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Editor's Note

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"Who's not for us is against us": the 'imperial super-meaning' of the Clinton and Bush II administrations' policies towards Cuba

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ABSTRACT

Prior to the end of the Cold War, the United States operated on the global stage as a typical hegemon trying through political and/or military proxies to steer regional power balances in its favor and in the process contain its primary rival, the Soviet Union. Since the end of the Cold War, however, the United States has increasingly tried to expand its position as the (currently) only superpower and employ modi operandi more typical of an empire.

In this article I argue that a) the US-Cuban relations in the past decade and a half have been characterized on the American side by an oscillation between these two approaches, and on Cuba's side by policies that did not go far enough in divorcing themselves from the more flawed aspects of the Soviet experience and, thereby, provided pretexts for the continuation or even increased application of imperial containment policies by the United States; and – to a lesser extent – that b) each country's policies suffered from a dramatic misjudgment of the driving dynamics of their respective opponent.

The article draws from a variety of sources in an attempt to demonstrate that since the Clinton administration a significant rhetorical shift in the justifications of aggressive US policies against Cuba has been under way.

Keywords: Imperialism, US-Cuba relations, Caribbean, US foreign relations, Cuban foreign relations, Latin America

Imperial impetus and the national interest

Imperial foreign policies are probably best explained by the tensions that exist between national interest demands and the political mission formal or informal empires more often than not claim for themselves. Prior to the end of the Cold War, the United States often operated on the global stage as a typical hegemon trying through political and/or military proxies to steer regional power balances in its favor and in the process contain its primary rival, the Soviet Union. Since the end of the Cold War, however, the United States has

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increasingly tried to expand its position as the (currently) only superpower and employ *modi operandi* typical of an empire. Like other empires (e.g., Rome, Spain, Britain, Russia) it has definitive objectives which it claims as its mission and which are aiming to integrate, drive and justify its global control impulses.

In this article I argue a) that US-Cuban relations in the past decade and a half have been characterized on the American side by an oscillation between these two approaches, and on Cuba's side by policies that did not go far enough in divorcing themselves from the more flawed aspects of the Soviet experience and thereby provided pretexts for the continuation or even increased application of imperial containment policies by the United States; and – to a lesser extent – b) that each country's policies suffered from a dramatic misjudgment of the driving dynamics of their respective opponent.

In my attempt to explain why US policy vis-à-vis Cuba did not realize a widely expected peace dividend following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, I am mindful of the explanatory differences between theories of imperial rule and theories of imperialism. As recently observed by the political scientist Herfried Münkler (2005:39), theories of imperialism – against historical evidence in several important cases – conceptualized the building of an empire as a process pushing from the center in the direction of the periphery. This approach largely ignored any pull factors. Theories of imperial rule, on the other hand, "develop an image of the usefulness of socially marginalized groups for the administration of an extended empire, in which the center cannot control all processes and decisions and has to rely on political delegates in the periphery" (Münkler 2005:43 – *my translation*).

From this perspective, then, it becomes perhaps understandable that with the budding transformation of the United States from an international hegemon into an informal empire, US policies vis-à-vis Cuba did not change significantly after the fall of the Soviet Union.[1] To the extent that this is the case, we would expect that the persistent isolation and political and economic aggression against Cuba is, however, rationalized somewhat differently than during the Cold War. On the other hand, Cuba's reluctance to relax its suppression of internal political dissent contributed significantly to this persistent aggression.

The US imperial mission in the post–Cold War era: Fighting the 'political savage' in the periphery

For an imperial power the limitation of dissent, even only ideological dissent, is an important function for the maintenance of stability in its domain of control. Dissent is particularly disturbing and discomforting if it originates in the periphery of the empire, because it has the implicit potential to spread

rapidly into the center where its containment may be even more difficult than in the periphery. As Münkler (2005:30) observes: "An empire... which in cases of conflict within its 'domain' or at its periphery repeatedly remains neutral will inevitably lose its imperial status."

Thus, for the United States intervening in the case of Cuba remains an indispensable *sine qua non* of regional and global maintenance of stability and political and military control.

Since the breakdown of the Soviet bloc the US foreign-policy making vocabulary has changed. While 'democracy' and 'liberty' have always been a notional part of the US foreign policy agenda, the latter has since the late 1970s become more explicitly and closely tied to concepts such as human rights, humanitarian interventions and peace-keeping. It has been argued, for example, that while US policy-makers' professed intentions to promote democracy and socio-political conditions are conducive to economic penetration, their real goal is to implement what may be characterized as 'polyarchy' (Robinson 1995:646ff.). Unilateralism, already firmly inscribed in US foreign relations of both Democratic and Republican administrations, received another major boost after the terrorist attacks of 9/11.[2] Indeed, the 'lone cowboy' impulse became even more pronounced in President Bush's doctrine of preemptive strikes, according to which "the United States […] will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self defense by acting preemptively against such terrorists, to prevent them from doing harm against our people and our country" (White House 2002:6, 14). What makes recent US foreign policy increasingly and unpredictably aggressive is that it erodes the hitherto qualifying legal concept of 'imminent threat' in order to claim a right to not just 'preemptive', but actually "anticipatory action […] even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy's attack" (White House 2002:15).[3]

With the increasing uselessness of the argument that to defeat Castro is to deny communism a right to exist at the United States' doorstep, the currently prevalent polyarchic economic ideology needs to depict the Cuban development model as outdated and not in touch with current economic and political realities of the world system. Thus, an otherwise astute observer like Louis Pérez underestimates the real motivation for action against Cuba, when he exclusively considers it against the background of the perceived threat of communism in Latin America. In Pérez's (2003:264) view:

> The anomaly of the embargo stood in sharp relief in the 1990s. The
> collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War had
> eliminated the security concerns that had so decisively driven the
> rationale of US policy sanctions; however, a strategy for threats that

were no longer present, against adversaries that no longer existed continued to dominate policy formulations.

Thus, Pérez perceives that the US post–Cold War foreign policy pursued an irrational course of shadow-boxing with regard to a non-exiting threat at its Southern border. Indeed, at one point Pérez (2003:267) even sees "cross-purposes of US approaches" as the explaining variable. This misreading of US Cuba-policy leads to further contradictory observations. Thus, while there is no more tangible security threat, the US allegedly engaged in a policy which "served to impede change in Cuba" merely because of domestic political factors (2003:264, 267) and the continuance of US intransigence vis-à-vis the island is simply because "its very longevity served as the principal rationale for its continuance" (2003:273).

From a perspective of imperial policy, however, the embargo is not an irrational anomaly but quite the opposite. While it is acknowledged here that US foreign policy is determined not only by the executive, but also by other considerations and constituencies in other branches of the government, as well as outside of government, an analysis which appears to say that the US conducts a contradictory and self-defeating policy towards a country that ostensibly is no longer of essential concern to its national interest, simply because of certain domestic pressures and circumstances, appears to fall short of a coherent explanation.[4] Pérez's conclusions, however, are not really surprising when one considers his fundamental premise. As he explains earlier, US Cuba-policy is a consequence of US determination to "limit the cost of Marxism-Leninism in the Western hemisphere," to make Cuba "an example of the cost of revolution", and "to make the cost of the revolution so unbearable as a way to deter and discourage others from emulating the Cuban model" (Pérez 2003:258). Although this explanation captures an important motivation in the US policy establishment, it probably does not go far enough in order to plausibly account for the Cuba policy of the late Clinton and Bush II administrations.

Thus, the communist threat explanation by Pérez has to be viewed as a sub-motivation of a larger agenda. In the final analysis, US Cuba-policy in the late 1990s and early 21st century is motivated by an 'imperial super-meaning'.[5] Thus, the objective is not just to prevent communist alternatives from rising in Latin America and the Caribbean, but rather that – even and especially from a classical realist point of view – the ultimate logic of an imperial space does not and cannot tolerate the existence of significant voices of dissent at its peripheries.[6] As James Chace (2003) recently summed it up, the United States is "engaged in a quixotic pursuit of a unipolar world". In a speech to Congress on September 20, 2001, President Bush further simplified the rationale:

"Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." It is this translocal foreign policy agenda which gives credence to what is here termed imperial super-meaning. Thus, spinning off from Frankl's explanation, the Cuban Revolution assumes a meaning to the United States only by virtue of being considered within the wider context of imperial maxims expressed through appropriate language.

Since the muffling of significant dissent runs counter the traditionally expounded US foreign policy objectives of promoting democracy and free elections, it can obviously not be expressed directly and openly, but has to be dressed in other justifications (e.g., the promotion of 'human rights', 'freedom', 'civil society participation', etc.). From this perspective, therefore, and despite all of Cuba's recent experimentation with capitalism, as well as its tentative overtures towards a 'normalization' of relations with the United States, Castro and the Cuban 'model' remain significant detractors and critics of the US-led efforts to exert worldwide influence via globalization and regional/local dominance via WTO and other economic, political and military mechanisms. [7]

US-Cuba relations in the post–Cold War era

US policy toward Cuba reflects the intention to apply pressure not just from outside, but also from the inside in order to force the Castro government to change. Robinson (1995) has termed this approach 'pushing polyarchy'. As he explains, this policy is an updated version of the United States' foreign policy goal of maintaining an asymmetric international order in which socioeconomic disparity remains intrinsic.[8] Instead of seeking alliances with right-wing dictators and autocratic regimes, US policy in the post–Cold War era promotes a rather formal version of democracy (i.e., polyarchy) which focuses on processes rather than on outcomes. In this view, democracy is not about changing the chances of social mobility or addressing the question of popular participation, but just about an elitist-pluralist conception of society and polity, and the right to cast a vote in regular elections:

> ... seen through the lens of promoting polyarchy, the composition
> and balance of power in civil society in a given Third World country
> is now just as important to US interests as who controls the
> governments of those countries. This is a shift from social control
> 'from above' to social control 'from below' (and within), for the
> purpose of managing change and reform so as to pre-empt any
> elemental challenge to the social order (Robinson 1995:653).

Within the ambit of this policy concept falls the increased focus that US policy-makers since the Clinton administration place on the question of human rights in Cuba. Generally speaking, two different concepts of human rights clash in this dispute. Whereas the US and many of its Western allies uphold a concept of human rights based on the rights of the individual, freedom of speech, freedom from political persecution, and the right to assemble freely, the Cuban government does not put a premium on these issues. Thus, for the Cuban government human rights primarily connote the right to food, clothing and shelter. Measured by this standard, the Cuban revolution has fared remarkably well, while most developing countries and increasingly the developed countries themselves have problems to legitimately claim that they have sufficiently cherished these fundamental rights (see e.g., Esping-Andersen et al. 2002).

It is a short step from the above described imperial hubris to recent policy decisions implemented by the US Government. Indeed, while President Clinton's Cuba-policy was relatively low-key, the Bush White House once again promoted a more aggressive and uncompromising approach (see also Landau 1993; Morley and McGillion 2005:2-11). Whereas Clinton's Cuba-policy was increasingly Congress-led, the Bush Administration's approach once again received much of its energy from the executive branch, which would seem to indicate a progressive internalization at the executive level of the anti-Cuba rhetoric promulgated and promoted by the 1992 Cuba Democracy Act and the even harsher 1996 Helms-Burton Act, which actually wrote the embargo against Cuba into law (see also Hoffmann 1998; LeoGrande 2005). Thus, the observation that "the collapse of the Soviet Union… revived US hopes that the right mix of economic coercion and ideological warfare could now bring Cuba to its knees" appears even more valid for Bush than for Clinton (Morley and McGillion 2005:2-3). If this trend continues, and nothing seems to point to the opposite, future administrations will be extremely reluctant to renege on this impulse, particularly if Congress should be inclined to disallow such a move.

The Clinton years

Although the US Congress has ever since the Cuban revolution had a keen eye on this issue, it clearly increased its pressures on the executive at the end of the 1980s, when many of its members started to expect a similarly dramatic change in the island as in the former countries of the Eastern bloc. Dozens of resolutions and bills pertaining to Cuba have been introduced and/or passed since then, particularly by more conservative representatives from Florida who obviously are very susceptible to the strong, albeit by no means united, anti-Castro lobby in that state.[9] However, as the military threat evaporated, the goal of 'democracy promotion' emerged as a 'consensus alternative'

(LeoGrande 2005:13). In a speech given on March 19, 1990 President George H.W. Bush redefined this goal to be now the demand for internal change in Cuba (see e.g. Smith 1991:87; Mujica Cantelar 1991:71). When the Cuba Democracy Act was introduced in 1992, then-President Bush initially opposed it. However, after Clinton campaigned in Florida saying he supported the act, Bush changed his mind and signed it into law in Miami on the eve of the 1992 election.

In February 1993, Representative Diaz-Balart introduced a resolution calling upon the President "to seek a mandatory international embargo of Cuba pursuant to chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations". In November 1994, he introduced a bill suggesting US opposition to Cuban membership in international financial institutions. In June 1995 Senators Mack, Gramm, Lieberman, Helms and Dole introduced a bill suggesting that no funds made available under any law could be used for negotiations, meetings, etc. between US and Cuban officials relating to the normalization of relations between the two countries, unless the House Speaker was notified 15 days in advance. These few examples already show the extent to which members of the Congress are preoccupied with drafting legislation to further isolate Cuba.

The Clinton Administration made every effort to remain within this new and narrowly defined policy ambit. However, relations between Cuba and the USA were strained in 1994 when the Castro regime suddenly allowed Cubans to depart by the way of boats and rafts, obviously in an attempt to ease the pressure that the embargo had built up inside the country. Within weeks thousands of Cubans took the opportunity and floated the 90 miles across the Florida Straits. Faced with this situation the Clinton administration started to shift US policy of over 30 years and proceeded to arrest and detain Cuban boat people in Guantanamo and detention camps in the mainland. Subsequent negotiations with Cuban officials in September 1994 led to an agreement whereby the US side agreed to allow more Cubans to legally migrate to the US, while Cuba agreed to stop the exodus of its people on rafts and small boats. Officials in the Clinton administration, however, maintained that the US is not interested to negotiate change with Castro, that internal change would be a matter between Castro and the Cuban people (see also Dominguez 1994).[10]

After years of exerting pressure, United States representatives in 1992 succeeded in getting the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) to appoint a Special Rapporteur to investigate claims of human rights violations in Cuba. The US also succeeded to have the UN General Assembly pass Resolution 1992/70 in December 1992 which "regrets profoundly the numerous uncontested reports of violations of human rights

and fundamental freedoms." Cuba, which initially rejected visits by the UN human rights commissioner, changed its position in summer 1994 and extended an invitation to the acting commissioner, José Ayala.

The Helms-Burton Act was quickly passed into law and signed by the President in early 1996 after Cuba shot down the plane of a Cuban-based group of Cuban exiles, who had previously flown over Havana to drop anti-government leaflets. Although with this act of aggression Cuba undoubtedly applied out of proportion force, the question still remains to be answered what reaction repeated attempts by unidentified planes to drop anti-government leaflets over Washington would have triggered even prior to the security concerns of the post-9/11 environment. The Helms-Burton Act has a number of significant consequences that have often gone unrecognized. Thus, the law stipulates the "conditions and requirements for what the US would recognize not only as a 'transition government' but finally as a full-fledged 'democratically elected government', giving the US ample field of action to pursue their interests"; as Hoffmann (1998:8) explains:

> Sec. 206 clearly states that a 'democratically elected government' by no means simply means, as one might think, a government that has been elected democratically. Instead it must be 'substantially moving toward a market-oriented economic system based on the right to own and enjoy property' (Sec. 206:3) as well as having made 'demonstrable progress in returning to United States citizens (...) property taken by the Cuban Government (...) or providing full compensation' (Sec. 206:6).

Consequently, the law provides significant room for political control of events after Castro's death and even in the event that a significant democratic transition should occur.

At the same time that ultra-conservatives argued for increased sanctions against Cuba, both the domestic and international opposition against it became more vocal. In the face of this opposition, its supporters sought to convince Congress that the embargo is the best and only way to proceed. Thus, for example, Congressman Robert Menendez (1998) argued:

> Whether or not you support sanctions, it ought to be evident that Castro holds the key to change in Cuba. The remaining question is this: Should the United States throw Castro a lifeline by lifting sanctions on Cuba? […] Lastly, we need to recognize that Cuba is not the target that Big Business is after; Cuba is simply the easy target for business looking to initiate a change in US sanctions policies around the globe. Trade with Cuba is pennies compared to their real targets in the Middle East – Iran and Libya.

Thus, without asking what the possible stabilizing effects are, support for lifting of sanctions was depicted as an egoistic move which would directly result in a prolongation of the Castro regime. More importantly, Menendez explicitly ties the attitude to Cuba to other international scenarios with geo-political control implications for the United States. Similarly, in her Congressional testimony (1998), Member of Congress Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, quickly redefined the military negligibility of Cuba as a success of the sanctions and proceeded to provide the new rationale for continued and increasing embargo sanctions by proclaiming Cuba's involvement "in illegal narcotics trafficking, in supporting terrorism, in supporting the Lourdes spy station, and in the condition of a dangerous nuclear power plant."

The Bush years

With the presidency of George W. Bush, the already weakening anti-Castro coalition in Congress, among US commerce leaders, and within the Cuban-American anti-Castro lobby and the Cuban-American community itself, the initiative of imperial action against the Southern renegade shifted to the executive. With individuals such as Otto Reich, Mel Martinez, Adolfo Franco, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and others, the Bush II administration appointed more Cuban-Americans to high office than any president before. More significantly, a rhetorical shift from security concerns to the promotion of regime change as justification for continued US opposition became the primary focus of all policies aimed at the Cuban Revolution.

As argued in the previous section, the imperial super-meaning which had hitherto been justified by a communist threat thesis, was now more and more explicitly defended by other justifications. This trend of US Cuba-policy occurred despite indications that Cuba itself was actually changing. Thus, Eckstein (1994:115) points out that changes in the Central Committee, the Political Bureau, and the Council of State signified a "generational turnover... rather unprecedented in the Communist world." As one North American analyst even argued, Cuba's socialist parliamentary system "can be effective and representative without oppositional politics and a multiparty system and without electoral campaigns of the type known in capitalist democracies" (Roman 1993:27). Particularly at the local, municipal and the regional, provincial level there has been a remarkable degree of direct representation and uninhibited grassroots participation unheard of in most Western countries. Indeed, about 95% of those eligible vote in elections for their municipal assembly and 60-80% attend street meetings, without coercion or legal obligation (Roman 1993:11). There is also evidence that the acceptance of the Communist Party (PCC) continues to be high and even appears to be increasing. Thus, amidst the social and economic crisis, party membership at

the end of September 1994 stood at about 700,000, compared with about 600,000 at the end of 1989.

The rhetorical shift also occurred irrespective of the fact that the Cuban dissident movement is by far not as homogenous as Western media and politicians are often trying to depict it. Thus, one of the most prominent figures of the Cuban dissident movement, Elizardo Sanchez Santa Cruz, head of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights, reminded Washington that its policy has failed and that any political transformation in Cuba should involve President Fidel Castro:

> I have no doubt that transition in Cuba is inevitable but it must be
> peaceful.... It cannot happen with guns. It must be at the negotiating
> table. We must work with the present personalities and government. If
> we say people must be excluded that will be the end of it.[11]

Under the Bush II Administration the overt justification for a tough policy attitude was exclusively made in terms of human rights and democracy promotion. The communist threat justification of earlier years was now eclipsed by an emphasis on the themes of terrorism, biological weapons, human rights, and drug trafficking. Thus, the "Report to the President by the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba" published in May 2004 as a major policy paper under the chairmanship of Secretary of State Colin Powell, reiterated a number of arguments that the Administration has expounded over the previous years.[12] Indeed, the entire frame for this 450-page report was set by Powell's introductory remarks, which connected the theme of democracy in the Western hemisphere with the specter of terrorism and the rogue state:

> As fate would have it, I was in Lima, Peru joining our hemispheric
> neighbors in the adoption of the Inter-American Democratic Charter
> when the terrorists struck the United States on September 11, 2001. By
> adopting the Democratic Charter, the countries of our hemisphere made
> a powerful statement in support of freedom, humanity and peace.
> Conspicuous for its absence on that historic occasion was Cuba (Powell
> 2004, Foreword).

The theme of terrorism and Cuba's possible role in it was subsequently raised in a number of instances, but it was utilized to undermine any possible validity of Cuba's domestic and/or international achievements. Thus, the Bush II administration appeared to be eager to diminish any possible role model notions in Cuba's approach to socio-economic development:

The current survival of the regime is, in part, dependent upon its projection of a benign international image. Cuba presents itself internationally as a

prime tourist destination, as a center for bio-technological innovation, and as a successful socialist state that has improved the standard of living of its people and that is a model for education, health care, and race relations for the world. This image belies the true state of Cuba's political, economic, and social conditions, its status as a state sponsor of terrorism, and the increasingly erratic behavior of its leadership (Powell 2004:xv).

The claim regarding Cuba's sponsorship of terrorism is nowhere documented in the report. Rather, the Powell Report is satisfied with simply invoking the specter of terrorism and claiming Cuba's "status as a state sponsor of terrorism" (Powell 2004: xviii, 9, 20, 45).[13]

In addition to the specter of terrorism used by the Report to taint the Cuban state, the allegation of a biological weapons program has been reiterated in it. Thus, the report proposes to allocate funds to the propagation of "the US Government's *belief* that Cuba has at least a limited developmental offensive biological weapons research and development effort" (Powell 2004: xviii – *my emphasis*). Thus, the administration reversed its earlier abandonment (since 2002) of this unproven claim.[14] Considering that the 2002 document "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America" (White House 2002: 6) suggested that the United States will focus on "any terrorist or state sponsor of terrorism which attempts to gain or use weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or their precursors", it becomes easy to see how and why Cuba's alleged possession of biological weapons and sponsorship of terrorism have been introduced into the dominant national security discourse in order to justify its continuing marginalization.

Finally, the Powell Report makes an attempt to portray Cuba's leadership as acting irresponsibly and irrationally. Thus, it repeatedly speaks of "the increasingly erratic behavior of its leadership" (Powell 2004: xv, 9, 14, 44). The accusation of authoritarian leaders as 'mad' or erratic in their decision-making has a long history and was last applied in the case of Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. However, by making this assertion policy analysts and the public alike do not take account of the motivations and rationalization that such leaders may pursue within a value-system different from our own (e.g., notions of honor and Pan-Arab nationalism), and therefore fail to arrive at conclusions that – short of a moral damnation – may actually create negotiable policy-positions.[15]

Casting Cuba in the light of a quasi-terrorist, drug-peddling, rogue state provided, at least *prima facie*, a more plausible and contemporary attempt to legitimize its continued isolation. In other words, the shift in the justification did not reflect a change in Cuba's policies or role in regional or international affairs, but was more a function of US reactions to other and new international challenges, as well as the absence of the old Cold War motivations. However,

given that similar allegations have proven untrue in the case of the alleged weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, it would appear that any future claims with regard to weapons programs in Cuba (or elsewhere for that matter) ought to adhere to stricter evidential thresholds than what was presented as true facts to the United Nations and the US public.[16]

Cuba as an irritant for US policy in Latin America

It may seem somewhat ironical that the very policies the US instated under Clinton's two predecessors are now making Cuba a center of economic gravitation for the business interests of the wider region. This movement towards a greater integration of the region with Cuba was symbolized by the Second Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), which was held in Havana in December 1996. At this meeting 24 of the 25 member countries (St. Lucia was absent) reaffirmed their criticism of the Helm-Burton Act. While the ACS stance regarding the Helms-Burton Act was already clearly established by a statement of condemnation issued in May 1996 in Tlatelolco, Mexico, the delegates to the second ministerial meeting spoke out once again on this matter, referring to the US legislation as harmful to the well-being of the peoples of the Caribbean region and to the integration process, as well as a violation of the principles that govern international coexistence and the sovereignty of states (*Granma International*, Internet: 7 January 1997/hereafter G.I.I). Earlier in December 1996 the 6th Ibero-American Summit had also explicitly affirmed its rejection of Helms-Burton.

Cuba's integration into this new regional institution is inching forward slowly, despite obvious misgivings in Washington. Thus, a meeting (also in Havana) of the special committee for science, technology, health, education, and culture in September 1996 was chaired by Cuban Ismael Clark (G.I.I: 13 October 1996). By and large, however, the issue of Cuba's membership in the ACS remains an irritant both within this group and for its external relations (see also Lewis 1995:183).

Even outside of this regional group several Caribbean states continued to strengthen their relations with Cuba. Most significantly, if not spectacularly, towards the end of 1996 Grenada moved to re-establish diplomatic ties with Cuba. Prime Minister Keith Mitchell dismissed fears of retaliation by Washington by stating the rationale behind his Government's move:

> This is a different world that we are dealing with. It is far different from the world of 1979 and 1983. With the new world order every country needs to start optimising its potential and relations with other countries so that they will be able to take maximum advantage of the opportunities available internationally.[17]

   Thus, only 13 years after serving the US interests in the region, Grenada turned the table and implied that Washington's official policies toward Cuba and the Caribbean are based on outmoded concepts and ideas. The symbolism of this act signifies that Grenada continues to give very strong consideration to its Caribbean connections, particularly since Grenada's previous diplomatic break with Cuba had posed an obstacle to Cuba's overtures toward CARICOM in the early 1990s (see Erisman 1994: 5).

   Cuba's close relationship with Venezuela's Hugo Chavez, as well as recent elections of social democratic, socialist or 'Bolívarist' parties or heads of government in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, and Bolivia, have contributed to new irritation in Washington.[18] In this regard, Cuba is seen as one of the main instigators of political dissent in Latin America. According to the US government, as a result of preferential oil-sale arrangements with Venezuela, Cuban exports of goods and services to Venezuela rose from $34 million in 2001 to more than $150 million in 2003.[19] In April 2005, Chavez and Castro signed 49 economic agreements on areas such as oil, nickel, agriculture, furniture, shoes, textiles, toys, lingerie, tires, construction materials, electricity, transportation, health, and education. In addition, Venezuela sends more than $400 million in various products duty free to Cuba and plans to open an office of state-owned commercial Venezuelan Industrial Bank (BIV) in Havana to finance imports and exports between the two countries, while Cuba will open an official Banco Exterior de Cuba in Caracas. Increased economic engagement along with the rapid growth in Cuban sales to Caracas has established Venezuela as one of the island's largest export markets. In return, Castro has supported Chavez's vision for a Bolívarian Venezuela by sending doctors and teachers to shore up support for Chavez among the poorer classes in Venezuela.

   However, the irritation derives also from the political implications perceived by the coalition between Chavez and Castro, as well as the ideological closeness to other Latin American governments. In addition to their economic relations, both countries also introduced an alternative to the US-led Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). Thus, on 29 April 2005, Chavez and Castro met in Havana to renew their call for a hemispheric trade pact, the Bolívarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), as an alternative to the FTAA. As Arreaza (2005) argues, ALBA promotes "endogenous development and rejects the type of employment that the sweatshop (maquiladora) industry generates because it does not contribute to the upsurge of the agricultural and industrial sectors of the poor countries and does not contribute to the elimination of poverty." If nothing else, in doing so, both Cuba and Venezuela offer a different vision of hemispheric cooperation and development,

and are thereby challenging the ideological hegemony of the United States in Latin America.

Although not officially on the summit agenda, the ALBA played a role in the (for the US) unsuccessful Summit of the Americas in Mar de Plata in November 2005.[20] Without doubt, the alternative vision developed by Cuba and Venezuela energized the opposition of those governments objecting to the US attempt to revitalize negotiations over a free trade zone in the Americas. In the summit's final document twenty-nine countries said they wanted to resume talks on a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) in 2006. However, five other governments – Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, Uruguay, Paraguay – opposed a resumption of talks on the proposed FTAA and insisted on waiting for results of the next World Trade Organization meeting in Hong Kong. Embarrassed by the failure to reach a unanimous final declaration or even just a routine communiqué about useful exchange of views, the US government quickly announced that now the DOHA round of global trade negotiations would take priority over the stalled FTAA. However, it is likely that the opposing governments will "continue their own free-trade talks without Venezuela" and that Mexico and Chile may assume some sort of leadership in this effort (Charter and McCann 2005).

From the US perspective, insult was added to the injury. Excluded from the OAS summit, a Cuban delegation participated in an alternative People's Summit, which convened at the same time under the slogan "Another America is Possible" and was sharply critical of the US vision of free trade in the Americas. Referring to five prominent Cuban agents jailed in the US, the final declaration of this alternative summit condemned "the immorality of the government of the United States, that talks about a struggle against terrorism while it protects the terrorist Posada Carriles and continues to detain five Cuban patriots in jail" (People's Summit 2005).[21] Together, Venezuela's visible opposition to the FTAA and Cuba's behind the scenes support for a quasi-socialist agenda à la Bolívar have contributed to a serious loss of face and – at least for a moment – lame-ducked US leadership ability in Latin America.

The setback at the Summit of the Americas and the looming vision of the ALBA initiative denote a significant political challenge to Washington's hegemony in the region. The recent debacle also made it patently clear that the challenge is more than just a question of vision, but that it increasingly translates into tangible political opposition at the macro- and micro-level (Martin 2005). Without doubt, the scenario must appear troublesome (see also Bridges 2006). Cuba's support for the ALBA initiative will very likely not contribute to any softening of the various US embargo provisions applied to the island. Indeed, the bruised ego of the regional superpower and irritation at

its lack of persuasive power have recently translated into an old reflex. Thus, in April and May 2006 the United States deployed a major naval force for Operation Partnership of the Americas to the Caribbean, ostensibly in order to enhance "military-to-military relationships with regional partner nations, improving operational readiness, and fostering goodwill", as indicated in the media release announcing it. The rationale for such exercises had been explained by US General John Craddock, commander of the United States Southern Command on a 2005 visit in Uruguay, and is worth quoting at some length:

> I do not see Cuba as a military threat to the United States, I do not
> see Venezuela as a military threat to the United States, what I do see
> is an influence in Latin America that creates, potentially creates
> instability and uncertainty, because in Cuba, obviously it is a
> totalitarian state, a communist state, and in Venezuela it appears that
> democratic processes and institutions are at risk. That has great
> opportunity to create, again, instability and uncertainty throughout
> the region if those processes are exported. So we are concerned, and
> we believe the neighbors in the region should also be concerned. […]
> … when we stand back and look at the entire region, the challenges,
> the threats to the region, by and large don't have military solutions.
> *The military aspect is to create conditions to allow other solutions to work,*
> *economic, political, social …* (US Embassy in Uruguay 2005 – *emphasis*
> *added*).

A further interpretation of the rationale for the unusual two-month-long deployment to the region was recently given by Loren Thompson from the Lexington Institute, a pro-defense think-tank in Washington:

> The presence of a US carrier task force in the Caribbean will
> definitely be interpreted as some sort of signal by the governments of
> Cuba and Venezuela. If I was sitting in the Venezuela capital looking
> at this American task force, the message I would be getting is
> America still is not so distracted by Iraq that it is unable to enforce
> its interests in the Caribbean. So the fact we are doing it now will be
> interpreted by Castro and Chavez as indicative of some sort of US
> plan, or initiative, or whatever you want to call it (Dorsey 2006).

Stephen Johnson, a former State Department and senior policy analyst for Latin America at the Heritage Foundation, opined that as far as the intention of sending messages to Latin American countries is concerned, "there is a challenge for us not to be threatening and reignite hostilities in the region"

(Dorsey 2006). Taken together (and even in isolation), the above-quoted official or semi-official interpretations of significant military activities by US forces in the region are barely veiled at all. In unambiguous realist terms, the flexing of military muscle in Spring 2006 was intended to contain the apparent attraction and influence of the Cuba-Venezuelan axis, which has been promoting an alternative vision for hemispheric trade and development, as well as – on the basis of this vision – increasingly wielding political influence among civil society groups and governments in Latin America. Goodwill and deterrence of potential hostility to the United States are therefore to be considered the goals of the exercise, because they represent the intended conditions "to allow other conditions to work" (US Embassy in Uruguay 2005).

Conclusion

Since the Clinton administration a significant rhetorical shift in the justifications of aggressive US policies against Cuba has been under way. With the advent of the Bush II administration, and particularly in the wake of the 9/11 terror attacks, the themes of terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, drug trafficking, and erratic policy making have become the absolutely dominating justifications for the unabashedly explicit official policy of regime change in Cuba. As argued in this article, the new rhetoric is an attempt to create meaning and a new justification for the continuing ostracism of Cuba. The Bush II administration was relatively short and inconsistent on any positive initiatives vis-à-vis Latin America which could have supported its goals of regime change in Cuba. As the highly respected Robert Pastor (2003) recently asked, what does support for democracy in Latin America mean

> when others in the administration support a coup d'etat in Venezuela, only to be chastized by the rest of the inter-American community? What does our declared support for democracy mean when US Ambassadors take sides in a presidential election in Bolivia and El Salvador? Does this administration not realize that Latin Americans remain suspicious of US declarations on democracy because we sometimes undermined democratically elected leaders, who were anti-American?

From a less idealistic perspective, however, the continued isolation and ostracism of the Cuban government can be seen as a rational decision within the frame of imperial interests of the United States. Thus, the existence and vocal presentation of an alternative development vision and socio-political agenda in Latin America, represented by Cuba (as well as, more recently, by Venezuela and other socialist governments in the region) is an issue which in a historical perspective of empires has always been a perceived problem of

imperial stability. In this view, therefore, policy makers in the United States will very likely continue to feel compelled to continue with their current Cuba policies and appear unlikely to heed Pastor's sage advice that "the United States needs to realize that its power has limits and obligations. US power can compel other governments to take our agenda seriously, but if we brandish it or ignore other views, we unintentionally invite resistance or simply no cooperation" (Pastor 2003).

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Notes

1. For a similar perspective on current US policies see, e.g., Putzel (2004).

2. Thus, for example, Clinton's Under-Secretary of State for Economic, Business, and Agricultural Affairs Stuart Eizenstat (1999) argued that "If we are unsuccessful in building a multilateral regime, and important national interests or core values are at issue, we must be prepared to act unilaterally. To maintain its leadership role, the US must sometimes act even though other nations are not compelled to do so."

3. Interestingly, in the same breath it is implied that while the United States has the right to proceed in this manner because it can claim self-defense, other nations "should [not] use preemption as a pretext for aggression" (ibid. 15).

4. This is also the central argument in Morley's (1987: 1-39 et passim) seminal study of US-Cuban relations. Incidentally, the Cuban lobby, which Perez appears to have in mind here, has become much more diverse in its composition and political orientation at exactly the time when it allegedly extended its influence over US Cuba-policy. An argument similarly mistaken as Perez's has been advanced by Weinmann (2004).

5. I am adopting the term 'super-meaning' from Viktor Frankl's (1984: 143ff.) exploration of existential meaning in situations of apparent meaninglessness of human life in cases of extreme suffering. For Frankl, super-meaning points beyond the limitations of human existence where an ultimate meaning may be created or found. Obviously, the term is here transposed into a different context, cleared of the dimension of human suffering, and invested with a political significance that its original psychiatric use did not supply. Importantly, however, the term 'meaning' is in this context not to be misunderstood as a future *post hoc* justification or legitimacy of a policy, but rather in the sense that the historical place of a particular policy may only become apparent long after it was applied. Apart from this, adopting a term of this scientific genre was meant to elucidate a significant psychological dimension in the foreign policy making of a large informal empire, i.e. the United States, where the 'meaning' of a specific (contemporary) policy may or is projected to become fully apparent from the historical distance of future generations.

6. Thus, for example, even observers who argue that liberal-internationalism is the major motivating force behind US foreign policy from Wilson to Bush II admit that the involvement in Vietnam "was driven primarily by concerns over the credibility of America's worldwide alliance commitments" (Dueck 2003/2004).

7. *New York Times* reporter Thomas Friedman has accurately characterized the US position on Cuba to be more an attitude than a policy (see Pérez 2003:272).

8. Robinson quotes George Kennan who already in 1948 bluntly stated: "Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will allow us to maintain this position of disparity" (Robinson 1995:644).

9. The argument is often made that US policy is heavily influenced by the lobby activities of Cuban-Americans, particularly those in Florida. The implication is that Cuba policy is therefore less a result of imperial impulse than a (democratic) response to citizen input. However, we would like to argue that this responsiveness is also a matter of choice. Thus, it has to be kept in mind that the US state has actively supported and assisted institutions such as the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) – see Stepick et al. (2003:47).

10. However, in contrast to what Dominguez seems to imply, Washington's preparedness to negotiate with Cuba was confined to its specific and immediate interests, which excludes – as Mujica Cantelar (1991:68) rightly points out – "global negotiations on fundamental concerns that divide both countries".

11. *Caribbean Daylight* (New York), Feb. 17, 1997: 19. Sanchez, who made his comments during a speech in Miami after a tour to Europe during which he was awarded a prestigious human rights award by French President Chirac, has spent eight years in Cuban prisons. Obviously, in the light of such evidence the conventional wisdom of the muted groundswell of popular resistance to the revolution in this Caribbean island should be more nuanced.

12. This report (Powell et al. 2004) will be subsequently referred to as the Powell Report. Among some of the most recognizable members involved in the drafting of this report were: Condoleeza Rice (National Security Advisor), Tom Ridge (Secretary of Homeland Security), Roger Noriega (Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Dept. of State), and Adolfo Franco (Assistant Administrator for Latin America and the Caribbean, USAID). Many announced measures in this report would be delayed by the provisions of the Helms-Burton Act, which – echoing the infamous Platt Amendment – stipulates that "only gradual lifting of sanctions will be used as a mecanism [sic!] to influence and control the Cuban government for quite some time even after the demise of Fidel Castro" (Hoffmann 1998:8).

13. At the same time, it can be claimed that since 1959 numerous terrorist attempts were undertaken by Miami-based anti-Castro organizations. According to Cuban sources, these "military landings and territorial incursions, weapons smuggling (including Stinger anti-aircraft missiles), and hotel and airline bombings have resulted in more than 3,000 deaths and 2,000 injuries over the years". The Council for Hemispheric Affairs in Washington therefore concludes that "in clear violation of the US Neutrality Act, Alpha 66 and other kindred groups such as Commando L, Omega 7 and the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), have undertaken or financed such missions out of Miami with complete impunity" (Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2005a).

14. See also Council on Hemispheric Affairs (2002).

15. See, e.g., Chomsky (1991), who in the case of the first Iraq War observed some of the missed opportunities to negotiate.

16. See LeoGrande (2005:32-35) for a detailed refutation of past allegations about biological weapon programs in Cuba; see also Allahar (2006).

17. Quoted in Michael Bascombe, "Government embraces Cuba ... again" (InterPress Third World News Agency [IPS] – posted electronically by Institute of Global Communications [IGC] Network, Oct. 18, 1996).

18. Having tried the conventional IMF-prescribed neoliberal approach in the 1990s, Venezuela emerged in 1999 with an increased foreign debt of over $22 billion and a gutted system of social services and education (see Council on Hemispheric Affairs, 2005b). Growing oil revenues have since then allowed Venezuela to turn around some of these negative developments.

19.   This and the following information in this paragraph has been taken from the current Department of State Cuba profile at URL http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2886.htm, accessed March 2006.

20.   Thus, a train with Argentine soccer icon Diego Maradona and dozens of other well-known people, such as the new Bolivian president Morales, Bosnian filmmaker Emir Kusturica and Cuban singer Silvio Rodriguez left Buenos Aires bound for Mar de Plata. The train, dubbed 'Alba Express', was joined by road by hundreds of buses carrying members of numerous political and social organizations. Cuba was the only country in the hemisphere that was not invited to this summit hosted by the Organization of American States.

21.   Carriles is currently being held in a Texas Immigration facility. The US Immigration and Customs Enforcement recently classified him as having a 'criminal past' (Chardy 2006).

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Hindu transnationalism in action: the racializing effects of Hindutva's ideology on contemporary Caribbean ethnic politics

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ABSTRACT

Political and cultural developments occurring in Hindu communities outside of India should act as a reminder that the study of Hinduism cannot be confined to the Indian subcontinent. The powerful influences that globalization and transnationalism have had in the area of ethno-nationalism demonstrate just how significant such processes are to the reshaping and reconstruction of identities and cultures in Diasporic contexts. This assumption finds empirical support in contexts where historically marginalized ethno-religious communities, such as Indo-Caribbean Hindus, have been capitalizing on the *Hindutva* or radical Hindu nationalism – as a resistive-liberative strategy – to culturally and politically empower themselves. This paper attempts to delineate the influence and impact that Hindutva, the radical Hindu right ideology has had on the Hindu resurgence movement in Trinidad and Tobago. The Indo-Trinidadian Hindu political struggles must be understood from a perspective that can account for both the effects of past colonial projects and their enduring legacies visible in many of the postcolonial geographies of the modern world. One way of understanding the constantly shifting and changing character of Hinduism, and Hindu identities in particular, is to examine the strategies and tactics that the Hindu elite has used in its attempt to 'ethnicize' Hinduism.

Keywords: Caribbean Hinduism, globalization, ethno-nationalism, Hindu transnationalism, diasporic politics, politicized religiosity, racialization

Introduction

It is a well known fact that the vast majority of Diasporic Caribbean Hindus do not have any strong desire to return permanently to the so called spiritual and cultural 'motherland' of Hinduism, namely, India, except of course for pilgrimages, and the like. But the fact that there continues to exist a relationship, albeit one related to a more or less *symbolic* connection based on an 'acute sense of rootedness' that has characterized the relationship between

Hinduism and India, should alert us to the continuing impact that India with all its religious, cultural and political developments has had and continues to have on the global Hindu Diaspora, including its Caribbean Diaspora. As such, developments occurring within Hinduism in both the South Asian/Indian and Caribbean Hindu contexts point to the rise of a form of Hindu transnationalism. One area where the Caribbean Hindu Diaspora is clearly being influenced by contemporary Indian politics is in its implicit (and at times explicit) embrace of *Hindutva* or radical Hindu nationalism. Though there exist relatively little scholarly work on the impact that *Hindutva* ideology and organization has had on the South Asian Diaspora (Smith 1996; Bhatt 2000; Bhatt and Mukta 2000; Prashad 2000; Bhargava 2003), there seems to be an increasing and sometimes dramatically visible influence of it in South Asian communities in the UK, US, Canada, and the Caribbean.

While not arguing that *Hindutva* has become *the* dominant ideology of Hindus in India or abroad, or that it has replaced traditional Hindu belief or secular formation among the majority of Hindus residing abroad, it is at the same time true to say that its impact is having a profound effect on the ways in which Hindu nationalist formations in the South Asian and Hindu Diasporas are being charted and articulated. In contexts involving significant globalizing forces and processes such as rapid technological advancements that migration and immigration have engendered, and the subsequent spawning of global diasporas, it should come as no surprise that the transnational dynamics that have been (and are currently being) played out in various diasporas are as a result of these very significant social forces. One consequence of migration – whether through force/coercion/involuntary or voluntary migration, as well as through refugee/asylum means – is the unprecedented rise in ethnic political nationalism (henceforth, I will use the term *ethnonationalism*), particularly as it is manifested in the realm of religion. In looking at diasporic and transnational forms of economic, political and cultural practices and activities, the issue of diasporic religious nationalism becomes an important area of study in the sociology and anthropology of religion.

In the specific context of the Caribbean, racialization processes themselves produced the histories of racial marginalization seen throughout the Anglophone, Francophone, and Spanish Caribbean. These processes have also produced a discourse on racial or ethnic minority status among Indo-Caribbean Hindus as a way of counteracting the 'majority discourse' that has defined the racial, ethnic and political 'Other'. What is particularly interesting about the Caribbean is that this once single discourse is now multi-layered, i.e. the discourse on racialization and racial marginalization has added another discursive layer to its structure – one articulated in religious-nationalist terms.

This paper will demonstrate the impact that *Hindutva's* politicized form of Hinduism has had (and is having) on traditional organized Caribbean Hinduism. Specifically, I argue that some Hindu organizations in Trinidad and Tobago (henceforth, Trinidad), as a way of building and maintaining their political struggles, have relied on *Hindutva's* fundamental principle to 'politicize Hinduism'.[1] To fully understand the resurgence of Hinduism in Trinidad it is very important that the *ethno-racialized* dimensions – so integral to any understanding of Hindu religious nationalism in Trinidad – are not ignored. I argue that the particular type of ethno-religious nationalism that has been playing out in 'Hindu Trinidad' in recent times is as a result of a history of *racialization* in the form of racialized *representations* of 'Hindu*ness*' and 'Indo-Caribbean*ness*'. To resist their marginalization, Indo-Trinidadian Hindus have been adopting and imbibing some of *Hindutva's* ideological and political underpinnings to counter their more politically and culturally hegemonically situated/positioned Afro-Trinidadian counterparts. The historical constructions, or more aptly, 'inventions' of the Caribbean as an Afro-*Creole* space (see Burton 1997) have had implications for the development of a unified national identity in highly ethnically complex, postcolonial societies such as Trinidad. Afro-Creole dominance in a Trinidadian context means that Hindutva forces, in its quest to challenge Afro-Trinidadian cultural and political supremacy, must necessarily engage and contest practices associated with the nation-state and its deployment of a national narrative that encapsulates *creolization* and *douglarization* processes (discussed later on).

Conceptual issues and theoretical considerations
Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Postcolonial Nation

Ethnicity, time and again, has demonstrated just how durable and complex a phenomenon it can be. The inability of assimilationist ideologies to effectively manage racial and ethnic diversity, coupled with free market globalization with its aggressively technological and capital intensive framework, have thus far proven to be unsuccessful in minimizing or making irrelevant such things as nationalism and other social and political movements where ethnicity is a prime mobilizing factor. In looking at the interaction between ethnicity and nationalism, one must examine an ethnic group's relation to the nation-state. Smith's (1991) analysis of nationalism and nationalist ideologies offers some insights that help in understanding the unequal relations between competing ethnic groups and their struggles to be represented as major elements/players in the larger national imaginary. He proposes what he calls a 'dominant ethnie' model to characterize the ways in which dominant groups

(propagated mainly by national ideologues and cultural elites) in postcolonial spaces create, construct and define 'nation' – constructions based on the selective use and manipulation of historical memory and the *invented* traditions derived mainly from the dominant group's cultural and ethnic infrastructure. It is this type of construction of community that comes to define the political and cultural identity of a nation and its national culture.

Creolization and the Dilemmas of Caribbean Cultural and Political Integration

In the context of Trinidad it is the Creole identity that has become the marker of Trinidad's national identity. With this type of ethnically specific nation-building/state construction strategy, all those ethno-cultural groups who do not see themselves as belonging to – or who fall outside of – this Creole complex feel excluded or as if they do not fully 'belong' to the larger society. Indo-Caribbeans entered Caribbean societies when a process known as *creolization* (a syncretistic blending or interculturation of African and European cultural forms in a colonial context) had already established itself as the dominant cultural *modus operandi* (Braithwaite 1974; Burton 1997; Nettleford 1978).

One of the most salient characteristics of nationalist movements is its goal to create and promote cultural homogeneity. On the flip side of the nationalism coin, however, are scholars, mainly from the cultural studies and postcolonial studies areas, including cultural critics such as Bhahba (1990) and Appadurai (1996), who argue that these attempts at homogenization are gradually being replaced by cultural heterogeneity and the embracing of 'difference' – a phenomenon they argue that could test the tenacity, durability, and longevity of the 'nation-state'. Indeed, creolization (or *créolité)* and associated processes such as *hybridity* are seen as temporary remedies to alleviate essentialist constructions of ethnicities and identities (Alleyne 2005).

Bobb-Smith's contention that any theoretical formulations around creolization that conceive of it as a homogenizing process is problematic. She argues that it should be seen as a composite picture of indigenizing cultures – a process that entails both individual and collective resistance to dominant cultures (Bobb-Smith 2003:62). Indeed, as Viranjini Munasinghe (2001:30) states: "Areas such as the Caribbean… traditionally represented as excessively heterogeneous are now celebrated by scholars as displaying a 'radical heterogeneity', an aesthetic symptomatic of the new age." The relegation of ethnic groups considered to be Othered, or those who do not fit neatly into this homogenous construction of the 'nation-state', becomes problematic for those groups who are deemed peripheral to the national core. Munasinghe (2001:31) states that those marked as "ethnics are positioned at a considerable material and ideological disadvantage vis-à-vis the nation-state in that

although they possess the right to make claims on the state (as political citizen), their right to control the state is severely hampered by their ideological representation as outsiders".

Tewari (1988:210), in his analysis of the positionality of Hindus in Trinidad vis-à-vis their relationship to the Trinidadian state, contends that "As a religio-ethnic group within a post-colonial nation-state in the process of formation, Hindus in Trinidad and Tobago must come to terms with their rights as well as their obligations and responsibilities." As we shall see later on, it is this very consciousness and internalization of their historically devalued status that has led many Indo-Trinidadian Hindus to embrace the Hindutva ideology as way of redefining Hinduness, Indo-Caribbeanness, and the nation-state.

Seen from this perspective, then, one can ague that the disposition of Hindus in Trinidad – especially so in their struggle with Afro-Trinidadians to claim and/or be an integral part of the nation-state – can be described as *oppositional* to the more hegemonic Afro-Trinidadian Creole culture. My choice of the word 'oppositional' may have subconsciously been triggered by the popularity of the *oppositional culture* theoretical model in contemporary American sociology. This framework has been used extensively in the field of racialization and ethnicity among sociologists affiliated with the macro sociological power-conflict perspective as a way of understanding resistance of non-European/non-White groups to the dominant Euro-American culture (Feagin and Feagin 2003).

Inevitably, the cultural tensions created by theorists adhering to the creolization thesis, i.e., the idea that Caribbean societies like Trinidad can be easily compartmentalized into 'European' and 'African', is a grossly untenable assumption given the marked heterogeneity that has characterized the Caribbean region. Thus, the idea that the 'nation' is more or less a static collectivity (see Connor 1994) is a highly contentious assumption in postcolonial states like Trinidad where Indo-Trinidadians, in addition to achieving rapid economic and political mobility – partly as a result of the 'oil--boom' period of the 1970s (see Vertovec 1992) – are redefining the nation-state by celebrating their newly revived and rejuvenated Hinduness and Indo-Trinidadianess. This is manifested in the creation of hitherto non-existent events and activities (on a national scale) such as Indian Arrival Day and *Divalinagar* (basically a reconstruction of the Hindu festival of lights celebrations on a national level) organized by the National Council of Indian Culture, to name just a couple. Even the cultural forms of chutney and chutney soca (Indo-Caribbean musical contributions) and their national prominence should alert us to the continuing attempts to redefine 'Trinidadianess'. In other words, to achieve parity with its Afro-Caribbean and,

largely Christian counterparts, Indo-Trinidadian Hindus are embracing a religious oriented ethnic ideology – a phenomenon that looks like the 'ethnicization' of Hinduism.

Douglarization as Creolization Strategy

The etymology of the term *douglarization* is derived from the Hindi word 'dougla' meaning 'outcast'. As a pejorative term, 'dougla' refers to the offspring of the unions between Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians. Beyond its strictly biological definition, douglarization represents a dual – cultural and political – process in which both the Afro-and Indo-Trinidadian groups find themselves in contested terrains of interculturation and identity complexes. Incidentally, the term douglarization was coined by Hindu nationalists groups in Trinidad and Guyana to voice their protest against what they saw as an attempt by the aforementioned countries' largely Black-Afro-dominant governments to use 'douglarization' as an assimilationist policy. Indo-Caribbeans, in particular, were concerned about the impact that douglarization (which meant *Afro-Creole* assimilation) would have on Indo-Caribbean culture and identity. One way in which the process of Afro-creolization could be accelerated in these countries was through 'race mixing' between the groups. Not surprisingly, the douglarization process was vehemently denounced by the Hindu nationalists and other conservative Indo-Caribbean organizations because it was seen as an attempt to thwart – with a view to eliminating – the further development of a vibrant Indo-Caribbean culture.

The gendered effects of 'douglarization' and the devastating impact that it would have on the status and morality of Indo-Caribbean women were of particular concern to many Indo-Caribbean men. Mohammed (1988:386) argues that: "Apart from being an economic liability (i.e., Indo-Caribbean women – *my insertion*) … – or worse yet, consort with the dreaded polluted race of Black men – [would bring] utter shame to the family". And, in looking at the impact that 'douglarization' has had on Caribbean cultures and identities, Rhoda Reddock (2001:224) has this to say about the process: "Douglarization was denounced as another arm of the process of creolization… attitudes towards douglarization, therefore, cannot be separated from an understanding of creolization… and lies at the heart of the problem of national identity and culture in Trinidad and Tobago".

An overview of the Hindutva movement

It is important at this point to offer a brief historical sketch of the Hindutva movement in terms of its organizational, political, ideological and cultural characteristics. More importantly, however, is the fact that that this overview is particularly significant from a sociological perspective insofar as it will shed

light on the ways in which concepts such as 'nation' and 'race' were constructed, conflated and imagined from a *Hindutva* perspective.

Contrary to popular belief, the Hindutva forces in India do not comprise a monolithic institutional structure such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), though it is possibly the most prominent political body that embodies Hinduvta's ideological underpinnings. Rather, Hindutva forces represent a constellation of an entire set of institutional arrangements and structures that function together in a reasonably coherent and systematic fashion. What follows is a description of each component part of the Hindutva complex.

The Sangh Parivar

The Sangh Parivar (or Sangh family), the Hindu nationalist movement that encompasses the recently defeated government ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), wants to unite all India's ethnic groups against Muslims and Christians. In their provocative political message a 'war for souls', the Sangh Parivar has aggressively called for a homogenous Hindu identity by capitalizing on the age-old idea that divisions within Hinduism weaken India. The Sangh and its offspring organizations such as the BJP have successfully employed effective rhetorical strategies by playing on the emotional sensibilities of the Hindu masses. They have used the name *Rama* (Lord Rama, the God King in Hindu mythology) as an effective political ploy with the aim of drumming-up anti-Muslim sentiments. This explains why they have been trying to convince *Dalits* (untouchables) and other lower castes groups and tribes to surrender their traditional identities and follow mainstream Hinduism (Pocha 2003).

To further advance their Hindu nationalist agenda, it has isolated Christians and Muslims by pressuring India's non-Muslim and Christian minorities such as the Jains, Sikhs and Buddhists to embrace the Hindutva ideology. In other words, the Sangh Parivar central ideological claim is the idea that anybody with 'roots' in India, is by definition 'Hindu'. As such, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, and Christians are variants of Hindu sub-sects. This particular type of religio-ethnic reasoning applies to the 'enemies' of the Hindu nation, i.e. Indian Muslims, Indian Christians, and Indian Sikhs. Thus, it should not come as a surprise when one of the BJP's principal leaders, L.K. Advani declared that Sikhs, Christians and Muslims living in India should be referred to as 'Sikh Hindus', 'Mohammadi Hindus', and 'Christian Hindus', in an effort to emphasize and reinforce one of Hindutva's core principles, namely the Hindu character of the Indian-nation state (Smith 1996). The implicit assumption here is that Hindu is synonymous with 'Indian'. Here we see a shift in the way particularistic and commonly held characteristics or descriptors about Hinduism such as its tolerance, universalism and non-

sectarian nature are conceived of. India's constitutional foundation, based on a secular nation-state formation, is herein contradicted.

Put simply, the notion of an Indian national identity being linked with a Hindu religious identity is clearly problematic in a nation-state that defines itself in a secular context of pluralism. Most Hindus have always articulated a position on their faith as one based more on 'a way of life' as opposed to a religion per se when compared to, say, the Judeo-Christian and other world religions. And, to conceive of their religion as having specific boundaries related to cultural or national identity may sound inherently contradictory to *dharmic* principles. Indeed, the undefinable nature of Hinduism stands in sharp contrast to a 'racial' or nationalist ideology. In this sense, 'Hinduness' or *Hindutva* becomes inextricably associated with the development of an 'Indian' national identity – a socially and politically constructed phenomenon that is disseminated and buttressed by the homogenizing and hegemonizing political current, i.e. the Hindu supremacist's Hindutva ideology. In this line of thinking, those defined as non-Hindu are categorized essentially as non-Indian (Christians, Muslims, Dalits, Adivasis, etc.), and therefore are seen as 'outsiders' within the Hindu nation state or *rashtra*. Again, the political fall-out of such an assumption can be devastating for India's religious and ethno-cultural minorities (see Clarke 2002).

The idea of a 'nation' from a Hindutva perspective is revealed by the following quote from one of its main proponents, M.S. Golwalkar – a protégé of Dr. Hedgewar, the founder of the RSS, and one of the most prominent Hindutva organizations – in his treatise *We, or Our Nationhood Defined*: "We believe that our ideas today about the Nation are erroneous… it is proper… to understand what the Western scholars state as the Universal Nation idea and correct ourselves (Golwalkar 1939:21). More significantly, his *racial* idea of Nation (the Sangh vision of a *Hindu Rashtra*/Hindu Nation) smacks of fascist overtones when he says: "…Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindusthan to learn and profit" (Golwalkar 1939: 35). In this pamphlet-like book, Golwalkar's makes laudatory references to Hitler and his theories of racial supremacy, and there is little doubt that he and other Hindutva proponents sympathized with both German national socialism and Italian fascism (see also Bhatt and Mukta 2000; Thapar 2000).

What are clear from the above quotes are the themes of racial and religious exclusivism, i.e. Hindu supremacy and Hindu nationalism. From these perspectives, Hindutva becomes a foundational concept that is related to a Hindu nationalist ideology and politics. The offshoot of this type of *race-nation* narrative reflects not only the politically potent character of the

Hindutva ideology and the identity politics that emerge from it, but the specific type of *politics of exclusive identity* that it engenders. In this type of politico-ideological construction, Hindutva is equated with "'Hinduness' *or the essence of being Hindu*" (Bhatt and Mukta 2000:413). It implies a primordialist orientation to identity wherein a common 'race', common 'nation' and common civilization take on a form of racial and cultural essentialism. Allahar (2004), for example, in demonstrating the interconnectedness between primordialism and cultural nationalism, points out that in both the Caribbean Afrocentrism/Black cultural nationalism and radical Caribbean Hindu nationalism (*à la* Hindutva) projects, that the Afro- and Indo-Caribbean ethnic entrepreneurs who 'peddle' (to use Allahar's term) ethnocultural forms of nationalism for their own political and social class gains, tend to embrace a more primordialist understanding of ethnicity.

In his highly influential book *Hindutva –or Who is a Hindu?*, Sarvarkar (1923), the Hindu Maha Sabha leader, espouses a view of Hinduism that conflates 'nation' with 'race' – that the Hindu (who is part of a 'nation' and 'race' at the same time) is determined by a common origin, and possessing a common blood. Thus, the criteria for membership in the Hindu 'nation' are members possessing a 'common blood' and common origins which, for all intents and purposes, can be traced to the ancient Vedic-Aryan forefathers. The idea of 'race' from a Hindutva perspective is "defined by the blood that Hindus share and which has flowed from the ancient Vedic fathers" (Bhatt and Mukta 2000:413). The notion that a 'Hindu' is one who inherits the blood of the 'race' has clear racial overtones, demonstrating once again the type of race-reductionist discourse that has come to define contemporary Hindu nationalism. The idea that very often essentialism is a crutch for racism seems to apply here. 'Essentialist' and 'constructionist' views on race differ. Whereas the former holds one's race as part of one's essence, the latter denounces essentialist attitudes to race (Hacking 1999). To be sure, most anti-racist/anti-racialist writings on 'race' tend to embrace an avowedly anti-essentialist worldview.

Hindutva therefore brings to the fore the resurgence of 'Aryan primordialism', i.e. the idea that Indian civilization was essentially a Hindu civilization, further implying that India's Hindu origins were primordial, existing from time immemorial while simultaneously suggesting that the original habitants of India were the Aryans (see Bhatt and Mukta 2000). This argument stands in sharp contrast to that of the European/Western view that the Aryans had entered India from elsewhere, possibly Persia and Russia. Golwalkar, who was known as 'Guruji' (respected teacher), and as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's (or the RSS) second Supreme Guide, was a profoundly important figure in the political development of the RSS (to be

discussed later). Some of his earlier writings, for example *We, or Our Nationhood Defined* (1939) cited earlier in this article, have a clearly *racialized* subtext. For one thing, Golwalkar's repudiation and rejection of the conventional historiographical albeit the Eurocentric interpretation of the Aryan presence in India, specifically the 'White Man's' view that the Aryans came from outside India, points to the *race-nation* binary, i.e. a one nation one race dialectic. According to Golwalkar, Hindus had existed in India from time immemorial: "We Hindus came into this land from nowhere, but are indigenous children of the soil always, from time immemorial and are natural masters of this country" (Golwalkar cited in Bhatt and Mukta 2000:417).

The conflation of 'nation' with 'race' is again clearly problematic because it privileges one 'race' over another, leading ultimately to the dominant 'race' – in this case Hindu Indians – becoming intolerant of non-Hindu minorities. Golwalkar's 'racial idea of nation' coupled with the alleged connections between the early Hindu nationalists with other nationalist movements such as Italian fascism and German national socialism, seems to take on some unabashedly fascist overtones. This assumption is given strong support in Savarkar's view regarding the Muslim League: "If we Hindus in India grow stronger in time these Muslim friends of the League will have to play the part of German-Jews" (McKean cited in Bhatt and Mukta 2000).

How exactly do Sarvarkar and other Hindutva exponents espousing such views convince us that all Hindus have the same blood, origins and and are of the same racial stock? One possible answer is to reinvent a 'past' based on a primordialist interpretation of tradition. It is not an uncommon tendency in radical nationalist discourse for movements' leaders/elites to exploit and play on constructed categories of belonging such as 'race', 'nation', blood and memory. The deployment of such politico-cultural strategies has enabled many ethno-political movements and their leaders (largely cultural and political entrepreneurs) to achieve their movements' political and cultural objectives, at times even to the detriment of those targeted as 'different' or Othered.

Hindutva's reliance on 'blood', for example, has the intended or unintended consequence of dramatically heightening the 'racial' essences that distinguished Hinduness from the Other. Marcus Garvey's skilful deployments of 'blood', proved as an effective rhetorical strategy – and a highly politicized one at that – to distinguish the 'essential' difference between Blackness and Whiteness, is a case in point. Similarly, Hindutva's vision of a return to a past era of glory, or to the so-called glorified Bharatiya traditions of the 'Hindu race', can be achieved with the creation of an *Akhand Bharat* (undivided India). The dream of creating a utopian Hindu homeland can be accomplished by organizing Hindus all over the globe. Again, a similar type of

nationalist construction process is at work in Black cultural nationalist movements where social variables such as 'race' and religion are used as the building blocks to create the foundation from which the constructions of the idealized 'homeland' is, and can be, *imagined*. An obvious example was the UNIA's (Universal Negro Improvement Association) deployment of many symbolic devices such as the lush vegetation of Africa, or the 'bountiful merry Africa" rhetoric that Garvey incorporated into his narratives on Black nationhood (see Carnegie 1999; Cohen 1979; Singh 2004).

Like its Afrocentric counterpart, Hindutva naturalizes ethnic and racial allegiances and categories by encouraging the notion that identities exist outside of history. The construction of myths about common ancestry and origins have the power to homogenize and make invisible differences among those considered to be the 'same', particularly internal differences within particular ethnic and cultural groupings. I am thinking here of internal variations related to 'race', social class, caste, gender, ethnicity, religion, linguistic, sexual orientation, and the like. The particular type of 'Hindu imagination' that the Hindutva movement propagates is troubling because of its explicitly essentialist underpinnings. What is truly 'Hindu' using categories such as 'blood', common origins/ancestry, and the like, is very difficult to ascertain given the history of migration, colonization, conquest, and all of the other external and internal forces that make 'purity' of all sorts – be they religious or racial – 'impure'. The envisioning of a Hindu nation-state represents a novel way for understanding *difference* in a Hindu-non-Hindu binary conceptual framework.

Gellner's (1964:169) assertion that nationalism "invents nations where they do not exist" is profoundly relevant here insofar as it helps to create a larger 'nationalist imaginary'.

Similarly, Anderson's (1983) idea of an "imagined community" and Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) notion of "invented tradition" seem to hold a considerable amount of conceptual relevance here. For the Hindutva forces, continuity with the 'past' be it real or imaginary, is necessary to maintain a sense of collective identity as 'Hindus'. One highly possible consequence of this is the creation of what I would refer to as a 'Hindu imaginary'. Smith (1992) argues that historical myths based on common origins and a collective romanticization of the past play an important role in creating, maintaining and sustaining the survival of an ethnic community. It is this need for a continuity of 'memory', or more precisely, a collective *representation* of the past that enables the Hindutva movement to foster Hindu pride while at the same time allowing it to develop and construct a vision for the future where notions of *sameness* and *weness* are constantly disseminated and reinforced.

The Hindutva movement, by laying claims to a Hinduism that seems somehow to be inseparable from entities such as cultural, national or regional identities, may in fact be engaging in a form of unbridled chauvinism and religious exclusivity "while standing behind the illusion of a Hinduism that, by definition, cannot be chauvinistic and exclusive" (Smith 1996:123). What is particularly problematic is the fact that this type of ethnicized religious ideology seems to be in active operation judging by the rise of 'Hindu intolerance' in the wake of the controversial and violent Ayodhya[2] event.

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)

The Sangh Parivar is constituted by the right-wing Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS, the National Volunteers' Corps). The RSS was founded in 1925 by Keshav Baliram Hegdewar, the fountainhead of the modern Hindutva movement, and is by far the most important Hindu nationalist organization in India. Organized around the concept of *shakhas* (militaristic gathering) and daily branch meetings, men receive physical and ideological training under the guidance of a *dada* (brother). It is here that religious and nationalist inculcation, as well as physical and marital exercises take place (Bhat and Mukta 2000). In some ways, the *shakhas* sound eerily similar to that of the Islamists concept of *madrassas* found in Pakistan. The RSS members (*swayamsevaks*) comprise mainly young boys (most of whom are under fifteen years old) and men, hence its associated reputation as being *masculinist,* or advocating a virilist brand of Hinduism. A fully developed gendered analysis of the Hindutva movement is beyond the scope of this essay. However, a future and larger project will seek to examine the critical role that gender – in relation to right wing, patriarchal ethno-nationalist and ethno-religious movements in the Hindu Diaspora – plays in the construction of the 'new Hindu woman'.

Though it has an anti-caste ideology, and its grassroots members were ostensibly from all castes and Hindu backgrounds, the elite leadership was from the Maharashtrian *Brahmin* caste. Indeed, as Bhat and Mukta (2000:424) point out, "Most of the founding leadership and intelligentsia of the Hindutva movement originated in *Brahmin* or other upper castes." This is why many have come to view Hindutva's ideology as reflecting essentially an upper-caste form of 'racism' (see Bhatt and Mukta 2000). Putting it in more contemporary terms, the Hindutva project was formed by the new transnational elite – of which the bourgeois technocrats constitute a major element – in our current phase of global capitalism. This new elite is *transnational* in terms of both its spatial and ideological dimensions and therefore conducts its political works in two nations at the same time (Prashad 2000). For example, the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), the overseas version of the RSS, sympathetizes with the Sangh Parivar by supporting it financially from the

United States by Non-Resident Indians (NRI) and other South Asian expatriate communities in the US and Canadian Diasporas. Money and other resources are reportedly channeled back and forth into the movement by organizations such as the Overseas Friends of the BJP and VHP of America, and the Hindu Student Council (HSC) of America (Bhargava 2003; Prashad 2000). In other words, there seems to be a type of 'Yankee Hindutva' (see Prashad 2000; Mathew and Bhargava 1996) effect that keeps the Hindutva movement active in its various Hindu diasporic configurations.

Bharatiya Janata Party

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) or the Indian People's Party is/was Hindutva's parliamentary front. The BJP's clever manipulation of the historical Hindu-Muslim schism brought it to power in 1998 as head of a coalition government. As part of its Hindu nationalist agenda, it has constantly breached India's secular formation through parliamentary actions by pushing for legislation of various kinds, making visible the party's ideological orientation in limited and constitutional ways within mainstream political discourse. It is no surprise that the BJP's success in large part was based on its anti-Muslim platform that equated Muslims with Pakistan. This artful strategy helped to reinforce Hindus' fears of pan-Islamic terrorism and its direct connection with India's on-going dispute with Pakistan on the question of Kashmiri independence. Add to the fact that the BJP participates in joint meetings with the RSS should eradicate any doubts about their relationship/connection with each other.

Vishwa Hindu Parishad

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP – World Hindu Council) was founded in 1964 in Bombay with the aim of being the first activist wing intended to undertake aggressive actions in civil society. One of its stated objectives is : the necessity "in this age of competition and conflict to think of and organize the Hindu world to save itself from the evil eyes of all three: Christianity, Islam and Communism (*The Organizer*, Diwali Special 1964). The VHP's primary functions are to mobilize forces for agitational purposes. It was instrumental in the Cow Protection Movement throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and was known to have played a significant role in the Babri Masjid Movement in conjunction with its 'youth wing', the Bajrang Dal. On the international front, the VHP has been successful in mobilizing migrant Hindus especially from the middle and lower middle classes. In fact, the VHP of America and its student wing, the Hindu Student Council, have played a prominent role in its international/global mobilization efforts.

The ethnonationalist thrust of the Hindu resurgence/revivalist movement in Trinidad

From their earliest entry into Caribbean society, Indo-Caribbeans have utilized Hindu tenets: practices, networks and organizations to consolidate themselves into politically motivated communities (van der Veer and Vertovec 1991). In particular, Brahmans have played an instrumental role in consolidating and formulating some of the ideological, symbolic and organizational aspects of Hindu ethnicity in the Caribbean. Indeed, Caribbean Hinduism can be interpreted as an "ethnicization of religion under Brahman leadership" (van der Veer and Vertovec 1991:149). The widespread popularity of Tulsidas' *Ramayana* coupled with the general embracing of the ritual authority from 'above', i.e., Brahmanical authority/submission, point to the centrality of Brahman influence on Caribbean Hinduism. The Brahmanic dominance over ritual activity in the Caribbean has resulted in a *Brahmanization* process (Singaravelou 1987).

The 1980s witnessed an unprecedented Hindu resurgence in the history of Hinduism in Trinidad and Tobago. Interestingly, it is at this same time that the BJP, with its strong Hindutva ideological platform, is emerging as the dominant political force in India. This resurgence was made possible by the oil boom in the island in the 1970s, and though the island was affected by a weak economy during the early 1980s, the movement continued to gain currency among Hindus. With the necessary infrastructural resources available, Hinduism in Trinidad witnessed the proliferation and institutionalization of a good many religious activities. This revitalization of Hinduism coincided with a strong ethnic resurgence as well (Vertovec 1992). Vertovec further contends that the rise of many Hindu organizations resulted in the national promulgation of Hindu activity all across the island that, in turn, may explain its high level of vibrancy at the grassroots level (Vertovec 1992).

The resurgence spawned an elaborate set of public, institutionalized activities that led to the revitalization of many cultural forms, including the creative expansion of ethno-religious and ethno-cultural elements within a Caribbean Hindu diasporic framework. The climax of this ethnonationalism was most visible in the 1990s, with the electoral victory of the UNC, headed by the first ever Indo-Trinidadian Prime Minister, Basdeo Panday. The *racialization of politics* under the UNC leadership – a situation similar to the People's National Movement (PNM) central political strategy, i.e., the mobilization of racial consciousness that enabled it to successfully rule for a good thirty years – heightened the ethno-cultural self-confidence among Indo-Trinidadians. This transformation was most visible in Trinidad's Hindu community. The political ascendancy of Indo-Trinidadians in the history of the island, in large

measure, fuelled the resurgence movement to such a point that Indo-Trinidadians were themselves saying "we have arrived" (see Verma 2000).

The development of the Hindu resurgence movement in Trinidad cannot alone be explained by internal factors. To understand the ethnonationalist thrust of Hindu resurgence in the Caribbean Hindu Diaspora, it is necessary to locate its development and trajectory in the context of global trends that have been emerging as they relate to religiously backed ethnonationalist movements inside and outside of the Hindu Diaspora. The strength and rise of the ethnonationalist movement in Trinidad can be attributed to the collective organization of various Hindu religious organizations whose main aims were to bring to the fore public discourses and other activities that were based on distinctively Hindu religious traditions and customs. One consequence of this type of organization along cultural and religious lines was the development of ethnic pride among Hindus.

So it is not surprising that Hindu leaders and members within the Hindu intelligentsia were successfully able to institutionalize, and even reinvent particular Hindu celebrations such as *Diwali Nagar* (festival of lights), *Phagwa/Holi* (Spring festival of colors) and, more importantly, *Raksha Bandhan* (or Rakhee Day). Rakhee Day, for example, is one of the most recent Indo-Trinidadian Hindu cultural *reinventions* – one that was lost during the colonial past and re-excavated in the postcolonial present – that has been appropriated, revitalized and institutionalized. Prior to the emergence of the revivalist movement in the island, Rakhee Day was one of the most invisible and least (publicly) celebrated of Indo-Trinidadian cultural customs. Today, however, it is recognized as a visible Indo-Trinidadian cultural tradition. The resurgence movement, coupled with the contemporary impact and influence that Bollywood (contemporary Indian cinema) continue to exert even in its postcolonial, far-flung overseas Indian communities, are critical variables shaping the reconstruction of traditional Hindu practices and customs. Rakhee Day not only demonstrates the ways in which cultural customs and traditions are constantly being reinvented by ethnic groups, but it also helps to elucidate the remarkable elasticity and fluidity of ethnicity, ethnic identity and culture. The celebration of Rakhee Day is a good example of the flexible and shifting character of ethnicity and culture. Indo-Trinidadian Hindus have recently incorporated this celebration into the existing diasporic ethnocultural and religious repertoire.

What is most interesting about this collective mobilization of ethnic consciousness along Hindu lines is its resemblance to the current *Hindutva* movement in India. One can argue that there has occurred a shift in the way in which Hinduism has been transformed in Trinidad – from an essentially 'passive' and ritualized form based on the *bhakti* tradition based on the tenets

of *sanatan dharma* (Vertovec 1992), to a more aggressive 'proactive' and radical type of Hinduism. The new brand of Hinduism, according to Verma (2000:378), has "systematically been drawn out of the private confines of the Hindu home and been transformed into a public, and oftentimes, defiant and ostentatious show of strength."

This activist and politicized form of Hinduism, while demonstrating the strength of the Hindu community and Hindu organizations in terms of an understanding of Hindu political and cultural empowerment, has the potential to alienate not only the larger Christian Afro-Creole Trinidadian community, but more significantly the 'other' Indo-Trinidadians, namely Muslim and Presbyterian Indo-Trinidadians. Historically, political parties in the Caribbean used and manipulated the historical divisions/polarizations within the Indo-Caribbean communities to achieve particular political goals. Eric Williams, the political leader of the creole-based People's National Movement (PNM), for example, used the Brahman control over the PDP/DLP to his own advantage by politicizing the issue of Hindu control over these political parties so as to sway the other Indo-Trinidadian votes, in this case the Muslim and Christian Indo-Trinidadian, into the PNM fold (Vasil 1984). These internal differentiations within the Indo-Trinidadian, and, indeed, in the larger Indo-Caribbean communities, support the long held argument that overseas Indian communities rarely ever achieve political unity as "cultural differences within [the] population become symbols for competing segments" (Kuper cited in van der Veer and Vertovec 1991:163).

So, the Presbyterian and Muslim Indo-Trinidadians because they are not Hindu, are not seen as quite 'Indian' and therefore their political allegiance is directed to the non-Hindu as well as to the non-Indian parties, as was the case in Trinidad and Tobago. This conflation of a Hindu identity with 'Indian' is remarkably similar to the tactics being employed by the current *Hindutva* movement in India where the Muslim and Christian 'others' are relegated to a second-class citizenship in 'Hindu India'. In this context, Muslim and Christian minorities are seen not only in essentially religious and cultural terms, but also as those outsiders whose lack of 'Hindu blood' puts them in the category of the non-Hindu Indian 'other'. This type of far-right-wing ethnic and religious absolutism and cultural nationalism has the potential to reignite 'ethnic cleansing' ways of thinking as was demonstrated in Nazi Germany and, more recently, in the Balkan states.

The current brand of Hinduism in Trinidad is clearly much more politicized in form and content when compared to its earlier counterpart from the 1950s, and in a remarkable way has brought together for the first time in the social history of Trinidad and Tobago Hindus from the very grassroots levels of society. This new brand of organized Hinduism, propagated via an array of

rhetorical strategies which include discourses around religion, culture, festivals, music, song, dance, and so on, has galvanized the Hindu masses leading to high levels of political consciousness about being a 'Hindu' To understand how this new form of politicized religiosity is emerging, it is necessary to examine the roles played by Hindu organizational and institutional structures in Trinidad. But what is most interesting is the fact that some of the more prominent Hindu organizations in Trinidad have adopted some similar politico-cultural strategies and ideologies derived from the *Hindutva* movement in India in their attempt to construct the 'new diasporic Hindu'.

Where the Hindutva influence is quite prominent is in some of the more stalwart Hindu organizations in Trinidad such as the Maha Sabha and SWAHA who, incidentally, are archrivals. These two Hindu organizations are similar to the Hindutva forces in India in that they adopt a more elitist position on Hinduism by adhering to a more orthodox and 'brahmanical' approach to Hinduism, namely the *Santani* brand of Hinduism in which a philosophy of Brahmin orthodoxy is at work. In contrast, other Hindu religious organizations such as the Academy of Hinduism and the Divine Life Society (both of which have rejected any form of Hinduism that privileges Brahman religious supremacy, and are therefore anti-caste) do not subscribe to the more orthodox, 'brahmin by birth' ideology that both SWAHA and the Maha Sabha pride themselves in. In a paradoxical sense, SWAHA, though similar to the Maha Sabha in terms of its Brahman-oriented elitist underpinnings, is at the same time the opposite of the Maha Sabha because of its *seemingly* progressive, intellectually based approach that has attracted educated upper class individuals who are, at the same time, 'orthodox' in their orientation. SWAHA has created innovative concepts such as its 'centers of learning' including the training of pundits for activist and leadership roles.

While acknowledging that the *Hindutva* ideology in the Caribbean has not spawned the mass-scale violence against Muslim and Christian minorities (as was demonstrated in contemporary India in the not too distant past), it is safe to say that organized Hinduism in Trinidad has skillfully been using a fundamental *Hindutva* principle namely, to make an otherwise passive Hindu into a more assertive, activist-type of Hindu, albeit in a non-violent fashion. For example, some of the movement's leaders have been able to sustain their politicized role by using particular Hindu ideological discourses. Thus, a 'politically astute Hindu' is one who is politically, socially and culturally conscious of her/his place and position in a particular social order. In the case of Trinidad, the projection of the new Hindu has, at its core, a two-pronged binary, that of race and religion, and the position of the Hindu and 'Indian' *vis-à-vis* his/her Afro-Trinidadian counterpart.

To assert himself/herself the 'new Hindu' must go beyond the *bhakti* tradition of Hindu worship that has characterized Trinidadian Hinduism – one that entails largely ritualized Hindu practices such as *bhajan* (devotional songs) singing and the chanting of *shlokas* (Sanskritic stanzas), and the like. These basic and customary ritualized religious practices, from a Hindutva perspective, do not project a 'strong and politically astute' Hindu.

Put simply, there is a clear focus that encourages *resistance to oppression* with a view to fighting social injustices. What seems to be occurring in the global Hindu Diaspora is the adoption and utilization of *resistive-liberative* strategies (see Clarke 2002) that non-Hindu minority communities in India have been using to resist the ideology of the majority. This particular type of resistance strategy that non-Hindu minority communities in India have used to resist domination is akin to the resistive-liberation strategy that Indo-Trinidadian Hindus have been using to counter the larger, Afro-Creole hegemonically-centered cultural space that has come to define the cultural mainstream of Trinidad and Tobago. At the level of politicized religiosity, the politically conscious, activist-type of Hindu knows that her/his *dharma* dictates this type of assertive religiosity. For example, the *Hindu Seva Sangh* (HSS) with its *shakha* system (based on the youth camp with a militaristic system of training) and derived from the RSS with its emphasis on moral integrity, self-pride and discipline and the fostering of a strong religious and ethnic self-awareness, is a good case in point.

Some well-known Hindu figures/activists such as Ravi Ji have been directly exposed to the Hindutva ideology through extensive training at one of its main organizational wings, i.e. the RSS. Ravi Ji is known as a 'cultural' activist in the Hindu resurgence movement in Trinidad, and spent thirteen years in India under the baton of the RSS. He currently is a major player in the *Hindu Pracher Kendra* (HPK). The HPK's main focus was to act as a missionary school, but it has gained a lot of public recognition through activities such as the *Phagwa* (festival of colors) celebration that have included several innovative features from its ethnic repertoire such as the *Pichkaree* song competition (an Indo-Trinidadian Hindu art form whose lyrics speak to the cultural and political disenfranchisement of the Hindu masses in the Caribbean).

The Pichkaree musical art form, therefore, must be understood as an ethno-cultural, ethno-religious, and ethno-political resistance strategy that seeks to interrogate and confront the hegemonic forces that have historically rendered the Indo-Trinidadian Hindu experience as 'marginal' to the larger Afro-Creole Caribbean cultural mainstream. What encourages this type of thinking is the historically specific racialized *representation* of 'Hindu' and 'Indian' as Othered in Caribbean societies. Realizing that the Hindu situation

in Trinidad was exhibiting a more 'passive', ritualized form of religious expression that was being disseminated by ineffective leadership – and all this in the context of growing frustration and economic and social disenchantment within the Hindu community – Ravi Ji saw the instrumentalist value of the Hindutva ideology as a way of politicizing the Hindu masses to use their religion and culture to empower themselves in public activity.

It was under his leadership that the first *Rashtriya Sankirtan Samadhan* (national religious procession) was organized and carried out in 1985. He played an instrumental role in organizing some prominent *sankirtan* (marches for morality) and other religiously oriented marches and processions. Adorned with their elaborate Hindu paraphernalia consisting of *bhajans, kirtans*, (religious songs/hymns), music, Hindu flags, and ethnic attire, the Hindu masses in Trinidad had asserted ithemselves (see Verma 2000).

Conclusion

In some very important ways, the struggle in Trinidad among Hindus is more of a *political* rather than a religious one when one examines the dynamics at play in an empowering movement that has at its core a *race-oppression* agency. The resurgence of Hinduism in Trinidad must be examined in the context of the rise of Afrocentric politics and its impact on the social, psychological, cultural and political psyche of many within the Indo-Trinidadian Hindu community. Hindutva, with its new and more assertive form of Hindu religious expression, should not be interpreted as if it were restricted solely to the realm of the sacred. Given the way it has been used and manipulated by the Hindutva elites and other Hindu leaders and ethnic entrepreneurs, it ought to be seen as an ethno-racial political strategy designed to counteract and dismantle the more dominant Afro-centered Creole structures. The coming to power of the UNC (United National Congress), political party headed by the island's first Indo-Trinidadian Hindu Prime Minister, Basdeo Panday, played a significant role in fuelling the degree and level of Hindu activism in both the cultural and political realms. The (temporary) political ascendancy of the Indo-Trinidadian community under the UNC provided the Hindu transnationals, elites and leader with fertile soil with which they could sow the seeds of further racialization via Hindutva. In this area they were successful in creating a high degree of ethno-racial consciousness among the Hindu masses in Trinidad, culminating in a more visible and intense form of racialization of political and religious consciousness.

The rise of religious essentialism as reflected in the embracing of a new form of 'politicized Hinduism' among Indo-Trinidadian Hindus goes beyond a simple desire to instill ethnic and religious pride. I argue that the Hindu resurgence movement in the Caribbean, with its highly politicized character,

provided the Hindu intelligentsia and those from the rank and file with a ready-made platform from which they could resist dominant structures of power. The divisiveness of the current political scenario – as evidenced by separatist forces such as the Indesh Freedom Party whose ambitions is to create an 'Indian' homeland in Trinidad (Persad 1993) – should act as a constant reminder of the political potency of the movement. The implications of this type of separatist scenario should alert us to the kind of trajectory that ethnic relations in the Caribbean are headed for. With global, local, and transnational forces interacting simultaneously – recall the defeat of the BJP in India's last election, and the defeat of the UNC government and the political victory of the PNM in Trinidad and Tobago – one can only speculate what will happen to the Hindutva ideology in these locales, especially in regard to its influence in the shaping and reshaping Hindu diasporic politics.

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Notes

1. This is the politico-ideological slogan that has been propagated by the ultra right-wing Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) Hindu nationalist organization in India. Its leader, V.D. Savarkar, venerated as an Indian revolutionary hero – and who had been given an almost *avatar*-like (God-like) status among Hindutva followers – has been credited with its creation.

2. The 1990s saw the emergence of a strong Hindu revivalist Rama platform that was preoccupied with the 'historic' birthplace of Lord Rama in Ayodhya in the state of Uttar Pradesh. The destruction of the Babri masjid in Ayodha, the alleged historical birthplace of Lord Rama, led to riots that took the lives of thousands. The RSS, VHP and BJP were the brainchild of this revivalist movement. The BJP and its affiliated organizations have been blamed for stirring up religious fervor that led to the destruction of the mosque. BJP historians claim that in the 16th century the Islamic invaders destroyed a Hindu temple dedicated to Rama, and instead erected a mosque. The idea of 'Muslim invaders' usurping sacred Hindu ground was enough to stir up thousands of Hindu nationalists to completely demolish the mosque on December 6th, 1992.

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Some practical ways to address the problem of HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean

David A. Yeboah

ABSTRACT

That HIV/AIDS is now a major problem in the Caribbean cannot be overemphasized. HIV/AIDS is now so significant to health and development and is having an impact on the health of the Caribbean population, its labour force and socio-economic development. Many factors have been identified in the existing research literature as the main causes of the disease in the region, i.e. factors which impact on the incidence and prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean, and this study complements those by proposing potential solutions to the spread of HIV/AIDS in the region. The article contends that the key solution to the problem of HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean involves addressing the causes, including improved and continuous collection, analysis and dissemination of information to create awareness, an aggressive social marketing of condoms, extensive education, addressing the cultural factors which encourage promiscuity, and the integration of HIV/AIDS services in family planning programs and services. The article concludes that the immediate or short to medium term prospects for the control of the disease are not good, but that there is potential for good long term prospects.

Keywords: Caribbean, HIV/AIDS, solutions, policy

Introduction

The Caribbean continues to exhibit high incidence and prevalence rates of HIV/AIDS, with the region now 2nd only to sub-Saharan Africa, albeit South East Asia is 2nd to sub Saharan Africa in terms of number of people infected. Some parts of the Caribbean, such as the countries of Hispaniola (Haiti and Dominican Republic), have even recorded higher incidence and prevalence rates than many countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

Many factors impact on the incidence and prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean (Remez 1989; Boulos et al. 1991; Uche 2001; and Green 2003). Yeboah's most recent work (2004) provides a comprehensive study of causes of HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean, and alludes to the effects of norms, values,

cultural practices, promiscuity and multiple partners, low age at 1st sexual intercourse, low/small proportion of condom use, lack of adequate region-wide epidemiological data on the disease, and inadequate laws on prostitution and homosexuality.

The high incidence and prevalence rates and the identification of the causes in the research literature presuppose a need to address the causes, identify and discuss potential solutions or responses to the causes. The purpose of this article is to provide solutions to the causes of HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean, with a view to reducing the incidence and prevalence rates of the disease in the region.

The rationale behind this study is clear. The problem of HIV/AIDS is becoming increasingly significant to health and development. Indeed, the need for a robust, practical and effective set of solutions to the HIV/AIDS problem in the Caribbean cannot be overemphasized. Hence, the importance of this study.

Methodologies and data sources

Various methodologies are used in this study including the analysis of existing data on incidence and prevalence, collection and analysis of survey data and evidence from the existing research literature, resulting in a triangulation approach. A survey of family planning associations in selected Caribbean countries, and a survey of clients of the Barbados Family Planning Association provided useful information on both the causes and potential solutions to the problem of HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean, which are subsequently presented in this study.

Existing epidemiological data on HIV/AIDS have been analyzed, while pre-designed questionnaires were administered to the chief executives of Caribbean family planning associations, and clients of the Barbados Family Planning Association (see also Yeboah 2002 & 2004). Eight English-speaking Caribbean countries were randomly selected and family planning associations in those countries were approached and requested to participate in the survey which sought information on the services provided, funding, specific programs for HIV/AIDS and related topics. Face to face interviews were held with the chief executives of some of the associations, while the others completed and returned the pre-designed questionnaire. The eight countries were Barbados, the Bahamas, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada, Antigua, Anguilla, St Vincent and the Grenadines.

In addition, the article draws on the vast experiences and successful approaches to addressing the HIV/AIDS problem elsewhere, and documented in various reports published by international organizations such as the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and the United

Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). It is clearly evident in the contention of this article that HIV/AIDS services should be integrated into family planning programs to achieve successful control of the disease.

The main data sources were, therefore, the existing data from various international agencies, and the data from the two surveys. Existing data have come from the statistical databases of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), UNAIDS, and the Caribbean Epidemiological Centre as well of ministries of health in the selected countries.

Incidence and prevalence

The reported HIV/AIDS cases and incidence rates per 100,000 population indicate that HIV/AIDS is endemic in the Caribbean, as it is elsewhere in the world. Most Caribbean countries recorded high incidence rates during the period 1990-98, with the Bahamas (86.8 per 100,000 population), Barbados (63.4) and St Vincent and the Grenadines (37.8) recording the highest incidence rates.

In addition, in 1999, 200,000 persons in Haiti, 130,000 in Dominican Republic, 15,000 in Guyana and 6,800 in the Bahamas were living with AIDS, yielding prevalence rates of 5.17, 2.80, 3.01 and 4.13 per 100,000 population respectively (Yeboah 2004).

What are the main causes of HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean?

Throughout the research literature in both the Caribbean and other parts of the world, certain factors continue to be identified as the main causes of HIV/AIDS. Low age of sexual initiation (Remez 1989; Uche 2001; Barbados Ministry of Education 2001); low levels of condom use (Bailey et al. 1982; Boulos et al. 1991; Yeboah 2004); promiscuity and multiple sexual partners (Barbados Ministry of Education 2001) have been identified as some of the leading causes of HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean. Other causes alluded to in the research literature include socio-cultural factors (*Nation* (newspaper) 2001; Green 2003); lack of region-wide epidemiological data on the disease (Remez 1989; Yeboah 2004); and inadequate laws on prostitution and homosexuality (Del Prado 2001).

The age at 1st sexual intercourse is low in the Caribbean. Uche (2001) for Jamaica and Barbados Ministry of Education (2001) for Barbados attest that the age at first sexual intercourse in the region has been as low as 9 years, with many children between 9 and 12 years being sexually active. This is exacerbated by the prevalence of a culture of low condom use (Boulos et al. 1991; Yeboah 2004). The risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS increases with exposure to sexual intercourse in the Caribbean because the disease is by and large

transmitted through heterosexual relationships in the region, albeit discernible through other modes of transmission.

Within sexual relationships, the use of condoms is proven to reduce the risk of infection and a combination of high exposure to sexual intercourse and low condom use is therefore fertile ground for the spread of the disease. The survey of family planning associations found that condom sales have been declining throughout the region, with Jamaica recording a decline of 14% between 1997 and 1998, for example. The survey of clients of the Barbados Family Planning Association also revealed that about 70% did not use condoms during sexual intercourse.

Closely related are the high levels of promiscuity and multiple sexual partnerships, which also increase sexual activity and hence the exposure to and potential risk of infection (Barbados Ministry of Education 2001; Uche 2001). There was also some evidence from the survey of clients of the Barbados Family Planning Association that many females are now having multiple sexual partners in what they see as a logical response to the behaviour of their male counterparts. (For a detailed analysis of other causes of HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean see Yeboah 2004).

What can be done to address the problem? Potential solutions

The factors responsible for the spread of HIV/AIDS have been identified earlier in this study, and the evidence is clear that the high incidence and prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean persist. The question arises as to how the epidemic can be controlled in the region. This paper proposes a number of strategies to address the causes of HIV/AIDS with a view to attending to the problem and reducing the high incidence and prevalence rates of the diseases.

Prevention

The study found a convergence of thought among the Caribbean family planning associations, survey respondents and published research that indicate that prevention is the strongest strategy to address the problem of HIV/AIDS in the region.

Information and awareness

A strategy involving widespread dissemination of information to the population of the region is a must, including wide dissemination of information on the nature of the disease, modes of transmission, preventive measures, referrals, treatment and related issues.

Political will

Closely related to information dissemination and increasing awareness is political will. Political leaders in the Caribbean should strive to participate in the spread of information by including statements about HIV/AIDS in their public speeches and appearances.

Low condom use

The study found that only a small proportion of the population actually uses condoms during sexual intercourse (see also Uche 2001 and Yeboah 2004). The survey of clients of the Barbados Family Planning Association found that only 29% of the respondents used condoms. This study supports a strategy involving a robust social marketing of condoms, an approach that is very likely to be successful.

Age at sexual initiation

Remez 1989, Uche 2001, and Yeboah 2004 provide a synthesis of evidence to show that the age of first sexual intercourse is very low in the Caribbean, and this was also found in this study. The Barbados Ministry of Education (2001) reported that children as young as 9 years were already engaged in sexual activity. The study contends that the HIV/AIDS problem can be adequately addressed if young children are educated and encouraged to postpone engaging in sexual activity until they are much older. This position was supported by many of the survey respondents.

Cultural practices, norms and values

The study found much evidence in the research literature and survey responses to corroborate the position that the existing social and economic institutions support and facilitate the spread of HIV/AIDS (Remez 1989, Uche 2001). Also, Yeboah (2004) demonstrates, for example, that promiscuity is widespread in the Caribbean because the existing socio-cultural and economic institutions favour that practice. Inadequate income, poverty and difficult life styles encourage young girls to establish sexual elations with older men for financial gain, the study found.

Funding

Many respondents expressed the view that funding of HIV/AIDS programs was inadequate and this was consistent throughout the region. The Caribbean family planning associations indicated further that a need existed for the coordination of HIV/AIDS funding.

Integration of HIV/AIDS services into family planning programs

Throughout the Caribbean, family planning associations are providing diverse HIV/AIDS services as part of their activities, including testing, referrals, support and advice (Yeboah 2002). The study also found some evidence from published reports of international organizations portraying the effectiveness of the integration of HIV services into family planning programs in controlling the disease (IPPF 2003; and UNFPA 2004)

Improvements in data collection and analysis

The study identified that the collection, sharing and dissemination, analysis and publication of data collectively constituted a potential effective strategy for establishing the level of HIV/AIDS in the region, and for the formulation and development of policies, services and programs.

Adequate laws on homosexuality and prostitution

Another salient finding of the study relates to laws on homosexuality and prostitution. Throughout the region, there are strict laws on these activities, and this study found that these laws, by and large, hinder efforts to address the problem of HIV/AIDS. The study found that many prostitutes do not voluntarily go in for testing, despite the fact that continuous screening is known to help reduce the incidence of the disease.

Education

While many survey respondents agreed that education was the key to reducing the incidence and prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean, the study also found ample evidence to support this in the existing research literature (see, for example, Yeboah 2004).

Education, as used in this article, includes informal education (community education programs, church, political speeches, print and non-print media) as well as formal education in schools and other parts of the educational system in individual countries.

Discussion

While many people in the Caribbean region have good knowledge of HIV/AIDS, many others have little knowledge and understanding of the disease. Dissemination of information should continue to be carried out at church and public gatherings and throughout the education system. As indicated later in this article, education is a vehicle which can adequately drive the fight against HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean.

Politicians and community leaders must not only show a commitment to fight the disease, but such commitment must be clearly visible to the public to achieve success. Caribbean leaders should also demonstrate commitment through adequate funding of HIV/AIDS programs and services.

No attempt or effort to reduce the incidence and prevalence rates of HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean will be successful without a serious effort to reverse the relationship between socio-economic institutions and HIV/AIDS. Persistent effort directed at drawing attention to the cultural practices, norms and perceptions which encourage promiscuity is essential. Public speeches by political and religious leaders must include statements on the need to refrain from promiscuity and multiple sexual partnerships and emphasize how those practices aggravate the risks of catching sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS (see also Green 2003).

There is also an urgent need to improve condom use in the region and a strategy with the potential to succeed is to address the cultural beliefs and practices which encourage sex without condoms. Slogans such as "if it is not on, it is not on" have worked dramatically in many countries including Australia, and could work to increase condom use in the region. People, especially the female population, should be encouraged to insist on condom use.

A common response to the question of why do you not use condoms in the survey of clients of the Barbados Family Planning Association was that "it was a cultural thing", with male partners insisting on "flesh to flesh sex" (Yeboah 2004). An attempt must be made to change this way of thinking, explaining to the Caribbean population that this line of thinking is encouraging the spread of HIV/AIDS and needs to change. An approach such as this would also give people the opportunity to make healthy choices and take responsibility for their health (see also Rogers 1999; Dzewaltowski et al. 2004).

The period preceding carnivals should be periods of extensive public education on the modes of transmission of HIV/AIDS and its preventive measures and practices. Condoms displays should be clearly visible in well marked kiosks to encourage carnival revelers to avail themselves of condoms if they intend to engage in sexual activity. The argument that this would potentially encourage sexual activity does not hold water here because there is adequate evidence in the literature indicating that sexual activity is rife during carnivals (see, for example, Yeboah 2004).

Another issue which requires urgent attention, particularly in terms of policy, is adequate funding of HIV/AIDS programs, services and activities. Funding is sine qua non for the formulation, development and delivery of HIV/AIDS preventive and therapeutic programs and services. The dissemination of information and creation of awareness about the disease require

adequate funding, while funding should also be available to reduce the cost of treatment to individuals and families, and to ensure that sufferers of HIV/AIDS receive adequate treatment and medication. It is necessary to coordinate funding for HIV/AIDS to maximize the potential benefits from the limited funding available, minimize waste and ensure that funds are well targeted.

It is important, however, not to lose sight of the fact that many Caribbean economies may not be in a position to inject massive amounts of money into HIV/AIDS programs and services, and international assistance may be necessary. However, Caribbean governments must strive to provide some funding for grass root organizations, such as family planning associations and HIV/AIDS support groups within the framework of their limited resources.

These associations provide services at grass root levels, and have good potential to succeed. The point is that when people go to the family planning clinics, it is difficult to ascertain exactly what they are there for and this encourages people to go there for HIV/AIDS services rather than go to the HIV/AIDS clinics, for example. For this reason, the integration of HIV/AIDS services into family planning programs should be encouraged.

Another area where the study found strong support is the integration of HIV/AIDS services in Caribbean family planning programs. Such integration has been successful in reducing the spread of the disease elsewhere, especially in Africa (IPPF 2003). The integration of HIV/AIDS services in family planning programs has found success in controlling the disease in Uganda and other areas (IPPF 2003; UNFPA 2004). Many of the Caribbean family planning associations agreed and insisted on this approach as a key strategy in the fight against the disease.

As indicated in the survey results, most Caribbean national family planning programs have identified prevention as the key to controlling the spread of HIV/AIDS, and this can easily be included in family planning counseling and related services. The UNFPA (2004) also identified prevention as the centerpiece of the organization's fight against the disease, noted that prevention programs were being integrated into reproductive health programs around the world and encouraged their use. There is every potential for HIV/AIDS to be controlled in the Caribbean through well designed prevention programs targeted at vulnerable groups and included in family planning and related reproductive health programs (see also IPPF 2003).

To assist family planning associations around the globe to integrate HIV/AIDS services into their programs, UNFPA and the IPPF have jointly developed guidelines for this integration. UNFPA and IPPF (2004) have issued new guidelines for including HIV voluntary counseling and testing in sexual and reproductive health programs, mainly for planners, managers and

service providers. National family planning programs in the Caribbean can and should avail themselves of these guidelines with a view to including HIV/AIDS services in their activities.

In addition, the work of the family planning associations at the local level, including HIV prevention and related services in their local level programs, could achieve much success. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that local level health programs and activities tend to achieve much success (see, for example, Rogers 1999; Green 1999; Baranowski and Stables 2000; Green 2003). All the executive directors of the Caribbean family planning associations involved in the study confirmed their respective organizations' desire and ability to continue to deliver HIV/AIDS services, provided there is adequate funding for the purpose. The point should also be made that some Caribbean governments continue to contribute large amounts of money to their national family planning agencies, notable among which are the Governments of Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago.

However, as noted by Yeboah (2002), much of the current funding to the family planning associations is not earmarked for HIV/AIDS activities. They simply constitute the governments' support for contraceptive use and related family planning activities. Additional funding specifically earmarked for HIV/AIDS services would assist the family planning associations to develop and deliver even better HIV/AIDS services to their clients at the grass roots level, with the inherent potential to control the spread of he disease.The problem of data collection and analysis needs to be addressed as part of a comprehensive strategy to control HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean. Many organizations (Caribbean Epidemiological Centre, PAHO, etc) hold information on HIV/AIDS, but little analysis occurs while most of the data are not disseminated. The available data can be used in speeches by community leaders, politicians, teachers and other leaders to draw attention to the HIV/AIDS situation in individual countries and the region, and to stress the need for behavioral change.

While not promoting homosexuality and prostitution, it is the contention of this study that a need exists to review the current laws on homosexuality and prostitution, with a view to introducing laws to protect prostitutes and homosexuals. This approach has the potential to reduce the stigma and fear associated with homosexuality and prostitution as well as HIV/AIDS. It would encourage current and potential sufferers to seek help without fear, with inherent advantages for reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS in the Region (see also Prado 2001).

Education is essential for addressing the causes of HIV/AIDS and should be used as an instrument for implementing any strategies developed to control the disease in the Caribbean. As mentioned earlier, Caribbean

political and religious leaders can and should use their speeches to educate the public on the dangers of acquiring HIV, the rising level of the disease in the region, preventive measures as well as the limited treatment opportunities available. The print media together with television stations (e.g. Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation) and radio stations can devote a number of advertisements on HIV/AIDS (especially prevention and treatment opportunities) as part of their community service and outreach programs. Indeed, political and other community leaders and community groups should request and encourage the print and non print media to do so.

More important though is the need to change the attitude and thinking of the Caribbean population in relation to sex and sexual practices (multiple sexual partners, promiscuity, low age at first sexual intercourse, low condom use etc). This change is most likely to occur through the use of the formal education system, and especially the school system. This is because it would appear logical to change the thinking of the younger generation as they go through the educational continuum, with a view to providing them with the opportunity of not repeating the behaviour of the older population. In addition, in school settings, teachers and related resource persons have the pupils engaged and can adequately use that opportunity to provide the children with information on HIV/AIDS. As the old adage goes, old habits are difficult to change and the younger population has better prospects for change than the older generation when it comes to sexual practices.

Remez (1989), Uche (2001) and the Barbados Ministry of Education (2001) provide a synthesis of evidence to show that age at first sexual intercourse is very low in the Caribbean (as low as 9 years in Barbados). Under this circumstance, the primary school is the most appropriate level to introduce an informative sex education program, but this education must continue throughout the educational continuum (see also Yeboah 2004). Social studies programs are the most suitable settings for education on HIV/AIDS, given that HIV/AIDS is now an important social and health issue in the region. Where sex education programs exist or where such programs can be introduced, HIV/AIDS education programs can be delivered as an integral part of those programs. Indeed, many Caribbean schools and colleges have sex education programs and HIV/AIDS can be included in the curriculum.

In addition, legislation could be enacted within individual countries to permit schools to provide free condoms to children. While this may appear controversial, it is a good step from the point of view of health to improve overall condom use and to teach the children the need to use condoms if they are to engage in sexual activity, an activity they are already undertaking (Barbados Ministry of Education 2001; Uche 2001). Indeed, this approach has been adopted by the United Kingdom where schools are now permitted to

provide free condoms to boys as young as 11 years (*Khaleej Times* 2004:38). The point is that the age at first sexual intercourse or age of sexual initiation is very low as previously stated, and the earlier the children are introduced to condoms, the greater the chances of reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

It goes without saying that education can and should serve as an essential catalyst to formally and informally promoting safe sexual practices among all population groups in the Caribbean (young and old).

Conclusion

Summary

This study has attempted to provide solutions to a number of causes of HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean identified in the research literature. The study contends that the key to successfully controlling HIV/AIDS in the region is prevention, which can be achieved through diverse formal and informal education campaigns in various settings.

The study concludes that the integration of HIV prevention and related services into family planning programs could reduce the spread of the disease in the Caribbean, and encourages the Caribbean family planning programs to adopt the UNFPA-IPPF guidelines for their HIV services.

Prospects

Given the current situation of low condom use, multiple sexual partnerships, and high promiscuity among wide segments of the population, the prospects for immediate improvements are not that good. The cultural practices, norms, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes which promote the spread of HIV/AIDS are very endemic, and cannot be eradicated in the immediate future. Besides, the exact effects of the existing and new programs to confront HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean would take some time to show any signs of success.

Even so, many governments in the region are becoming aware of the effect of HIV/AIDS on the population and are setting up HIV/AIDS commissions, etc. A number of strategies have been proposed in this study, many of which are taking place at various levels of implementation in some Caribbean countries. Together, these measures have an immense potential to improve the situation.

Changing thinking, perceptions and attitudes through formal and informal education should assist in the fight against HIV/AIDS in the region, presupposing good prospects not in the short to medium term but in the long term. Introducing sex education programs at the primary school level with a

strong HIV/AIDS component could change the thinking, perceptions and attitudes of future adult generations and reduce the incidence and prevalence of HIV/AIDS.

The basis for success lies in effective targeting of programs to appropriate population groups, i.e. special youth programs and school programs in formal educational settings as well as adult programs in community settings and environments (see also Green 2003). Programs which target at risk and vulnerable groups, including carnival revelers, have a good potential to improve future incidence and prevalence rates of HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean.

The study concludes further that short to medium term prospects of HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean are not great, but that the medium to long term prospects are good.

Policy directions

The following policy directions are proposed:

1. More effort should be put into the collection, analysis and dissemination of information on HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean

2. Effort should also be directed at learning from successful strategies elsewhere, and the exploring the potential to adapt them to the Caribbean situation

3. Strong political will to support efforts to address the HIV/AIDS problem should be clearly seen by the people of the region

4. Health promotion and HIV/AIDS disease prevention policies that address the norms, attitudes and cultural practices (which support promiscuity) should be encouraged

5. Policies which promote the use of condoms should be developed and supported, as the use of condoms is widely known to slow down the spread of the disease

6. Funding policies and arrangements should be streamlined and coordinated to achieve effective and efficient use of resources

7. Policies should be developed to promote the inclusion of HIV/AIDS services in family planning programs

8. HIV/AIDS information and prevention should be included in sex education in schools

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