



WOODBROOK ON THE PATH TO INDEPENDENCE

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“The colour of the rulers might darken; the ethnicities might change, blur or merge, but the culture of the power structure remains” – Jeff Henry (2008)

Summary

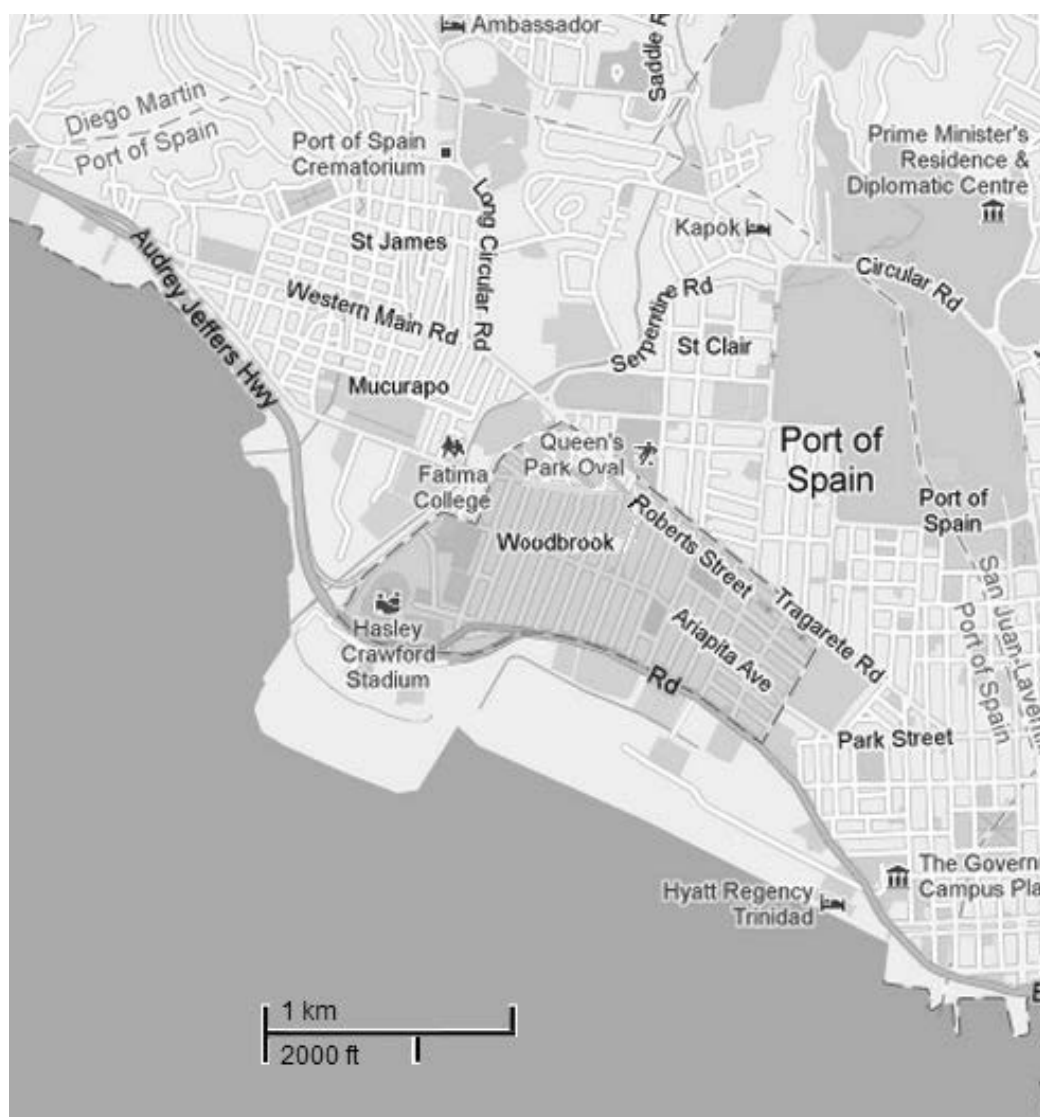
In this paper, Woodbrook during the period 1920–1960 is fleshed out through the childhood memories of residents, oral histories, newspaper records, previous accounts and economic data. The paper suggests Woodbrook as a central site of an emergent “Trinidadian” nationalism produced out of the collision between the two economic systems of capitalism and colonialism. It illustrates that the capital interests and class concerns of a particular cultural group came to represent the interests of the nation in the expansion of post-colonialism. The paper concludes with the suggestion that the socio-cultural legacy of this economic and cultural movement is a neo-colonial one, wherein the relations of domination and subordination of colonialism became the relations of domination and subordination of capitalism in a blur and mystification of Independence.

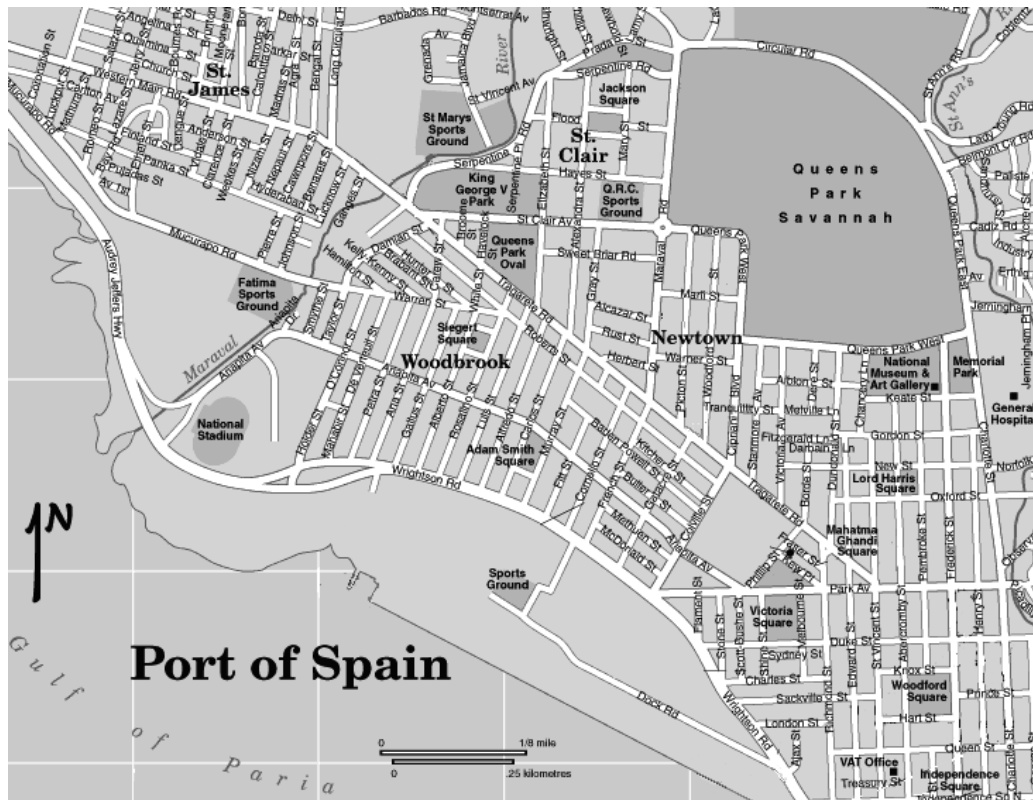
Introduction

This paper analyses oral histories collected and recorded in Woodbrook, Trinidad, between 2002 and 2008. In particular, it presents local thoughts and evidence on what Woodbrook was like, and how it changed, during the period 1920 to 1960 – an era I have described as ‘Woodbrook on the Path to Independence’. In what follows it is suggested that Woodbrook can be used as a site to view, describe and understand an emergent “Trinidadian” nationalism produced out of the collision between the two economic systems of capitalism and colonialism; a nationalism that was mobilised successfully on the path to independence but at the same time hid within it the seeds of our present class and race-stratified society.

For those unfamiliar, Woodbrook is a well-known, urban district of Port of Spain whose class composition has ranged from middle to upper class and back to middle class over the last 50 years. Approximately 200 hectares in size and home to 5000 people and 1000 houses, Woodbrook was formerly a

wholly residential suburb, and home for a time, to many figures who featured prominently in the local, nationalist and later post-colonial politics of 20th century Trinbagonian history such as Capt. Cipriani, V. S. Naipaul, Audrey Jeffers, George Bailey, Beryl McBurnie, Ranjit Kumar, Eric Williams, Pat Bishop, Marion O'Callaghan, Rudranath Capildeo, Ellie Manette and others. Today, Woodbrook, while still residential in parts, is best known for its neon-lit, commercial, "Las Vegas Strip", its numerous Carnival masquerade camps, its casinos, restaurants, bars and offices; and the amount of traffic these places of commerce generate.





In 1920, Woodbrook occupied a symbolic socio-economic place in Trinidad's development as a capitalist society. There were remnants of the lower-class who had middle class aspirations. This was a transitive class, distinct from labouring masses with definite desires of upward class mobility. Woodbrook also boasted members of the elite French Creole class and the elite of other ethnicities who over the next few decades moved out and on to the affluent districts of St Clair and Maraval. Much of modern day Woodbrook to the West wasn't built until the 1950s and before the Americans arrived in the 1940s and filled it in, the seafront at the bottom of Woodbrook was a spot locals called Crabs Beach. Many people I spoke to had fond memories of flying kites, swimming and going for walks there. In many ways everybody knew everyone else in Woodbrook.

Woodbrook was populated at this time by the families of school teachers, small businessmen, civil servants, tram inspectors, store walkers (clerks), customs workers – persons who had what were considered for locals, respectable class jobs – many of these jobs can be phrased in the colonial society as working for the colonial authorities. Home ownership was very important too. Many of these persons were members of a very ambitious afro-lower middle class who moved to Woodbrook at the start of the 20th century and then again in the

1920s from Belmont. There was also much immigration into Woodbrook from other Caribbean islands – especially Bajans. Some of the children of these early residents of Woodbrook would go on to get the first university scholarships to study abroad and many would return to be involved in local politics.

A certain level of income structured who could live in Woodbrook – in many ways post the 1910s it always has. In the 1920s and 30s the district represented the elaborate protocols of middle class respectability and the protocols of an aspirant elite, more than the lives of the masses. These protocols were conservative and consciously ‘British’ (Rush 2011). Woodbrook was economically comfortable and it was settled. In the lives of urban Trinidadians Woodbrook was also becoming somewhat of an institution. What previously people could only attain through church attendance, marriage and education, i.e. ‘British’ respectability, could also now be achieved along with the others in moving to Woodbrook (Goodenough 1978, 5). This respectability and aspiration can be described as an emerging class consciousness in the lives of Woodbrook residents that might be called ‘Trinidadian.’ Fifty years later commentators would look back on this time and describe the residents with the label ‘Afro-Saxon’ (Tapia 1981; Best 2003; Ryan 2009, 21). While some readers might be uncomfortable with the phrase ‘Afro/Indo-Saxon¹’ it nonetheless does a good job of linking two different economic systems – colonialism and capitalism – through the lives of persons who lived, organised and transitioned between the two overlapping periods. It also illustrates well a contradiction of post-colonial West Indian life and politics; our leaders and elites mastered the goals and education of British society so much so that on Independence they were unable to lead us beyond such values (Rush 2011; Ledgister 2010). As Best pointed out in 2003, “the upshot of Afro-Saxon culture among us is that we were to come to a real independence but only a nominal freedom, one without the benefit of any political class of even responsible elite.”

1920s to 1960s Woodbrook

To provide a local sense of what was going on in residents’ heads during the period 1920 to 1960 oral histories are a useful way to build a picture of

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1. “Following Independence status from Britain in 1962, A Trinidadian academic, Lloyd Best introduced into the Caribbean literature the term ‘Afro-Saxon’. It was not intended to be a pejorative term, but a descriptive analysis of the ruling class then, that had adopted and absorbed and internalised the values of the White colonial masters. This, he pointed out was a natural phenomenon, since postcolonialisation, the ruling elites pursued the norms of respectability of the white man and aspired to it for acceptance and survival” (Maharaj 2000, 96).

the times. The oral histories I collected build a story of socio-economic and cultural transformations – specifically changes in class and culture – taking place in Woodbrook between 1920 and 1960, when groups, figures, ideologies and sites of cultural production like the Little Carib Theatre, the Invaders pan yard, Carnival, and an intense process of connection between the past, present and future, rearranged power relations in a colony set on the path toward self-government and independence.

I have prepared a summary of the most relevant information collected from the primary data. The summary has been worked into the narrative below and is designed to capture the main points of the 12 interviews and provide a well-rounded context for that content. Of course as oral history is based on a person's memories and recollections, the information can be conflicting or historically inaccurate. Through secondary sources I have attempted to limit such inaccuracies by removing those known to be inaccurate. There has also been an attempt to order the information in this summary chronologically:

“Growing up in the 1920s and 30s, Woodbrook was almost a village. The Police knew everyone, and they would send messages to parents if needed. When my mother wanted to scare my brother she would get the police to come over and threaten to arrest him. Although, the idea there was no crime then is a myth. I remember moonlight nights when the streetlights went off. The square was particularly important as a meeting place.

Woodbrook was populated at this time by school teachers, small business men, civil servants, and home ownership was very important. There was much immigration from other Caribbean islands to Woodbrook too. Many Bajans moved to our street and different families set up residence in numbers 7, 8, 9 and 13, such as the Armstrongs and the Edgehills. Many of them, alongside Trinidadian Afros from the sugar areas were brought in to police Port of Spain, it's a way to avoid conflict in the cities but was the root of conflict between Afro and Indo Trinidadians.

Much of modern day Woodbrook to the West wasn't built until the 1950s, and we've been encroaching down little by little. There was a pumping station for sending sewage further out to sea, the ruins are still there, where Movietowne is. When we claimed back the mangrove we destroyed the Carib site there [Cumucurapo²].

I grew up on Carlos Street. They said there was a slave graveyard here. This led to many haunted stories when people died. On one side of us was an Inspector of Trams and on the other side a Store Walker [store clerk]. Back then they were

2. “It is interesting to note that the remains of Indian [Amerindian] settlements in the shape of pottery have been found in three separate places in the area to the West of the Maraval Dry river and south of the Western main Road now known as Mucurapo. One of those sites yielded pottery of high grade equal in quality to that of Erin and Palo Seco.”

considered respectable class jobs. I went to a private school on Lewis Street from three years old, then to Tranquillity then to St Joseph's by which time I got a bike. I walked up until then.

Children went to specific schools depending on the Church they went to. There was interplay between religion and class here. Certain points held Woodbrook together, and churches were bonding devices in that. People met at churches. There's St Theresa's Church, St Patrick's Church, an expensive church, both were Catholic. There's St Patrick's bordering Newtown/St Clair with Carlos Street at the ending of the catchment area. There is St Crispin's, an Anglican church on Rosalino St., Methodists had to go to Tranquillity or Hanover. Those going to All Saints Church went Bishops [highschool]. St Theresa's has a school attached and it became a Syrian church in 1930s. The Holy Faith Sisters, an Irish Congregation came out in 1948 just as the Syrian community began to move out and they took over St Theresa's. The convent began to train their children. As they moved up economically the heavy Syrian presence in Woodbrook from 1920s to 1960s decreased. Housing prices in more expensive areas slumped in the 1970s allowing them to buy out upmarket St Clair. What Woodbrook was in the 1940s and 1950s, was really the juncture where the lower middle class entered the professional class.

Woodbrook always had a fairly heavy movement out of country too. Even though it was extremely expensive to go to university – before UWI you had to go to Europe – as US degrees weren't accepted here. Many residents of Woodbrook went away on a scholarship, particularly those who served in the armed forces during World War II. They got the first scholarships. Many would study abroad then stay abroad. There was a very ambitious afro-lower middle class who finally moved to Woodbrook in the early 1900s from Belmont. Many of these residents got scholarships.

When I was young, kite flying down on Crabs beach was a big event. When the Americans took over the base and filled in Crabs Beach it moved to the Savannah so I'd often walk to the Savannah for kite flying and also to see the Police band playing there. Shipway is what they built down on Crabs Beach at the bottom by Wrightson Road. It was a very deep water Channel for big ships³. Previously people from Woodbrook walked and swam there.

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3. "Port of Spain's very commodious harbour in the Gulf of Paria, protected by the arms of the Peninsulas in the North and South, provides safe anchorage. The modern docks and harbour facilities were constructed upon reclaimed land in 1932 thus providing deepwater anchorage alongside. The docks extend for 5,500 feet, and the basin dredged to a depth of 32 feet has a mean width of 900 feet and length of 5,500 feet. The dredged channel or approach is 350 feet wide and automatically lighted beacons mark both. The channel is approached on two leading lights ashore bearing 61° 15' from seaward. There are eight berths and in addition there are several smaller wharves and jetties and two slipways" (Cameron 1958). In order to receive construction materials for the two bases they were building on the island, in 1941 the US military moved in and took over the deep sea anchorage. At this time the area became known as 'Docksite' by locals (Anthony 1978, 51).

Some things changed here after that American military base came by Flour Mills. There were lots of street fights between US black soldiers fighting US white soldiers. This brought the idea crime could and did exist and we started closing our doors from bottle fights. When World War II started the US base changed Woodbrook even more. There was a rush by women to get white American soldiers because the amount of white men had declined, and a number of people married US soldiers too. There was prostitution on the corner of Carlos St., too. Up until then we knew little of the States. I never knew Americans were white, my aunt who came back from there was black, the doll she brought me was black. I lived in a majority black country. I didn't think Americans were white.

Pre 1940s there was no Carnival in Woodbrook. Yes, random Carnival characters would pass by our house and wander in – midnight robbers etc. and on a Tuesday afternoon we'd wander down to Independence Square and watch the bands. At the time there were two types of mas – the hoity toity – you know, white people on lorries with ropes. The other type was people from working class areas jumping up, but Woodbrook people not in that.

When I was growing up very few people from Woodbrook would have been playing Carnival and women certainly wouldn't go to tents. We did go out on Jouvert morning from 6am and come back by 9am. We'd only be with Invaders [steelband], and only up to Roxy cinema so we were protected from downtown. The end of World War II was a big thing in Woodbrook. There had been no Carnival during the war and now bands were back in the streets. Looking forward, that Carnival changed Carnival. That was the Carnival when the middle class entered Carnival. It was young people, without masks following steelbands.

Many well-known people lived in Woodbrook over the years. Ellie Mannette was born in Sans Souci in 1927 but he grew up in Woodbrook. He became involved in the beginnings of pan as a boy. He and his friends used to steal the garbage can covers around Woodbrook. Those covers predate steelpan and were what they played on before the pan was invented. He played for my birthday once. I was so embarrassed at first because it was lower class and associated with violence⁴ and I was used to pianos. Arthur Cipriani lived near the cemetery. He died in 1945. Eric Williams lived on Cornelio Street for a while. The Naipauls lived on Lewis

4. “The modern multi-octave, finely tuned “pans”...were not developed until the post-war period, using as raw material the 50-gallon oil barrel. Every district, almost every neighbourhood, would acquire its own steelband...District Carnival bands would now be organised behind such famous early steelbands as the Woodbrook Invaders, whose leader, Ellie Manette, is generally credited with some of the major breakthroughs in the development of the instrument. The majority of the early steelbands were from lower class districts, and the old neighbourhood rivalries of the jamenttes and stickfighters were resurrected in the steelband wars which began to rage, particularly at Carnival. This gave steelbands a bad name among the middle classes and in official society, and several years passed before their true artistic worth was recognised” (Oxaal 1968, 82).

Street and Vidia wrote Miguel Street based on his memories of living there. The Naipauls hated Woodbrook. Ranjit Kumar lived here too, he was the first person to use race in an election – he was an Indian engineer, who fought for workers rights he also built the dual carriage way Wrightson Road, on land they said you couldn't built a road on. That was Trinidad's first dual carriageway.

Cars started appearing from the 1950s, also changes in metropolitan culture, things like health and policy affected Trinidad and Woodbrook. After WWII Woodbrook was poised to do what happened and it became a clearly middle-class area. All the bishops came from Woodbrook, same thing with the diplomatic corps. For a long time up until then Trinis were blocked from the top positions in civil service (police etc.) It was first the English who came out, then local whites, then Protestants. Now it's Trinis [italics mine].”

Analysis

The local picture this summary tells of the period 1920-1960 speak to changes in the class character of Woodbrook and the consolidation of a local Creole middle class of varying skin colours. This picture is shared by economist Trevor Sudama (1981, 17) more generally when he discusses over the same period how in Trinidad a ‘petty bourgeoisie’ (read middle class), mobilised by the metropolitan bourgeoisie in the first half of the century, was replaced by a new, more nationalistic middle class (Phillips 1984, 139) who in the period to follow emerged as the most politically significant class in Trinidad and Tobago. Before pushing for self-government this new middle class performed ‘essential services of the bourgeoisie state’ such as staffing the courts, administering law and order, and inculcating ‘appropriate values through schools, churches and the mass media,’ (James 1963; Post 1978, 81).

The summary I provided suggests pertinent ways to conceive this process of class transformation as it occurred in Woodbrook. For ease of analysis I have divided the summary thematically:

Schools, Churches and Cliques

The importance of churches, and their overlap with different ethnic groups, is mentioned. This suggests in the Woodbrook of the time we can conceive of class being qualified by ‘cliques’⁵. Cliques can be conceived of as ethnic factions within a class group. For example, a clique could be identified by church membership, which in turn denoted the school one went to and the ethnic group one associated with. As one resident stated “those going Bishops

5. “Indeed in Trinidad there are no classes in the rigidly defined sense rather there are status groups defined by ethnicity and money but with varying degrees of fluidity” (Sankeralli 2001, 2).

[Girl's School] go to All Saints Church." As such, we can imagine interplay between religion and class (Campbell 1992), whereby ethnic factions – Syrian, Portuguese, Chinese, Coloured etc. – existed within a broader middle class defined by its education and its possession of some wealth, hence the allusion to the importance of owning one's home.

It was also mentioned to me that in some streets of Woodbrook there were different cliques who knew each other but didn't necessarily mix. This lends itself to the idea that an ideology of race⁶ and a hierarchy of colour ranked cliques. Such ranking was no doubt complex because as Neptune notes of the period (2007, 163–166), race could be concealed in Trinidad.

The fact that many Woodbrook children of this period went to the island's most prestigious schools like QRC and CIC, which still reflected the social divisions of the colony, and were staffed for their first two generations mainly by teachers who had been to Oxford and Cambridge (James 1963, 34), further supports the observation of cliques in Woodbrook – CIC (boys) and St Joseph's Convent (girls) were French Creole and middle class Roman Catholic schools; QRC (boys) and Bishops (girls) were where the sons and daughters of English officials and middle class blacks and coloureds attended (Campbell 1996, 171). James' description of his QRC school cricket team from around 1915 provides a glimpse of the early ethnic, racial and class mixture of the children who were being educated in British ways:

We were a motley crew. The children of some white officials and white business men, middle class blacks and mulattos, Chinese boys, some of whose parents still spoke broken English, Indian boys, some of whose parents could speak no English at all, and some poor black boys who had won exhibitions or whose parents had starved and toiled on plots of agricultural land and were spending their hard-earned money on giving the eldest boy an education. (James 1963, 34)

A decade or two after James' description, the colonial government and the churches controlled the schools in Trinidad (Campbell 1996). The consequence of this control and the elite system of colonial education many children from

6. 'Race' is a central term in Trinidadian history so it is worthwhile defining here how this project understands the term. As is common in anthropological theory 'race' is recognised as a biological fallacy and a 'social construction' with conceptual limitations. Nonetheless, it has material presence in the world, and is both used by the public and used in social analysis. As such, like Trinidadian scholar Rhoda Reddock, I use race "to refer to socially constructed groupings differentiated by phenotype, physical features and area of origin" and the term 'racialization' to refer to the "dynamic process where social relations between people have been structured by the signification of human biological characteristics in such a way as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities" (Reddock 2007).

Woodbrook encountered was a process of differential acculturation (Crowley 1957, 823) or cultural assimilation where the children of middle class blacks and coloureds came to share common values and standards with the Creole whites of the ruling classes, while also affecting the Creole whites in such things as language, culture and ideology.

In terms of education, another point to think about is the comment about scholarships. 'Island Scholarships' to institutions in the UK were an original form of 'public diplomacy,' diplomatic propaganda and 'soft power'. They were designed by imperial powers to shape the future leaders of the colonies and produce persons who followed the ways, views and positions of the West and their capital interests (Oxaal 1971, 17). The winners of Island Scholarship on their return to Trinidad often got involved in the local electoral and parliamentary politics and were the Afro/Indo-Saxon architects of post-colonialism in the island.

The blacks and the coloureds who won university scholarships, and who were able to establish themselves as respectable professionals, were an inspiration to the rest of the non-white people (Campbell 1996, 277).

A final point worth considering is the observation Lloyd Braithwaite (1953) in his study of social stratification in Trinidad gave attention to. Braithwaite looked at the early twentieth - century situation. For him, colonial education during this era was a central means of social mobility for the black and coloured lower-middle class, however this was specifically within a class and not across class. He believed class had a caste-like quality. Hence, we may say, rather than strict class mobility taking place in Woodbrook in the period from 1930 to 1950, what was taking place was a transformation and swelling of the Creole middle class as a lower middle class subdivision experienced mobility. A point identified in the notion of residential class transformation in Woodbrook.

Sexuality, gender and race

Harvey Neptune's work (2007) supports residents' observations of the impact the US 'occupation'⁷ had on prostitution in Woodbrook and expresses

7. The US occupation of Trinidad refers to the World War II (1940) 'destroyers for bases' deal between the British and US governments. While the two main bases were far away from Woodbrook, at the bottom of Woodbrook, Wrightson Road to be exact, the USO as well as the deep sea harbour were manned by US service personal who frequented Woodbrook often. Harvey Neptune's excellent book *Caliban and the Yankees: Trinidad and the United States Occupation* does a good job of fleshing out this often over-looked chapter in mid twentieth century Trinidad social history. Anthony (1978) also touches on the realities of the situation, remarking that life for the US soldiers there was "bright and colourful." While many lived in tents (nicknamed 'camp causal') they nonetheless had a cinema, a men's club, a wide open space for outdoor games and attended calypso tents, mixed with local 'womenfolk' and eventually moved into better more permanent wooden housing.

the apparent disdain and offense local sensibilities suffered as the morality of colonial life was changing.

No one would have honestly disagreed with the US official who concluded that it was during the occupation that prostitution broke out in Trinidad on a large and lucrative basis. The arrival of thousands of American men injected new vigour and profit into the local trade...There were, nevertheless, visible changes associated with the conduct of commercial sex during the occupation. The centre of gravity of soliciting, for one, shifted toward Wrightson Road USO recreational facility. It was a re-orientation that outraged many Woodbrook residents, who publicly charged pimps, prostitutes and, 'procuring' with ruining their prized middle-class neighbourhood, with degrading it into a disreputable rendezvous point. Street-walkers, complained one dweller, had become so commonplace in the area police could be seen 'chatting' with them. By late 1943, disgusted, fed-up denizens began demanding that police mop up what one paper agreed was a 'blot' on their community (Neptune 2007, 181).

One resident mentioned a "rush by women to get white American soldiers because the number of white men had declined." Such an observation suggests the respectability and wealth associated with white men – a reflection of foreign and local ruling class values and the racial ideology of capitalism. It also suggests female residents of Woodbrook thought this themselves while also suggesting a more general decline in the white residential population of Woodbrook, who were being replaced by a new, more phenotypically mixed 'Trinidadian' middle class.

Ralph De Boissière's famous novel *Rum and Coca Cola* (1956) deals with this era and in particular the relations between daughters of wealthy local white families and the newly arrived 'Yankee men.' The novel ends with the death of a traditional Trinidad and the emergence of a country suited for an American future, symbolised in the death of a broken hearted father who sees his daughter transformed by her exposure to American ways.⁸ This is local literary evidence of transformation between an old Creole class and the emergence of a new 'Trinidadian' one.

The mention of prostitution and the responses I found in 1940s newspapers⁹ to the practice present other vistas to the white-on-white sexual relations of the

8. "The island's upper classes (St Clair and Maraval), he observed in 1944, began visiting calypso tents mainly because Americans were doing so...U.S. citizens also helped legitimise and globalise the calypso through their participation in its production" (Neptune 2007, 141)

9. "Police Plan Special Action for Woodbrook Nuisance," *Trinidad Guardian*, Oct 31, 1944
"Wrightson Road Demand Police Action," *Trinidad Guardian* Oct 26, 1944

French Creole class and the US officers (elite French Creoles would rarely date an ordinary G.I.) One is the intolerance by some local residents of Woodbrook to interracial mixing, and the other tells us that many ‘Yankees’ disregarded the colour line in pursuit of female company, caring little about race when it came to intimacies (Neptune 2007, 169).

Another issue to consider is the economic one. In an economically distressed time, the money on offer from American soldiers was a serious consideration for heterosexual and homosexual participants in the sex trade who usually came from the lower classes (Neptune 2007). The disdain toward this profession by some Woodbrook residents suggests the morality of Woodbrook was unsurprisingly for the times, non-reflective of the economic realities poor people faced. One can also suggest Woodbrook residents were unhappy with the influence Americans and their dollars were having on the lower classes and society more generally. As Neptune notes, Woodbrook residents during the 1940s exhibited a distaste for “salacious American consumers who had become ‘corrupters of manners and morals’” (Neptune 2007, 150), and were leading young ladies away from the lessons of Church and social convention¹⁰. Such symbols can be imagined as fault lines for societal cultural change to come.

Nationalist Culture

A syncretic nationalist ‘Trinidadian’ culture also appears in residents’ recollections. The first example is the mention of steelband¹¹, which one resident noted had one of its inventors, Ellie Manette, living, making music and growing up in Woodbrook. Another recollected her embarrassment at being serenaded at a birthday party by steelpan and not piano. This provides evidence that the instrument, like Carnival, was not seen then as becoming of the ‘better’ classes – no doubt because of its ‘African’ heritage¹². Albert Gomes, a post war parliamentarian of the late 1940s writing in a local newspaper of the

10. Writing in 1956 Powrie states, “Pious, naïve, virginity is the approved ideal for young unmarried girls. Deviation from this ideal places such girls in danger of social ostracism. But it is difficult, and becoming increasingly impossible, to live the ideal life. Deviation is extremely common and the sense of fear and guilt harboured in the mind of the average girl gives hollow meaning to the outward show of piety based on regularity of Church going” (1956, 226)

11. A better metaphor of the creation of new culture is harder to find, as Lloyd Best has written: “Pan turned literally to the dustbin and emerged as the essential metaphor for transforming nothing into something, the magic of creation. It translates into making music wherever you go, with whatever you find. The ultimate capacity to invent” (Cited in Laughlin 2006)

12. Steelpan is related to the 19th century percussion instruments the Tamboo Bamboo used in Jamette Carnival (Johnson 2011)

time, noted members of the middle and upper classes were against the “field of the Steel band”. More importantly, Gomes also knew steelpan and the bands forming around it from each district on the island were perhaps at the time, the most important thing happening in the lives of young men who “come from the most depressed areas of the colony” and “grew up when the Colony was in the throes of a great convulsion” (Gomes 1974).

As winds of national self-definition begin to emerge, such sentiment changed, and as the oral histories imply, it changed in Woodbrook too, again suggesting a transformation in the old colonial class values of Woodbrook toward a new, more nationalist and transculturated type of values. Ellie Manette and a few friends from Woodbrook formed a band, the Oval Boys, which later became the famous Woodbrook Invaders. Steelband emerged in both the battles and as a bridge across class divisions, like those between Woodbrook and Laventille¹³ in the creation of a Trinidadian culture, and move from being seen as a symbol of the vulgarity of the lower classes to be seized in the 1950s by nationalist politicians as a symbol of Trinidadian culture.

Another part of the emergent nationalist and populist culture of Woodbrook to mention is literary authorship and V.S. Naipaul’s novel *Miguel Street* (1959). As a boy Naipaul made acquaintances at both Tranquillity and QRC with people like Lloyd Best and C. L. R. James. Made up of connected narratives, *Miguel Street* is about Luis Street in Woodbrook. Its narratives, especially those of Hat and his love of cricket, can be seen as documenting the struggle between a united white elite and its coloured imitators versus the black masses:

Miguel Street, as Naipaul named his first novel, was Luis Street. It was re-named Cowpen Street when Indians moved in to staid Woodbrook. They kept cows. We kept ducks, chickens or turkeys. Were we really as different, Trini-Indian or Trini-African as we are told that we are? As I read Naipaul’s authorised biography I was reminded that we were not. Woodbrook was not a ghetto as French [Naipaul’s biographer] supposes. It was one of the rare places where we all met. We talked over fences, over gates, but rarely visited. We guarded our secrets. The country was racist. It still is. Woodbrook added to that. It was classiest and snobbish. None of us was taught about sex. In this Victorian lower middle class society storks, shoeboxes, and angels brought babies. The so-called nuclear family of the Black middle class consisted not

13. Laventille was and is a poorer, working class, majority Afro descended community on the hills east of Port of Spain. It is often cited in opposition to the more wealthy, lighter skinned Woodbrook class. It too boasted many important faces and persons on the road to Trinidad independence and many saw the population as manipulated by Eric Williams and later the PNM government of Patrick Manning for electoral votes with promises of development and better infrastructure that have still gone unfulfilled.

only of brothers and sisters. Our parent's friends were aunties and uncles with rights of interference [quote from interview with Woodbrook resident Mary Cain]

The life of Beryl McBurnie, another Woodbrook resident of the era described, embodies the idea of changing values in Woodbrook. In her 1983 book *Cradle of Caribbean Dance* Molly Ahye tells a fascinating story of how McBurnie, a coloured girl born in Woodbrook in the early part of the century, brought up surrounded by conservative and consciously British values, constantly put on plays and dance shows during her youth in her mother's backyard. At first these shows reflected British ideas on dance. They reflected the type of dance taught by colonials of European descent, forms like classical ballet and the type of balls the French Creoles, white upper class and coloured middle class who lived in Woodbrook, attended in their privately owned clubs (1983, 8) like the Country Club¹⁴ and the St Clair Club.

Over time and through the influence of such persons as the anthropologist Andrew Carr and trips she made around the country, McBurnie became fascinated with local folklore and customs. She learned and taught folk forms many of her peers, teachers and neighbours thought inappropriate. Nonetheless, she persisted. To pursue her dream of building a permanent theatre and dance school in her mother's backyard she left Trinidad in the 1938 to study dance under Martha Graham at Columbia University.

Her many performances, talent, skills and belief in local folk forms, meant she was widely known in Trinidad. On completion of her studies, some say at the request of Eric Williams and C. L. R. James, two of the most ardent supporters at the time for national self-determination (Sankeralli 2001, 3), she returned to Trinidad. On November 25th, 1948, in the backyard of her mother's home on Roberts Street, Woodbrook, McBurnie opened the Little Carib Dance Company and Theatre. The theatre became a cultural centre for Woodbrook and the island as a whole. It promoted and supported the arts from a local

14. The Trinidad Country Club came into existence in 1931. The estate, formerly known as Champs Elysees, comprised 670 acres and was obtained by Philippe Roume de St Laurent from the Spanish Government on behalf of his mother who went on to purchase five other parcels of land to enlarge the property. The Club was purchased by JB Fernandes in 1955 and Fernandes readily admitted that membership then consisted of "old, stuffy people... We weren't different to any other club. Everyone had their own club in those days."

perspective¹⁵. Present on opening night were many important local figures including politicians in the government of the day, the commissioner of police, the future Premier of Trinidad and Tobago, social workers such as Audrey Jeffers¹⁶, the island's top lawyers, many artists, religious figures, folklorists and journalists (Ahye 1983, 31).

While local cultural products of transculturation were being looked down upon by colonial elites and classed as primitive, McBurnie and her company toured the island and created works based on local art forms and folk dances, giving previously derided cultural forms a sense of integrity. These forms included such things as steel pan, bongo, calenda, drumming, shango songs, work songs, calypso, the belaire, as well as East Indian and other culturally specific forms. When McBurnie opened her junior theatre section she attracted patronage from the likes of Wilson Minshall (father of Peter Minshall), Sir Hugh Wooding, Dr Patrick Solomon, Bruce Procope (Lawyer/Cultural Historian), Jack Kelshall (Trinidadian socialist and former advisor to Cheddi Jagan), Andrew Carr, Audrey Jeffers, John 'Buddy' Williams (musician) and Albert Gomes; whose children were among the first to register. These figures are all central to Trinidad and its history, and these persons all gravitated to Woodbrook either as residents or patrons of the theatre. Viewed in this light it is little surprise McBurnie came to the attention of Dr Eric Williams and other nationalists, who embraced her ability to produce folk forms that overcame the prejudices of the day and spoke to local cultural creativity. Her life also illustrates well the transformations taking place in Woodbrook, where a new local middle class was replacing an older, whiter, colonial class.

Evidence of the role McBurnie and other residents of Woodbrook played in an emerging nationalism is well articulated by Sankeralli:

Beryl McBurnie, together with artists such as Boscoe Holder and Olive Walke, spearheaded a cultural renaissance in Trinidad wherein the songs and dances of village and hamlet were rediscovered and brought into society's mainstream. Beryl did for culture what Eric Williams did in politics and

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15. "We must not be afraid of being black. The European ballet forms are lineal, mechanical... machinery, industry. In the Caribbean we are more sensual, agricultural. We understand the agricultural form, we come from it. We do not understand the 'modern form.' Do you realise what we seem to be doing now is exercises?...So what do we have? A lot of little monkeys on stage" (Sankeralli 2001, 5).
 16. Born in January 1896 on Baden-Powell Street in Woodbrook but who later moved out and lived in upper class St Clair, Jeffers was a prominent figure in the women's liberation movement and spent her entire life up to her death in 1968 improving the state of social services in the country.

scholarship, Learie Constantine in cricket, C.L.R. James in a variety of fields, Audrey Jeffers in social work and women's issues, Ellie Manette and others in the steelband movement, Lord Kitchener in calypso, Albert Gomes in literary criticism and many others both sung and unsung, were doing in every sphere of life in the 1930s and 1940s. They were building a Trinidadian nationalism of tremendous power and self-confidence, one that would eventually lead us to independence (Sankeralli 2001, 2).

Carnival

Residents' observations about Carnival in Woodbrook also provide evidence about the changing socio-cultural character of the area. As one resident remarked, Carnival in pre-1940s Trinidad was still seen as a festival of the lower classes; "Woodbrook people not in that," giving a glimpse into the class mentality of the time, and the distance Woodbrook 'people' wanted from a festival of the local masses. Residents also remarked that Carnival changed after World War II (Kerrigan & Laughlin 2004). Suffice to say that Carnival in the 1950s, like the local folk forms practiced by McBurnie, was soon appropriated by the newly emerged and self-assured local intelligentsia as a festival of national culture, no matter it would later lead to the dis-enfranchisement of its working class authors (Green and Scher 2007).

Nevertheless, in the era 1920 to the Second World War, Carnival remained a divided phenomenon. While thousands of masqueraders took over the streets of Port of Spain, the upper classes continued to enjoy elaborate costume balls at private homes and at the Trinidad Country Club. When they ventured out on Carnival Monday and Tuesday it was in decorated lorries, from which Trinidad's French Creole, Colonial and Coloured elite, dressed as Arthurian or Elizabethan courtiers, waved down at the crowds – like the SUV's of modern-day Woodbrook look down on the less economically wealthy in the daily traffic jams through Woodbrook. When Carnival returned after the war, events had changed and one begins to see the general trend toward the commodification of the festival that had begun at the turn of the century take off fully. The numbers of spectators and revellers increased; and costumes inspired by tales from history and literature were more ambitious than ever. But the most significant change in these years was the integration of the lighter-skinned mas of the Country Club – that of the Woodbrook class – with the darker-skinned mas of the streets, as the island's always-fluid colour lines shifted and faded.

In Trinidad, as in the rest of the world, the war had wrought major social changes. These being the years leading to self-government and independence, a spirit of nationalism was in the air and as the boundaries of class and race

grew subtler and more complex, Carnival took on the same changes and an air of self-confidence. When one resident states with Fanonesque imagery, “It was young people, without masks,” she could easily have been describing the changing times. Whereas previously Trinidadians wore a colonial cultural mask, after World War II they became more comfortable in themselves, in a new Trinidadian identity and revelled in it with confidence.

In a 1946 newspaper commentary on that year’s festival a reporter notes the change to come and its capitalist implications.

For many years, a great number of the country’s inhabitants have deplored the license and vulgarity so often evident during the celebration of the their national festival, this year they hope that the new Carnival Committee, by offering valuable prizes and other encouragements to proper bands will make the two-day fete something to be proud and capable of being unashamedly offered to the America [sic] and other tourists to whom we look for a handsome income in the near future (Diaz in *Trinidad Guardian* 3/3/1946).

Woodbrook as an ‘Historical Bloc’?

The oral narrative summary of Woodbrook residents and the literature on the timeframe tells us about the mobilisation of a nationalist sentiment, guided by a new middle class who were replacing the older colonial elite as political leaders on the island. It was a local middle class that unsettled the broad set of handed down British conventions. ‘Culture’ became something the ‘natives’ and not just the colonial elites now possessed, while paradoxically this local middle class were also participants in the economic traditions and values of the foreign capitalist class that had influenced a local capitalist class (Phillips 1984, 141). As C. L. R. James once said, “the leaders of a revolution are usually those who have been able to profit [economically] by the cultural advantages of the system they are attacking” (1989).

One way to describe this is that an older colonial class-consciousness in Woodbrook defined by its aspiration to metropolitan values, influenced through school and churches – ‘education’ in the Gramscian sense (Gramsci 1971, 162–190) – transformed into an emergent Creole class faction that came to measure their success by proximity to these metropolitan values (Rush 2011). In this colonial situation the synergy can be interpreted to mean “the economic-corporate interests of the dominant group were adopted by a subordinate group” (Gramsci 1971, 405–406).

In this we began to glimpse through the production of local cultural forms and transformation in Carnival, culture and the arts – “a single combination of

ideas becoming dominant and pervasive throughout society” – what Gramsci called an ‘historical bloc’ (Gramsci 1971, 406). As the old colonial socio-cultural values were modified by socio-cultural changes, new locally produced cultural products gave confidence to ideas of self-rule, nationalist ideology and intellectual decolonisation. By 1962 this combination of ideas led toward self-government and independence. In claiming these cultural forms as authentically Trinidadian, the newly emergent middle class symbolised by Woodbrook and its residents was able to claim authority as the spokesperson to represent the masses on the path to self-determination. A central problem with this claim is the economic and social value system this new middle class adopted on its post-1950s path was one firmly based on Eurocentric values and hierarchy, as Oxaal reminds us.

The know-how and cohesion required for electoral and parliamentary politics ironically (or intentionally?) created structural inducements for that section of the coloured middle class with the requisite background and ‘values’ enabling them to presume to represent the black masses to take over the legislative and official seats occupied largely by white backsides in years gone by (Oxaal 1971, 26).

By the 1956 general election, the Woodbrook Afro-Saxon class had come of age. Gone was the necessity of the moral and political leadership of the imperial power. In its place emerged a self-confident national movement. One able to distil the battles of many key actors, such as Capt Cipriani, Albert Gomes, and Beryl McBurnie, who through the vehicle of trade unions, alongside a cultural renaissance, helped to represent a large enough mass into a single political organ – a multiracial party representing “the people of Trinidad and Tobago, whatever their race and class, colour or religion” (Williams 1955, 36). In the election, described by one author as “the Old World versus the New”¹⁷ (Ryan 2009, 116), the People’s National Movement (PNM), “a national party with a national programme”, led by this new middle class¹⁸ emerged triumphant winning thirteen of twenty-four seats, a barest possible victory, yet one that

17. As the campaign drew to a close, it was clearly Williams and the PNM against the rest. The press, the Catholic hierarchy, big business, the old government and members of the legislature, all came out in opposition to the PNM, while the Americans stood on the sidelines” (Ryan 2009, 142)

18. “The breakdown of PNM candidates in terms of ethnic affiliation reveals that the centre of gravity in the PNM was in the black professional class, though only seven of the twenty-four candidates were graduates of universities or Inns of Court. Only one candidate could seriously be considered a worker in the sense in which that term is commonly understood” (Ryan 2009, 140)

would lead to Independence at the next election. Woodbrook was not simply a homogenous space of class and culture either – as if it ever could be – but mixed ethnically and economically. As some authors point out of the success of the PNM in the Port of Spain North constituency – within which Woodbrook is contained – not all people of upper and the upper middle class voted for the PNM.

In the five polling stations that were in the high-status residential areas of Port of Spain North, the total vote for Gomes was 850, and for the PNM, 402. The fact the PNM was able to win a little less than 50 percent of the total votes in the five stations indicates, however, that the party did manage to win the confidence of some members of the European creole community (Ryan 2009, 145).

Building on this quote, I would suggest that Woodbrook and its increasingly mixed income residents can be separated from the upper-class areas of St Clair, which in this era, as the summary mentioned, saw a movement out of Woodbrook and into St Clair by the richer elements of society. If true it lends further evidence to the changing class composition of Woodbrook in the era 1920–1950s from colonial upper class to Creole middle class and also supports the notion this new local middle class was a central element in the articulation of the nationalist movement.

In the 1950s, Woodbrook with its prized amenities – paved streets, street lighting, piped water, sewerage and underground storm drainage – was fast attracting new residents as the upper and upper middle classes moved out¹⁹. One of these new residents (although he had lived there previously as a child) was Eric Williams, recently removed from a position of power at the Caribbean Commission and soon, in 1962, to become the first Prime Minister of an independent Trinidad and Tobago. According to one source, Williams told colleagues that a move to Woodbrook would make him “a part of the people and less apart from them”, (Williams cited in Ryan 2009, 74). He soon began to hold many of his early cottage meetings at the Little Carib Theatre (Sankeralli 2001, 2). At these meetings Williams and his colleagues, who included a handful of young dynamic East Indians, articulated their cross-ethnic solidarity and desire to “create and lead a nationalist movement in Trinidad and Tobago based on disciplined, nationalist, party politics” (Meighoo 2006, 13).

19. This highlights further the importance and symbolism of Woodbrook as an institution in the emergence of the new Trinidadians and backs the observation that in the 40s and 50s Woodbrook was really the juncture where the lower middle class entered the professional class

By now the Woodbrook class of person represented the culmination of a process begun after Emancipation. Mostly as beneficiaries of limited educational opportunities for locals, a lower middle class had developed into a concrete Creole middle class stratum in local society and politics (Craig 1982, 414) with professions such as doctors, teachers, lawyers, pharmacists and journalists. This is not to say there were not confrontations and agitations with other class and ethnic groups in Trinidad. There were; most specifically with the working class masses and East Indian rural population both prior to and after the election. However by the mid 1960s it was the new Trinidadians, a class of people symbolised in the middle class of Woodbrook and their Afro-Saxon values, who would control the destiny of the island.

Legacy

What I want to suggest for future research is that Williams and his Woodbrook sensibilities, the Creole middle class world of the central political class in Trinidad, the Afro-Saxons, in gaining control of the state was always, since the 19th century, and still is today, aligned with the capital interests of Euro-American capitalism and elites elsewhere who are intent on weakening working class politics such as the trade union movement (Phillips 1984, 149). One way to describe this is to say Woodbrook represented a Gramscian historical bloc and how it ultimately, neither self-consciously nor through force, manufactured consent and negotiated assimilation of the interests of global capitalism, from the first instance to the present.

As one author snipes, “Nationalism degenerated into a new bourgeois Eurocentrism” and “an even more vicious neo colonial bureaucratic power structure was imposed” (Sankeralli 2001, 5). The relations of domination and subordination of colonialism became the relations of domination and subordination of capitalism in a blur and mystification of nationalism and Independence. Understood through a contemporary neo-colonial cultural lens the nationalist rhetoric of ‘independence,’ delivered by local political leaders leading up to and into independence, can be described as a socio-economic and cultural pattern readily observable around the world. The 1940s and early 1950s anti-colonial politics of pre-Independence Trinidad, which were concerned with potential alternatives to Western state formation driven by a vibrant and creative cultural nationalism, dissolved to be replaced by political emphasis on Western bourgeois normativity and respectable conduct, as seen by the desire for many of the tools, symbols and signs of an “Afro-Saxon” worldview that was designed to venerate Anglo-Saxon society. Woodbrook

itself we should remember was above all a Creole space, its middle class was essentially Creole, its nationalist culture and politics (whatever the rhetoric, or the presence of a few Indo-Trinidadians) essentially marginalised the Indians community (and others). Fifty years after Independence we, like many other post-colonial societies, are still living with the consequences, socio-economic class inequalities and ethnic divisions of such a legacy.

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