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Being DR DYLAN KERRIGAN

When men speak: Half-Trini, half-Scottish this anthropologist is intellectually engaging and intriguing

Apr 3, 2014



Mark Fraser

That boyish grin superimposed onto a serious man, sir to his students and Dr Dylan Kerrigan to everyone else Unassuming and unclassified, the lecturer in anthropology and

political sociology at The University of the West Indies, St Augustine Campus (UWI) was hard to read at a first glance. One part quirky, ferociously gesticulating with every sentence he uttered and other parts intellectually engaging, with the ability to converse about everything under the sunhmmmm.

The Hampstead-born (and bred) lad born to a Trini mother who once resided in St James (migrating to England in the 70s) and a Scottish dad, was busy at his office at UWI, structuring exam questions for his students. When I passed by for the interview he made time nonetheless for our chat, after all, conversing with his study subjects- people, was his specialty. Tell me about your roots; the chronicles of being half-Trini, half-European, I engaged. His accent had a European twist and the long blond curls cascading down his chiseled face beamed British pedigree. My sister Lanra and I were given middle names such as Gin and Rum respectively, without further explanation does this seal my Trini heritage and disposition he laughed. I nodded my head in approval waiting to hear more about his mix and his childhood days growing up in England. He continued. My moms house was always full of Trini people and Trini voices and Trini food, so I was brought up in a Trini culture, he recalled, reminiscing about the days when students from Trinidad would stay at their home while studying in England. Then he got a dj vu of his mom holding his hands and teaching him how to wine as a little toddler of either three or four. Amusing chap, I decided, as he stood up in his paper packed office showing me the moves he learned as a child. Are you a champion winer now? I teased and he smiled widely, I am the King of wine! And this crowning came from a Trini not a Brit because Brits dont (cant) wine. I reckon I can hold my own in any fete!

Kerrigan, the King of wine then enlightened me on his early West Indian influence healthily balanced with an appreciation of Europe. I travelled to Spain a lot when I was a boy and so I became fluent in the language at the age of 12, a competency which I still maintain today. Both my parents secured jobs as lawyers in England, so growing up I was privileged and opined, life was generous to me and thats the reason why Im so passionate about social justice for people who did not grow up that way. Social Justice. Its a term on the lips of everyone these days but still no major change has been made in terms of equality, I wondered aloud if the man of the moment can do the impossible- How can you enable social justice lets say in Trinidad and Tobago Apparently, I had hit the nail on the head as Kerrigan unleashed his Napoleonic views one by one - I have a voice where I can speak about things and ignorance is not an excuse, its an opportunity to provide information. I champion the causes not only for the economic have-nots but for those who face discrimination like the gay and lesbian community. When I was about 18 years, my best friend in England had a really beautiful girlfriend and then he told me he had broken up with her. When I asked him why, he told me he thought he was bisexual. This

experience hit close to home and was very impactful. I believe that the reason some people are homophobic is because they don't associate with gay people or have made up perceptions about them. He was quick to clarify however I don't try to push gay rights in people's faces but I do try to educate them about their circumstances. I do believe that the Constitution needs changing however.

Championing the cause for the underdog- he shared these stories and other burning issues affecting the lives of the poor and discriminated. He spoke of his indoctrination into activism by his dad who worked as a solicitor for local government in earlier years. I remember around eight, nine years old picketing with my dad singing slogans about getting the government out. In England What era I asked. It was the 1980's and Margaret Thatcher was the British Prime Minister. She was against the unions and my dad and I marched in support of the miners. I remember chanting- Maggie must go, Maggie must go! Those were the days!- his nostalgia was infectious as I take myself back to these times but to be honest I can't imagine this man with placard and chanting.

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Intriguing as Dr. Dylan Kerrigan touched on almost every issue in life, the local film industry and all. More and more I asked myself the question- how exactly did this gladiator of social justice come to pursue a career in anthropology Ahhh, that was when the story became even more interesting as the 38-year-old Liverpool Football Club fan revealed some new angles to his personality. I learned that by all accounts, his life as an anthropologist started as one of persuasion rather than deliberate pursuit... When, I was 18 years old, I applied to do a major in International relations and was accepted, however, I diverted my path after following the advice of a girl I really liked who suggested that I would make a better anthropologist!

Your dream girl led you to your dream job? I asked. That boyish grin again and then a response. Not the girl of my dreams but a girlfriend and yes she led me to a great field. Before starting his university studies, however, the free spirited Kerrigan decided to take a year off and back-packed through South America visiting places like Chile, Ecuador, Venezuela (where his fluency in Spanish became handy of course). He described this period as major to his development as a year later he attended the University of Sussex and graduated with a major in anthropology.

A job in Trinidad as a writer at Caribbean Beat and Discover magazines became his next pivotal stop and in later years a Masters degree which gave him a mastery of anthropology shaped his continued path. As if not animated enough, the resurrection of a latent childhood goal of becoming a writer further coloured his occupational journey. As a child Ive always wanted to write, I always had this idea of writing a book so I decided to move to Tobago (Friendship Esatate) because I needed a quiet place to write. I lived there for nine months working on a manuscript. Imagine that I spent a lot of time taking care of horses, and growing tomatoes, chives and peppers he said. A budding agriculturalist I am

still trying to figure out this enigma of a man but without luck. No not really but I love nature. Although the manuscript was never published, the theme of the book clicked for me. It illustrated the carefree nature of youth; where you are young and believe that you can change the world but as you get older, that idea disappears.

Craving stimulation and an outlet for creative expression, he returned to his old job until eventually destiny and yet again the influence of the fairer gender brought Kerrigan to a full scholarship to pursue his Ph at American University in the US. My girlfriend at the time was leaving to study Architecture so I took the scholarship. You see how women have an influence on my life he quipped. Indeed, I interject. In the end his romance didnt work out but his career did as he graduated, returned to Trinidad and dived deep into teaching under the wing of veteran lecturer, the late Dennis Brown. Okay so tell me what was your real attraction to Trinidad- he stopped me mid-sentence-I am a Trini remember, its intrinsic for me to live here.

Whats your inspiration as a lecturer, I question further. My students. They give me the passion for what I do. You can see the light go off in their heads about things that theyve never thought about. Sometimes, they come to me with ideas that Ive been resolute in over the years and then I realise that Ive never considered it their way either he said. Hes also passionate about innovative teaching methods, always thinking about ways to mix it up to keep students engaged.

Since teaching at The UWI, he has been able to lobby for the introduction of an anthropology minor which he describes as highly subscribed.

I want to continue to teach anthropology and write books. I will always be spending time here but I must make sure and leave the country now and then to just reset my mind. It helps to keep my sanity, he added. Perusing through his topics for exam, I popped the all time hard question to the Doctor in Anthropology- Married, single, its complicated or all of the above And is she a Trini or Brit Chuckles followed and then a frank response. I am in a relationship but it is new and fresh. We just begun so how do you classify that he inquired. We both decided that time will tell and to end our conversation, I curiously asked what it meant to him to be a Trini. Trinis have a sense of humour and a way of living among cultural differences. I think we as a people are becoming more confident in our talents and more assertive on the global scale.

Of course Carnival, Jouvert, partying and having a good time are also part of the Trini identity but simple elements like these make us who we are and we should embrace

them!."

The man of many moods stated sealing off the interview with his signature grin.