

Speech for UTT

You know me
I name survivor
I survive through the strength
Of mih culture
Beat out
In the skin of the drum
Beat out in the steel of the pan
Pounded out in the tassa's rousing rhythms
Sung in the calypsonian's song
I claim all of me

Good afternoon, Madame President, and it is with especial pleasure that I say MADAME President. Greetings to the Governing body of UTT, the lecturers, graduands, and those of us who are being specially honoured this day.

I speak for myself and for my fellow awardees, for Machel and for Leo. Leo, man of power, embodying the magic and might of technology to improve our lives in the farthest corners of our Republic. Machel, who was not too young to soca, taking the power of our music worldwide, nurturing other artistes, exploring the richness of our divine cocoa.

What an awesome convergence of Trinbagonian cosmic energies do we have here? In Leo we have someone with the understanding that science and technology are really, at the most beneficial when predicated by the impact of society. We ask about the effect of science on society; maybe the true question should be the effect of society on technology. For in a society where there is cultural confidence and knowledge of self then we can create our own science according to our needs and, make use of technological advancement to the benefit of our people.

And it is no accident that the soca man chooses to focus on our cocoa, even as he is moving, more and more into the role of Griot, teaching our history of resistance, in Buss Head, bringing to the fore the name of one of our earliest freedom fighters and national heroes Joe Talmana. It was through his efforts and that of the other stickfighters that we have the Carnival that we have today; they fought for it in the KAMBULE of 1881. Talmana, the stickfighters, the jammettes, the barrack yard people taught us to resist oppression and fight for our rights.

Who will teach our children as we struggle to create a truly plural society. Who will remind our children that Africans, Indians, Hindus, Muslims, got together to challenge the same colonial administration and many lost their lives in the Jahaaji Massacre of 1884.

Sadly that history is absent from our education system and indeed, I understand that history is now optional in our schools. Much, I am sure, to the chagrin of one of our great educators, Roy Augustus, who proved that quality education could be achieved in schools in the East Dry River area. And sport is here represented another powerful arena of possibility for harnessing talent, reaching excellence, learning discipline and team work as distinct from Star power. Alvin's voice commenting on the radio, his exploits on the field are now part of our collective national memory.

This synergy of awardees here today is so amazing to me. Someone at UTT is really serious about getting our stories told, and helping our people invoke from the alchemy of self knowledge, the will to find again, our power to resist and fight for what is right.

To mould the technology, like Leo, to fill the need of our people, understanding, that like in the twin cutlasses of Ogun - not by accident, the father of both technology and creativity - there is the power to both create and destroy.

I must reflect a little on my own journey. I attended through a Government Exhibition Scholarship in those days, the newly erected first co ed Government School - St. George's College.

There I was taught to love language. Gloria Valere, the daughter of the great Lord Constantine taught me English and English Literature. My theatre Guru, Slade Hopkinson, taught me Latin and initiated me into the magical, mystical world of the theatre; opened up to me the possibility of transformation that lies largely untapped in our plays our poetry. He would say, just do the work, the rewards will come if, and when they come. He would also say, that as Trinis, we are afraid of becoming who we really are.

My family was poor like the proverbial church mice, but rich in the cultural emanations of that most fertile and mystical of valleys, Santa Cruz. My mother's skirt a powerful,, threadbare matrix of protection, held the life giving potions of stories, wonderful traditional foods, her knowledge of herbs, her sense of family, community.. We were rich, so rich.

In her material poverty, Ida Marie Guerra Arttley practiced and preached respect for elders, pride in self, fierce loyalty and honesty.

Make do with what you have; doh envy nobody thing, you eh know if they sleep with the devil to get it; hold you back straight when you walking in the road; say you prayers, give God thanks.

And always the stories, the sayings. So many of our children have never sat at the feet of elders and drunk from the depths of ancient wisdom. It worries me as I go into schools to see the ignorance of self, but, also the hunger which unassuaged, leads often to social apathy, criminality, mediocrity. For us, criminality was never the corollary to poverty.

The best policing in the world cannot fill the void in their very beingness.

Who will teach them through the plays, calypsoes, poems, pichakaree. Who will infiltrate the new technologies with our stories? Who will be our Stan Lee and tell on screen the story of the original Spiderman, Anansi. Who will digitize the back step and the full moon? Who will take our kaiso into our schools.

Who will dare to create a new curriculum in which we are present, who will make our panyards and our gayelles the centre of creating new communities; and engineering the bad man vibes of which Voice writes and sings. When will our leaders recognize Shadow as the Philosopher that our people have crowned. As mentor in this year's programme from the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, I had the responsibility of inducting the mentees into the art and practice of the story. I took the group to the Hindu Prachar Kendra, where they sat at the feet of Shri Raviji, to the First Peoples in Arima, where they were exposed to the P'yai Atekosang, to the Ifa Orisa Ile, to learn from the Araba Olatunji Somorin. They learned through the stories from these elders that the most powerful obeah is self knowledge. Most of the mentees, some of them teachers, had never been in any of these iconic spaces. How are we moving to obliterate the fear of difference? The task is immense and I am full of hope. The struggle continues, as we said in the 70's. I put on my boots then. I have not, will not ever take them off. I give thanks to my ancestors. I recognize and bow to the presence of my children and my grandchildren.

Now, We fighting still
To know we self
to love we self
Surviving. Surviving
Through the strength of we culture
My thanks to UTT