

ABSTRACT

Trinidad and the West African nexus during the Nineteenth Century

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This thesis starts on the assumption that there is a duality at the base of Trinidad and African Diaspora history that has so far not been emphasized enough in Trinidad and West Indian historiography. In its essence this duality is symbolised by the cultural forces of Europe and those of West Africa. The duality implies, firstly, that in spite of the hegemonic role of European culture in the West Indies, the West African peoples who forged the foundations of Trinidad society can only be properly understood by being seen as reflections of their West African backgrounds; in terms of clans, nations, kingdoms, etc. Secondly, events as they occurred in Trinidad's history in relation to these West African peoples can be studied within the terms of West African cultures as they still operate today. In effect this thesis assumes that the 'here' and 'there' and the 'then' and 'now' are not mutually exclusive and can indeed be creatively bridged to provide insights to historical analysis.

On the bases of the assumptions above, the thesis identifies a number of themes and sub-themes in Trinidad's social and cultural history for research and analysis. The aim is to provide Trinidadians and West Africans with points of common recognition: the points where there were meetings between individuals, groups and institutions common to the two peoples. It is in the name of such points of recognition that the idea of an Atlantic world is used generally in this thesis to assert that by the nineteenth century, Europe, the Caribbean and the Americas were able to show cultural traits that were West African in origin. Furthermore the European imperial effort generated currents that resulted in a viable concept of 'creole' so that within the Atlantic world, *krio* in Sierra Leone, Cape Coast, and elsewhere in West Africa was as valid as *creole* in the West Indies.

The major areas identified for study in this thesis are centred around:

- i. The conceptual difficulties presented when the concept of slavery is analysed exclusively within the traditions of English usage of the term. In this regard, we argue that plantation slavery, expressed through chattelising was unlike any form of servitude known in most traditional West African cultures. The point is advanced therefore that the correct way to use and appreciate the concept of slavery in relationship to West

African peoples is to constantly critique the term instead of the reflex acceptance of current usage which treats the term as polymorphous holdall for all kinds of servitude.

ii. The thesis describes the relationships between the wars of state formation in West Africa, the European demand for African labour in their West Indian plantations and the role of Sierra Leone as the main conduit for the supply of captive West Africans to Trinidad before and after the abolition of the slave trade.

iii. The individuals, West Africans and Trinidadians, whose lives mirrored in particular and complex ways the nexus between Trinidad and West Africa, from the middle to the later part of the nineteenth century.

iv. The story of one West African ethnic group - the Ewe-Fon (Radas) in Trinidad. The thesis reconstructs the culture and traditions of this group, their grouses and their struggles against the colonial state and their determination to preserve the spiritual and religious bases of a West African culture.

v. Finally, an examination of the roles of Trinidad and Trinidadians in the evolution of Pan Africanism as a viable tool of African political reaction during the closing years of the nineteenth century when the destruction of African kingdoms by Europeans had left the continent of Africa defenceless in the face of European colonial expansion.

In conclusion, the thesis asserts that the nexus between Trinidad and West Africa will increasingly broaden to include the deeper and fundamental questions concerning the nexus between Africa and her Diaspora. In this frame, there is no doubt that Trinidadians will continue to play their part, bringing into the often restricted debates their cosmopolitan perspectives that hopefully, will help create new methods of analysis and understanding of the history of the African Diaspora in the West Indies in general and in Trinidad in particular.

KEY WORDS: Emmanuel Kwaku Senah; 19th century Trinidad and West African nexus; African Diaspora; slave trade; chattel slavery; *krio* in Sierra Leone, creole in the West Indies; historiography; Ewe-Fon (Radas); culture and traditions; colonial; Pan Africanism.