if we must acknowledge that we are all living in Leviathan, as Maybury-Lewis puts it, as he writes on minorities and the state (Maybury-Lewis, 1984), the state is not always an appropriate synonym for society, nor is the nation always an appropriate synonym for culture, even if folk models may sometimes suggest that it is so. Both can be misleading; there are different levels and degrees of both culture and society, and we should not be deluded by professional ideologists into committing the same errors of reification as they themselves commit.

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