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ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to enhance documentation and bring change in Trinidad and Tobago, by providing scholarship on the reassessment of removing statues of colonial figures and renaming the streets that were dedicated to European figures who were involved in the history of Trinidad. This analysis focuses on the current social movements that are closely related to these permanent changes that countries all across the world, including the Caribbean, have been involved in. These movements include Black Lives Matter movement, the Rhodes Movement and Cancel Culture. The work establishes that although these changes may bring awareness to the population of Trinidad and Tobago, in particular, they have no real impact on the society, therefore being irrelevant, though the movement has been prevalent globally.

Keywords: monuments, streets, social movements, Trinidad and Tobago, identity, nationalism

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INTRODUCTION

Rationale- This study is meant to enhance documentation and to influence change in the mindsets and behaviours of our population, by providing scholarship on the reassessment of removing statues of colonial figures and renaming the streets that were dedicated to European figures who were involved in the history of Trinidad, encouraged by the recent trends through social media and other movements.

Thesis Statement- The removal of these statues and the renaming of the streets may be impactful in bringing awareness to the history of Trinidad and highlight the atrocities of the European figures who these emblems were dedicated to, but the population of Trinidad will not be directly affected or necessarily gain anything by these changes.

Parameters of Study- The area of this study focuses on Trinidad's historical past and the events that led to the placing of statues of European colonisers, in recent years- from as far as 2017 to 2022. This study will examine the importance- or lack of- of tearing these statues down and replacing the street names, through the lens of social movements around the world, which have been adopted or bled into the country and the region of the West Indies, by extension.

Objectives- The primary objective of this study is to examine how social movements impact our country, with reference to historical events and individuals. The aim is to determine whether the removal of colonial statues and renaming the streets of European historical figures impact the country, or improves the lives, economy, and social development of the population, in any way- both direct and indirect.

Methodology- As this movement and the advocacy of removing statues and changing the names of streets, given in honour of the European men who participated in the colonisation of

Africans and West Indian nations, among many other, have become more prevalent in the recent years, specifically from 2020, this study will reference both primary and secondary sources.

There will be interviews of retired history lecturer, Brinsley Samaroo, from the Department of History of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, and of students between the ages of 17 and 21 years old. These interviews would account for the primary sources included in this study. There will also be references to scholarly publications and local newspaper articles, which will be secondary sources that provided information in the assessment of this phenomenon. It is important to note that all of these sources will be qualitatively analysed, to provide historical context in understanding the need for colonised nations to remove all these statues and rename the streets of our nation.

Chapter Outline- This study consists of three chapters, which would provide in-depth analyses of the conducted research. Chapter 1, entitled *The Presence of Europeans in Trinidad and Tobago*, presents historical context for the study by highlighting the Europeans' time in the country- and the Caribbean- and the reflection of these empires and figures in our present society. This chapter outlines the presence of the French, Spanish and the British, in Trinidad and Tobago in the past and how their influence is still felt- in the names, by the statues that were erected in their honour, and through several other ways. Chapter 2, which is entitled *What Happened After Colonialism: A Change of Mindset*, gives context on what happened after colonisation in Trinidad (1962). This would focus on the transition of moving from being a colony of Britain to becoming a republic, but also exploring the consequences of the leaders of the time not getting rid of these people and their names, that are still seen in our society. Lastly, chapter 3, *The Rhodes Movement, Black Lives Matter and Cancel Culture*, will focus on the social – and politically driven- movements that have energised the discussions of the importance

of removing colonial statues and renaming street names, while also considering the impacts of these changes to the public.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The reassessment of the world's history- specifically the colonial history of Africa, India, and the West Indies- has been revitalised by recent social injustices and social media. The discussions started in Trinidad after the murder of George Floyd, an African American man who was killed in Minnesota, USA in 2020, by a white police officer kneeling on his neck. This event energised the social movements that revaluated the colonial histories of nations and calling for the removal of physical representations of the brutality that our ancestors were subjected to. Throughout this entire period, social media has been an essential part of reaching global audiences and spreading awareness. This interesting and special event caused a monumental movement where people gathered, calling for justice for the atrocities against black people that were perpetuated by white people, from as far back as the 16th century. Due to this situation, the world has turned the spotlight on two specific movements- the Rhodes Movement and the Black Lives Matter organisation- where the organisations fight against oppression, racism, and discrimination overall.

With these movements in America and in the UK, other parts of the world were influenced, and these actions also moved into the region. In 2020, there was the removal of the statue of British Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson, a character who heavily defended the slave trade, from Bridgetown, Barbados. The island also was encouraged to replace the late Queen Elizabeth as the head of state in 2021, due to the re-evaluation of their history and move away from that past and into a republic. A similar event took place in Wales, the United Kingdom, where there was an art exhibition showcasing Sir Thomas Picton's tyranny and atrocities while in the New

World.¹ While Barbados, a nearby West Indian country, has acted and removed a statue of a colonial figure, in Trinidad and Tobago, there still is a long way before these actions are taken. Wales has shown disapproval of the actions of their own man, while Trinidad and Tobago continue to celebrate him, unconsciously, by dedicating several street names to him.

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in America, after the murder of George Floyd in 2020, was influential globally and that includes the re-emergence of the Rhodes Must Fall campaign.² Timalsina's article highlights the actions of Cecil Rhodes' actions which disenfranchised the populations of Zimbabwe and Zambia, limited them economically, the inhumane conditions that his reign forced the Africans to live in- on their own land. Rhodes' reign in South Africa and his political career was rooted in and defined by "ruthless imperialism and blatant racism against Africans" in modern day Zimbabwe and Zambia.³ The author argues that there were apologists who claim that all should be forgiven because Rhodes had left money for scholarships- that could still be accessed today- but does that make amends for what he had done to Africa? The simple answer should be, "no, it does not".

While these apologists called for the statues to not be removed, they claimed that his donations to scholarships and his contributions to history should be considered. However, the Rhodes Must Fall movement reassures that relocating the statue of this white supremacist is not- and will not- erase Rhodes in history, but its new location in a museum helps ensure that the historical context of Rhodes' legacy will be preserved, while also cutting ties with him and his actions in the past. The article also brings a question that must be considered, while referring to the removal of Joseph Stalin's statue in Georgia, USA, in 2010. The ejection of statue of Joseph

¹ Michelle Loubon, "Time to Erase Racist Picton" (Trinidad: Trinidad Express, 2022).

² Tarun Timalsina, "Why Rhodes Must Fall" (USA: Harvard Political Review, 2021).

³ Timalsina, "Why Rhodes Must Fall".

Stalin- the Russian dictator who had nearly 1 million of Russian citizens executed. He caused many families to be victims to deportation, famine, massacres, and several other atrocities, but it did not spark controversies or get the same refusals, so how and why is the removal of Cecil Rhodes' statue from the public any different when compared to other characters whose legacies were also atrocious and unbelievable?

In 2020 and 2021, there was a series of streets being renamed in Trinidad, mainly in San Fernando and in Port-of-Spain, after national and cultural icons who founded and developed institutions and the cultural identity of the country. Street names were dedicated to figures including Janelle “Penny” Commissiong, Dennis “Sprangalang” Hall, Elma Francois.⁴ Honouring these persons, all of African descent, meant that there has been a certain exclusion of cultural contributors who belong to the East Indian heritage, despite their contributions to society. It must be noted, however, that there have been streets named after Indo-Trinidadians- though in small numbers- including Torrance Mohammed in 2021, who was a pioneer in the arts in Trinidad. Despite certain discriminations, these renaming of streets has been inspirational and well-received by the public and Teelucksingh agrees that it should be encouraged for the public of Trinidad to embrace their history and positive change with these changes, “If newness equates positive change, then I welcome this bold move. If it is a success in Port of Spain and San Fernando, then the renaming of streets should be continued throughout T&T”.⁵

Today, the challenges that are faced in the Caribbean- and around the world- were and are rooted in the colonial history that is shared by the nations who were once colonised.

⁴ Shane Superville, “Penny Dreams of Revived POS” (Trinidad: Trinidad and Tobago Newspaper, 2017); Laura Dowrich-Phillips, “San F’do street renamed after Sprangalang as city celebrates 32 years” (Trinidad: Loop T&T News: 2020); Jerome Teelucksingh, *A Fragmented Caribbean Empire: Social, Political and Cultural Influences* (New York: Peter Lang, 2022), 5.

⁵ Loubon, “Time to Erase”.

Therefore, these events and records must be assessed before actions are taken in the process of removing and replacing effigies and the changing of street names.⁶ Though making these permanent alterations may promote patriotism⁷ and give recognition where it is due,⁸ historians and leaders may consider the consequences of making the changes. Changing these things may not directly affect the population, but it lessens Europe's presence in the countries that were affected in the past, as there already are many sectors of society that are European dominated- including the laws, education systems, institutions, governance, religion of a country.

Valletta Jeffers-Theodore analysed the presence of the Europeans in the Caribbean, where she included studies and documents from the Spanish officials, Bartholomew de La Casas, Eric Williams, and many other scholars, who documented the different- and often contradictory- behaviours of the indigenous peoples that were encountered, and the Europeans' need to add, remove, or replace names in Trinidad. In analysing the colonial past of Trinidad and the region, Bridget Brereton highlighted that nationalism and the search for national and social identities usually amplifies during a challenging period in the country (2007). Her article examined the history of Trinidad and Tobago and aimed to analyse and correct the narratives of what the country was supposed to be like and their influences in their search of their unique identity. Similarly, Jerome Teelucksingh's *A Fragmented Caribbean Empire: Social, Political and Cultural Influences*, published in 2022, examined and highlighted the national identity of Trinidad and the region, while underlining the experiences between the Afro-West Indians versus the Indo-West Indians, the little representation of the Indians in the Caribbean, among

⁶ Joshua Seemungal, "Confronting T&T's Colonial Past" (Trinidad: Trinidad and Tobago Guardian, 2022).

⁷ Loubon, "Time to Erase".

⁸ Laurel V Williams, "San Fernando Street Named after Theatre Icon Lee Wah" (Trinidad: Trinidad and Tobago Newsday, 2022).

many other factors that put the spotlight on insufficient representation of one of the major ethnic groups in the Caribbean.

CHAPTER ONE

The Presence of Europeans in Trinidad and Tobago

The first European contact with the inhabitants in Trinidad was in 1498, when Christopher Columbus and his troops arrived on the island, during his third voyage. The Spanish settled immediately and conquered the land from the indigenous peoples, specifically the Kalinagos and the Tainos, due to genocides and diseases. The Europeans' presence in Trinidad indeed was a very "name bruising" and traumatic experiences as the Europeans- more particularly the Spanish- added and removed names of peoples and places according to their convenience.⁹ In Jeffers-Theodore's thesis, she mentioned the Spanish giving the Kalinagos the name "Caribs", which was rooted in the term "cannibal", as they attempted to portray the indigenous tribe as human flesh-eating, warlike and vicious in their documents. However, it is difficult to determine the accuracy of the claims of Columbus and the other Spanish colonizers, as Bartholomew de La Casas described the same group as "good and kind".¹⁰ From 1498, Trinidad was under the rule of the Spanish empire until 1797, when the British captured the colony, due to the lack of security and a number of internal conflicts. Trinidad's sister isle, Tobago -as small as it was, geographically- was often in the centre of contention, as Amerindian tribes, the English, the French, the Spanish, the Latvians, and other empires fought to gain control over the minute island. Eventually, the island suffered greatly due to natural disasters and continuous invasions, which negatively and significantly impacted the economy. In the end,

⁹ Valletta Jeffers-Theodore, "When Europeans Came to Trinidad: A Name Bruising Experience", MA Thesis (St. Augustine: University of the West Indies, 2007), 30-32.

¹⁰ Cited Jeffers-Theodore and quoted in Eric Williams, *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1962), 24.

Britain conquered the French and regained control of the island and annexed the island to Trinidad in 1889, maintaining their rule until the islands became independent and became the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in 1962.

These European colonisers similarly rushed to other islands in the region, with the intention of obtaining wealth for their own economies, while christianising the peoples that they encountered. There was an encouraged competition between the European powers- as Spain had already become an established leading power in the West Indies and further attracted other Europeans to build their own foundations in the Caribbean as well- and as a result, in the 17th century, the English and the French started settling in the other colonies.¹¹ The English moved into St. Kitts, Barbados, Montserrat, and Antigua between 1624 and 1627 and the French settled in Martinique and Guadeloupe around the same time.

Colonizer	European colonies
Spain	Cuba, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico
British	Bahamas, Jamaica, Cayman Islands, Turks and Caicos Islands, Antigua, Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Grenada, Barbados, Virgin Islands, Trinidad and Tobago, Montserrat, Anguilla, St. Kitts and Nevis
Dutch	Curacao, Bonaire, Aruba, St. Eustatius, Saba and Sint Maarten (south half)
French	Haiti, Guadeloupe, Martinique, St. Martin (north half), St. Barthelemy
United States	Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, Cuba

Figure 1
Image of a table showing the European colonisers and their West Indian colonies
(Source: Saylor Academy, 2021)

¹¹ David Lambert, “An introduction to the Caribbean, empire and slavery” (Britain: British Library, 2017).

These European powers have influenced the Caribbean nations that they colonized, with both tangible and intangible evidence of their presence in the region over centuries. There are features of the European cultures in numerous sectors of the modern West Indian culture, including the laws and institutions, education, festivals, and religious beliefs, among many other sectors. Most of the previous colonies adopted the Westminster model of government- a type of parliamentary government, which originated in Britain. Many schools in the Caribbean- during the 19th and early 20th centuries- also were replicas of European schools, and today, not much have changed, seeing as there are many schools still being run by religious boards, though one notable change is an alteration of the curriculum where there was the introduction of school gardens, rather than only having academics being taught.

The Caribbean adopted many other factors of the whites who exploited them, including celebrations, sports and leisure activities, languages, music, and religion. Throughout the year, there are several festivals and holidays, most of which came from European influences. Carnival, the festival of colourful costumes, exuberant celebrations and "pure vibes" in Trinidad- and the region by extension- originated from the French during their period of reign. The free enslaveds adopted the celebration as a means of expressing themselves and even as a way to taunt the white officials. Cricket, which is the main regional sport of the Caribbean, was also taken from the Europeans. The Caribbean adopted their languages from the Europeans, depending on who the main governing power was, for example, Haiti and Martinique speaks French and Cuba and Puerto Rico speaks (refer to Figure 1 to understand the languages of the colonies due to the main coloniser). The European languages also gave birth to patois and the music also was influenced, by the tunes of the Europeans' music and even some instruments, like the cuatro which is used for parang during the Christmas period.

Finally, during the period of expansion and colonisation, the Church controlled most sectors of society and Christianity became the dominant and only socially acceptable religion of the population. Due to this, Christianity also became the most prominent religion in the region, though there are a variety of religions today. In the following photo (Figure 2), it is clear to see that there is a variety of religions in Trinidad and Tobago, with Christianity being the most dominant religion. Christianity continued to spread through the migration of the European powers and by the forced conversion of slaves in the Caribbean. Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam came into the Caribbean through the migration of the Jews, Chinese and Indian people, but while these religions remain authentic or even diluted at times, there were other religions created in the West Indies. These religions are called ‘folk religions’- as seen in Figure 2- which represented only 2% in Trinidad and Tobago, during the 21st century.

“Folk religions” are syncretic religions that have combined various beliefs and theologies and include religions like Spiritual Baptist, Santería, Orisha, Rastafari and Vodun in Haiti. These religions exist throughout the Caribbean and had emerged during an era where the Europeans were forcibly converting the Africans from their native religions and practices as a means of control. These African slaves cleverly integrated their own African religions with the religious practices and beliefs from the Roman Catholic faith- the dominant religion of the European elites.

Religious Diversity in Trinidad and Tobago

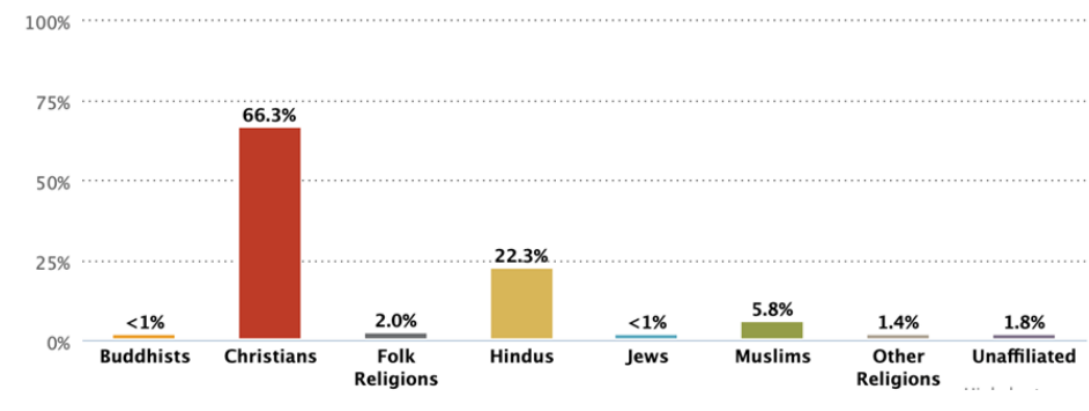


Figure 2

Graph table showing the variety of religions in Trinidad and Tobago in the 21st century (Source: Kevon Wilson, “The Caribbean is One of the Most Religious Places in the World”, 2021, <https://exceptionalcaribbean.com/2021/12/09/the-caribbean-is-one-of-the-most-religious-places-in-the-world/>)

The Europeans' influence on the institutions of society is almost unconsciously accepted and not ever questioned. However, the physical representations of the presence of these same Europeans in Trinidad and Tobago, and in the region, are questioned and recently, the focus of discussions in the Caribbean, due to the outrage of the brutality that non-white people have experienced and endured, and still go through today. These representations include street names, monuments and statues, awards, flowers, and even the population of the countries. In Trinidad, there are numerous streets named after Sir Thomas Picton- one of the cruellest British governors of Trinidad- including, "Picton Street, Laventille; Picton Road, Sangre Grande; Picton Street, Woodbrook; Picton Street, San Juan; Picton Street Extension in Diamond Village, Penal; and

Picton Court Apartments, Port of Spain".¹² There are statues of Christopher Columbus in Port-of-Spain, in an area that was also named after him- "Columbus Square"- and moving into the region, there was a statue of British Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson in Bridgetown, Barbados, which has now been removed as a way of moving away from their colonial past.

Two of Trinidad and Tobago's highest awards were also named after Europeans- the Spanish, to be specific- The Chaconia Medal and the Trinity Cross. The national flower was named the 'Chaconia' after Don José María Chacón, the last Spanish governor of Trinidad and Tobago, who was responsible for the implementation of the Cedula of Population in 1783. Lastly, one of the most prominent reminders of presence of the Europeans in the country is today's population of Trinidad and Tobago- though this is necessarily a negative impact of the Europeans settling in the country and the West Indies. The population today is a mixture of ethnic groups who were brought to the country and forced to co-exist, while the Europeans benefitted from the tensions and inhumane conditions that these groups were confined to, as they provided labour to maintain themselves and their families.

¹² Michelle Loubon, "Time to Erase".

CHAPTER TWO

What Happened After Colonialism: A Change of Mindset

Trinidad changed colonial hands several times, being governed by European powers including Spain, France, Britain, and even Denmark, all utilising significantly different systems of government. By the 20th century, between 1946 and 1962, the colony moved progressively through a series of constitutional changes towards the unexperienced and unfamiliar system of self-governance. The colony of Trinidad and Tobago achieved its independence in 1962 and later, became a republic in 1976.

Trinidad's journey to becoming independent was closely linked to the granting of the local population's right to vote in 1924 and the pleas for more "local" representation in the government. This constitutional change came primarily from the Labour Riots of 1937, which were fuelled by global, regional, and local catalysts. Globally, a few events that were occurring during this period included World War 1, the Great Depression, the growth of trade unions and Pan Africanism. Regionally, there was a series of unrest, inter-isle migration, and the return of West Indian soldiers who served in the Britain army. Lastly, some local considerations of these riots included the Abolition Act of 1833, the abolition of the Indentureship Scheme in 1917, class and race divisions, and continued economic hardship. The non-white population relentlessly pushed for involvement in the developing political scene and so, the labour riots, led by Tubal Uriah "Buzz" Butler, led to Britain granting the citizens of Trinidad Universal Adult Suffrage in 1945.

Intellectuals and activists such as Tubal Uriah "Buzz" Butler, George Weekes, Adrian Cola Renzi, Arthur Cipriani, C.L.R. James, and Eric Williams shaped and evolved the electoral

and governing process. In 1956, Eric Williams became the first Chief Minister (Prime Minister) when his party the People's National Movement won the most seats on the Cabinet.

By gaining this independence, it meant that Britain no longer had any control in the matters of the country and the responsibility was now on the shoulders of the newly appointed Chief Minister- Eric Williams- and the Cabinet that was appointed by the citizens. It also meant that the country would need a new political structure, symbols, emblems, an army, currency and official passports and documents for the citizens had to be established. Over time, these effects were established, and measures were taken to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago no longer had ties to the motherland- politically wise- and the country now had its own national anthem, pledge, flower, motto, and many other components that showed the pride of being an independent nation.

During this period, Eric Williams had ripped apart the British train system in Trinidad, but the question still remains, why did he not remove the colonial statues and rename the European street names, monuments, and other colonial symbols? Colonial statues and symbols in question include the Columbus statue, Columbus Square, Fort King George in Tobago, the Chinatown monument in Charlotte Street, Charlotte, Abercromby, Woodford and Picton streets, most of which are located in the country's capital of Port-of-Spain today. It can be suggested that Eric Williams was burdened with several responsibilities at the time and as he and his government were in search of developing an identity for the country, the removal and renaming of European representations was not his priority at the time.

In examining the black working classes' movement to development in the West Indies after emancipation, Franklyn Harvey stated that the society was moving towards social development, particularly, being "driven on by the energy, creativity and struggle of the working

class”.¹³ Essentially, the working class was determined to develop the Trinidadian identity after centuries of corruption, exploitation, and oppression in all forms- social, political, religious, and economic. The black working class gradually became tremendously nationalist after the first world war and more so after their emancipation, and the movement sought to not only develop the country’s identity, but all the institutions that they previously lacked. The proletariat embraced their newfound liberties and were determined to profoundly transform the country from being the property of Britain to being independent. However, the general population of Trinidad was bound to face difficulties during this period because Trinidad, itself, was already plagued with social challenges including the race divisions that the Europeans thrived on.

In the search for the national identity of Trinidad and Tobago, after its independence, it is fair to suggest that the government was faced with the challenges of appropriately forming an inclusive cultural identity that reflected the entire population. This can be proven by Bridget Brereton, in her article, where she said, “Trinidadian (but not really Tobagonian) national identity was closely linked with cultural forms associated with Creoles; these were the forms which were recognized as "authentic" and "national," by the state and by majority”.¹⁴ While the Afro-Trinidadians were indeed on the islands before the other ethnic groups and were larger in numbers, it was unfair to create an identity around only the African population and their history because it did not reflect the entire Trinidadian population. When a society is in search of a new identity, challenges follow including the conflicts between the new and older ideologies and structures, where “the mass of people move against old outdated forms” and sometimes the

¹³ Franklyn Harvey, *Rise and Fall of Party Politics in Trinidad and Tobago* (Toronto: New Beginning Movement, 1974), 2.

¹⁴ Bridget Brereton, “Contesting the Past: Narratives of Trinidad and Tobago History”, in *New West Indian Guide*, ed. Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2007), 169-196.

leaders, themselves, hinder the progress of the nation.¹⁵ Placing Trinidad in this context, Eric Williams and the PNM became enemies of a fraction of the population- the Indo-Trinidadians- who represented a large part of the country- because at the time, “ideology and ethnicity had found a fertile political environment in Trinidad and Tobago”¹⁶, highlighting the institutionalised discrimination against the Indo-Trinidadians and even today, these people are not as represented as the Afro-Trinidadians.

It can fairly be suggested that race and representation in Trinidad and Tobago goes hand in hand, seeing that there have been obvious exclusions in the process of building statues and naming streets, institutions, and other monuments in the country. Since there has been the movement of removing colonial statues and renaming streets, in attempts of moving away from colonialism and imperialism in the country, the government has once again fallen victim to another European system; “divide and conquer”. There has been a significant number of streets being renamed after local figures of Afro-Trinidadians, as compared to the Indo-Trinidadians. Examples of the street names of the African icons in the country include Queen Street in the capital being renamed the Queen Janelle Commissioning Street in 2017. Commissioning is an Afro-Trinidadian cultural icon and Miss Universe 1977, making history and becoming the first black woman- and from the Caribbean- who won the prestigious pageant.¹⁷ Then in 2020, ‘Park Street B’ in San Fernando was renamed after the late Dennis “Sprangalang” Hall, after the comedian who is of African descent, becoming the ‘Dennis “Sprangalang” Hall Street’.¹⁸ ¹⁹ This happened

¹⁵ Bukka Rennie, *Revolution and Social Development- A Direct Address to the Unemployed of Trinidad and Tobago* (New York: Research Institute for the Study of Man, 1976), 7.

¹⁶ Teelucksingh, *A Fragmented Caribbean Empire*, 6.

¹⁷ Superville, “Penny Dreams”.

¹⁸ Dowrich-Phillips, “San F’do street renamed after Sprangalang”.

¹⁹ Teelucksingh, *A Fragmented Caribbean Empire*, 5.

again in 2021, when Jadoo Trace 2 was changed to the Elma Francois Street in Port-of-Spain, in honour of the Afro descendent activist, who was born in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.²⁰

Although most of the streets were being named after national figures who were of African descent, it must be noted that there were still streets being named after those of East Indian descent also, though the numbers were small. Two examples of these streets include ‘Keate Street’ being renamed the ‘Torrance Mohammed Street’ after the late national icon, who was a prominent choreographer and the founding member of the Arawak Dance Group, among other organisations.²¹ There was a street renaming in San Fernando in 2019, where Harris Promenade East was renamed to ‘Lennox “Bobby” Mohammed Street’. Lennox “Bobby” Mohammed is a veteran steelpan arranger and a bass pan player, who received the Hummingbird Medal (Gold) in 1992, started the Guinness Cavaliers in 1963, attended and played in the Commonwealth Arts Festival in 1965, among man of his other accomplishments.²²

²⁰ Teelucksingh, *A Fragmented Caribbean Empire*, 5.

²¹ “San Fernando Street Named After Cultural Icon, The Late Torrence Mohammed” (Trinidad: TTT News, 2021).

²² Seeta Persad, ““Sando Street Named after Panman” (Trinidad: Trinidad and Tobago Newsday, 2019).



Figures 3 and 4

Images showing the street signs of the recently changed names after Janelle Commissioning and the late Torrance Mohammed in Port-of-Spain and San Fernando respectively (Sources: Trinidad and Tobago Newsday, 2017; Trinidad Express Newspapers, 2021)

Similarly, there are more statues and monuments of Afro-Trinidadian figures in the country than those of Indo-Trinidadians. There is a statue of Trinidadian born Lord Kitchener in Arima. Lord Kitchener, Aldwyn Roberts, was one of the founding and greatest calypsonians of the post-war era. Also, there is a statue of the Mighty Sparrow, Slinger Francisco, which was built in Port-of-Spain. Francisco was born in Grenada but migrated to Trinidad with his family when he was barely 2 years old. Like Lord Kitchener, he is known for his contributions to calypso in Trinidad and the Caribbean, and he has been awarded many international awards including The Most Excellent Order of the British Empire in 2015. Barbados also constructed a statue in honour of Francisco in 2020. Another figure who was honoured with a statue in the

country but was not born in the country is Tubal Uriah “Buzz” Butler. Butler was also born in Grenada but was a very significant character in the labour protests in the 1920s and 1930s in the country, after he returned from serving in World War 1, and his statue is presently in Fyzabad, where he gathered for his meetings and led his protests to. Lastly, a very recent statue that was constructed in honour of the history and culture of the Africans in the country is a Yoruba monument in Port-of-Spain, in an attempt of highlighting the significance of teaching the correct history of the country, rather than the story of Christopher Columbus “discovering” the country. This statue was strategically placed in its location because the statue of Columbus still stands a few feet from the Yoruba Village Square.²³



Figures 5, 6 and 7
Images showing statues that were built in honour of Lord Kitchener, the Mighty Sparrow,
and Tubal Uriah “Buzz” Butler
(Sources: National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago; Bertel Gittens, 2014)

²³ Janelle De Souza, “African Monument Erected in Port of Spain to Honour History, Culture”, Newsday, 2022.

It is obvious that a requirement of having a statue constructed in honour of a person does **not** include being born in the country, as seen by the Mighty Sparrow and Tubal Uriah “Buzz” Butler who were both born in Grenada. The honourees were to have contributed significantly to the development of the country in some facet or the other. So, the question arises, why are there considerably less statues and monuments of the East Indians in the country, although there were the same numbers of figures contributing to the same sectors in the society?

There are three significant statues constructed in honour of the East Indians in the country, with two being associated with religion. Firstly, there is the statue of Sundar Popo, that was built and unveiled in 2011 in Debe, south Trinidad. Sundar Popo Bahora was an important contributor to Trinidadian music, when he integrated Hindustani and English in his lyrics, and he was awarded several awards, including the King of Chutney in South Florida, United States in 1993.²⁴ In Waterloo, there stands a statue of Siewdass Sadhu who built the Temple at the Sea, after wanting a space where he and his community could peacefully and reverently worship their gods. He constructed the area originally in 1947 and had to rebuild due to challenges, but in 1994, the temple was completed, with help of the government at the time. Lastly, there also is the 85 feet tall statue of Lord Hanuman in Carapichaima- the largest statue of a Hindu god outside of India. Though it was not built to honour any human man, it was a representation of a group of people from the country, whose religion was the second largest, following Christianity (refer to figure 2).

²⁴ National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago, “Statues And Monuments Printables Part 1” (Trinidad: NTTT, 2020).



Figures 8, 7 and 10
Images showing the statues that represent the East Indians and their presence in Trinidad
(statues of Siewdass Sadhu, Sundar Popo and Lord Hanuman)
(Sources: Dool Hanomansingh, 2023; National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago)

While there has been a struggle for sufficient representation of the Indo-Trinidadians in Trinidad, it is strange that the government would readily construct a statue of Mahatma Gandhi and rename a park in honour of Nelson Mandela, one of whom never visited the country, nor did they have any direct or real contributions to the development of the country. “Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was... India's "father of the nation." He was a lawyer turned freedom fighter using 'Satyagraha' or resistance to all forms of tyranny, a potent, muscular, austere "do or die" form of "ahimsa or non violence." Gandhi inspired civil rights and independence movements globally. Gandhism became synonymous with selflessness, self-reliance, and a social conscience”.²⁵ In south Trinidad, there is a memorial set up in his honour for his great leadership, peaceful resistance techniques, and for being a worldwide inspiration. Similarly, Nelson Mandela was instrumental in the abolition of apartheid in South Africa and he “created a framework for

²⁵ Ira Mathur, “Gandhi, Tagore Leave T&T Spellbound” (Trinidad: Trinidad and Tobago Guardian, 2011).

peace and social justice in South Africa and around the world” even winning the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1993.²⁶ But while these two globally recognized and honoured men were integral in the freedom and independence of their countries, why were they honoured in Trinidad with a statue and a park dedicated to them? Could it have been that the government felt as though the country needed to honour them, just as the rest of the world was? While Butler and Mighty Sparrow were born in Grenada, the statues that were constructed in their honour can be justified by historians who can provide evidence that these two men contributed to the political and cultural developments of Trinidad and Tobago, respectively, unlike Gandhi and Mandela.

The public is allowed to question how Gandhi and Mandela were recognised with a monument and the naming of a site in Trinidad, but a prominent and acclaimed figure like Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul has never been considered. V.S. Naipaul also received a Nobel Prize, like Nelson Mandela, "for having united perceptive narrative and incorruptible scrutiny in works that compel us to see the presence of suppressed histories", according to the academy, and was also knighted in 1990, for his contributions to literature. Though, Naipaul indeed was a controversial character, the government could have also honoured him after death, despite his flaws, seeing that the continue to allow the statue of Christopher Columbus in the capital of the country, when the population and the entire world knows of his atrocities and his obvious racism. Though the government clearly has no intention of erecting a statue of Naipaul or naming one of their buildings after the Nobel Prize winner, the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine has recognised his creativity and brilliance and has named one of its buildings after him. This also shows that it is a fair claim that those who are wealthy and are from a higher social class in

²⁶ Jarrod Sadulski, “Celebrating the Life and Contributions of Nelson Mandela” (USA: American Public University, 2022).

society can be honoured by the naming of buildings or other sites. Examples include V.S Naipaul Centre and John F. Kennedy Auditorium in UWI, St. Augustine, and the Roodal Cemetery in San Fernando, after a pioneering figure in business, the owner of an oil company, a politician, and a member on the Borough Council.

CHAPTER THREE

The Rhodes Movement, Black Lives Matter and Cancel Culture

*“We, here on our islands, handling books printed in this world and using its goods, had been abandoned and forgotten. We pretended to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men of the new world, one unknown corner of it, with all its reminders of the corruption that came so quickly to the new.” – VS Naipaul, *Mimic Men*, 2001*

In the 21st century, the three listed social movements which have become prominent very quickly, due to several factors including globalization through technology. The *Rhodes Movement*, *Black Lives Matter*, and *Cancel Culture* have tremendously impacted the Caribbean. Recently, the current generation, Generation Z, has become more aware of the histories and developments of their cultures, and hence have started advocating for a series of injustices and problems that they encounter and observe. Admittedly, some of these movements are formed without real causes or knowledge which leads to misinformation and even more hateful or discriminatory actions of those who are involved. Fortunately, the three movements are supported by many organisations, scholars, and those who wish to see change in society, though *Cancel Culture* seems to be more of a nuisance than supported by those who witness and experience examples of those who become involved in the movement, in one way or another.

The *Rhodes Movement*, which is more popularly known as the *Rhodes Must Fall* movement, started as a protest at the University of Cape Town in March 2015. The marches quickly spread to several other campuses in South Africa.²⁷ The protest was directed against removing the statue of Cecil Rhodes, a prominent white supremacist in South Africa of the

²⁷ Amit Chaudhuri, “The Real Meaning of Rhodes Must Fall | Amit Chaudhuri” (UK: The Guardian, 2016).

colonial era. The organisation emerged victorious in their mission of having the statue of Rhodes removed, just one month after the campaign began, and gained swift popularity within its first year- with students at Oxford University, in London, being inspired to doing the same to the Rhodes statue at the Oriel College.²⁸ The movement has been prevalent since its conception in 2015 and in 2020, it became even more widespread, as a result of the Black Lives Matter movement- which energised several campaigns that assess the colonial past of many colonies.²⁹

The *Black Lives Matter* (BLM) movement was established in 2013, in USA, in response to the acquittal and injustice of Trayvon Martin’s murder in 2013. The foundation’s mission is to “eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes”.³⁰ The BLM movement is a political and social movement that aims to highlight the injustice, racism and discrimination that black communities are forced to experience- at the hands of those who are supposed to protect them, mostly, like the police force. Like the Rhodes Must Fall campaign, the Black Lives Matter movement also became popular very quickly, in the United States and it spread to several countries who were outraged at the events that clearly displayed discrimination against minority ethnic groups, particularly African Americans, but not excluding the highlighting of Asians, the native peoples, and the other immigrant groups in the US.

Cancel Culture is described as a “process of publicly calling for accountability, and boycotting if nothing else seems to work which has become an important tool of social justice — a way of combatting, through collective action, some of the huge power imbalances that often exist between public figures with far-reaching platforms and audiences, and the people and

²⁸ Chaudhuri, “Rhodes Must Fall”.

²⁹ Timalisina, “Why Rhodes Must Fall”.

³⁰ Black Lives Matter, “About Black Lives Matter” (USA: Black Lives Matter, 2013).

communities their words and actions may harm”.³¹ This culture has been popular on social media, where platform users go into an uproar when a celebrity or some public figure says or does something that offends or displeases specific groups in particular. Thus, it can be suggested that this cancel culture has been fuelling the Rhodes and Black Lives Matter movements, where the younger generations aim to cancel or “effectively...revoke the cultural cachet”³² of the colonial figures who are still represented in the countries that they invaded and even globally. Closely linked to this cancel culture that aims to completely remove these characters from society is the term “woke”. In the past, the term simply was the past tense of the verb ‘wake’ as in to awaken, but recently, the term “woke” emerged as a slang in the black community and progressively became an integral term in society and has been used in movements which speak out against racial injustices against the black community, in 2014, after the brutal murder of Michael Brown in Missouri, in the United States, by police officers. As it is still not defined in a scholarly thesaurus, the only real definition of the term, in the context that it originated is, “to be informed, educated and conscious of social injustice and racial inequality”.³³ The American government, during the presidency of Donald Trump, has criticised the term and the movement, but it remains a term which tells the members of the public to continue being aware of the social and racial justices of their everyday lives, and it continues to be a complex and controversial term that is closely linked to the discussions about activism and social justice.

From the interviews that were conducted for this analysis, the general population who lack understanding and knowledge of the history of Trinidad and Tobago- and the Caribbean-

³¹ Aja Romano, ““What Is Cancel Culture? Why We Keep Fighting about Canceling People” (Washington: Vox Media, 2020).

³² Romano, “What is Cancel Culture”.

³³ Kiara Alfonseca, “What Does ‘Woke’ Mean and Why Are Some Conservatives Using It?” (New York: ABC News, 2023).

and who doesn't follow the social movements that are launched and become widespread, internationally, seem to believe that Trinidad is not influenced by global cultures and movements. This position can be disputed by several historians, including Debbie McCollin, a lecturer at the University of the West Indies, who supports the argument that the Caribbean is easily persuaded by international movements that attract attention. According to McCollin, the Black Lives Matter movement which strongly emerged again in 2020, was an "incredible resurrection" of a movement that was deeply rooted in the Black Power Movement and Pan Africanism in the Caribbean in the 20th century.³⁴ Though it seemed new to the region, due to the public's ignorance and absence of insight of the Caribbean identities, the islands were easily persuaded in getting involved because the West Indian population was now becoming "woke". A very practical example of the Caribbean public becoming motivated to jump on the bandwagon of the BLM movement occurred in June 2020, when millions of social media users shared black blocks to their accounts with several hashtags, speaking out against racial discrimination across the world, including *#blackouttuesday* and *#blackouttoday2020*. Though the ubiquitous movements across the globe have been influential to the Caribbean, it is important to note that in Trinidad, specifically, there have been figures who have been continually working behind the scenes for these changes in the society like Brinsley Samaroo and Khafra Kambon, important individuals who were fundamental to the Black Power Movement marches in Trinidad in the 20th century.

However, McCollin, and others, including Teelucksingh, have questioned the impacts of removing these colonial statues and monuments and the renaming of streets in Trinidad and

³⁴ UWI St. Augustine, Department of History, "Let's Talk History! Episode 2: Black Lives Matter Movement, Study of History by Dr. Debbie McCollin" (Trinidad: YouTube, 2021).

Tobago. Teelucksingh wondered whether these permanent changes of removing statues and renaming streets would be able to “lower levels of poverty and unemployment” or “improve gender relations or reduce illiteracy”.³⁵ Using the information from the interviews, all of the interviewees shared the view that these changes would not have any real impact on the population and should not be made. The general feedback reflected that while making these changes may display Trinidad as a culturally and historically aware nation to the international audience and acts as a form of resistance against the lingering presence of Europeans in the country, these permanent changes bring more challenges than positives. Three major disadvantages expressed were: the confusion that would plague the nation as the population would have to readjust to the renaming of the streets in particular, the fear of the population erasing history and removing the reminders of the progress that the country had made, and lastly, the challenges of who should be honoured in the progress, which has been proven to be difficult.

Brinsley Samaroo emphasised he does not share in this perspective, as he had been present during the period of the country transitioning to a republic and the many challenges that the population encountered in their fight for their liberties and against racial discrimination. Samaroo believed that for us to truly be independent, “we must look inwardly and honour local people who we can identify with”, as he strongly advocates for these changes. According to him, he believes that these names have profound psychological effects on people, while naming places in Trinidad like “Jackass Alley”, “Trumakark” and “Snake Alley”, claiming that these names do not inspire the people in their environment. Making these changes is important, according to Samaroo, because it would bring awareness to the population who do not know the meanings of the names of the places where they live, for example, “Trumakark”, in West Trinidad, means

³⁵ Teelucksingh, “A Fragmented Caribbean Empire”, 6.

‘monkey hole’ which has a racist connotation behind it, seeing as the names were “given in the colonial era to suppress the people and their spirits”.³⁶ Samaroo believes that these changes are necessary for the uplifting, consciousness, and awareness of the society to their history and for their growth of appreciation for the society that exists today.

³⁶ Interview with Brinsley Samaroo, UWI, St. Augustine, 13 December 2022.

CONCLUSION

In examining the social movement surrounding the removal of colonial statues and renaming streets in Trinidad, it is reasonable to argue that the removal of these statues and the renaming of the streets may be impactful in bringing awareness to the history of Trinidad. This process will highlight the atrocities of the European figures who these emblems were dedicated to, but the population of Trinidad will not be directly affected or necessarily gain anything by these changes. To support this claim, Brinsley Samaroo and four students were interviewed, with the intention of obtaining their true perspectives on the current situation in Trinidad. The interviews of the students reflected that the population is unconscious of the lingering presence of Europeans in the country, which was implemented to suppress the local population. Chapter 1 indicated a few European factors that are encountered in everyday life, including religion, language, music, the education system, and laws.

Local and regional historians still raise the question of why Eric Williams made the decision to not have the colonial monuments and street names replaced, honouring local icons and contributors to the society. Today, in the 21st century, the population continues to interact with these effigies, while lacking the knowledge of the county's history and the development of the cultural identity, and recently, the movement has also opened the discussion of who should be honoured with statues, street and building names, to name a few. Chapter 2 discussed this phenomenon, as the issue of having names of other international figures, who had no direct impact on the independence of Trinidad being honoured, namely Mohandas Gandhi and Nelson Mandela. While this is an interesting topic for discussion, the public and many historians have highlighted that the statues and street names that are of local icons are no inclusive. The

argument is that the entire Trinidadian population is not reflected by the changes that have been made thus far, specifically questioning why the changed names and monuments are mostly of public individuals who were of African descent, while excluding those of minority groups and even the East Indians, to a large extent.

It was also obvious that Trinidad is easily influenced by global movements, including the Rhodes movement and the Black Lives Matter movement and the Cancel culture and “Woke” culture, as supported by Debbie McCollin. The people remain ignorant of the country’s history and the Caribbean’s identities, and so they become involved in everything which has gathered tremendous attention, as seen clearly in 2020 when the BLM movement was quickly revamped. While chapter 3 discusses three main movements which influenced the world and the Caribbean, the consequences of the government making these permanent changes were also examined. From the interviews conducted, it shows that the country still remains unsure of the impacts, while many citizens are strictly against these changes because it does not necessarily bring any real changes and benefits to the population, other than awareness. All in all, while making these changes are forms of resistance against the Europeans, even today, they still do not bring about real change in Trinidad and thus, should be reconsidered or further researched.

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APPENDIX A

Topic: "An examination of the social movement surrounding the removal of colonial statues and renaming streets in Trinidad (2020- 2022)"

My name is Ronallisa Preddie, a final year student, who is doing a Caribbean thesis on the social movement of removing the colonial statues and renaming streets in Trinidad and Tobago. I would greatly appreciate if you could take the time to complete this questionnaire for my investigation, as I aim to include the general population, who may have little interest and knowledge regarding history or social problems. Your responses will be anonymous and only used for research purposes. Thank you.

Questionnaire:

1. The "Black Lives Matter" in the USA has pushed the movement to change names and monuments in the USA. Do you feel this has affected Trinidad and Tobago?
2. "Trinidad is influenced by foreign movements." Do you agree?
3. Should Trinidad and Tobago include themselves in the movements of removing these European statues and renaming streets?
4. How do you feel about removing the statues?
5. Do you feel that statues of local personalities should be created?
6. Do you believe that renaming streets is important?
7. How does these changes impact Trinidad and its people today?
8. How will renaming a street help the population of Trinidad and Tobago?
9. How will removing a statue help citizens of Trinidad and Tobago?

Figure A: Image showing a sample of the questionnaire used for the research

