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**ARCHITECTURE AND IDENTITY: A STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF
IMMIGRANTS ON THE ARCHITECTURE OF TRINIDAD**

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ABSTRACT

This project focuses on identity in Trinidad and in particular how it is portrayed by architecture. It looks at the different human experiences which inform their perception of self and how it relates to their built environment. The aim of the study is to provide evidence of displays of identity through architecture by looking at the historical, socioeconomical and cultural exchanges of different peoples that comprise Trinidadian society. The paper is an analysis of the arrival and settlement of different ethnic and racial groups to the island from its earliest peoples to the present. The purpose of this study is to highlight the relationship between people and architecture as a complex phenomenon that is further compounded by both internal forces (the individual) and external factors (time and culture).

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INTRODUCTION

Thesis Topic

The connection between Architecture and Identity as they relate to the influence of the Amerindian, Spanish, French, British, African, East Indian and American peoples in Trinidad from pre-Columbian times to the present.

Rationale

This study started out as a personal and professional inquiry into the architecture of Trinidad. As a student of interior design, I found that the focus of the architectural and design courses offered at my school were not diverse enough. They mostly centred around a Eurocentric culture and narrative with which I found it difficult to identify. I did not intend to cover such a broad topic however, once I started, I knew that I had to widen the scope. It is my intention that this paper can be a form of reference to anyone interested in the field of architecture and design and in particular, The design and architecture of Trinidad.

Method and Structure

The paper is organised in four chapters. Chapter one—Identity Interrupted, addresses the arrival of two major groups to the island— the Amerindians and the Spanish. Firstly, the manner in which Amerindians established identity through architecture among themselves was looked at. Then the ways in which the Spanish used the built environment establish dominion. The second chapter—Plantation Identity describes the incorporation of two groups responsible for one of the

biggest change to the physical environment of the island. The infusion of the French and the British to the Amerindian- Spanish composition brings about many architectural displays of identity as they navigate the rise of a plantation economy. Chapter three— Identity Crisis looks at the Africans’ and East Indians’ attempts at identification and architecture on a personal and national level. Lastly the Americans’ influence on the future of architectural identity in Trinidad.

The main text used was “ The Indigenous Peoples of Trinidad and Tobago From the First Settlers Until Today” by Arie Boomert. . It chronologically and comprehensively follows the different people who settle the island. To understand the meaning of identity, an article by Linn Song titled “ The Muenster City Library: The Politics of Identity and Place” was used. It provided a synopsis of the psychology of identity and the built environment. A better understanding of the social, economic, cultural and political dynamic of Trinidad in the early 20th century, Bridget Brereton’s “Contesting the Past: Narratives of Trinidad & Tobago History” gave much clarity and food for thought in analysing the complexity of the societal construct of Trinidad. Leniqueca Welcome’s “Class Status and Identity in the Trinidadian House: A Semantic Reading of the Typical Trinidadian House, Across Class levels, with Emphasis on Facade Design” was an in-depth argument that closely aligned with my topic. Her paper was used as a reference for illustrations and other primary source material that related to the themes of my study. Another Thesis project that revealed important sources was Naqiyah Assin’s “The influence of the French immigrants during Spanish colonialism, on the aesthetics of architecture in Trinidad. An interview with local Brian Lewis, the son of Trinidad’s famous architect, Anthony Lewis provided historic and cultural context and ideas on the contemporary state of architecture from his personal view as a member of the field. “Historic architecture in the Caribbean Islands” by Edward Crain was used

for illustrations and historical context. Concise detailed illustrations and text from Lawrence Waldron helped to understand the features of Trinidadian architecture. General historical facts and photos were gleaned from various government services such as The national Archives of the UK and The National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago.

In his essay “The Muenster City Library, The Politics of Identity and Place” Linn Song states,

Our understanding, perception, and cognition of the physical environment often begin with the visual image. The comprehension of the image depends on our ability to sort, compare, and contrast, for example, a new environmental intervention to our individual visual/aesthetic experiences of the past. Often, an ideological image based on a nostalgic understanding of the past (not necessarily our own) serves as the gauge against which the new is judged. The physical environment of the city is not only the objective evidence of our existence but also becomes a manifestation of one’s identity, as part of a perceived collective/cultural narrative (Song 12).

He is saying that human beings rely on what they see around them to make sense of their relationship with their surroundings and they use their findings to classify themselves in relation to the greater whole. He furthers that history and personal experiences influence what we grasp about our physical world. Places may be influenced by external factors as people move from one place to the next. The use of architecture as a means of identity is therefore unavoidable.

According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, shelter is one of mankind's fundamental needs for survival. By building physical structures in the environment man was able to protect himself not only from the elements but from danger such as animal predators and potential rivals. These

structures differed from place to place depending on the climate, technology and the type of society and became a part of our physical environment. Furthermore, these learned habits are passed down through generations and eventually become norms and inform culture. Culture has a direct impact on the built environment because it encompasses, “The values, customs, beliefs and symbolic practices by which men and women live.” (Eagleton 1).

Early Americans were often nomadic typically building structures of materials that were not permanent because they lacked the tools and technology to create more lasting structures. They would sometimes carry what materials they needed with them or leave what they could not take or deemed unnecessary. This would depend on the climate, difficulty of construction and availability of materials. An example of this is witnessed in Native North American tribes, who would customarily reuse the poles needed for their tipis from place to place because they had to travel long distances to harvest these poles from trees that were scarce in their domain. They erected tepees – conical dwellings out of the poles and animal skins they harvested from hunting. These tepees might have differed from tribe to tribe depending on a number of factors such as location and temperature however these structures identified them. African Pygmies on the other hand, assembled abodes out of rods and leaves from readily available trees in the dense forests of Equatorial Africa. Unlike the North American natives, the homes created by the Africans were never deconstructed and reintroduced elsewhere because there was an abundant supply of the materials required for construction and as such it was more sensible to leave the old housing behind and conserve the energy it would have taken to transport materials from place to place (Ireland 2). This is a major identifying trait of the tribe. The structures they built informed who they were as a people.

‘A House for Mr. Biswas’ by Nobel Laureate Sir V.S. Naipaul is a metaphoric and tragic tale of self-determination in which the house is a symbol of independence and identity (Naipaul). The identity for which Mr. Biswas is continuously searching is akin to Trinidad’s own continual struggle in search of a national architectural style. Brian Lewis, a local architect and son of the renowned Anthony Lewis in an interview for this paper noted that there was a general, “lack of appreciation for architecture in Trinidad and Tobago” (Lewis)¹ He attributes this to a no interest in the fine arts and the fact that tourism is not a major focus in the country so holding on to the historic built environment was a struggle for preservationists like himself who were trying to document old structures of historic value before they disappear. He believes that architecture could have identifying characteristics of a place and its people, but it could be problematic because of the different ethnicities that make up the Trinidadian community. This Paper argues that the Amerindian, Spanish, French, British, African, East Indian and American peoples all used architecture as a form of identity throughout history from pre-Columbian times to the present.

¹ Recoded unpublished interview with the architect Lewis.

CHAPTER ONE

Identity Interrupted

The Amerindians

Archaeologists believe that pre-Columbian peoples migrated in different waves from south America to the Caribbean islands from as early as 9000–8000 BCE when Trinidad was still a part of the South American continent because of artifacts found in Central Trinidad. Not much is known about these groups other than they were identified by the type of tools they used which were similar to that of other tribes on the mainland (Boomert 16). Additionally, cooking utensils revealed differences in diet of the early natives (Banwari and Warao) which led to the conclusion that there was a number of different ethnic indigenous people at different times (17). Ceramic studies classified other groups as ancestors of Arawak and Kali'na people (24) who would later be known as Arawaks, Kalinagos or Caribs. Evidence shows that two major dwelling areas of these early Trinidadians; Banwari Trace and St. John, existed in what is today the southern edge of the Oropuche Lagoon in southwest Trinidad. Excavated evidence has been analysed and studied resulting in a better understanding of the culture of the early inhabitants of the island. The discovery of different tools used by the people suggests that the groups were quite diverse and in fact, were hunters, fishers as well as horticulturalists (17).

Many tribes settled near sources of water as fishing was a major part of their livelihood while other settlements were organized around small gardens called “swiddens” (18)². Around these gardens semi-permanent shelters were erected to house the communities. One lesser-known tribe called the Warao inhabited parts of Trinidad around 1600 (23). Their villages were small and usually consisted of a small number of rectilinear open pile structures (24) (see fig. 1). They constructed their buildings using the moriche palm tree where the trunk for pillars and the leaves for thatching. Some archaeological studies have identified that Amerindian villages on the island of Trinidad were centred around a rectangular courtyard with several oval shaped buildings (see fig. 2) around its perimeter (27). Another group of natives were categorized as Arawak due to their linguistic patterns. The Kalinago or Caribs settled Trinidad during one of the later waves of migration. It is believed that Caribs, a warlike tribe settled in northern Trinidad and were met by Christopher Columbus on his third voyage to the Americas in 1498 (Beckles 77).

There was a complex form of hierarchy among different tribes and distinct roles for each class and gender. At the top of the chain there was a chief often referred to as the cacique (69). This person held the most power in the tribe and was allowed to have more than one wife and is perhaps the reason his dwelling was larger than the other homes as homes could be used to identify social station and authority (Ireland 1). Next were the priests or shamans who conducted religious

² horticultural plots, generally less than a hectare in size, which were tilled systematically and planted with a small number of ground provisions, seed crops and fruit trees.

ceremonies, followed by warriors, farmers and fishermen respectively. Many tribes practiced communal living and structures were built to house many different families at a time (Boomert 48). In Trinidad utilized local raw materials to erect circular and sometimes rectangular shelters called “Ajoupas” which consisted of roughly cut tree trunk posts which were enclosed with “tapia”- a mixture of straw and mud (108). Roofs were constructed with palm leaves. John Newel Lewis believes that the “Ajoupa” is the foundation of Trinidadian vernacular architecture in that it was a simple yet functional form of shelter that was uniquely adapted to the climate of the island and suited the needs of its original peoples. The tightly woven palm leaves of the conical roof (Boomert 48), served to repel the heavy rains that drenched the region during the wet seasons and kept the scorching sunlight at bay during the dry months. The walls were sturdy to withstand strong winds but were often aerated between horizontally stacked logs to allow ventilation. Some shelters boasted openings on the sides to let in more breezes. Airflow was also aided by the single opening at the front of the house that remained unobstructed. Some versions of the “ajoupa” were raised on stilts. This was another way that the Amerindians were able to control the temperature in the extremely humid conditions that prevailed.



(Fig. 1). *Rectangular Ajoupa*, Waldron.



(Fig. 2). *Oval Ajoupa* Waldron

The Spanish Arrive

In the late 1400s, Spain was solidifying herself as a powerful leader throughout Europe because of royal alliance between Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand. Spain, a catholic nation was bent on unifying its country under one Christian banner by the formation of the Spanish Inquisition which was responsible for the expulsion of the Moors and Jews from the Iberian Peninsula (Encyclopaedia Britannica). It is during this period that Christopher Columbus is granted permission and aid from the Spanish Crown to find an alternate route to India. Subsequently, Columbus never found his way to India via the new route he had proposed. Instead, he came upon the Americas which set off a sequence of events that changed the world. He would embark on three voyages in the name of Spain greatly expanding the Spanish territory. In 1498, Columbus spotted the island which is now called Trinidad. There he encountered the native Carib peoples. Accounts of the initial meeting of the Spaniards with the locals are contradictory (Boomert 83). Some reports proclaim that the natives of the island of Trinidad were peaceful while other reports indicate they were hostile. These identities ascribed to the natives by the interlopers was used to

justify their treatment of the Amerindians. If they resisted subjugation or inhabited places that had economic value, they would be labelled hostile and subsequently be eliminated. On early voyages Europeans traded with the Amerindians. The Spanish were known to benefit from a thriving pearl trade on Trinidadian shores before overfishing drove them elsewhere (84). They attempted unsuccessfully to settle the island at first to facilitate this trade but the lack of mineral resources like gold that had been discovered on other islands as well as the numerous wars with the natives prevented the Spanish from truly developing the island for many years (87). Although not much is recorded about the structure of buildings erected by the Spanish, early depictions relate that the Spanish built fortresses made of mud (89). This was due to the fierce resistance of the locals and a need for security against other European interlopers.

During the 15th century Europe was undergoing its rebirth. Classical architecture was the desired style prevalent among the wealthy. However, this style was not transported to Trinidad by the Spanish. Instead, missions were erected on the island and were supposed to resemble miniature versions of Spanish towns and were suited to the needs of the few Spaniards who controlled the island. The Spanish were keen on converting the native Amerindian tribes because they thought that it was their spiritual duty. Being extremely religious they usually organized the settlement around a square with a church situated on its eastern side and store houses with food stocks and agricultural instruments would be located near the church. The other communal buildings, such as the casa de cabildo for village meetings and craft shops, were often to be found on the north side of the plaza. The church, which was invariably east–west oriented, dominated the village. The walls were made of tapia and featured thatched roofs, with statues of coloured wood inside while the Amerindian multi-family houses were laid out in an orderly pattern within the mission's

confines. These quarters designed for the indigenous peoples by the Spanish were rectangular unlike the round dwellings they created for themselves (Boomert 133). The different approaches to the composition of the abodes by the Spanish and the Amerindians themselves indicates both groups had different views of the classification of indigenous people. Furthermore, social ideas such as the hierarchy of the multi-ethnic society can be inferred by looking at the distinctive elements of living quarters. It demonstrates that the Spaniards held a dominant role on the island.

An 18th century fantasy engraving published in Edward Cavendish Drake's "A New Universal Collection of Authentic and Entertaining Voyages and Travels..." (qtd. in Boomert 102) (see fig. 3), illustrates what a Spanish prison might have looked like at the time. The prison appears to be constructed of masonry walls supported by a series of unadorned columns and arches. There is a wooden door at the entrance fastened together by nails as well as an arched transom over the door with what appears to be metal bars which resemble most buildings of confinement. If the drawing were to be a true representation of the time period it sought to convey then it would be the earliest attempt at articulating Spanish dominion on the island of Trinidad by using architectural vocabulary that closely resembled a European building.



(Fig. 3). 18th Century Engraving, Boomert

St Joseph, first capital of Trinidad, was founded by Antonio de Berrio in 1592. It remained relatively in squalor for much of the 1600s and displayed a combination of public buildings and some small wattle-and-daub houses made of earth stamped solid, which they called tapias, featuring roofs with thatch or other combustible material. The floors were often made of a mixture of clay, dried grass and dung (108). After many hardships including Amerindian attacks and disease, the Spanish government sought to rescue Trinidad from its improvised state. In 1783 the *Cedula* of Population was a treaty established to entice mostly French plantation owners from neighbouring islands like Guadeloupe to immigrate to the island (142). They had hoped that the French who were already successful farmers in the region, would help them make Trinidad a prosperous Spanish colony.

CHAPTER TWO

Plantation Identity

The French

In the late 18th century, the new *Cedula* decreed by the Spanish crown would intensify the existing policies that granted land to other Catholic nations on the island of Trinidad (Newson 139). The dwindling white Spanish and Amerindian populations was infused with new white French plantation owners and their African slaves. This brought an infusion of new cultures and further stratification of the races on the island as well as the formation of a new class system (Welcome 13). The new immigrants included French whites, mixed race people and African slaves. Bridget Brereton describes this phenomenon as the French Creole narrative. There was a unique relationship between the French masters and their African slaves where the slaves were afforded a balance of kindness and firmness by their masters. The French Creole went on to become the elite ruling class on the island which was one of the early signs of the division of race and class in Trinidad (Brereton 172).

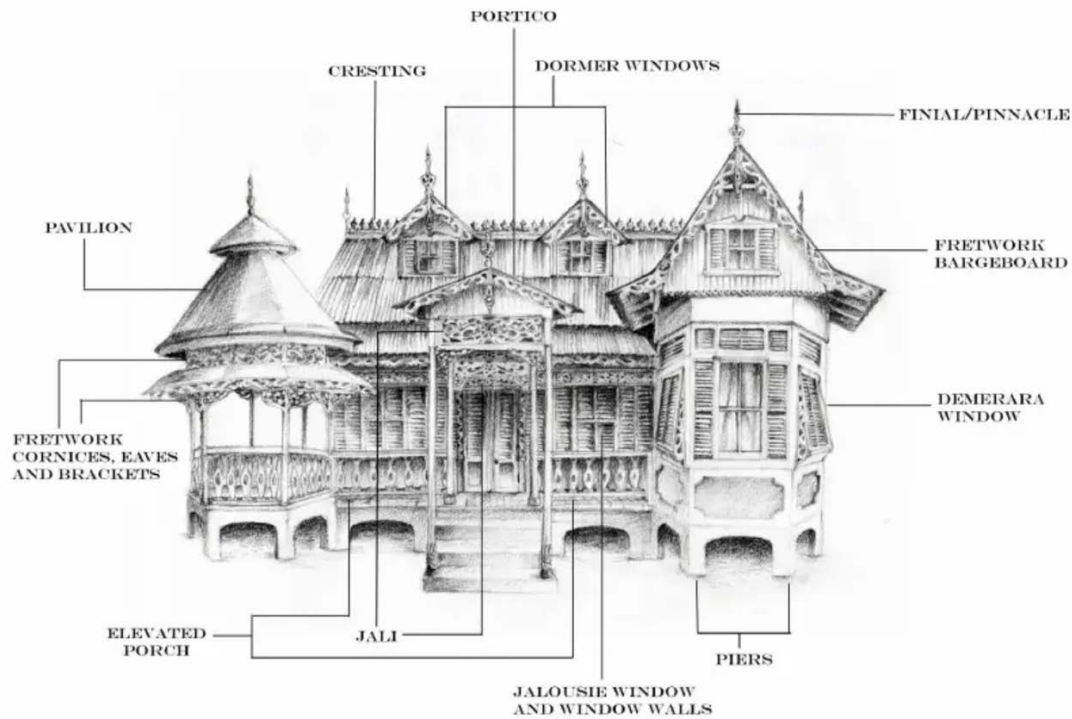
Under the economic leadership of the French the island was transformed into a flourishing agricultural and commercial powerhouse. The Spanish government also allowed free and fugitive slaves to make a living on the island. However, instead of the tax incentives given to the white Catholics they were required to pay up to six times the amount in order to stay in Trinidad. Subsequently, class, race and wealth all contributed to the complex web of the cultural environment during the late 1700s. The French who first arrived in the Caribbean were not the

same as the Spanish and British counterparts who tended to be criminals and outcasts. Instead, they were mostly former members of the aristocracy who readily migrated to the region to escape persecution back in France as France was undergoing political and social revolution at the time. Unlike the Spanish who were mostly searching for *El Dorado* and had little interest in staying in the New World after making their fortunes, the French set about to create a new society for themselves (Brereton 172). They asserted themselves as a cultured class of elites and required what they thought would identify them as such. Their wealth afforded them access to products from Europe including construction materials to erect buildings suited to their tastes. Soon the French style emerged as the new upper-class identifier in Trinidad's architecture. According to John Newel Lewis it was derived from the combination of French architectural taste and the local vernacular style (qtd. in Welcome 14). Some of the features included more permanent looking stone buildings adorned with fretwork and mansard roofs and as the population increased so too did the need for more buildings to house people on the island. The population explosion led to Trinidad becoming a commercial hub by the end of the 18th century (Newson 139).

Colonial architecture in the Caribbean islands came about as a direct result of the different peoples who migrated to the region over the years. At first, styles travelled from Europe to combine with the existing native Amerindian structure to form a distinct type of architecture that adapted to the unique cultures, climate, the physical environment, and the availability of raw materials (Waldron 61). Like much of Europe, the style and organization of different edifices were treated in distinct ways. Palladio's concepts on the suitability that must be maintained in private residences (Palladio 3), speaks to the ideas of using architecture as a sense of identity. The new elite concerned themselves with establishing their position in society by mimicking as best as they could the

common trends set forth by Europe at the time. Often these styles were behind their European origins by a season or two because of distance. Nonetheless, Caribbean towns soon became littered with buildings that indicated influence from overseas architecture such as the Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo, Neo-Classical, Gothic Revival and Victorian styles (Waldon 61).

One style that proliferated throughout the early 19th century was the Trinidadian gingerbread house (see fig. 4) —a cacophony of different cultural tastes that eventually became the go-to option for residential buildings (Waldon 63). The French influence is visible in the sloping pavilions on the roofs, intricate fretwork, demerara windows and dormer windows. The portico which was a common feature of some homes in France provided shade from the elements at the main entrance of the building and was adorned with fancy expertly crafted ornament such as finials and latticework to signify the status of the owners. Wraparound verandas typically appeared in gingerbread constructions as they were a way for plantation owners to keep watch over their plantations. They were essentially the indoor/outdoor design feature of the time and location.



(Fig. 4). *Gingerbread House*, Waldron.

Demerara windows (see fig. 5) sometimes used were an adaptation to the climate and provided privacy to the household. They were louvered windows without glass equipped with a hinged shutter at the top of the window that could be opened to let air into the house. The window was usually propped open by a wooden stick and contained an outer box around its frame that was pierced with elaborate latticework (Waldon 68). These wooden louvers called *jalousie* (see fig.6) aided with natural lighting and aeration and provided a view to the outside without compromising privacy. In fact, louvered doors and walls were also a popular aesthetic of the French as they provided the same benefits of the windows with the same features.



(Fig. 5) *Demerara Windows*, Waldron



(Fig. 6) House with *Jalousie Windows and Doors*,
Waldron



(Fig. 7) *Ajoupa Elevated off the Ground*, Waldron

Thermal regulation was achieved by balancing the structure on pillars (see fig. 7). The Amerindian peoples exploited a technique that was especially helpful to keep the home dry particularly, in low lying areas in the event of flooding that could occur as a result of heavy tropical rainfall that is typical of the climate in Trinidad. This feature was adopted by the different classes across the Trinidadian society in different ways according to what was affordable to the individual. It was also responsible for temperature control as the space below the house allowed breezes to flow underneath the house causing a cooling effect (64).



(Fig. 8) House with *Jalousie Windows and Doors*, The National Trust of T&T

The apotheosis of the gingerbread house is displayed in Boissiere House. (see fig. 8). The house was built in 1904 and designed by the architect Edward Bowen, a personal friend of the owner, C.E.H Boissière. It included all the trappings of the popular vernacular variety of house. Not only did the house boast bright eye-catching colours but also its grand size and profuse ornamentation served to draw the attention of passers-by. The house is located in the ritzy Queen's Park Savannah area. This area is flat grassland situated in the heart of the city center of Trinidad which was purchased by the Cabildo on the direction of Sir Ralph Woodford from the Peschier family in the early half of the 1800s. The area became a relief from the burgeoning city and is known to have been a major recreational ground for activities such as horseracing since the early 19th century (National trust of Trinidad and Tobago). The buildings around the Savannah belonged to an elite few who could afford to purchase the land in that area.

The roof of the house is a myriad of sloping highly pitched sides covered in green slate with pagoda-like domes all embellished with pointed finials of differing heights giving the home a romanticized gothic and exotic appearance. The materials used were slate, stone, wood, wrought iron and marble. The pagodas were added to the design at the behest of the owner who on his travels to Britain was enamoured with the chinoiserie he saw at the Great London Exhibition (Welcome 35). Attention to detail by the architect was seen in the broken quatrefoil encasement over the upper dormer window at the center of the house. The dormer windows at the upper level are arched while the lower ones feature *jalousie* louvers. The building exhibits elaborate fretwork on the ceiling of the curvilinear pagoda that forms part of the covered outdoor area and the majestic front portico that graces the main entrance to the home. All of these adornments were essential in demonstrating the class and wealth of the owner.

Another example of French inspired architecture in Trinidad is Roomor, or Ambard's House (see fig. 11). It was constructed in 1904 by Lucien Ambard from a pattern book (see fig. 9) of designs by a French designer for a wealthy family. Ever since Vitruvius documented his ideas on design in the middle ages, people have been interested copying architectural designs. The advent of the printing press in the mid 1400s facilitated the distribution of designs across nations and eventually across borders (Historical Styles II Spring 2020).³ The elite community of Trinidad strove to establish their rank in society by commissioning lavish residences that resembled the mansions of Europe. Houses were often a multi-layered compilation of different styles. Roomor House is one such depiction of this eclecticism (Crain 108). The home displayed exquisite materials such as marble imported from Italy, French tile and Scottish cast iron (The National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago). Although the house displays many baroque flourishes it is considered Second Empire Style which was the New World's interpretation of the Empire Style of France. In France the Empire Style arose out of the French Revolution as Napoleon sought to use architecture to identify France as great nation by constructing monumental buildings which often incorporated classical forms associated with powerful ancient civilizations. Architectural styles of America describes the Second Empire style (see fig. 10) as

Italianate style and massing with a Mansard roof. The Mansard is the key feature that typically allows for a quick identification. Often includes dormer windows in the upper floor, providing light behind the Mansard roof. Sometimes includes a square, central tower, decorative brackets, and moulded cornice. Expect to see similar Italianate details on and

³ History course at the New York School of Interior Design.

around windows and doors. The floor plan often includes pavilions, which are outward projections of a building's center or side (Architectural Styles of America).



(Fig. 9) *Pattern Books*, Architectural Styles of America

Roomor House displays a dark grey slate mansard roof with a staccato of dormer windows with either oval or arched glass inserts. Each window is heavily ornamented with white mouldings that contrast with the dark colour of the roof. There is a dome on one side of the house that covers a circular room on the second floor. Both the upper and lower floors display balconies adorned with balustrades of elaborately curving metalwork. French louvered windows which also appear on the upper and lower levels which balance the appearance of the predominantly asymmetric form of the building. This residence was designed to convey wealth and class by the owners by appropriating European style. The Eurocentric focus of the built environment in Trinidad at the

time was a direct result of the stratified culture that established the white European minority at the top of society and the other races especially the African slaves at the very bottom. Similarly, Courtney Micots describes the colonial architecture of Ghana as having elements of both local and European architectural features. He argues, “that the motivations for such cultural appropriations are complex and require a deep understanding of the social, political, and economic contexts in which the houses were built” (Micots 41).



(Fig. 10) *Second Empire Style*, WordPress.com (Fig. 11) *Roomor House*, National Trust of T&T

The British

In 1797 when the British captured Trinidad, the island was a flourishing agricultural center. The French had transformed the economy and culture with their arrival and expert farm management and free labour provided by slaves. Trinidad became a major cocoa exporter in the region and was said to produce high quality cocoa (Boomert 143). As mentioned earlier, there was a complex racial, cultural and socio-economic structure already existing on the island. However, under British rule the hierarchy changed. The once elite French Creole people many of mixed race were marginalized by racist and prejudicial policies that discriminated against persons

with slave ancestry and those of the Catholic faith (Brereton 173). Many coloured landowners lost their farms to the newly governing British who set about initiating themselves as the new dominant figures in Trinidadian society.

The influence of the British on architecture in Trinidad can be seen in Killarney. Killarney or Stollmeyer's Castle (see fig. 12) was built between 1902-1904 for Charles Fourier Stollmeyer and designed by the Scottish architect Robert Gillies. The house is Scottish Baronial in architectural style and was modelled after Balmoral Castle (see fig. 13) in Scotland (The National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago). Balmoral castle was built for Queen Victoria and Prince Albert in 1856 (Architectural Digest). Stollmeyer's Castle is constructed of sand coloured brick with a blue-grey accent stone that appears on the corners of the building as quoins, along windows, arches and other openings as well as the cornice of the entire building. There are two towers on Stollmeyer's castle. One tower has a circular turret accompanied by decorative crenelations while the other has a pointed roof. The house was so over the top that the owner's wife gifted it to her son to live in instead.



(Fig. 12) *Stollmeyer's Castle*, National Trust



(Fig. 13) *Balmoral Castle*, AD Magazine

CHAPTER THREE

Identity Crisis

The Africans

African people were kidnapped from Africa and forced to toil on colonial plantations during the seventeenth century. Before British rule, Black fugitives and mixed-race people were permitted to live in Trinidad and to even own land. The French in particular were responsible for the influx of the earliest slaves to the island which led to the existence of the coloured French Creole Brereton wrote about. However, between 1662 and 1807 Britain shipped 3.1 million Africans across the Atlantic Ocean in the Transatlantic Slave Trade (National Archives United Kingdom). The slave population rapidly increased by the time the British took control (Boomert 143).

To the British, African slaves were considered property and were treated horrendously. In his book “Capitalism and Slavery”, Dr Eric Williams, a European Creole descendent, made the convincing argument that the wealth of European countries was the product slave labour. Even though Africans were prohibited from using any of their own traditional customs – an injustice that had lasting negative effects on the group’s sense of identity, some features of West African architecture (see fig. 14) still found their way into slave dwellings in Trinidad as professed by Waldron when he wrote, “In their long, rectangular shape and thatched roofs” these structures shared features of houses of Yorubaland and the Igbo and Calabar territories of Nigeria (Waldron 68). The houses of slaves (see fig. 15) were raised on posts like many other vernacular buildings

to adapt to the conditions of the climate. The slave huts were typically made of wattle and daub which was brought from Africa (Crain 58). They were allowed to use the cheapest and most basic materials of construction for their dwellings because they were thought to be inferior to their white masters. There was no ornamentation or flourishes except for the weaving pattern of the thatched roofs they may have learned from the Amerindians (Crain 59). Crain also argues that the front porch was a colonial architectural invention informed by the culture of Africans. He attests that Africans had a custom of gathering around the entrances of their houses and typically designated a space at the front of buildings to separate semi-public and public spaces before entering the private quarters of their homes that often comprised solid doors and windows which they could open or close to control temperature and especially privacy.



(Fig. 14) *Traditional Nigerian Adobe Hut*, Waldron (Fig. 15) *Caribbean Slave Hut*, Waldron

The British slave trade officially ended in 1807. However, although the buying and selling of from African people was illegal, slavery itself had not truly ended. It was not until 1 August 1834 that the enslavement of Africans came to an end in the British Caribbean after statute passed the year before. Under the provisions of the new law, a period of apprenticeship was observed but

true freedom was only actualized in 1838. Even after the end of servitude and apprenticeship the Caribbean was not totally free. Freed slaves were not granted reparations and had limited representation in the legislatures (National Archives of the United Kingdom).

After years of bondage Africans wanted nothing to do with the plantation (Kerrigan 84). A number of them through education and hard work were able to eventually change their fortunes by the late 1800s. With the passing of new legislature guaranteeing education for all, Africans became literate. Brereton in "History of Modern Trinidad" adeptly describes their rationale when she says, "the harshly restrictive world of the manual labour." (qtd. In Welcome 47). They used education to change their status in society. A large number moved to Port-of-Spain and environs to gain better access to the schools that were located there. More housing was required to accommodate them. Kerrigan mentions the planning of the town of Woodbrook in his study surrounding housing and the socio-economic classification of different groups of residents in the area who formed an integral part of the ever-stratifying Trinidadian society (Kerrigan 192). While some remained working class others went on to become middle and upper middle class. The increasing power of the new dominant classes of Blacks led to a further complexity in the culture of the island. They earned more income and were able to afford better homes than their ancestors. Many showed signs of an internal identity crisis as they adopted anglicized attitudes resulting in what Lloyd best coined the Afro-Saxon- a person of African descent who adopts European culture as their own (Kerrigan 9).

Working class Trinidadians owned modest homes that represented their identity or at least the representation of what they wanted others have of them (see fig. 16). The simpler the structure and the more inexpensive the materials used indicated the economic standing of the family and

displayed this identity to the rest of society. On the other hand, upper and middle-class individuals had better economic stations in society, so they were able to afford more elaborate residences (Welcome 49).



(Fig. 16) *Working Class home*, by author



(Fig. 17) *Middle Class Home*, National Trust

An example of a middle-class home from the early 1900s is The Piccadilly House (see fig. 17) which was the home of the Figari family built in 1920 and designed by George Brown. This house was one of two family homes which allowed the family of seven children, three boys and four girls, to attend urban schools in the city. The 58 Piccadilly Street residence is located at the Eastern side of Port of Spain along the East Dry River/St. Ann's River.

George Brown was Trinidad's great nineteenth century architect who was educated in Glasgow. He filled the need for local talent to design and build homes that reflected their status. His designs would become so popular that they became a part of the Trinidadian architectural identity. The designs were an advanced model of the gingerbread house described in a previous

section of this paper. His designs however, incorporated his Scottish origins, featuring cast iron work from foundries in Glasgow and decorative fretwork from woodworking machines imported from Scotland. The “Great Fire of Port of Spain” devastated much of downtown Port-of-Spain including lower Frederick Street, Port of Spain’s central square and main commercial street. George Brown was charged with redesigning the area. He developed a distinctive style of building which showcased balconies with cast iron balustrades extending over the pavements, decorative fretwork to the gables and eaves of the buildings, and large central atriums with high clerestory windows which provided cooling cross-ventilation and light to the interior (The National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago). These features were derived from concepts on architecture native to Glasgow trends infused with the adaptations to the local climate and culture of Trinidadian society at the time. This style was Trinidad’s signature architectural style for much of the early 20th century. With its mass-produced elements such as delicate wooden filigree, jalousie windows, peaked roofs, dormers, and a welcoming gallery, the gingerbread style proliferated throughout the island because of its easy adaptability to the different classes. Many Afro-Trinidadians aided by increasing wealth and a desire to identify with the new class to which they ascended utilized architects like Brown who readily designed homes which conveyed their rising dominance.

The Indians

From 1845 to 1917 there was a significant introduction of a new group of people to Trinidad which further complicated the already complex social fabric of the island. Brereton’s “Indocentric Narrative” describes the arrival, struggle and triumph of East Indian immigrants in forming an

integral part of Trinidadian society and culture (Brereton 187). When they arrived, they were forced to endure hardships that some felt were either the same as the African slave experience or even worse (189). Unlike the slaves, indentured labourers were allowed to retain their native customs so much of their Indian Heritage remained. Housing conditions for the workers was poor and typically included former slave housing already existing on sugar plantations. The conditions under which East Indian indenture workers lived were very telling of their lower-class status in society. Plantation housing was referred to as barracks (see fig. 18). They were a simple *Ajoupa* usually constructed with locally sourced timber. They were bare, unadorned, and lacked privacy because the inner walls often did not extend to the ceiling. (Mahabir 7)

Estate cottages which were a streamlined modern *Ajoupa* were introduced to house plantation workers that had rank and privilege (see fig. 19). They were also raised off the ground on posts but had no porch.



(Fig. 18) *Barracks*, Mahabir



(Fig. 19) *Estate Houses*, Mahabir

After indentureship ended, the industrious nature of Indian Trinidadians propelled them toward better economic stability. Coupled with the education act, which they used to educate their children, they quickly became a part of the emerging middle class in the early part of the 20th century (Brereton 190). The racial conflict between the two most populous demographic groups-- Africans and Indians played a role in the cultural fabric of the island (189). With the increase in wealth and education East Indians went about creating homes that conveyed their new status. At first many adopted the colonial vernacular architecture that was popular at the time- the gingerbread house (Mahabir 18).

One such house was Jaggassar Great House in Longdenville. Construction started in 1919 and lasted for 73 years (see fig. 20). A majestic double staircase reminiscent of the Italian villa entrances is adorned with a balustrade that extends around the gallery. This grand staircase is facilitated by the presence of tall concrete arches that support the main structure which is not typical to the usual height and shape of supporting posts of gingerbread houses. This new feature provided storage for equipment and farming needs as the owners were farmers (19) or perhaps, was later used as additional living space by closing off the openings to create a two-story building. However, the house still encompassed all the vernacular gingerbread elements such as a front porch and portico, lacy fretwork, pitched roof, dormer windows, casement windows flanked by French louvered shutters, and finials atop the roof.



(Fig. 20) *Jagassar Great House*, Mahabir

Customization of vernacular architecture continued to inform choices in architecture by Indians as they strove to establish themselves as major players in the society. Amar Wahab describes the changing architectural landscape due to the influence of East Indian culture in the nation in “Contesting Cultural Citizenship? The East Indian “Big House” in Trinidad’s Nationalist Discourse”. She attests that the nationalism espoused by Dr Eric Williams when he proclaims that there can be no Mother Africa or India in adopting a national identity excluded Indo Trinidadian culture and glorified the Creole who was of African descent (Wahab 145). This created further tension between the two peoples. The feeling of marginalization experienced by the East Indian population increased their need to be recognized. The 1970 oil boom resulted in an economic boon for many Trinidadians, especially the Indians who in this period experienced their greatest socio-economic advancement (149). To show off this wealth the newly monied Indians began constructing expansive mansions. Many of them were now constructed using brick because wood attracted termites that became a major problem for the older timber structures. The homes did not

have any particular unifying attributes except that they were large. Some Indians created romanticised houses that reminded them of India like the Lion House (see fig. 21) built for the highly respected Capildeo family in Chaguanas in the 1920s which Father Anthony de Verteuil described it as

Outstanding in its own right, the house has become internationally famous because of its description in cynical style, by Capil's grandson Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul, in his book *A House for Mr. Biswas*, in which he transforms the lions into representations of the monkey-god Hanuman, Capildeo becoming Tulsi and Chaguanas Arwacas (The national Trust of Trinidad and Tobago).



(Fig. 21 *Lion House*, National Trust

Some homes were brightly coloured brick boxes with profuse decoration -- the preferred dwelling style for upper class Indians during the late 20th century. Ornamentation took on a new life because contemporary East Indians were uninterested in recreating the colonial fretwork of gingerbread houses. Instead, they desired to create a new identity with the plural society they now

called home. Welcome's labelled depiction of one of these homes demonstrates how ornament is used to convey stature in wealthy Indo-Trinidadian residences (see fig. 22). The house is painted in a gaudy mustard colour and features slightly sloping roofs as opposed to the highly pitched ones of gingerbread houses. Quoins painted in a cream colour contrast with the darker yellow hue which adds drama to the façade of the edifice. There is an upper balcony with balustrade featuring eye-catching stonework that resembles marble. The windows are mostly arched and highlighted with heavy mouldings and rounded pilasters. There is no ornate fretwork present instead wrought iron curvilinear forms reminiscent of Art Nouveau embellish the front gate and property wall. The East Indian culture truly contributed over the years to the architectural variety of Trinidad's residences.



Intricate iron-work of the gate



Moldings fashioned to imitate marble



Quoins and engaged pilasters

(Fig. 22) Upper Class Indian House,
Welcome

CHAPTER FOUR

The Future Identity

The Americans

During WWII, Trinidad was used as a military base for the United States of America. Throughout the war Trinidad and the US enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship. The United States in setting up large military bases on the island positioned itself in a strategic military and geographical to defend its interests during the war. As a result, Trinidad experienced a profound and swift technological and infrastructural development influenced by the North American nation. This led to an infusion of American ideas on the island which informed an already plural culture. Mark Raymond attests that, “ARCHITECTURE EVOLVED in Trinidad during this time in response to three primary factors. Firstly, the impact of American culture, secondly the radical politics of late colonialism and then post-colonialism and thirdly the nationalist search for a local and regional identity”. (Raymond 67) Trinidad’s existing struggle for a national identity due to its complicated ethnic, historical and socio-economical dilemma was further impacted by post war for autonomy. Cultural advancement of self-governing Trinidadian society was a challenge because each subgroup of the society had their own identity which they did not want to give up in order to find a true unified nation identity. Mid 20th century Trinidad scorned British colonial domination. The British political, social and cultural structure that had been retained was a fundamental part of the development of Trinidadian society because the absence of any indigenous culture or clearly identifiable cultural past, fuelled the need for a cultural foundation. Although

parts of the British cultural structure persisted the emerging Trinidadian identity was influenced considerably by the North American culture (65).

After the war Trinidad embarked on restructuring its physical environment through extensive city planning that focused on modernization. The International style which started in Europe as a response to the harshness of war and the need for new architectural language quickly spread to the Americas. Trinidad, wanting to identify with its regional influencer looked to the United States for ideas on building. One such architect was Anthony Lewis. A native Trinidadian who attended the Illinois Institute of Technology at the same time that Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe (1886-1969) was head (Raymond 69). Mies migrated to the United States from Germany and is considered one of the most influential modernist architects of all time (Cohen 6). Mies Van der Rhoe's legendary Farnsworth House in the United States is an iconic American representation of the International style (see fig. 23). The Farnsworth is a rectilinear glass box with minimal ornamentation and glass walls. It was raised off the ground by short posts that supported its delicate frame (110). The simplicity of the design influenced many modernist architects who admired Van der Rhoe's articulation of form and its relationship with the landscape.

Anthony Lewis' design of the Wight house in the 1950s articulates a similar architectural style to the Farnsworth. However, the Wight house exhibits Trinidadian vernacular elements. The house was situated on a hill overlooking the ocean. Its rectangular shape was raised on delicate posts that were a reminiscent feature of the original architecture-- the *Ajoupa*. The façade of the rectilinear form was clad with timber in a vertical pattern that continues Lewis' exploration of the

rectangular form. One side of the building displayed open brickwork that was used to ventilate the structure. The main part of the house was sandwiched between two concrete slabs that extended across the entire structure emphasizing the architect's preoccupation with horizontality. The middle of the roof was extended upwards with a slightly sloping second tier. The area between the lower roof and the upper roof consisted of aerated blocks which allowed breezes to pass through the house. This type of design was referred to as a "cow-shed roof" and was a practical device to provide thermal comfort without breaking the bank (Lewis 38).

The Wight house was an interpretation but not a replica of any of the modern houses of the United States (see fig. 24). Architects of the era incorporated vernacular tenets informed by the plural societal construct and climatical requirements as a means to establish some sort of national cohesiveness.



(Fig. 23) *Farnsworth House*,
Farnsworth House



(Fig. 24) *Wight House*,
Manikin, Lewis

The influence of American ideas on contemporary Trinidadian Architecture can still be seen today. These newly constructed homes like the ones of the 50s and 60s portray concepts of modernists Frank Lloyd Wright however, the articulation of the designs are unique to the country. Some of these homes retain many vernacular attributes such as wooden shutters. Artist's House and Studio by Jennifer Smith Architects is a recent depiction of American inspired architecture

(see fig 26). It resembles Elam House built in 1956 by Frank Lloyd Wright (see fig. 25). Both roofs display asymmetry in the butterfly type roof. There is a contrast in materials in both compositions. However, they differ in the type of materials used. In the Frank Lloyd Wright house natural rusticated sand coloured stone is used while wood trim encases the large windows which are painted in a warm natural brown hue. Wright demonstrates his expert understanding of mass and form as the heavy stone blends effortlessly into its environment. The Jennifer Smith house utilizes a more modern and popular material – concrete (see fig. 26). This material became popular due to its affordability in relation to the increasing cost of wood in Trinidad and its nature to be more resistant to strong hurricane-like winds that occur in Trinidad. Vernacular elements are visible in the presence of louvered shutters made of a warm local wood and provide necessary light filtration in the sunny climate. They are an inexpensive way of cooling that harkens back to Trinidad's colonial architectural past. There are familiar balustrade rails of the first-floor balcony. The balcony on the second level is open and seems to be made of glass or wire (see fig. 27) Another use of modern materials is seen in the galvanized roof.

American presence in Trinidadian culture remains constant today. With a continuously globalizing world through technology styles are rapidly being passed from the first world nation to the island at alarming speed. However, many elements of old architectural styles however varied their origins through the countless cultural insertions from the different peoples that call the island home.



(Fig. 25) Elam House



(Fig. 26) *Artist House and Studio, Lewis*



(Fig. 27) *Traditional Balustrade and Modern Rail, Lewis*



(Fig. 28) *Use of Concrete, Lewis*

CONCLUSION

When Winston Churchill told his countrymen, “we shape our buildings, and afterwards, our buildings shape us” (qtd. in Winslow 255), he was alluding to the relationship between architecture and identity. Just like our residences reveal our personalities so too does the architecture of a particular place convey ideas of identity. This essay followed the different stories of the many diverse ethnicities who inhabited Trinidad and how they displayed their ideas of “self” through their built environment. It may be easy to view identity as an individualist occurrence, but it has to do with how we see ourselves in relation to each other and the world at large. It is informed by history, culture and social structure. All of the groups’ choices for shelter were influenced by the environment and most notably the climate. However, as time went on and events took place each new group’s entrance on the island formed a separate layer of who they were individually and who they were in relation to one another. Lewis’s notion that all houses in Trinidad were essentially the same was an oversimplification that is the complex nature of architecture in Trinidad. Principally, the Indigenous population used basic methods to produce a self-picture of a practical lifestyle that mainly catered to their need for shelter. There was a hierarchical arrangement in place according to power and dominance which was illustrated in the different types of shelters built. —we shape or buildings. The Europeans perpetuated a “our buildings shape us” concept when they purposefully created shabby slave huts for their enslaved people. The slaves were kept feeling subjugated and less than human which is exactly how they were viewed in the society. When slaves gained their freedom and built elaborately ornate houses they were depicting “our buildings shape us”. The complexity of the Trinidadian experience is exacerbated by the presence of a multitude

of different groups. Trinidad's colonial past ensured foreign influence on the architectural language on the island and later the nationalist movement adopted yet another imported style from the Americans. The struggle for architectural identity on a national scale is elusive because the general search for this identity always seems to look outward rather than within.

Findings

One of the major challenges in conducting this study was locating sources. Many of the books relevant to this study were on reserve at the library so accessing them was impossible. With the pandemic of 2021, everyone was forced to work remotely and to further exacerbate the issue, I conducted this research while residing overseas so I was unable to physically get to the library. Online Versions on the UWI library website never worked.

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