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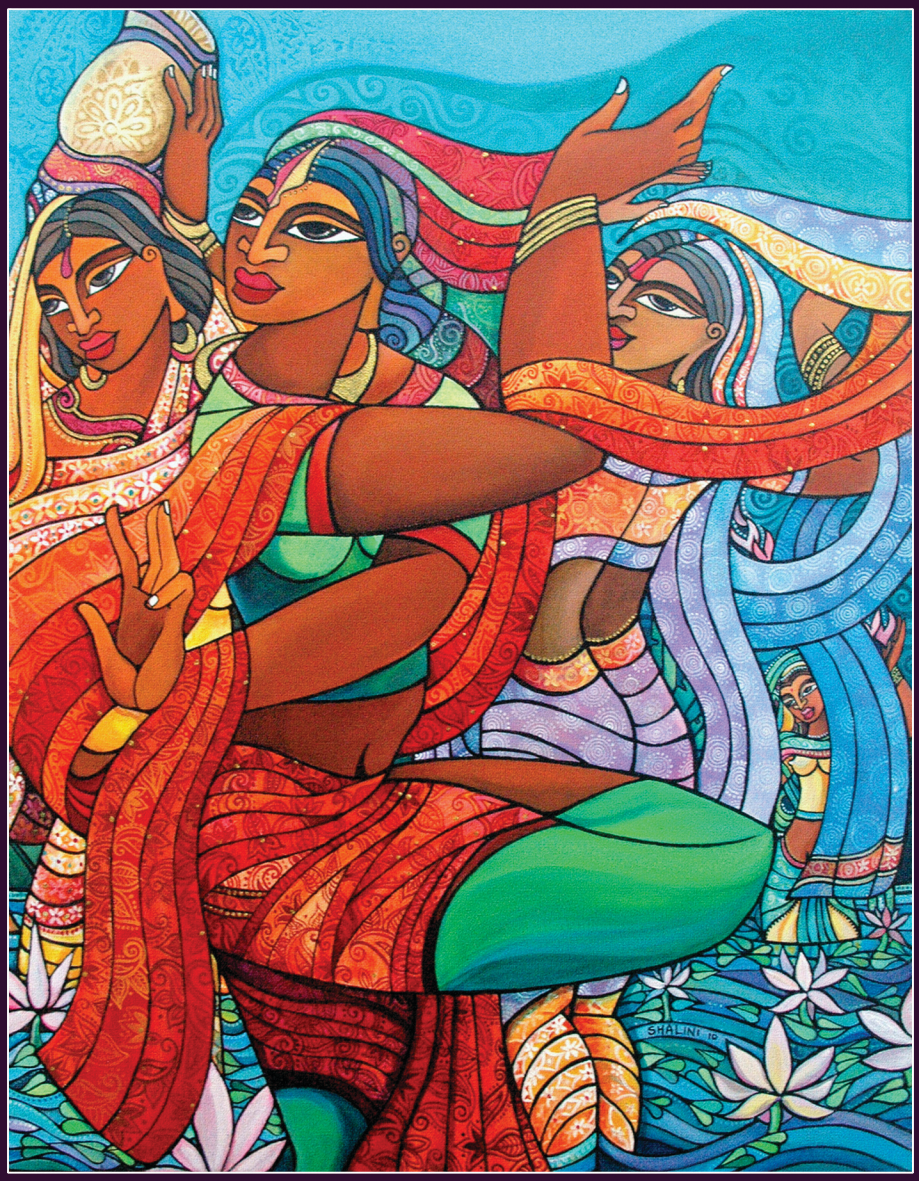
Indo-Caribbean Feminisms: Charting Crossings in Geography, Discourse and Politics



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GENDER DIALOGUES

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Indo-Caribbean Feminisms: Charting Crossings in Geography, Discourse, and Politics

Gabrielle Jamela Hosein and Lisa Outar

An examination of Indo-Caribbean feminisms is a fraught endeavor, burdened as the figure of the Indo-Caribbean woman is with the weight of historical stereotypes and with competing contemporary expectations of the role she must play in community identity and in protection of what is seen as the boundaries of Indianness in the Caribbean. While contemporary Indo-Caribbean literature and scholarship have done much to push against these flattened versions of what Caribbean Indian femininity is or should be, the dominant notions of the Indo-Caribbean woman as Hindu, as passive, as heterosexual, as conservative, as submissive, as guardian of Indian culture via her body and her morality continue to haunt us. This special issue of the *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* pulls together a wide cross-section of voices—scholarly, artistic, and activist—to try to highlight the often-unaddressed diversity of this community and to offer some sense of the critical and revolutionary interventions that Indo-Caribbean women are making in conversations about Caribbean femininity, politics, agency, and the nature of "authenticity" in diasporic contexts.

As Kris Rampersad has suggested in her assessment of early Indo-Trinidadian publications in *Finding a Place* (2002), the emergence of Indian voices onto the political and literary landscapes of the Caribbean often coincided with anxiety about the effects of creolization and modernism on Indian women. Seepersad Naipaul's representation in *The Adventures of Gurudeva and Other Stories*, first self-published in 1946, of the Christian

Indian character, Daisy, who serves as a temptress to the eponymous Gurudeva is an early index of this concern. With her Western clothes, use of makeup, job on the American base in Trinidad and refusal to adapt to the more conservative image demanded by Gurudeva, the elder Naipaul signaled his alarm about the trajectory of Indian women in their life in the colony as they encountered new models for womanhood outside of the traditional purview of the family. The twentieth century's intense attention to Indian female comportment was not new. In fact, concern about the degradation of Indian women in conditions of indentureship, which loosened the ties that tightly bound women's sexual and economic choices, became the lynchpin for bringing down that system. The Indo-Caribbean woman was thus always an object of scrutiny and judgment for the effects of diaspora on Indians. Recently we have had attempts on the part of those like Tejaswini Niranjana (2006) to track the differences between the diasporic and the non-diasporic Indian via the female body, its adornments, and movements, as Ananya Kabir compellingly notes in her Gender Dialogue. The choices that Indian women and girls make, on how to dress, to dance, to date, to marry, to work, are all used to wage larger arguments about Indian engagement with nationalism, transnationalism, creolization, and modernization, usually without taking into account those same women's perspectives on their own choices. In these larger discourses, the Indo-Caribbean women and girls largely remain ciphers onto whom various agendas are imposed rather than being seen as actively shaping Caribbean culture or feminist activity in the region to their own unique needs and concerns.

Celebrations of Indo-Caribbean culture inevitably foreground the Indian female body, yet contemporary versions of Caribbean Indian femininity are rarely what are featured. Instead, over and over again, in events that explicitly address Indo-Caribbean issues, we find images of the traditionally garbed, demure Indian woman or flashy Bollywood icons standing in for the complexity and contradictory nature of Indo-Caribbean femininity. In seeking to understand the nature of various Indo-Caribbean feminist interventions, we are constrained by the obfuscations of these dominant images. Shalini Seereeram's artwork, which provides the front cover for this Special Issue, gestures toward these images, but also reminds us to look behind them. She shows Indo-Caribbean women crossing feminist, geographical, ideological, and historical waves, surrounded by feminine markers of power such as the lotus and continuing to carry responsibilities for family and community sustenance.

Yet, these figures seem to move together in sisterhood, as if they bring the erotic as power to struggles ahead, and they appear as if they are moving forward powerfully, almost stepping entirely out of the frame as others follow behind. With all its decoration, the artwork in this issue suggests that Indo-Caribbean women must continue to visualize the myths that constitute sources of power in the new femininities and feminisms that come to life in the modern and mundane. As discussed below, Jennifer Samuel's Photo Essay, "Home Away from Home," complements Seereeram's focus by highlighting how the transcendent comes to life in diverse feminisms, faces, and forms in the everyday.

Studies of Indo-Caribbean women and girls are, however, sometimes constrained too by the more critical lenses we utilize. Brinda Mehta (2004) has warned us that applying particular standards for feminist action to this community can lead us to misread acts of

agency as passivity. Particularly interesting in this issue of the CRGS, then, are the pieces that assess rural women, Hindu women, Muslim women (groups viewed as bastions of conservativeness and cultural retention) in their subtle, subversive acts of working from within their group norms to reshape institutions to meet their distinct individual and communal needs. Furthermore, while novels like Narmala Shewcharan's *Tomorrow is Another Day* boldly imagine alliances and common goals between Indo-Caribbean and Afro-Caribbean women, scholarship about these groups still often continues to delink these feminist efforts from each other. This Special Issue, therefore, considers all of the various influences on Indo-Caribbean feminist consciousness, both local and transnational, to attempt to make visible the complex landscape within which Indo-Caribbean women make choices in their daily lives and negotiate the constraints, stereotypes, and expectations that are placed upon them.

The image of the coolie woman, in particular, is one that continues to be iconic in any discussion of Indo-Caribbean femininity. Rajkumari Singh and Mahadai Das in now canonized works like "I am a Coolie," "Per Ajie," and "They Came in Ships" attempted to recuperate the term "coolie" from its perjorative origins and to point to the strength and resilience of the Indian female ancestors who made the journey from India. The harnessing of those ancestors to narratives of self-sacrifice and familial commitment, however, sometimes downplays the revolutionary nature of the choices some of those early women made. Like Gaiutra Bahadur's forthcoming *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture*, Mark Tumbridge's essay reminds us of the powerful menace that the coolie woman (who may have independently indentured herself, traveled without a husband's protection, or had the freedom to choose from an abundance of available mates) posed to patriarchal and colonial structures of containment, and the revisionism that had to happen to restore the Indian woman to the image of passivity from the active threat that she posed in the early period of indentureship and its aftermath. In his examination of the minor appearance of a freed Indian woman traveling aboard a ship carrying indentured Indians to the Caribbean in 1877 in W.H. Angel's *The Clipper Ship 'Sheila'*, Tumbridge notes the sense of inscrutability of the formerly indentured Indian woman, describing textual attempts to contain and control the undermining influence that she represents. Tumbridge highlights the liminality of the space that Indian women occupied between ties to India and the new possibilities that the Caribbean represented. Woefully, despite our efforts, this collection does not include the perspectives of Francophone Indo-Caribbean women, yet the Francophone Caribbean term "échappé coolie" for someone of mixed Indian and African origins has particular relevance to our issue since the measure of Indian ability to integrate into Caribbean society and into modern life was largely judged by Indians' ability to escape a presumed inherent coolieness, both as a mindset and as a physical condition. As with the freed woman in Angel's text, Indian women became a key index for tracking that transformation from early expectations of the laboring body to something else.

Janet Naidu's poems in this issue also track that transformation, as she envisages the older generation's yearning for education and opportunity giving way to the principled encounter that "Ammani's Cushion" represents. That poem offers the possibility of dialogue, of mutual recognition between man and woman where female ambition and

quest for personal fulfillment can be recognized and not subsumed by male requirements for succor and traditional feminine roles.

Many of the contributions in this issue challenge the common presumptions of homogeneous goals, aspirations, and lived conditions among Indian women. Halima Kassim's and Patricia Mohammed's Gender Dialogues, in particular, remind us of the important impact of religious identity on the ways in which Indian women engaged modernity, education, and life outside the home. In "Words and Work," Kassim describes the tension between religious and secular education among Muslims in the first half of the twentieth century. Her interviews with Muslim women reveal some of the costs for women caught in the crosshairs of such conflicts and opens up some consideration of what role Islamic schools may have played among young Indian women. She notes the ironic ways in which such schools, intended as a corrective alternative to the social mixing incurred through secular education, allowed for an erosion of patriarchal constraints on women and for them to negotiate some freedoms in their paths between identities as Muslim women and as members of larger Trinidadian society.

This theme is returned to in Sarah Nabbie's personal reflection on her experience of participating as a young woman in her mosque's administration and leadership. Nabbie poignantly highlights the intersecting relationships that help to shape, define, and give power to young Indian Muslim women. She reminds us how much a new generation of educated, empowered, and even feminist young women continues to draw on revered female figures such as Khadija and Aisha and the precedent set by past generations of women leaders. Religious tutelage provided the basis for her commitment to gender equality and Nabbie's story speaks back to contemporary blind spots regarding a generation of young Indian women who wield rather than abandon the resonances of religion, family, and community as they extend their own exercise of power. Unwilling to be constrained or to take constraints lightly, Nabbie draws together her Muslim identity, her feminist politics, and her ownership of, above all, choice. It is together, rather than pitted against each other, that these can provide large and small ways in which such young women may make all the difference in the world.

Kassim's interview with Rose Mohammed further suggests the need for understandings of Islamic femininity that are specific to the Caribbean context. Rather than accepting the restrictions that are imposed upon women by certain narratives of Islam that come from outside the region, we see Rose Mohammed actively shaping her own local sense of how Islam intersects with womanhood and how it allows for ethical engagement with others across ethnic and gender lines. Patricia Mohammed, for her part, while also arguing for attention to local specificity, carefully tracks the use of kinship terms and the archetypes they invoke across religious differences within the Indo-Caribbean community to show the existence of an ongoing collective Indo-Caribbean feminist project. Her Gender Dialogue reveals the ways in which new meanings are continually constructed from communal identity markers and identifies the work that remains to be done to "expand our understanding of the complexity of gender and feminist theory and practice" and to establish dialogue with other feminisms.

Lauren Pragg's essay also points to the blind spots within scholarship on Indian women, especially the presumption of heterosexual subjectivity. She challenges the heteronormativity of Caribbean feminist writing and usefully reviews works by scholars like Alison Donnell (2005), Brinda Mehta (2004), Gayatri Gopinath (2005), and Rosanne Kanhai (1999, 2011), which have addressed Indo-Caribbean sexuality, for their paradigm-shifting possibilities. By pointing out "the literal and theoretical silencing of non-heteronormative Indo-Caribbean female subjects," Pragg challenges scholars to re-examine the assumptions of the frameworks within which they work, which can further flatten our understanding of the various forms that Indian female subjectivity can take and can result in the separating out of Indo-Caribbean feminist history from a unified Caribbean feminist movement.

Gabrielle Hosein's essay further challenges the homogenization of this group by pointing out the unique challenges and negotiations of Indian girlhood in the region. She argues for the specific ways in which girls differentiate between creolization and modernization, embracing the latter as a source of power that allows them to still align themselves with certain notions of honor and respectability. Pairing Hosein's essay with Anusha Ragbir's reveals the extent to which young Indo-Caribbeans both accept and challenge the patriarchal and ethnic structures that contain them. Ragbir's description of careful ways in which sexuality and notions of Indian identity are channeled in Indian beauty pageants illuminates the tricky path that young women walk between tradition and modernity. She sees even within such a presumably anti-feminist space as the beauty pageant the challenges that girls pose to available narratives of both Indian and Caribbean femininity. In both essays, agency is something to be carefully tracked and explicated for its specific and shifting iterations.

Ragbir's and Hosein's work thus invoke Alison Donnell's reading of Indo-Caribbean women as "double agents." In seeing Indo-Caribbean beauty pageants as a reconfigured site of female agency and empowerment, Ragbir argues that they draw upon multiple modernities and push back against certain excesses they find in both India and the Caribbean. Similarly, Hosein examines girls' choices regarding culture and argues that "This does not mean that girls do not reproduce patriarchal expectations of Indo-Trinidadian girlhood. Rather, it explains how and why they both contest and reproduce these expectations, and their understandings of the opportunities and risks involved." Following Brinda Mehta's call, Hosein emphasizes a process of "rereading" on more empowering terms. She and Ragbir emphasize the roles that girls *choose* to perform.

It is in this context that Kavyta Raghunandan's critique of essentialized understandings of ethnicity and gender in Indo-Caribbean young women's identities makes sense. She locates Indo-Trinidadian female negotiations not only in the context of diaspora, but also in relation to calls to race in party politics and claims of hybridity by the Trinidad and Tobago nation-state. Raghunandan's essay usefully traces conceptions and discourses of diaspora, race and ethnicity, hybridity, and hyphenated identities in relation to Indo-Trinidadian gender negotiations. What her reflections suggest is that along a continuum of signifiers, in "the lived experience of young Indian Trinidadian women, ethnicity must be figured as a contingent, delocalised construction which is repeatedly claimed in different contexts to be essential, localised, spatialised and even bodily." This observation

is important because it reflects the diversity of approaches to self, community, tradition, modernity, and politics represented in Rosanne Kanhai's (2011) edited collection, *Bindi: The Multifaceted Lives of Indo-Caribbean Women*, which is reviewed by Lisa Outar in this issue.

The Photo Essays provide their own rich commentary on the diversity of the Indo-Caribbean gendered experience. The pictures included here from Jennifer Samuel's project on faces of the South Asian diaspora invoke the complex nexus of race, class, family configuration, religion, and work present in Trinidad. These photos, like so many contributions in this issue, refuse to see tradition and modernity, religion and consumerism, ethnic identity and inter-ethnic mixing as endpoints on a continuum. Rather, Samuel shows they are completely and complexly interlocked in ways that viscerally refuse stereotypes of who and what Indo-Trinidadian women and their politics are and are becoming. Similarly, Andil Gosine's photo essay, "Orhni and Cutlass," uses personal memories of Indo-Trinidadian foremothers to explore and fashion an iconography and aesthetic associated with women's dress and decoration in order to explore how these are "as much markers of oppression as they are evidence of the creative agency of women." His photos and the material culture and conditions that they invoke provide a lens to highlight the importance of memory, femininity, family, tradition, and labor, as well as agency, autonomy, pleasure, and refusal in mapping the contours of Indo-Caribbean feminisms, even as Indian women were shaped by and influenced colonial and postcolonial life.

In the particularly rich Gender Dialogues section of the issue, we find Ananya Kabir's reflections on the discontinuities from India and the revolutionary possibilities of Indian female embodiment in the Caribbean. Noting "the anxieties Indian diasporic rhythm cultures present to the Indian from India," her work allows us to think of the various ways in which the female body is called upon to mark what is both constitutive of and revolutionary about diasporic Indianness and, as she notes, how much "moral commentary" goes along with that. She allows for the possibility "that diasporic dislocations can potentially free the South Asian woman's body from caste/class proscriptions, or at least from expectations generated by these proscriptions that are duly internalised by us, Indian women in India." Gloria Wekker's poem, "Tower of Babel on the Suriname River" also urges a careful ethical engagement with the difference that the Indo-Caribbean woman can pose to an outside observer. The narrator's attempts to move beyond language and to read silences are in part what all of the authors in this issue are urging.

Brenda Gopeesingh's reflections in this issue's Research in Action section and Lisa Outar's dialogue with Jahajee Sisters, the New York-based activist group seeking to empower Indo-Caribbean women in the diaspora, reveal the concrete challenges facing women as they try to address the inequities and injustices facing Indian women. Gopeesingh notes the indifference with which organizations devoted to Indo-Caribbean rights and issues treat what are seen to be exclusively female issues such as anti-violence measures and raising the age of legal marriage, and the mistreatment meted out to women who speak out on such issues. The perpetuation of sexual violence and incest in the Caribbean and the gendered violence that prompted Jahajee Sisters to start their group in

New York, as they describe in their interview, all demand greater attention to the vulnerable positions in which Indian women and girls continue to be placed by their communities and the silences that surround such traumas.

Rosanne Kanhai also ends with a call to confront violence in all its guises and in all its spaces, from the family to the nation. Writing unapologetically about the complex positioning of Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the first Indian woman to become prime minister in the Caribbean, she firmly steps away from seeing Indian women at the margins and affirms their claim to belonging at the center. From here, she cautions that the larger contribution of this trajectory can be made not by ending in triumphalism, but by making "intelligent and sensitive contributions to the welfare of all women" and by refusing to excuse "Kamla" when her policies seem unjust. Combining such gender and ethnic identification with critical engagement and a commitment to solidarities across race, class, and religion, Kanhai reminds us that we are also compelled to ask "what feminist praxis can we develop from this place?"

As Mrs. Persad-Bissessar continues to lead the Trinidad and Tobago government, she will become more compromised and more controversial. Nonetheless, her historic victory in May 2010 compelled greater reflection on the nuances of being female, Indian, and Trinidadian; the pressures to erase belonging in one sphere to be accepted in another; and the risks of "difference" in a nation where power appears always racialized. "Kamla's" victory, as part of the long struggle to break glass ceilings everywhere, was one for all women, but it was also one for Indian women in the Caribbean. "We own this identity," Kanhai rightly concludes. As we try to figure out what the move from a more marginalized status to a more public and powerful one means for Indo-Caribbean girls' and women's knowledge and practice, we will also continue to chart how the unfolding negotiations of Indo-Caribbean female power articulate and constitute Indo-Caribbean and truly inclusive Caribbean feminisms. New generations will continue to work through what it means to be an Indo-Caribbean woman in public life, not reproducing patriarchal domination in social life and the state, nor being only Indian, but also Western, creole, diasporic, and modern in all its multiple and emerging forms.

In all their different styles of articulation, from poetry to scholarship and from personal reflection to dialogue across diaspora, the contributions in this issue aim to enlarge the discursive space for thinking about how scholarship on Indo-Caribbean gender negotiations intersects with that on national, regional, diasporic, and global feminisms. They aim to reflect critically on the production and politics of existing knowledge about Indo-Caribbean women and those in the diaspora, and contribute to mapping Indo-Caribbean feminist consciousness and action across history, geography, and difference. This is not a new dialogue and we draw on the literature that explicitly explores the interplay of Indian womanhood with Caribbean feminisms. In her 1998 article that reflects the perspective of both an earlier time and generation, Rawwida Baksh-Soodeen writes, "Caribbean feminism has been largely Afro-centric and simultaneously interlocked with processes of independence and national identity struggles…there is a need for the movement to reflect the experiences of women of other ethnic groups in the region. In this regard, in Trinidad and Tobago the Indo-Caribbean voice has been emerging and broadening the feminist base" (1998, 74).

This issue contributes to that broadening and deepening. What is clear is that feminist discourses on Indo-Caribbean women emphasize both continuities and transformations. Those continuities can be found in the metaphors, myths, names, and relations that continue to shape this group's identities and sources of power. At the same time, whether in relation to Mrs. Persad-Bissessar or the evolution of chutney and chutney-soca music in the more than 20 years since Drupatee Ramgoonai's entry to the public stage, gender negotiations are being worked through in ways nuanced by generational shifts, changing power relations between women and men, US and westernized Bollywood's popular cultural influence, increasing female educational advancement and economic autonomy, and a legacy of regional and international feminist activism. These foci are common across different Caribbean contexts, but should remind us to continue to open space for understanding the differences in experiences, cosmologies, and politics among Indian women and girls in Guyana, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, the Francophone and Hispanophone Caribbean, and even in countries like Barbados where more recently arrived immigrants from India are embedding a new and very different generation of locally born children in the unfolding social landscape.

We, therefore, look forward to continued scholarship on the political and economic relations as well as the transnational discourses that have shaped how Indo-Caribbean women's agency, organizing, and politics are viewed, shared, studied, and theorized. Given the expansion of Caribbean masculinity studies, as a tributary flowing from the questions raised by regional feminist scholarship, we also continue to call for further interrogation of how Indo-Caribbean masculinities have been engaging and will continue to engage Indo-Caribbean feminisms—past, present, and future. As Patricia Mohammed (2003) has pointed out, feminisms' impact has dissolved "like sugar in coffee," compelling men to become gender conscious and changing the terrain on which feminist struggles against patriarchy and for male allies take place. While this issue explores the historical roots and cultural underpinnings as well as forms of difference that have shaped Indo-Caribbean women's approaches to feminism, far more can be said about how Indo-Caribbean women and men are shaping feminism in the Caribbean and how feminism is shaping them. These are the directions for further work to which this issue points.

The rich body of scholarship on Indo-Caribbean gender identities, and on their meanings for forms of feminism that enable women to take their Indianness with them, has benefited from the interest of South Asian women in the diaspora. Major works on Indo-Caribbean ethnic and gender identities have been produced by scholars such as Tejaswini Niranjana, Aisha Khan, Viranjana Munasinghe, Brinda Mehta, Shalini Puri, and others. This speaks to the way that bodily practices, individual and collective discourses, and generational navigations developed in the Caribbean travel back to India and its diasporas, helping to inspire and create solidarities, such as those formed by Jahajee Sisters, across geography and history. It remains to us to continue to explore the correspondences as well as differences between articulations of South Asian feminisms and Indo-Caribbean feminisms, and the discourses about them, as well as the ways that a multifaceted legacy from the region travels, creating a myriad of implications.

Our goal in continuing this multi-generational, diasporic, and inter-religious conversation is to draw on the knowledge that has been created about Indo-Caribbean women's and girls' gender negotiations, but also to explore further what these mean for the scholarship, activism, and politics that mark the contours of these groups' engagement with Caribbean, Indian, diasporic (and here we mean multiple overlapping diasporas), and global feminisms. Do the contributions in this issue enable us to speak about Indo-Caribbean feminisms? What is it they enable us to say? What makes Indo-Caribbean feminisms different from as well as invested in South Asian feminisms, North American and European feminisms, black feminisms, "Third World" feminisms, and Afro-Caribbean feminisms? How does it navigate its own trajectory across, within and, at times, against these as it refuses activist and discursive forms of colonization, marginalization, invisibility, and de-legitimization.

What emerges from past writings and from the contributions in this issue is that Indo-Caribbean women and girls continue to draw on our histories and herstories, on forms of culture memorialized in women's dress, adornment, bodily movements, songs, spirituality and piety, art and mothering, on knowledge about how to conduct politics in the heteronormative and patriarchal contexts of family and religion, and on the experience of living, loving, and struggling to build solidarities that cross ethnicity, class, and nation. Theoretically, performatively, and politically, Indo-Caribbean women are engaging feminisms, understood as desires for equality, freedom from violence, sisterhood, and the right to unapologetically claim and resist inalienable ethnic markers and symbols of national and regional belonging, as the meanings of empowerment and transformation for all Caribbean women and men are persistently envisioned and worked through.

Still emerging Indo-Caribbean feminisms continue to journey, cross, arrive, return, renew, reach beyond, contest, and create. This issue's contribution is that it draws on all of those approaches and experiences as articulated across scholarly, activist, personal, and artistic forms. In enabling this Special Issue to make such a contribution, as Guest Editors, we would like to thank the CRGS Editorial Staff comprising our Editorial Assistant, Donna Drayton; Copy Editor, Jewel Fraser; and Webmaster, Daren Dhoray; the Executive Editor of the journal, Patricia Mohammed; and an earlier generation of Indo-Caribbean feminists whom we and others in this dialogue still draw on as we bring additional voices, spaces, concerns, and vision to the gendered theorizing and feminist politics of the region.

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Fictions of the Past: Staging Indianness, Identity and Sexuality Among Young Women in Indo-Trinidadian Beauty Pageants

Anusha Ragbir

Abstract

> Beauty contests are places where cultural meanings are produced, consumed *and* rejected, where local and global, ethnic and national, national and international cultures and structures of power are engaged in their most trivial but vital aspects (Cohen, Wilk, and Stoeltje 1996, 8).

"The contestants paraded around the stage in a very slow, graceful manner which also matched the slow, languorous music that accompanied this segment. The girls displayed their outfits in numerous ways; some held up the heavily decorated shawls at intervals, some made hand movements that seemed to display their clothing while also appearing to add to their grace on stage. Smiles were transfixed on their faces, as they were told to constantly remember to smile, and many of them gave very coy, playful, demure facial expressions. All of the traditional garments revealed the arms of the contestants, while most displayed a bit of the stomach and back. For this segment, most of the contestants wore saris, which were fitted tightly around their bodies, revealing their figures" (Ragbir 2010, 73).

Ragbir, Anusha. 2012. Fictions of the Past: Staging Indianness, Identity and Sexuality Among Young Women in Indo-Trinidadian Beauty Pageants. *CRGS*, no. 6, ed. Gabrielle Hosein and Lisa Outar, pp. 1-21.

Introduction

This description was part of my observations at the Miss India Trinidad and Tobago Pageant, one of the sites for my study. Beauty pageants are specific sites that produce and make visible perceived feminine ideals. Thus far, there has been no actual research on staging as it pertains to "Indianness" in a pageant context in Trinidad. Furthermore, there is a gap in the analysis on young Indo-Trinidadian womanhood that many have sought to address (Kanhai 1999; Hosein 2004, 2012; Mohammed 2002) and which I believe a study on beauty pageants as a site that is geared towards young Indo-Trinidadian women can help address. This paper is part of a larger body of work that looks beyond the surface of Indian pageants in Trinidad to explore issues of sexuality, identity, visibility and the tensions and ambivalences between modernity and tradition which are highlighted in the relationship between India, namely "Bollywood", and its diasporic nations.

Patricia Mohammed's (2002) concept of gender negotiations is relevant in highlighting how women manoeuvre and strategize within patriarchal constraints; as well as highlighting the resistance and contestation by Indo-Trinidadian young women in beauty pageants but within the patriarchal space. Hosein (2012) points out that theorizations of late twentieth century "patriarchal bargaining" need to include both forms of negotiation and navigation. In a contemporary context of womanhood having multiple and shifting demands, young Indo-Trinidadian women have to navigate different ideals as well as negotiate the expectations of each. Indian women who were not a part of the public sphere could become nationally visible through Indo-Trinidadian beauty pageants, thereby negotiating their visibility and all that came along with pageant participation within a patriarchal space—or a space of competing patriarchies—the Indo-Trinidadian patriarchal space and that of the wider society. They could also navigate between competing and different prescriptions of womanhood in the process of finding the balance of identities and practices appropriate to different spaces and situations.

This paper must be read through a clear understanding of what is meant by "creolization"[1] and "modernity" in this context. I use these terms keeping in mind Hosein's (2012) reading of gender differential creolization, i.e. Indian women cannot access creolization in the same way that Indian men can because Indian men can gain status from both an Indian and creolized reputation, whereas in contrast, Indian women lose status from a creolized reputation and therefore risk shame. This is because of creolization's association with Afro-Trinidadian femininities, masculinities and sexualities. Here, the intersections of creolization and modernity are useful for teasing out how these young women draw on multiple modernities—white, creole, Indian and Indo-Trinidadian—to navigate their terms of ethnic belonging. Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that Indo-Trinidadian girls access notions of modernity from India that are directly influenced by the West.

[1] "Creolization" is a troublesome but useful term. Troublesome because there are so many interpretations of the word, useful because it confronts the issues related to ethnicity and ethnic relations in a multi-racial society.

While beauty pageants on the whole objectify and commoditize women, I acknowledge that power relations are more complex and thus pageants can give Indian women power, voice and visibility that may not be afforded to them in other aspects of their lives. In this context, this article seeks to answer the following questions: how do young Indo-Trinidadian women negotiate and navigate between multiple sites of modernities that become visible on a beauty pageant stage; what does this say about their identity and how do they, on stage, negotiate their sexuality?

Finally, I compare Tejaswini Niranjana's (2006) study on chutney singing in Trinidad to Indo-Trinidadian beauty pageants to highlight and further problematize prescriptions of "modernity" and "tradition" and to show how this space presents Indo-Trinidadian young women in a different light from chutney: one that is fantasized, imagined and symbolic. Beauty pageants, although an avenue for visibility and agency, present a remarkably different space, since Indo-Trinidadian beauty pageants represent a renouncing of chutney, while, at the same time, embracing contemporary Indian modernity. I will note here that I have not done any specific research on chutney music or its impact on Trinidadian womanhood. My limited analysis in this paper is only for the purpose of providing a much needed counterpoint to female Indo-Trinidadian diasporic claims regarding the Indianness of chutney music and beauty pageants. Niranjana's in-depth and enlightening work on chutney music informs this comparison.

Methodology

My background as a former Indian beauty pageant contestant and winner has guided my interest in pursuing this research. After competing and winning, I was involved in helping pageant producers screen young women and I was a judge for the Mr. and Miss India Trinidad and Tobago Pageant. When I became a student of Gender and Development Studies, it became clear to me that pageants were traditionally seen and are still seen by many feminist scholars as "unfeminist"; indeed, the famous women's liberation protest at the 1968 Miss America Beauty Pageant is considered one of the catalytic events of the modern Western feminist era (Lawson and Ross 2008). However, many contemporary feminist writers have since recognized that pageants can be considered not only a site for further exploration but a possible space of feminine empowerment (Banet-Weiser cited in Reischer and Koo 2004, 312).

The pageants chosen to be a part of this study have been selected on the basis of their availability at the time, as well as the willingness of the producers to open up their pageants for research. The Mastana Bahar Pageant was a particular choice because it is the oldest established Indian pageant in Trinidad. There is a sense of Mastana being more on the conservative side; there is no Modern Wear segment; the Mastana audience is generally an older, Indian crowd; and much emphasis is placed on tradition, which for the pageant segment would mean adherence to traditional notions of Indian womanhood. Even audience members tend to be on the conservative side, and if they are not they are often chastised for it. A letter written to a Trinidadian newspaper complains, "…in recent Indian Variety and Mastana Bahar shows, I have seen girls in maxis [ankle-length dresses], but with their necks, arms and backs exposed, I do not think this is right for any girl who participates in Indian culture...I would appreciate very much, if the organisers of these Indian programmes could encourage our Indian girls to dress in a more decent and

graceful manner" (Niranjana 2006, 116). This letter highlights how Indian tradition and culture can be read through the female Indian body and how Indo-Trinidadians (both male and female) look to Indian cultural shows like Mastana Bahar to maintain those ideals. Somewhat contrastingly, while the Miss India Trinidad and Tobago Pageant still looks to culture and tradition, it is more liberal in that it has embraced a more Western and "modern" sense of Indianness. One example of this is the pageant's "Modern Wear" segment, where contestants are allowed to wear Western-style dresses. Interestingly, the Miss Divali Nagar Pageant has a "Traditional Indian Wear" and a "Modern Indian Wear" segment; both are different takes on how Indian clothes are worn and adorned. For example, in the traditional segment, a young woman would try to appear as "traditionally Indian" as possible. She would show less skin, have her hair in an elegantly styled-up do, wear lots of Indian jewellery and would model to a slow, reverent melody. In the modern segment, her hair may be worn loose, the Indian wear would expose more skin, and she would model a bit faster and more jovially to an upbeat, modern Indian film song.

The pageants chosen are not representative of all Indo-Trinidadian beauty pageants because there are others that I have not observed or been affiliated with and the young women in this study do not represent all Indo-Trinidadian young women. For my study, I have focused on young women between the ages of 15 and 25 who have entered a local beauty pageant, mostly from the areas of South Trinidad and Chaguanas (areas where there is a higher concentration of Indo-Trinidadians). They are Hindu, Christian and Muslim young women (I note that Muslim young women are largely underrepresented in beauty pageants, as Muslim codes of conduct for girls/women are different, and in some ways, much stricter and so fewer of them are contestants compared to Hindus). Christian young women also take part but are few in number; this may be because the Indian pageants are so closely linked to Hinduism. In the minds of many, Indian pageants are synonymous with Hindu pageants. As Patricia Mohammed points out in *Gender Negotiations* (2002), although several religions are present in India, Hindu values penetrated and dominated, and these values were brought to the Caribbean. I have not, however, looked deeply into the issue of religion but it is acknowledged here because the majority of the young women who enter the Indo-Trinidadian beauty pageants are Hindus.

Many of the young women who enter an Indo-Trinidadian beauty pageant often go on to enter others after that, depending on if they win or not. Additionally, the pageants that are a part of my research are the more widely recognized when it comes to media coverage and prizes.[2]

[2] Prizes for some of these pageants are very vague and I have been told that they change constantly. There is a monetary reward that can range anywhere between $3,000 and $10,000 TTD, as well as special prizes such as hampers from sponsors. In the Miss India T&T Pageant the winner gets the chance to compete internationally but not the Miss Mastana Bahar Pageant winner; however, winners in the Miss India T&T Pageant must wait until the end of their reign to receive their prizes. When I was the winner of Miss Mastana Bahar in 2002 I received all of my prizes within a week and every time I visited the show after winning, the producer always gave me several hampers to go home with.

I will also acknowledge that although there are no rules that state Indo-Trinidadian beauty pageants are for "pure" Indo-Trinidadian young women only, they are certainly dominated by them. There are very few cases of mixed-race young women entering the pageants, and even fewer cases of them winning. One of the pageant coordinators for the Miss and Mr. India Trinidad and Tobago {T&T) Pageant told me that you have to have Indian lineage but you do not have to be "pure" Indian. Yet in the pageants I have observed for my study, all of the contestants seem to identify themselves as Indian and did not declare outwardly any mixed status.

I conducted three in-depth interviews with pageant officials, 14 in-depth and semi-structured interviews with pageant contestants, three reflective narratives and additional interviews with others involved in the pageants. I also conducted participant observation research over a period of four months with the Mr. and Miss India Trinidad and Tobago Pageant. I was able to participate by helping in the practice of the question-and-answer segment, helping the young women in their modelling and training exercises and giving them feedback when asked. For the Miss Mastana Bahar Pageant, I utilized non-participant observation.

Indo-Trinidadian womanhood

Indian men and women's assimilation into Trinidadian society did not necessarily mean that they began to identify with the predominantly Afro-Trinidadian culture. In fact, Indians for the most part exercised an Indian identity that has sometimes been seen as the manifestation of "Indian nationalism" (Niranjana 2006, 30). Being West Indian[3] was seen as being Afro-creole and Indians sought to distinguish themselves from this while producing their own narratives of what it meant to be Indian. This has led to claims of "Indianness", which refers to an assertion of Indian identity through several means, for example, according to Niranjana (ibid, 33), when East Indians in Trinidad make the claim to Indianness, it is addressed to a divided audience. Attempting to erase the differences from India rather than to mark it, East Indians assert a racial similarity in relation to the "mother country" and a racial difference to "others" in Trinidad.

If Indians were seen as the "other" in Trinidad by the rest of Trinidadian society, Indian women were doubly "othered" on the basis of their race, ethnicity and gender. With the construction of community and family life in early twentieth century Trinidad, Indian women were put under strict patriarchal codes that meant they were controlled in various spheres of their lives. Part of this control came out of the fears of Indian men that Indian women would have relations with non-Indian men and that they might become "loose" like the African women. As Shalini Puri (1997, 126) states, the creolization of the Indian woman is identified in terms of a change in her sexuality. The strict codes for Indian women thus meant their relative invisibility from the larger society, and especially, the larger Afro-dominated creole context.

A major means in which culture, myths and symbols gave Indo-Trinidadian women their gendered values in Indo-Trinidadian society was through the Hindi cinema. The first

[3] West Indians were presumably every purebred or mixed person who had not migrated from India (Mohammed 2009, 64)

Indian film screened in a Trinidadian cinema, in 1935, was *Bala Jobhan*, and this one and the continuous stream of films that followed from 1935 on had a remarkable influence in nurturing ideas of Indianness and Indian culture among Indian men and women in Trinidad. For the children of those migrants who were born in Trinidad, this represented the India they had never seen. They saw India in the landscape, the clothing, and the practices of religion which were transmitted on the screen, the fictional characters who lived out the morals which their priests preached that they should replicate in their own lives (ibid, 79-80). Indian women now had proof of the behaviour that they were expected to mimic, but even having this access to Indian traditions did not mean they were as "Indian" as the Indians living in India (when evaluated by the standards of Indians in India), and this was highlighted especially with regard to women.

Disciplining Indian women's sexuality during the indentureship period in the Caribbean was more about securing a sexual contract between Indian women and multiple patriarchies in the name of both Victorian morality and economic rationality (Wahab 2008, 6). Planters wanted the Indian male workforce to be stable and this became dependent upon successfully policing Indian women's sexuality. At the same time, Indian men also wanted the subservient, passive female that they had come to expect in India. Later on, notions of respectability for the Indo-Trinidadian woman would still hold value and prominence. Therefore, the Indo-Trinidadian woman was uniquely positioned in a site where she had to deal with the expectations of competing patriarchies: the expectations of Indian womanhood from India, the expectations of Indian men in Trinidad and, additionally, the entire Trinidadian patriarchal society itself.

In an effort to be "seen", to be visible in Trinidad, many of these women took to the Indo and national public stages where their femininity and sexuality were being visibly renegotiated. For Indian women in Trinidad, being in the public eye meant stepping outside of their very private homes and being part of a public that was considered Afro-creole.

The image of the Indian woman was contrasted with her African counterpart: the African woman, the ex-enslaved, the urban *jamette*[4] of Carnival whose sexuality was othered. The latter was seen as vulgar, promiscuous, loud and disruptive (Niranjana 1999, 236). The transformations among Indians had to do with finding ways of inhabiting and changing their new home through a series of complex negotiations with other racial groups, especially the Africans. Exposure to "Western" ways came to the Indians through interaction with the Afro-Caribbean as well as through contact with the European. Even today when Trinidadian Indians speak of Westernization, they often treat it as synonymous with "creolization"[5] (ibid, 238). Yet, Hosein (2004) argues that creolization and modernization are intersecting, but not interlocking processes. While the idea of

[4] A Trinidadian term for a brash, shameless, highly provocative woman, usually associated with the Afro-Trinidadian woman.

[5] It must be recognized that this article was written by Niranjana in 1999; with regards to Westernization today; however, globalization through the media, Internet and several other arenas have come to play a more important role in Westernization in Trinidad. But in her article, she is attempting to link chutney-soca, which is an East Indian phenomenon, with creolization and the degradation of "Indian culture".

"creole" is racially identified and can bring with it shame and dishonour, the term modernization offers options for expanding the boundaries of respectability. Seeming modern and cool (modernization in this sense is associated with status and "whiteness") can give value to certain behaviour, which for Indian girls would normally be seen as inappropriate, in a way that creolization cannot.

When Indian women take to the stage as singers or dancers, or as politicians, the protracted struggle over "culture" and "authenticity" takes a new turn, not only in the national arena between different ethnic groups but also within the Indo-Trinidadian community itself. The chutney-soca[6] controversy of the early 1990s has provoked some rethinking of what claims to Indianness involve in Trinidad. The singers, and the (specifically female) participants in the chutney dances, were denounced by many in the East Indian community for what were termed their "vulgarity" and "obscenity" (Niranjana 1999, 240). The public sphere is here considered to be an "African" and masculine realm, so the making public of chutney (and its Englishing) necessarily involves making it available to the gaze of Afro-Trinidadians. The disapproval of "vulgarity" can be read also as an anxiety regarding miscegenation, the new form of chutney becoming a metonym for the supposed increase in relationships between Indian women and African men (ibid, 240).

When women, such as Drupatee Ramgoonai, took to the stage with chutney music, the visibility of Indo-Trinidadian women increased and became controversial. With its highly charged sexual lyrics, raunchy dance moves and female chutney singers' and dancers' "vulgar" clothing, female Indo-Trinidadian sexuality came under fire and "the cultural or should we say encultured body of the East Indian woman proliferated discourse...the controversy seemed to indicate an intimate connection between the musical form and the East Indian woman's sexuality" (Niranjana 2006, 119).

Many Indian women were relatively confined to their own Indian and private contexts, but by providing a platform for Indo-Trinidadian women, chutney singing made these women known as individuals to the rest of society; although Indo-Trinidadian pageants did not accomplish this national visibility in quite the same way, they were still visible to the public. It should be noted here that media coverage of these pageants is not as widespread as that of the national pageants and has decreased in recent years. Despite this, though understudied, beauty pageants provide yet another space for Indo-Trinidadian young women to negotiate and navigate their visibility, their identity and their sexuality on the public stage.

Indian beauty pageants in Trinidad

There are several Indian pageants to date that take place in Trinidad. I have chosen to focus on what I have deemed to be the more "popular" ones, based on media coverage and my own observations. The pageants discussed here are the Miss India Trinidad and Tobago Pageant (which also incorporates a Mr. India T&T Pageant) and the Miss

[6] While this term is very broad, it can simply be described as a spicy blend of "Indian" music that incorporates creole soca music (even soca music itself was arguably seen to be an Indian-influenced type of local music derived from calypso).

Naturally Fair Mastana Bahar Pageant. I also did some research on the Miss Divali Nagar Pageant. My intention was to observe these pageants as they took place; particularly, observing the choice of clothing, the way the pageants were structured, the dialogue, the music, the ambiance, the young women themselves. The Miss India T&T Pageant specifically captured my interest because it contained both a "traditional wear" and a "modern wear" segment. Also, since I knew the producers well (as I was once a participant in this pageant), I was afforded one-on-one access to the young women for interviews and observations that spanned a few months leading up to the pageant. This proved very useful because the young women (and men) were required to meet once a week for pageant practice. This consisted of a series of pageant-related exercises such as walking in heels, learning to do stage turns in a sari and practising for the question-and-answer segment.

The first organized mainstream Indian pageant was the Miss Mastana Bahar Pageant, called the Miss Naturally Fair Mastana Bahar Pageant since its endorsement of the *Naturally Fair* brand in 2002 (*Naturally Fair* is the brand name of a range of skin lightening products manufactured in India)[7].

The Miss Mastana Bahar pageant began in 1975 as part of the Indian Cultural Pageant, which was a live stage show that took place at the Queen's Park Savannah. This was the first major Indian-centered pageant and the current producer, Mr. Kayal Mohammed, informed me that it all started because women constantly approached the organizers, wanting to be a part of the Indian cultural show, but were unable to sing or dance. They also did not feel comfortable entering the larger, national pageants but had a love for modelling and pageantry[8]. At that time in Trinidad and Tobago, Indians were actively becoming a much more visible force politically and economically. Viranjini Munasinghe (2001, 19) argues that Indo-Trinidadian protests of discrimination and alienation intensified in the 1980s, a period marked by the consolidation of Indo-Trinidadian social mobility, increased cultural expression and a historically unparalleled display of Indo-Trinidadian confidence in the political arena. Yet their visibility should not be seen as an attempt to become integrated with the dominant creole culture; nor did the creole hegemonic class try to integrate them into society. According to Munasinghe, the 30 years of rule by the People's National Movement (PNM)[9] had left behind two principal legacies: first, the widespread consensus that "the people who were of the state and who possessed it were Negroes" and second, the proclivity to mute ethnic differences for the good of the nation. An Indo-Trinidadian PNM minister (Shamshuddin Mohammed) once said that he had repeatedly been attacked by others in his party for his efforts to propagate Indian culture and even opted to leave Indian cultural events out of Independence Day

[7] I acknowledge that this in itself is problematic and certainly requires further probing and examination, which I have done in my larger body of work.

[8] Hosein (2004) and others have argued that Indo-Trinidadian females rather than males have been made to be markers of difference within a creolized society. The majority of Indian girls, therefore, would by choice participate in beauty pageants but within the context of appropriate Indian womanhood (Indian pageants). Going outside of these borders can result in females losing their "Indianness", femininity and difference, which mark their Indo-Trinidadian female honour.

[9] The People's National Movement (PNM) is one of the main political parties in Trinidad and Tobago and also considered to be highly Afro-dominated.

celebrations because "it only parrots what is going on in India and as such goes against the grain of Independence" (ibid, 19). This is relevant here because if it became important to mute ethnic difference in Trinidad and render an entire group of people "invisible", then Indo-Trinidadian women would be made to feel even more so. Hence, the desire for Indo-Trinidadian women to negotiate their space of visibility, even (or especially) within an Indian context, would be increased. Additionally, the crises of belonging Indians felt in Trinidad at that time only made them look more to India for that sense of home and belonging.

The national pageant, the Miss Trinidad and Tobago Pageant, began in 1963, right after Independence and since then there have been only a handful of Indo-Trinidadian contestants. From the interviews with Indo-Trinidadian young women I have conducted, it seems clear that their two main issues with entering the National Pageant are the swimsuit segment (concerns about Indian women putting their bodies on display in a swimsuit segment will be discussed later in this chapter) and the stigma that became associated with the national pageant because of its being so Afro-dominated. Yet, some Indo-Trinidadian women have entered the national pageants in an effort to represent their country on an international stage, which is generally not the case with the local Indian pageants.[10] The many Indian women who wanted to model or to be in a pageant felt more at ease doing so within the boundaries of appropriate Indian womanhood, i.e. within the Indian patriarchal boundaries of what was considered appropriate for Indian women and girls to maintain their markers of difference in a creolized society, and Indian beauty pageants gave them this opportunity.

Differing spaces

As previously stated, beauty pageants present a remarkably different space—Indo-Trinidadian beauty pageants represent a renouncing of chutney and, at the same time, they depict contemporary Indian modernity. Chutney singing in Trinidad has been well documented and analysed by Tejaswini Niranjana (2006). For the purpose of this paper, I will reference chutney as a point of comparison to the pageant space, simply because they are both spaces of visibility for Indo-Trinidadian women, yet the spaces are remarkably different from each other and produce opposing interpretations of Indo-Trinidadian women.

In her groundbreaking study on Indo-Trinidadian women and chutney music, Niranjana (2006) asserts that rather than looking to India and Indian nationalism, the analysis of contemporary discourses of East Indian women's sexuality has to be placed in the biracial framework of Trinidad. As mentioned previously, Indo-Trinidadian women are contrasted with their Afro-Trinidadian counterparts; Indo-Trinidadian women must avoid "becoming African". Niranjana acknowledges that while what is "proper" for Indo-Trinidadian women is enabled in part by the colonial and Indian nationalist

[10] In previous years before this study was undertaken in 2008–2009, the Miss India Trinidad and Tobago Pageant sent their top three winners to international Indian pageants, the biggest being the Miss India Worldwide Pageant, which was held every year in different diasporic locations. Young Indian women from different nations would compete. However, funding to send the girls, sponsorship, and so on, would be necessary and was sometimes an issue.

reconstructions of ethnic and racial identities, this assertion in Trinidad today is part of a Trinidadian reconstruction of such identities, whose major players include both "Indian" and "African". Thus,

> …the East Indian attempt to resolve the question of women...can be seen as aligned with the effort to consolidate the meanings of cultural and racial identity at a time when the new political visibility of 'Indians' is providing newer spaces of assertion for women as well as men (ibid, 123).

While I agree with Niranjana, I illustrate through a reading of beauty pageants that Indo-Trinidadian young women both assert their visibility within a cultural space in biracial Trinidad that demarcates them from what is considered "African" and look to India and Indian modernity as well as tradition. They emphasize respectability and certainly utilize an Indian influence on the pageant stage, yet although not as overtly as chutney, they maintain a public and national visibility of sexuality as well as femininity.

The modernity that is asserted by these young women in beauty pageants is influenced by the West (directly as well as through creolization) and also through modern India (which is also Western-influenced). Thus, Indo-Trinidadian modernity is neither Indian nor Afro-creole but both creolization and Indian (from India) modernity are produced as well as negotiated. Additionally, pageants look to an Indian modernity of the past[11] to criticize the Indian modernity of the present. One major way this can be seen is through "the swimsuit issue"; although young women in Indian pageants are allowed to model swimsuits onstage, in Indo-Trinidadian pageants this is not permitted and is viewed with disdain. To interrogate these claims, I will examine how Indo-Trinidadian young women's ideals are shaped and how this is manifested on the beauty pageant stage.

'Bollywood'

"The sense of belonging that Bollywood films foster—the sheer sense of security and shared joy, the commonality of experience despite the geographical separation of so many thousands of miles—is second to none. It works more because Bollywood is one of the things that bind us together as Indians, never mind where we live" (Bhattacharya 2003 cited in Bandyopadhyay 2008, 82). "Bollywood" as an industry has had a significant effect on the construction of identities in the diaspora. Of course, Bollywood means more than films, though these are a major part of it. Songs, dance, even pageants are part of the Bollywood industry. In Trinidad, images, characters, storylines and music evoke specific feelings of "Indianness" and are ultimately associated with "tradition", the "past", and a separate and India-derived ethnic identity (Vertovec 1992, Ali 1993 cited in Hosein 2004, 192).

Bollywood movies and music videos, actors and actresses were constantly used as reference points and as inspiration for young women in Indian pageants. Yet many aspects of Bollywood also seem to be disturbing to them. The new era of Bollywood which has taken up a more "Westernized" mode of dress, attitude and even culture does

[11] Less overtly sexual, less Western-influenced.

not sit well with the girls in my study (this once again highlights their ambivalent struggles with tradition and modernity. I got the impression that if they wanted to see sex and the body on display they would rather see it in Hollywood than Bollywood). In fact, they prefer the more traditional, conservative, older Bollywood that is slowly disappearing. All of the female pageant contestants that I have interviewed expressed this view. A 27-year-old former Mastana Bahar contestant expressed that "India was losing its traditional values and this could be seen in Bollywood movies that now have kissing and lesbianism". Another pageant contestant, 19 years old, stated "India's high prostitution rate is linked to Westernization and a loss of Indian values".

Thus, Bollywood, and for that matter, India, no longer seem to be an unproblematic model for Indo-Trinidadian girls; there is a shift in the meaning of Bollywood in relation to Indo-Trinidadian female identity. This phenomenon is quite a turn of events from previous notions of India as the ultimate archetype for Indians in the diaspora. So what is it about India that now seems to be garnering this mixed reaction? From my data, I can conclude that Indian girls within the pageant do consider India and Indian culture their main inspirations. A 19-year-old Miss India Trinidad and Tobago contestant remarked, "I want to be as Indian as possible. I get more respect if I wear Indian wear every day." However, they connect this with a traditional view of India and, due to globalization and modernity, India no longer fits the static icon of its "traditional" past. The pageant setting promotes contrasting ideals; girls are expected to conform to a traditional notion of Indian womanhood but, at the same time, promote Bollywood and their connections to India. However, this promotion of Bollywood does not mean a promotion of modernity *per se*; only certain "acceptable" facets of Bollywood are tolerated in the pageants by both the producers and the contestants. The other paradox comes from my observations and conversations with the young women when they are outside of the pageant setting.

During practice sessions, when on lunch break, contestants in the Miss India Trinidad and Tobago Pageant utilize the opportunity to socialize with each other, both males (as there is a male section of this pageant, the Mr. India Trinidad and Tobago Pageant) and females. There were often conversations about going to clubs on the weekends; some of the girls socialized outside of the practice sessions in these settings and there was even a "lime" organized for all the pageant contestants to go to a prominent club in the Chaguanas area. From the conversations I have had with contestants, none of them were revealed as smokers but all (apart from the 14- and the 15-year-old) said they drank on occasion. One of the former winners of the pageant claimed that her parents are strict Hindus, who do not even eat meat and she also is a vegetarian, but she also revealed that she loves to go out to clubs and she drinks alcohol socially.

It is as if young Indo-Trinidadian women want to be creole in real life (that is, be modern, fit into Trinidadian creolized culture) but want to be Indian when desired, and need India to stay as an icon of Indianness for them to have a reference point of what that means. Therefore, India's own modernity can be seen as threatening to their own ability to challenge creolization in Trinidad (at least on a pageant stage) since their notion of what is traditional, what is respectable, and so on, rests in their channelling of this from India.

While Indo-Trinidadian women are part of both the chutney and the beauty pageant stage, what is produced and staged on each is in contradiction. As Patricia Mohammed (2002) has outlined, a key consideration for Indians since their arrival has been the negotiation of their ethnic and gender identities. How have Indo-Trinidadian young women in beauty pageants negotiated their identities? How is this identity different from the identities of women on the chutney stage? The symbolic Indian girl in the Indian beauty contest is not part of the everyday realities of these young women. Outside of the pageant, these contestants, for the most part, are not stereotypically traditional. They must adapt, at least for the stage, the image of Indian womanhood that is required of them. Thus, they must negotiate their identities onstage to portray the ideal, traditional Indian girl; a passive, mild-mannered virgin, yet ambitious and educated. The chutney stage hosts a blatant display of female sexuality through the lyrics as well as through clothing and dance. It is anything but passive and mild-mannered. And it speaks to the working-class women rather than to the middle and upper classes that look to India to maintain their respectability and tradition.

The rules and regulations with regard to appropriate female behaviour in Indo-Trinidadian beauty pageants suggest to me that even in the setting of a pageant, Indo-Trinidadian young women are expected to maintain their Indian codes of behaviour, especially because they are on display to the public eye. They are not just representing themselves "out there", they are *symbolizing* something even bigger than the individual. They are representing their family, religion, culture, heritage, and their future—the whole spectrum of what it means to be an Indian woman. King O'Riain (2005, 3) notes that by invoking cultural norms, the good behaviour that pageant officials want the queens to exhibit becomes oddly racialized. Hosein (2004, 3) observed in her study that young Indo-Trinidadian women performed a kind of "symbolic womanhood" at extended family gatherings, religious settings and cultural functions. This representation could be very different from their everyday lives and other ways of dressing and carrying themselves. This concept of "symbolic womanhood" is important in giving definition to the girls' portrayal. "Self-regulation, performance, and tactics of masking and manipulating femininity are part of girls' attempts to deal with competing pulls in society. Young women's dress and behaviour cannot be simply seen as aspects of assimilation or cultural loss because girls carry themselves in ways that enable them to access belonging across a range of sites" (Hosein 2002, 2004).

One site of negotiating their claims to "goodness" while intertwining their fantasy of an India of the past with the more global, modern Indian image is in the "Bollywood Gown" segment. Some girls have opted to be more revealing than others in this segment, despite their claims that they prefer a traditional, conservative Bollywood image. This has led me to conclude that although many young women do not necessarily agree with or endorse this newer Bollywood image that closely resembles a Hollywood image (at least not publicly or in the context of the pageant), they still seek to find a balance between conservative and sexy Bollywood for the pageant. Young women seem to be okay with the sexiness of Bollywood and sexiness generally, but are not allowed to say so in the context of the pageant and may in fact value the pageant stage as one that enables a particular kind of exalted, on-a-pedestal, transcendent, "princess"-like symbolic womanhood to be made visible—a form of womanhood at odds with chutney shows,

music videos and even Bollywood depictions, one in which they may be invested, among others, but have few other spaces to engage with, embody and perform. Of course, family and religion can also play a role here in restricting the choice of clothing. Interestingly, a "modern wear" or "Bollywood gown" segment in a pageant also becomes a way of mediating between an India of the past and an India of the present, but from my data I can conclude that Indo-Trinidadian girls within the pageant context for the most part expressed a general discomfort with the more extreme aspects of contemporary India of Bollywood (kissing in movies and music videos, bathing suit segments in pageants, etc.).

Figure 1: Miss India T&T Contestant in Hollywood/Bollywood Gown
http://www.vikashdancers.com/vikashdancers/mrmissindiatnt/history.html

Another very important point that could possibly explain Indo-Trinidadian young women's discomfort with the modern, sexy Bollywood image is that there is a need for them to show their differences and their distinctiveness from Afro-Trinidadians, thus emphasizing a resistance to creolization. Of course, as mentioned before, this is not to say that in the everyday, private lives of these girls, they do not dress sexily or modern or Western. But the public Indian female image, associated with ideals of beauty, pageantry and royalty or "queendom" must illustrate a traditional, conservative, high class and high caste Indian woman. Hosein (2004, 170) asserts "different configurations of ethnicity and femininity are at work when it comes to Indo-Trinidadian girls. The first is cast as Indian, modest, morally decent yet old fashioned. The other is Western, sexual, trendy and mainstream, but also at times, considered immoral". While the demands of Indo-Trinidadian womanhood frame a narrow path for young women, their ambivalence suggests that they must also navigate "tradition" and "modernity" in terms of ethnic belonging.

Bringing the point back to chutney, Niranjana (2006) clearly demonstrates that when Indo-Trinidadian women took to the chutney stage this was a blatant disavowal of middle-class, pure, respectable Indian womanhood. This sort of thinking was crafted out of Indian nationalism and the arguments against indentureship; the disavowed East Indian woman is the other to the ideal Indian woman of India. Pageants, on the other hand, disavow chutney and this working-class, overtly sexual, "licentious" space for women. Pageants present the fantasized Indian woman that is in direct contrast to the woman in chutney; she is pure, traditional, respectable and modern without displaying the facets of modernity that would have young women appear too Western and too creole.

One can say that within the specific context of the pageant, this diasporic Indian womanhood vs. the Bollywood Indian womanhood dynamic shows up. It does not show up in chutney or music videos as these do not look to India for constructions of identity, femininity or sexuality, nor in Indian participation in Carnival[12], nor in other times and places where young women identify with Bollywood stars and aesthetics. In other words, the pageant is a specific site where specific visibilities are given room, ones not given room elsewhere, where young Indo-Trinidadian women can be lifted above the complexities of everyday femininities, can access a space of ideal femininity that doesn't actually exist and never really did, enact a particular fantasy of womanhood, "the past", "tradition" and India which is lost in other sites of Indo-Trinidadian culture as well as India itself, and therefore makes visible a particular fiction of Indian female modernity that is highly esteemed, valued and rewarded, despite or perhaps because of the fact that everyone—producers and contestants—knows it does not exist. This is why the young women themselves participate in protecting this staged space from swimsuits, westernized Bollywood and Afro-creole culture the way that they do: it is the only site they can appear as pure as Sita[13], as devoted as Draupadi[14], as untouchable as Rapunzel and as much the star of their own fairytale as Cinderella, an ordinary girl who became queen—sexually desired, idealized, yet unique, innocent, chaste, pious, untouchable—and in the end, rewarded for their efforts.

Sexuality

> We will never permit vulgarity and bikini wearing in our competitions…we don't believe in the axiom the shorter the dress the greater will be the chances of winning the prize. We are very conservative in that. We only showcase the best of Indian culture and not the skin. We strongly oppose exhibiting women in a cheap manner on the dais (Dharmatma Saran, founder of the Miss India USA and Miss India Worldwide pageants, cited in Mani 2002, 125).

[12] I am referring here to the annual Trinidad Carnival, which involves a range of activities that conclude with a parade of costumes on the streets of the nation's capital during a two-day period. The costumes, for the most part, are very skimpy and body-baring and the Carnival's historical roots as well as blatant displays of sexuality are associated with the Afro-creole.

[13] Sita, in Hindu tradition is the wife of Lord Rama, and is esteemed as the exemplar for all Hindu women in discharging her wifely and womanly duties, for example, virtue, respectability and devotion.

[14] Draupadi, wife of the five Pandavas, who in Hindu tradition is the exemplar of faith and devotion.

> Bikini wearing will never be allowed in my show, even if it is done in India (Kayal Mohammed, producer, *Mastana Bahar*).

In this section, I discuss the notion of sexuality within Indo-Trinidadian beauty pageants, with specific reference to swimsuit segments, to highlight its taboo nature among Indians in Trinidad and how it has provided one of the most important bases for the Trinidadian (and I am certain other places as well) diaspora's rejection of India's global, modern image. Swimsuits are allowed in the national Indian pageants but are not currently allowed in any Indo-Trinidadian beauty pageant to date. Firstly, however, I argue that sexuality is produced and displayed onstage, even without the swimsuit segment, through an aesthetic of movement.

Malathi De Alwis' discussion of the implications of *lajja-baya*, or "norms of sexual modesty and proper behaviour" for Sinhalese women in colonial Ceylon, is important in examining the ways in which the category of "respectability" mediates the relationship between nationalism and sexuality, drawing attention to the patriarchal formation of respectable-yet-modern women in colonial Ceylon. With the influence of Christian missionaries and European fashions, the emerging Ceylonese nationalist movement sought to police the display of female bodies by advocating "indigenous" styles of dress for bourgeois women. The contentious relationship between norms of modesty and respectability sanctioned by the Ceylonese nationalist movement, and the clothing and behavioural styles encouraged by the "Europeanized" bourgeois class, were accentuated by the location of these debates within an emergent Ceylonese women's movement. De Alwis discusses her experience as a judge of a Sri Lankan beauty contest. The winner was evaluated not only on the appropriateness of her attire (all contestants were clothed in a style of dress particular to young girls in nineteenth century Ceylon) but equally importantly on her "walk or gait". However, the clothing of the contestants works only in conjunction with what De Alwis calls an "aesthetic of movement", i.e. the way she moved in the clothing (Mani 2002).

When I read this, I was immediately struck by the similarities to Indo-Trinidadian beauty pageants. In many respects it is not the same due to the modern wear segment where there are such themes as the "Hollywood/Bollywood" gown and contestants can certainly choose to reveal some skin, but even then they are still bound by the constraints of appropriate Indian womanhood, i.e. they must always be cognizant of not revealing too much skin so as not to appear "vulgar" (or creole), which would not be considered fitting for a young Indian girl. We can more clearly see the similarities in the traditional wear segment of the competition, where the girls must parade in authentic Indian outfits (although most wear a very modernized version of Indian outfits as they see exemplified in current Bollywood fashions). Even clothed in Indian wear, trying to evoke purity and modesty, the contestants' movement of their bodies, which includes facial expressions, emanates sexuality, which is what De Alwis (Mani 2002) described in her own pageant context above. Additionally, sometimes the very concealing Indian wear can show just the slightest bit of skin, giving the audience just the right dose of hinted sexuality.

In the modern wear segment, contestants were afforded more room to display their bodies in revealing ways but always staying within the boundaries of appropriate Indian womanhood. The picture below demonstrates the contrast of ideals presented on stage: the clasped hands as if in prayer and the facial expression reveal the ideal Indian woman on the stage, yet the pose and the style of the dress to reveal the leg showcase sexuality. The slit in the dress is also not very high which would appear too outwardly vulgar and would cross the boundary of what is deemed appropriate. It becomes obvious from the discussion of the body and respectability that sexuality is produced in Indian pageants whether overtly or covertly so.

Figure 2: Meenakshi Sharma Miss India T&T 2009 winner, http://ww.trinidadexpress.com/index.pl/print?id=161482065.html

Contemporary Indo-Trinidadian girls, despite their deportment in their private lives, try to maintain a traditional, conservative image of Indian womanhood that condemns the more provocative aspects of Bollywood, while also using certain parts of it to inspire themselves. The producers and promoters of Indian pageants in Trinidad pride themselves on not having (or needing to have) a swimsuit segment in their competition, even though it is done in Indian pageants such as the Miss Femina India contest. Being overtly sexual is not seen as being Indian according to traditional Indian patriarchal constructions of appropriate femininity. Handa (1997, cited in Hosein 2004, 167) argued that "managing sexuality" through dress and public behaviour is about avoiding shame

and ultimately about "marriage marketability". Handa (1997) further argued that "appropriate" dress is linked to "tradition" and "changing times" with a move to greater "immorality" (ibid, 168). This point came up several times in my interviews with both contestants and producers. They felt that Indians in India were slipping away from tradition. India has certainly embraced Westernization more readily than, for example, Indians in Trinidad, and it has been reflected in their beauty competitions, fashion, movies and music. Furthermore, beauty queens are utilized in India to promote modernity. Ahmed-Ghosh (2003, 205) asserts that beauty queens are used as symbols to "convince" the world at large that India has "arrived" on the global stage as a "modern" country on its path to "development".

It is no surprise that women would be used as representative of tradition; as part of the nationalist movement in India, the conceptualization of the Indian woman was in terms of femininity, purity, submissiveness, mothering, caretaking instincts, compassion and morality (Ahmed-Ghosh 2003, 208). Katrak (1992, cited in Ahmed Ghosh, 208) concludes that "the belief that women even more than men were the guardians of tradition, particularly against a foreign enemy, was used to reinforce the most regressive aspects of tradition". Indian women's vulnerability is always quoted to protect them from the corrupting influences of the West, which are always "invading and polluting the Indian middle class with movies, television shows and now beauty pageants, that will bring nudity, dubious morals and AIDS in their 'wake'" (Nair 1998 cited in Ahmed-Ghosh, 209). However, beauty pageants in India are located at the intersection of economic liberalization and the global approval of Western social norms. This, combined with their Indianness creates a hybridity that suits the national agenda, as long as traditional images of women are reinforced through state-controlled representations (ibid, 219).

In India, incorporating the swimsuit as part of their pageants can be seen as a move to meet international standards as well as to be considered a contender in the global arena. In Trinidad, incorporating the swimsuit as part of the local Indian pageants is seen as immoral and as a deviation from "Indian ways and culture". As the producers I have interviewed have said, if Indian girls want to parade in swimsuits onstage, they can join the national pageants. Thus, Indo-Trinidadians associate wearing swimsuits on stage with creolization as much as Westernization. Therefore, Indians are greatly underrepresented in the national pageant arena.

Figure 3: Priya Chanderbally, an Indo-Trinidadian contestant in the national pageant, http://www.legacy.guardian.co.tt/archives/2008-02-23/features1.html

Following the interviews and my observations, I was able to conclude that Indo-Trinidadian beauty pageant producers police the sexuality and the bodies of the contestants in order to reject modernization, Westernization and even creolization. Sexuality must not be overtly staged because it does not fit with the image they intend to portray: the image of the traditional Indian woman, pure and virtuous. If Indian girls in Trinidad desired to wear a swimsuit on a pageant stage, they would have to enter the national pageants to do so. However, despite these claims of not promoting sexuality on the stage, it is still produced. Sexuality does not have to be overt and provocative; as the aesthetic of movement concept shows us, it can be produced with the movement of bodies. Furthermore, although Bollywood's newer sexy image is rejected and condemned by both contestants and producers, it is still used in several ways to promote the pageants, for example, the opening dance is usually to a Bollywood song, and the talent segment contains Bollywood song and dance. Thus, this highlights that there is still an overlap between traditional and modern on the Indo-Trinidadian beauty pageant stage as well as ambivalence over what these concepts mean to young female contestants. There is also the question of what is seen as constitutive of Indian culture.

The moralistic, virginal, respectable Indian girl that needs to be displayed on stage does not necessarily (or hardly ever) translates into the actual lives of the contestants. This is not to say that the contestants were revealed to be immoral and degrading to themselves and their culture, but rather that the archetype of the Indian woman that is presented on stage is not who they really are, thus enabling them to perform this imagined Indianness. This speaks to the symbolic nature of the pageant; it allows a particular Indian discourse to emerge that does not speak to other aspects of their lives. It encourages a fantasy of another place and another time (Khan 1995); a fantasy of femininity as decorative, statuesque and respectable.

Conclusion

Identity, sexuality and gender are all aspects of Indo-Trinidadian beauty pageants that have been explored in this study. Also relevant are issues of creolization and tradition vs. modernity. It is both very interesting and complex how Indians in the diaspora (in this case, Trinidad) try to hold on to Indian ideals of tradition, even in this era of Westernization and modernization across the globe. Perhaps, this is their attempt to resist creolization, or to resist, in a way, Westernization, or to define diasporic Indian alternative modernities. I believe in the case of Trinidad that all of these are plausible explanations.

I have attempted to show that chutney music presented a revolutionary space for Indo-Trinidadian working-class women that made them visible, empowered them and created controversies as they challenged traditional ideals of Indian womanhood. Beauty pageants are somewhat in opposition to this space; they seek to produce and maintain traditional ideals of Indian womanhood and reject chutney's overt sexual displays and raunchiness that are not in keeping with respectability and purity.

The pageant space becomes an imagined one that is created from an imagined past. Young women are able to be lifted above the everyday lives they lead, given the chance to be a queen, to feel like they are part of this "authentic Indianness" they have only heard about and seen in movies. Further, in a creole society, they are able to create boundaries from "the other" (while themselves being "othered" to Indian women from India) and demarcate themselves from Afro-Trinidadians.

While both chutney singing and beauty pageants are different spaces of resistance for Indo-Trinidadian women, they are still representative of a mode of visibility, even within specific contexts. Although the whole idea of a beauty contest may seem as frivolous as they come to some, I have to acknowledge that women use the resources and circumstances available to them to further themselves in whatever way, small or large, they can. Granted, many young women who enter beauty pageants do not view pageants as part of a well-oiled patriarchal machine, and in fact, choose to believe that they have empowered themselves and are inspiring others. Although this thinking may be ignorant of the realities of beauty contests, the young women are still not powerless vessels. They have found a space to represent something; whether it is their identity (real or imagined), their ethnicity, their culture, their country, they have found a space to have experiences that their real lives may not afford them, and they have found, even in small doses, power and a resistance to patriarchal power.

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Modern Navigations: Indo-Trinidadian Girlhood and Gender-Differential Creolization

Gabrielle Jamela Hosein

Abstract
This article examines suburban, adolescent Indo-Trinidadian girls' engagement with gender-differential processes of modernization and creolization at the turn of the twentieth century. It argues that girls' experience of these processes should be understood in terms of their divergence, rather than their interlock. This divergence is a reflection of the globalized, Indian diasporic and locally racialized contexts within which processes of creolization and modernization are given meaning. Specifically, modernization's associations with white metropolitan femininities and being up-to-date with everything, cool, and liberal enable these girls to legitimately negotiate and navigate ethnic, gender, age and generational boundaries regarding their personal choice, femininity, sexuality and participation in national belonging. This does not mean that girls do not reproduce patriarchal expectations of Indo-Trinidadian girlhood. Rather, it explains how and why they both contest and reproduce these expectations, and their understandings of the opportunities and risks involved.

Drawing on questionnaire data gathered in 1999 among mainly 14–16 year old Indo-Trinidadian girls attending secondary school in North Trinidad, the article focuses on music, cinema and television, mainly of the US and India, in order to show how girls construct notions of appropriate modern Indo-Trinidadian girlhood through their

reception of popular culture. Overall, what emerges is that the navigations associated with modern Indo-Trinidadian girlhood are framed by notions of Indian female honour and (white) metropolitan reputation. This is an explicitly gendered frame and compares to that of Indian honour and creole reputation for adolescent Indo-Trinidadian males. The salience of this gendered framework among girls at the turn of the century provides a useful lens for thinking about shifts in Indo-Trinidadian young womanhood in the decade since, and for explaining the continued recasting of its terms across religion, geography and class as a means of expanding Indo-Trinidadian female generational power.

Introduction

In her influential 1988 article on Indian women's creolization, Patricia Mohammed argued that in the late twentieth-century experience of this group, creolization and modernization were "interlocked". Indo-Trinidadian adolescent girls' negotiation and navigation of gender identities, ten years later and at the turn of the century, suggest that we should pay attention instead to their divergence. This article does not argue that the interlocking nexus of creolization and modernization is no longer salient, but that these girls manage this interlock by differentiating between creolization and modernization, and by making modernization, in particular, an idiom of adolescent female power. This is because of creolization's stereotypical associations with masculinity, reputation, and Afro-Trinidadian, as well as working-class Indo-Trinidadian enactments of autonomous and public sexuality.

In order to explore more fully girls' gender-differential experience of creolization and how modernity works as an instrument of adolescent Indo-Trinidadian female power, this article first reviews Mohammed's original conceptualization regarding Indo-Trinidadian women as well as Neils Sampath's exploration of modernity and creolization in relation to rural Indo-Trinidadian adolescent males. Working within the interstices of these two texts to trace Indo-Trinidadian girls' gender negotiations and navigations, the article then uses Tejaswini Niranjana's (2006) conceptualization of Indian, creole and East Indian modernities to make sense of how notions such as respectability and reputation, which inform gendered understandings of honour, status and shame, are made to work both to recode and reinscribe the boundaries of "too much freedom and mixing" for Indo-Trinidadian female adolescents. By recoding their participation in an interlocked "creole-modernity" (Niranjana 2006) in terms of identification with white and sub-continental Indian modernities, and with the US as metropole, Indo-Trinidadian girls try to transcend local classed, religious and racialized understandings of honour and shame. They nonetheless invoke ideals of modern, middle-class, respectable Indo-Trinidadian girlhood when defining an unacceptable degree of modernity and creolization.

The complex landscape for girls' navigation of modernity is panoramic and marked by sub-continental Indian nationalists' construction of post-colonial Indian modernity, premised on imagined traditions and gendered forms of civility (Chatterjee 1989); by Bollywood's more "modern" representations of Indian modernity, which can fail by either being too out of date or too Western (Ragbir 2012); by European colonial and more contemporary US symbols of modernity which exemplify being metropolitan and liberal, but can also become inappropriately excessive; by Indo-Trinidadian (what Niranjana calls

"East Indian") modernity and its tensions regarding class, religion, geography, respectability and women's sexual freedom, as seen in debates regarding chutney music; and by creole-modernity, best exemplified by Carnival's visible staging of the nation. The article does not delve into all these points, but nonetheless draws on this panorama to assess how theorizing the divergence of creolization and modernization can contribute to Caribbean feminist scholarship on the intersections of ethnicity, class and religion, as well as nation, diaspora and metropole, with Indo-Trinidadian girls' generational agency and power.

Gender, modernization and creolization: Interlock and divergence

In one of the first feminist essays describing Indo-Trinidadian women's greater social and occupational integration in "creole society"[i], Patricia Mohammed (1988, 393) drew on Brathwaite's (1974) conceptualization of creolization as the indigenization of African cultural forms and more privileged European ones in the formation of Caribbean society. "Indian" cultural forms and identities[ii] were peripheralized in Brathwaite's model, which focused on Jamaica, Relatedly, scholars of creolization in Trinidad and Tobago had not yet begun to theorize "ethnic tensions, structures and hierarchies…issues of gender and male control over women" and "individual identity choices" (Reddock 1999, 9), as well as discourses of ethnic difference and authenticity (Munasinghe 2001), as they affected Indo-Trinidadian women's ethnic community and national belonging.

Mohammed read Indo-Trinidadian women's increasing "commitment—political and social—to the new society, as well as physical engagement with the society" as testament to their "creolization" or acculturation to locally habituated, syncretic values and relations. In contrast, modernization referred to "the intrusion of the external and metropolitan". Yet, to understand Indo-Trinidadian women's changing terms of participation up to the late 1980s, and a concomitant forming and sharing of new values between and among various groups, Mohammed employed "both concepts at the same time". In this way, she "interlocked" processes of creolization and modernization (ibid, 393). She did note that Indo-Trinidadian women's creolization is "selective" (ibid, 395), as an affirmation of national belonging can coexist with revitalized ethnic and religious identification. This pointed to both the capacity of hegemonic patriarchy to preclude and limit women's choices, *and* female agency and attendant changes to their terms of inclusion in the "national" sphere. It also highlighted the intersection of creolization and modernization with Indo-Trinidadian women's gender negotiations, and the resulting tensions, overlaps, pulls and possibilities among their gender, ethnic, class, national and even diasporic identities.

Looking at the lives of adolescent girls a decade later, I argue that it seems more useful to think about these mutually constitutive processes in terms of their divergence, rather than interlock, particularly for this group, rather than for adolescent males (Sampath 1993) or adult women (Kanhai 1999, 2011). In the decade between Mohammed's 1988 article on Indian women's creolization and 1999, when I gathered the data discussed below, Indian women's participation in economic, political and cultural spheres had expanded. Such shifts were stimulated by, for example, Indo-Trinidadian female leadership and participation in chutney music and spaces; changes to Indo-Trinidadian political power

over the course of the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) and United National Congress (UNC)-led governments in 1986 and 1995, respectively (Ryan 1996); Indian women's increased occupational mobility (Reddock 1991); girls' educational advancement (across ethnicity); Indian women's increased participation in Carnival; and the impact of Caribbean feminist politics since the 1980s. The space for being both Indian and female in the national sphere had widened. Yet, processes of modernization and creolization continued to provide key contexts within which girls' negotiations were understood because each shaped how this group made sense of gender inequities (especially a sexual double standard), assertive sexual desire, personal value choices and adolescent self-definition.

The salience of modernization and creolization for this group of young women pivots on their unequal coupling with notions of honour and shame, as well as respectability and reputation[iii]. As I argue below, even though both processes policed girls' reproduction and contestation of feminine ideals, creolization continued to be associated with greater vulnerability to shame. This was because of its historical associations with African bodies, women's sexual freedom, cultural loss and miscegenation (Ali 1993, 155; Rohlehr 1990; Ryan 1999, 82-85). As early as the late 1950s, anthropologist Morton Klass (1961, 108) observed how the term *sar* (wife's brother) expressed contempt for Afro-Trinidadians *because* of females' sexual autonomy:

> The term is used particularly in a vulgar East Indian expression of contempt for the Trinidad Negro, *kirwal sar.* The word, "kirwal" is a corruption of "creole". The use of "sar" in this expression is said to reflect the East Indians' contempt for the Negro, who does not watch over his sister, wife or daughter, and for the promiscuity which many Indians believe the Negro woman to practice as a direct consequence of this absence of "proper" supervision.

Judgments about masculinity among males relied on control of female sexuality. Thus, from childhood, Indo-Trinidadian girls' bodies and desires were implicated in an explicitly gendered framework of individual respectability and reputation, and community honour and shame. In this way, female sexuality acted as a source of honour or insult for all men of that ethnicity or for the whole community. The only legitimate option for girls was obedience to family and community. As Klass (ibid, 111) described,

> "Respectability" in sexual relations was achieved only within marital unions that were approved by the families involved and, particularly, by the family patriarchs.

These gendered expectations, rooted in gendered symbolism, mythologies, and Hindu and Muslim religious rituals[iv], continued to be significant two decades later. As the experience of Drupatee Ragoonai in the 1980s showed, Indo-Trinidadian female

"incursion into the creole culture" particularly raised (Indo-Trinidadian male) fears of defilement of Indo-Trinidadian women's "purity" through their participation in national culture and interaction with Afro-Trinidadian men (Reddock 1998; Puri, 1999). Writing in the 1990s of women in *mas* and the contestation over ownership and definition of culture, Rhoda Reddock (1998, 424-425) pointed out as follows:

> In their rejection of Carnival as a national festival, Indian nationalists refer to this vulgarity and wanton display of sexuality which they argue is incompatible with the Indian or Hindu way of life[v]…Indian women who participated in Carnival until recently were seen as putting a stain on their sacred womanhood. The debauchery of this festival is seen as another example of the decadence and low moral standards of creole society and the African population in particular and some have called for Indians to refrain from participation. In this situation it is the Indian women in particular who have to be watched for it is they who have the responsibility of maintaining the image of the culture (note added).

Indo-Trinidadian girls and women embodied and signified a (racial and sexual) purity premised on gender division, regulation and subordination (Kanhai 1999, 226). Such gender differentiation was linked to the construction of creole space as vulgar, immoral, Afro-Trinidadian and masculine. Similarly, it also marked the existence of a range of salient related binaries including female/male, traditional/modern, older/adolescent, and honour/reputation (for males) and honour/shame (for females). It is this historical context that informs this article's examination of 14–19 year olds' consumption of popular culture, in particular their favourite kinds of music, television, movies and role models. Looking at these sources for definition of womanhood, I show that late twentieth century adolescent girls continued to navigate a moral terrain, where their honour, respectability and acceptability were essential, by differently accommodating modernity and creolization. As I argue, modernity's divergent associations with the metropole and with whiteness, rather than working-class, Afro-Trinidadian or even sub-continental Indian femininities, provided significantly different openings for re-reading adolescent female reputation on more empowering terms.

Such a specific focus on adolescent girls has been missing in the literature on Indian female gender negotiations. To date, much of the historiography has conflated the experience of adolescent and adult females, because of the early transition from girlhood to womanhood, due to commonly accepted practices of Indian female teenage marriage and motherhood in earlier decades (Mohammed 2002; Reddock 1986; Kanhai 1999, 2004, Mehta 2004; Baksh-Soodeen 1999; Hosein 2004a). There are different reasons for this conflation in the scholarship on Indo-Trinidadian femininities today, among them a more fluid contemporary continuum between girlhood, young womanhood and adult womanhood resulting from an expanded stage of adolescence and later ages of marriage and motherhood. As well, by the turn of the century, markers of womanhood began to be

more greatly defined by a personal sense of maturity, responsibility and achievement in education and employment rather than strict age or marital categories (Mohammed 1997; Hosein 2004b). This highlights the shifting, contingent and culturally constructed nature of Indo-Trinidadian girlhood as well as its qualities and meanings, and its unstable intersections with class, religion, geography and ethnicity. Attention to girlhood rather than womanhood shifts the experiences and questions that inform feminist scholarship on Indo-Trinidadian gender identities and negotiations. In this context, a re-reading of Mohammed's conceptualization of Indian female creolization, in terms of *girls*' gendered and generational experience of agency, negotiation and power in Trinidad and Tobago, has so far remained underdeveloped.

This article contributes to filling this gap by utilizing questionnaire data gathered in 1999 from 83 14- to 19-year-old, Indo-Trinidadian girls in secondary schools in North Eastern Trinidad. The sample is essentially suburban and Northern, consisting primarily of 14–16-year-old[vi] Hindus who self-identified as middle class (see Table 1). The school clusters were chosen to encompass a range of religious backgrounds and differences in educational privilege. The schools chosen were the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha (SDMS)-run Lakshmi Girls Hindu College in St. Augustine, the Presbyterian St. Augustine Girls' High School (SAGHS), the co-educational Rafeek Memorial Trinidad Muslim League (T.M.L.) Secondary School in St. Joseph and the co-educational state-run El Dorado Secondary Comprehensive School. Schools in Trinidad are on a hierarchical continuum ranging from "prestige" seven-year schools such as St. Augustine Girls' High School to lower ranking senior comprehensive schools such as El Dorado Secondary Comprehensive School. Students from upper and middle-income homes, therefore, predominate in "prestige" schools. However, whereas schools often correspond to social class, school culture, particularly at "prestige" schools, minimizes differences in social class and ethnicity. Overall, religious differences seem less significant than those among school groups. Even if a majority of girls in school identify as "middle class", parental educational differences suggest that St. Augustine High School students may represent a different "class" background than those from other schools[vii].

Table 1: Demographic profile of survey participants 14-16 years old by school group and religion.

	Total	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	None/ Other
SAGHS[1]	20	10	4	6	0
TML	8	4	3	1	0

[1] "SAGHS" represents St. Augustine Girls' High School, "TML" represents Rafeek Memorial T.M.L. Secondary School, "LGHC" represents Lakshmi Girls' Hindu College; "El Do." represents El Dorado Secondary Comprehensive School.

Lakshmi	31	19	2	9	1
El Do.	24	15	4	5	0
Total	**83**	**48**	**13**	**21**	**1**
%	**100**	**58**	**16**	**25**	**1**

The questionnaires administered across the four schools sought to understand the experience of Indian girlhood in terms of young women's reproduction and contestation of late twentieth century gender ideals and moral imperatives, and the implications for marking the boundaries of ethnic identities and regulating processes of creolization among young Indian women. At the heart of such regulation, and its negotiation, were gendered and generational notions of purity, respectability and honour as well as reputation and shame (Hosein 2004a). In this article, I particularly focus on the influence of US media and popular culture on these girls' *repositioning* of respectability and reputation in relation to honour and shame. In mainly tracing the messages from and girls' reception of US media, I give less attention to other important influences such as family, peers and religion, but attend to differences in girls' responses across class, religion and school cluster. Overall, the picture that emerges is one of great contradiction and ambivalence, or alternatively, fluidity, flexibility and experimentation, in the girls' reception of gendered ideologies regarding reputation and respectability. This reflects both the opportunities and risks of "too much freedom" and "too much mixing", which are associated with creolization and modernization in different ways.

This late twentieth-century data is therefore the basis for theorizing how Indo-Trinidadian girls sought the kinds of status typically allotted to adolescent Indo-Trinidadian males, and how they attempted to recast female reputation, meaning "outsider" or "bad" girl femininities, while reproducing ideals of respectability, meaning "insider" or "good" girl femininities (Hey 1997, 131). Sexuality, in particular, creates contradictions regarding girls' perceptions of respectability. For example, in relation to music, these young women described women in songs they liked as "good persons and queens or sluts, heartbreakers and hos" or "in different ways, some good, some bad, mostly weak, sometimes independent". US women in music are respected for their strength and independence, yet girls appear to feel some discomfort about their overt expression of sexuality. In complete contrast, Indian women in music were described by a small group of girls as "living legends and goddesses, deeply in love, very religious and thoughtful".

Girls' mixed perceptions may have enabled them to suspend judgment or to see the "very bad" as "good" when it may have been cool to be glamorously sexy or "wild". For males, the machismo image of the "bad boy" who breaks rules and is sexually promiscuous and potent makes the "bad" better than the "good" which conversely appears as weak and passive. This only applies in a limited sense to girls because, unlike

"bad boy" heroes, "bad" women rarely win in the end. Nonetheless, for adolescent boys *and* girls, rebellion, resistance and coolness may be increasingly defined by "bad boy" ideals. Girls may also be influenced by the "illicit" ideals of the sexual "playmate" who, like Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera, is similarly "bad" (having abandoned "purity" and the "prerogatives" of "insider" femininity), but also independent, worldly, interesting, assertive, seductive and "a little dangerous" (Ruth 1998, 110).

Representing their manoeuvres as metropolitan and modern enabled these young women to navigate the threat of dishonour or reputation associated with creolization. In this way, media messages offered girls options for blurring the divisions between masculinities and femininities, and between constructions of different ethnicized femininities. As argued by Sampath and discussed below, young Indo-Trinidadian males may gain status from creolization rather than risk shame, but girls' differential experience means that their navigations are conducted on unequal, gendered terms. It is in this context that divergence rather than interlock helps to explain what exactly modernity was seen to comprise in the eyes of these girls and why it became a source of power that creolization could not be.

Indo-Trinidadian adolescence and gender-differential creolization

Building on Mohammed, Neils Sampath affiliated creolization with issues of generational change and contestation, and argued that adolescent Indo-Trinidadian males "accommodate creolization" (1993, 239). First, he described how non-traditional behaviours in Indo-Trinidadian males were legitimated by shorter-term gender and adolescent identity satisfaction (ibid, 249). The "interstitial and liminal nature" of male adolescence, therefore, became a "transition period" for making decisions "as to the viability of the old as well as the new" (ibid, 243). This enabled adolescent males to challenge older male dominance and values, to resist what they considered low-status aspects of masculine Indian identity, and to see themselves as culturally hybrid, able to claim freedom from "old time" values and be part of "modern" society. Rather than under-cutting patriarchal privilege, creolized Indo-Trinidadian adolescent males primarily challenged the *hegemony* of some masculinities over others, and attempted to share, appropriate and redefine dominant status symbols.

Second, based on his data on rural Indo-Trinidadian males, Sampath argued that this group accessed status through Indo-Trinidadian female purity, Indo-Trinidadian markers of male respectability and creole ideals of male reputation. Therefore, they could be both modern and creole without risking honour. Whereas girls were expected to maintain respectability in domestic ritual and practice, adolescent males could gain rather than lose status from having a macho reputation or from behaviours associated with Afro-Trinidadians. Sampath therefore described "creolization as an instrument pertaining to masculine power" and, further, as "an idiom of adolescent masculinity" (ibid, 244-5) because it enhanced male power and status on unequal, gendered terms. He concluded "the transition period between male childhood and adulthood can sometimes be considered a cultural transition as much as a generational one" because it legitimized redefinition of what is acceptably Indian and what is not (ibid, 243).

In the process of creolization, two kinds of prestige became available to adolescent males: "Indian" honour *and* creole reputation. At the heart of such honour is Indo-Trinidadian females' responsibility to reproduce ethnic and gender boundaries, enabling Indo-Trinidadian men to retain access to the familiar identities, moralities and power relations coded as authentic and traditional. By contrast, creolized Indo-Trinidadian girls risked loss of "Indianness", femininity and "difference"—the markers of Indo-Trinidadian female honour—without gaining equivalent prestige from more assertive sexuality, greater freedom from patriarchal control, and association with Afro-Trinidadian bodies and practices. Therefore, for Indo-Trinidadian adolescent females, the counterpart to male status from reputation was female loss of status from shame—associated with loss of community values, disobedience to patriarchal and elder control, and a move to identification with creolized masculinity[viii].

Associated with heterogeneous options for female status and identities are "too much freedom" in society and "too much mixing", wrote Sampath (1993, 237). These blur moral divisions premised on difference and manifested in ethnic/gender representations. These are even less acceptable when they make Indo-Trinidadian females act "too bright" or "modern" and enable them to access status through "conciliation with creole values". Embedded as they are within a patriarchal discourse about creolization, notions of male honour/status and female honour/shame, therefore, dualistically and hierarchically organize gender and ethnic identities among Indo-Trinidadian adolescents. As I discuss next, it is in this context of gender-differential creolization that modernity has acted as an instrument of adolescent female power. Modernity's power is its association with and capacity to legitimize how girls choose to expand the boundaries of respectability, blur gendered and ethnic dualisms, and access mobility, choice, freedom and sexuality without fear of the shame associated with creolized bodies, sexualities and identities.

Modernity as an instrument of Indo-Trinidadian adolescent female power

Like many Indian girls across the diaspora, Indo-Trinidadian adolescent girls' contestations occur on very different terms from adolescent males. Their willingness to obey rather than challenge elders including elder males, as well as to reproduce rather than fail at respectability, has been a central part of feminine socialization, earning of freedom and recognition of maturity. Thus, Handa notes that the tactics of young South Asian women in Canada included hiding, lying, arguing with parents, disobeying, "sneaking out", "adhering to ideals of beauty and attractiveness without appearing 'too sexual'" (Handa 1997, 20) and "masking parts of their own identity" (ibid, 22). Recognizing their father's disapproval of particular clothes, two girls admitted, "we change later that's what we do" (ibid, 22).

Closer to home, Rosanne Kanhai (1999, 219) has argued that, while young Indo-Caribbean males are influenced by westernized and multi-racial cultural styles, "there is less confusion since they have always had opportunities for more public life and they are not called upon to be keepers of culture". By contrast, she described, young women's "schizophrenia" from socialization both to westernized, multiracial models of womanhood and to the loyalties expected of them at home. Similarly, I argue here that,

for girls at the turn of the century, the crux of the relationship between gender and creolization was that adolescent males could privilege new generational values over those of a "seamless" past *without* disrupting the wider terms of patriarchal power.

In the context of such gender-differential creolization, how can Indo-Trinidadian girls' agency within and against their relative disempowerment or at least greater regulation of their gendered and generational contestation be understood? To answer this question, I attend to girls' "gender negotiations"[ix] (Mohammed 1994), as well as their navigations (Hosein 2004a) of competing and coalescing ideals. Not only do Indo-Trinidadian girls seek individuality within gender codes and roles, but they are also able (and to some extent compelled) to move among and choose from a range of competing prescriptions. They, therefore, manoeuvre family, marriage and motherhood differently from education and employment as together they offer a continuum of multiple and shifting demands of womanhood. Continually finding the balance of identities and practices appropriate to different spaces and situations, these young women must therefore *navigate* different ideals as well as negotiate the expectations of each. Their "patriarchal bargains" both reinforce particular gender ideals as well as open new areas of struggle within a gender system. Ultimately, this bargaining "blur[s] the line between good girls and bad girls" (Handa 1997, 24) and "threaten[s] categories of appropriate femininity" and ethnic identity (ibid, 5), even as girls uphold the sanctity of dominant ideologies, social institutions and moral imperatives. For this group, overlapping diasporic, racialized and classed ideals of Indian female honour remain hegemonic. Thus, metropolitan reputation, recoded as "up to date with everything, cool and liberal", offers girls the least risky possibilities for expanding the legitimacy of their freedom and mixing, penetrating males' privileged access to status and outmanoeuvring girls' gendered burden of shame. Creolization and modernization may be interlocked, but girls accommodate them in divergent ways.

Across school and religious group, the responses of Indo-Trinidadian girls, therefore, exemplified ambivalence about identifying with or as creole. For this group, modernity was associated with economic independence, recognizable success in competition with men in education and employment, fewer compromises and accommodations, decision-making power, material goods, leisure, mobility, money and independence[x]. Why does modernity have these associations with wealth, cosmopolitanism, equality and assertion of control over one's life, choice responsibility and female desire? How does it work as an instrument of Indo-Trinidadian adolescent female power? What does it mean for how Indo-Trinidadian girls view and value Indian womanhood?

First, modernity is associated with an expanded stage of Indian female adolescence and, therefore, *legitimate* individual identity formation, and the development of "personal choice" as the pivot for generational negotiation of gendered ideals. The shift is an absolutely modern development that is less than 50 years old and reflects a sharp shift from earlier decades' illegitimate, but nonetheless ubiquitous, gendered negotiations of Indo-Trinidadian women and girls (Hosein 2004a). The potential for girls' legitimate generational contestation underscores their navigation of forms of "insider femininity", or being a "good" girl (Hey 1997, 131), that girls *choose* to perform but can no longer be compelled to make constitutive of their self-identity. Potential legitimacy also

underscores their aspirations to and redefinition of "insider masculinity" or forms of status and honour once positively associated with male educational, occupational and financial success.

Second, to many Indo-Trinidadian adolescent girls, white US womanhood represents or is the face of modernity. Thus, television can perhaps be seen as a primary source of female iconography for the majority of girls. The key messages of both US music and television emphasize that power, sexiness and independence are white, modern and cool. They convey alternative, competing bases for Indo-Trinidadian girls' self-regard, femininity and respect. As much as 65% of all girls in the sample saw women in US television as "powerful, intelligent, confident, outspoken, and brave role models and women of the nineties". Similarly, an El Dorado Secondary Comprehensive School student appreciatively described them as follows:

> Independent and having a mind of their own and not following others or caring what others think of them. (15-year-old, Indo-Hindu)

A minority of 10% further saw these US women as "heroic with many fighting techniques" in addition to being "promiscuous players and sex symbols". About 15% described them as "okay, easy-going, *everyday* people" who are "dedicated to their jobs" and "*encouraging*". At many levels, these girls identified with and wanted to emulate these actresses and/or their characters. Interestingly, in comparison to approximately 40% of girls attending St. Augustine Girls' High School (SAGHS) and Rafeek Memorial TML Secondary School (TML), 65% of those attending Lakshmi Girls' Hindu College and El Dorado Secondary Comprehensive School saw women on television as role models. Mothers, sisters and other family members comprised the other most influential group.

US white females represented the widest array of options and identities, and they appeared as lifeguards, investigators, lawyers, doctors, heroines, judges, fighters and "VJs" (video jockeys), some of whom successfully, bravely and even violently challenged and even protected others. US black models, rappers, R & B singers, singers and actresses were usually the second most popular group for almost a quarter of girls. Black US stars, such as Tyra Banks, Missy Elliot, Aaliyah, "Moesha", Naomi Campbell and Oprah were least popular among, primarily Hindu, girls attending El Dorado Secondary Comprehensive School and most popular among, primarily Christian, girls at St. Augustine Girls' High School. This suggests some intra-ethnic religious segmentation. US black female icons are much less varied and the models and entertainers that girls liked seemed, largely, to be only sexually assertive. Fewer popular African American stars portray heroines such as Xena, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, La Femme Nikita, Batgirl and Catwoman or Dark Angel, or professional and working women such as "Scully" (from the *X-files*), Judge Judy and "Joey" (from *Dawson's Creek*).

While the girls had concerns about US women as "sex symbols, promiscuous and having a casual approach to sex", womanhood here did not rely on being docile, having manners or being respectable, but the women were still seen as "respected". More than anything else, media, "modernity" and metropolitan femininities emphasized the diversity of

femininities that could be acceptable. As a Lakshmi Girls' Hindu College student described in the following, women in US movies could be:

> Sex symbols, independent, anything you can think of they can be or are portrayed as. Anything. (15-year-old, Indo-Hindu)

In this regard, feminine identities portrayed in US movies *challenge* those of women in Indian cinema. Indian icons of womanhood both compete with and copy the representations of femininity and sexuality emerging from the US. However, generally Indian female stars, such as Anuradha Padiwal and Maduri Dixit, were not portrayed as assertive, aggressive, heroic and professional, and they did not offer many girls young, confident characters with whom they might also identify[xi].

Third, femininity as active, assertive, autonomous and demanding respect not only challenged other constructions of femininity, but the complementary construction of masculinity. US (and British) black and white women who contest the boundaries of "insider" femininity (by opening it up to include values and behaviour often associated with masculinity) challenged the boundaries of femininity itself (by challenging the association of these values and behaviours with masculinity). Being "liberal", "independent" *and* Western may be associated with freer expression of female sexuality, blurred gender roles and disagreement with or disregard for feminine imperatives of obedience to and respect for men and male authority. Such a powerful message complemented those from family, school and society about females being equal, having the right to occupational choice and advancement, and needing to have autonomy and control over their lives.

Indo-Trinidadian girls could therefore accommodate modernity, epitomized by successful, assertive and sexualized white (and to a lesser extent black) US women, without experiencing the repercussions of identifying with Afro-Trinidadian femininities. Located within an historically racialized discourse that stereotypically conflates creolization (and the Afro-creole) with sexual vulgarity, immorality and miscegenation (Reddock 1998), Indian girls overwhelmingly positively identified with white femininity because it was more acceptably "different". In other words, white female sexuality personified modernity and enabled these Indian young women to be modern without being creole. Thus, unlike creolization which remained a symbol of two forms of Other, the peripheralized Indian Other within Afro-Trinidadian cultural hegemony and the Afro-Trinidadian female Other disavowed by Indo-Trinidadian patriarchal gender ideals, modernity enabled Indo-Trinidadian girls to "take their Indianness and femaleness with them" into the public and national sphere (Kanhai 1999, 227-334), at the same time as it legitimized girls' agency and choice in relation to traditional or patriarchal expectations. This enabled these young women to shift and (to some extent and in some spaces) entirely step out of a dualistic symbolic frame even while an ethnic discourse sought to keep it intact. This can be seen in girls' responses regarding their music and television preferences, and the ethnicized, classed and gendered meanings regarding Indo-Trinidadian femininities that they conveyed.

Keeping in mind these three implications of modernity's meanings in girls' lives, it is worth remembering that, particularly with regard to sexuality, the boundaries of femininity were not entirely challenged by US-based womanhoods. Patriarchal ideologies still regulated female sexuality by withholding respect from those women who were seen as immoral or lacking in respect (for themselves and, ultimately, for male authority over what is valuable and redeeming about women (the male gaze)). In this regard, being "loving, supportive and looking for the right person" and being an "angel" were still aspects of femininity that were normalized. Clearly, these young women navigated both traditional messages from their religion, families *and* media, and those messages that stepped out of those boundaries. They recognized the dilemma that women face in being both respected for challenging and for conforming. This is the ambiguity of metropolitan "insider" femininities. Respectability and reputation were positioned ambiguously and, at times, contradictorily within the iconography of US womanhood. Acceptable US femininities enabled Indo-Trinidadian girls to contest other local and global imperatives, to challenge the dominant terms of insider femininity and to blur the gender boundaries demarcating femininity itself. Yet, these diverse womanhoods did not dismantle patriarchal gender systems.

Girls' modern navigations

Similarly, US and Indian womanhoods, as conveyed through cinema, were neither dichotomous nor homogenous. Yet, they become integrated into a local discourse that juxtaposes eastern and western values regarding women's behaviour, sexual desire, and choices. Indian movies provide an Orientalist message of what it means to be from the "East" while simultaneously incorporating western ways of dressing and dancing in a transnationalized image of Indian womanhood (see Puri 1999). Yet, though highly westernized and sexualized, Indian femininities and bodies in movies mark an East/West, respectability/reputation dualism. In this context, (obedience to) "protective discourses" and narratives of romance are then presented as appropriate ways of "managing sexuality" (Handa 1997) and navigating modernity.

In Trinidad, Bollywood images, characters, storyline and music evoke specific feelings of "Indianness" and are ultimately associated with tradition, the past and a separate and India-derived ethnic identity (Klass 1991, Vertovec 1992, Ali 1993). Local television stations broadcast Indian music videos, Zee TV[2] can be accessed through cable television, and newspaper magazines such as *Dil* and *Chutney Star* focused heavily on the stars of Bollywood cinema. In addition, almost 60% of girls said they went to the cinema to watch Indian movies. However, more Indo-Trinidadian girls attending Rafeek Memorial TML Secondary School and El Dorado Secondary Comprehensive School went to these movies than those from St. Augustine Girls' High School. One explanation may be that religious difference intersects cultural participation as, in comparison to 65% of Indo- Hindus and 72% of Indo-Muslims, only 35% of Indo-Christians went to the cinema to see Indian movies.

Of those girls who went to see Indian movies, more than one-third liked or identified with "the actors, actresses, songs, dances, clothing, music and characters". These are important

[2] This British Asian station primarily shows movies and music videos.

messageways for Indian womanhoods and they convey an impression of the femininities available to Indian women, the issues in women's lives and the options available to them to find solutions. This diasporic "Bollywood" metanarrative is not balanced by images of "othered" Indian women who challenge women's (gender, class, caste and religious) oppression such as the assassinated "Bandit Queen" Poolan Devi, or heterosexism (and the portrayal of Indian femininities as heterosexual) as in Deepa Mehta's movie *Fire* (Gopinath 2005). In this regard, a quarter of girls described women in Indian movies as "honest, docile, loving, caring, compassionate, lovely and kind" and as "angels with class, style and beauty". As one Lakshmi Girls' Hindu College student wrote about women in Indian movies:

> Some are independent, but some are not but I think almost all of them are respectable. **(**15-year-old, Indo-Hindu)

Indian cinema portrays women as wealthy, glamorous, fair skinned and generally unaffected by forms of subordination of women, except in instances of marriage (wanting to choose their partner, but nonetheless wanting to get married) or in instances of sexual violence (when a male hero eventually comes to the rescue). Still, almost one-third of Indo-Trinidadian girls identified with "the stories, [the] same predictable story line and the problems faced". The narrative of romance, "couples' trials to be together", the issues of parental approval and the goal of happiness through heterosexual love perhaps resonated with the girls who were also exposed to such transnational ideologies through US television and movies. Overwhelmingly, girls associated Indian movies with femininity, romance, respectability and decency. These may have provided legitimate ways for young women to think about their sexuality and desires.

Indo-Trinidadian girls may also have identified with the Indian family portrayed in movies. Just over 10% responded they liked Indian movies because they show "how a typical Indian family should be, the role of everyday living and knowledge about my religion and tradition". This occurred in two ways. First, movies "teach us about what our ancestors used to be like when they were in India" and, second, Indian movies show how "parents protect children, especially daughters". In this regard, protective discourses concerning "daughters'" bodies and sexuality intertwined with those regarding the imagined community and Indo-Trinidadian "difference" in Trinidad and Tobago, and their meanings were interpreted within this national discourse.

Yet, the messages regarding appropriate womanhood remain ambiguous and contradictory. Over 40% of Indo-Trinidadian girls felt these movies portrayed Indian women as "traditional sometimes, normal sometimes, sometimes weak, sometimes independent, sometimes with dignity and sometimes vulgar". These young women also wrote that Indian women were "respectable before, now dress changed, some shy, others wild, many are sex symbols". Two Indo-Christians from El Dorado Secondary Comprehensive School attributed this to Indian movies "following US movies". Similarly, an El Dorado Secondary Comprehensive School student wrote,

> I can't identify with Indian movies, they have become embarrassingly westernized. (15-year old, Indo-Hindu)

As Puri (1999) pointed out, images and messages are mixed because "tradition" is both demarcated from and overlapping with the contemporary—or eastern with western—in these transnational constructions. These movies' "newest" portrayals of Indianness, which at times may seem to run counter to the "oldest", exemplify how stereotypical storylines and characters are incorporated or transformed into apparently "newer" femininities. "Westernization" appears to signify less respectable femininities and a move away from authentic and identifiable Indian identities, and ethnic and moral difference. Yet, Indian women seem compelled to navigate tradition and modernity, and contemporary Indian movies reflect these diverging pulls. Similarly, young Indo-Trinidadian women may consider "traditional" femininities respectable, but also view subservience, inequality and lack of choice as *un*acceptable. For example, a quarter of girls described women in Indian movies as "women searching for love, man hungry and deprived of outdoor experience", "sometimes lower than men" and "forever the victim, holy, subservient, timid, having to accept arranged marriages and lame". Emphasizing this, a Lakshmi Girls' Hindu College student wrote the following:

> They are all so stupid and act like they lived in the 60s. They don't work and follow men like if they weren't others in the world. (15-year-old, Indo-Hindu)

Another, this time from El Dorado Secondary Comprehensive School, described them

> As only dressing up in a lot of uncomfortable clothes and running around trees and flowers singing songs. (15-year-old, Indo-Hindu)

The subterranean implication that this world and its inhabitants cannot be taken seriously is important to the way that girls saw women in Indian movies and compared them to women in US movies. As well, many girls clearly did not identify with images of women as "victims". Indian womanhood may thus be valued for its continuing depiction of tradition, romance, family and femininity as fantasy. This suggests that the impact of Indian womanhood on Indo-Trinidadian adolescent femininities may have been primarily symbolic. Nonetheless, Indian womanhoods contributed to an overall emphasis, across messageways, on some version of respectability, femininity and sexual morality. By contrast, US media images and messages expressly blurred and expanded boundaries established by other competing messageways such as family and religion. US white femininities appeared to convey alternative, competing bases for self-regard, femininity and respect. Respectability and reputation were, therefore, positioned ambiguously and, at times, contradictorily within the iconography of metropolitan and diasporic womanhoods.

The collage of radio, cinematic and television messageways thus complicated the imperatives of insider femininity propagated by religious authorities and parents. Young Indo-Trinidadian women therefore recognized and reproduced the dilemma of being both respected for challenging and, simultaneously, also for conforming. Indian female movie stars were not popular enough to displace a heavy reliance on and identification with US-based women who appeared to make choices, exercise control over their lives, achieve

success, fight off the "bad guys", have sex for pleasure and exude confidence. Local and regional music offered some respite from this heavy cultural importation, but white and black US music and television stars dominated girls' lists of favourites. US media represented modernity and globally exported metropolitan ideals of femininity, sexuality and morality as if they were the most generationally appropriate. Nonetheless, it cannot be forgotten that notions of "outsider femininities" continued to offer rearticulations of the risks of too much freedom to navigate amongst competing and coalescing options, and of too much mixing of respectability and reputation, and Indian and creole, in the lives of suburban adolescent Indo-Trinidadian girls.

'Too much freedom' and 'Too much mixing'

Almost 60% of Indo-Trinidadian young women across religious groups described female immorality in terms of "indecent, rude and vulgar behaviour, drinking, degrading yourself in public, obscene, noisy and loud language, discourteousness and an uncaring attitude" (which may mean both not caring for others and not caring about what society thinks). Thus, as a St. Augustine Girls' High School student wrote, having good morals means not engaging in "vulgar dancing, flirting with men, wild, ho-like behaviour or skettish Carnival-like gyrating in bra and panty, laughing loud and liming with men in skimpy clothes or walking around with your breasts and half your ass showing" (15-year-old, Indo-Hindu).

Almost 20% of girls also thought that they could get a reputation from being "too wild, outspoken, disrespectful to elders, disobedient, own way and unmannerly". Here, being "too wild" was linked to defying adults' expectations of femininity coded as "obedience", "respect" and "manners". One young woman wrote that it becomes easier for Indo-Trinidadian girls to get a reputation "when other Indian women do the wrong thing". Girls might therefore "police" each other's behaviour and seek to (at least outwardly) distance themselves from those girls who then became positioned as the "other". Further, "other" Indo-Trinidadian girls' behaviour might deepen the pressure on young women to prove their "goodness" as a precondition for accessing liberties. This makes sense given that girls from all school and religious groups repeatedly equated sexual freedom with sexual irresponsibility and immorality, "prostitution, promiscuity, stripping, abortion, adultery, pre-marital sex, lesbian sex, having illegitimate kids", and being "sexually active teens". Ideologies of compulsory heterosexuality and marital monogamy and motherhood clearly influenced these views.

Finally, as one Indo-Hindu young woman said, "Indo-Trinidadian girls gain a reputation for the same things that give women a bad reputation in society". This underscores the way that, across ethnicity, class and religion, "outsider" femininities may be common among communities that otherwise see themselves as separate, but also that girls are therefore offered interstitial opportunities for negotiation. Thus, while women in society can generally get a reputation from the "same things", these are represented and given life through shifting iconographies. Though manifested and regulated in a variety of ways, insider femininities underscored the dominant meaning of respectability for these Indo-Trinidadian young women. In this instance, Indian female honour and metropolitan reputation enabled these girls to retain community belonging, and also to be national,

diasporic and cosmopolitan, though not ultimately on hegemonically Afro-Trinidadian-defined terms.

Indian honour and metropolitan reputation: Repositioning gender, status and shame

Girls' divergent accommodation of modernity, because of their gender-differential experience of creolization, has some interesting implications worth noting. To discuss these, I want to use Tejaswini Niranjana's (2006) nexus of "Indian modernity", "East Indian modernity" and "creole modernity". For Niranjana, Indian modernity reflects Indian nationalists' conceptualization of Indian womanhood as middle class, civilized and respectable. Characterizations and disavowal of indentured Indian women were absolutely central to this conceptualization. Thus, East Indian modernity, borne through the experience of indentureship, was seen as degenerated, degraded, inauthentic and impure. Ironically for Niranjana, contemporary Indo-Trinidadians seeking to affirm an unbroken connection to India came to identify with the Indian nationalists' vision of female modernity rather than an East Indian one which implodes it from inside, offering expanded options for validation of subaltern Indians, and Indian females, in India and in Trinidad. In addition to these two forms, Niranjana uses creole modernity to describe how modernity, meaning the western and European, came to be known to Indo-Trinidadians through the creole and African-Caribbean.

Using this frame, I argue that "East Indian" or late twentieth century Indo-Trinidadian modernity, as Indian honour and metropolitan reputation, empowered Indo-Trinidadian girls to invest in and give meaning to all three of these forms—"East Indian modernity", "Indian modernity" and "creole modernity"—in different ways. First, Indo-Trinidadian modernity provides a space, however hybrid and fictive, for Indo-Trinidadian women to code creolized behaviour as Indo-Trinidadian. Its effect is akin to the impact of the chutney arena, which continues to project the female sexual licence of the matikor to the public stage, as a form of Indo-Trinidadian modernity that empowers females of all ages to blur and stretch the boundaries of reputation and respectability while inalienably belonging to an ethnic community. As Kanhai (1999, 227-234) observed,

> These Bhowjees have been able to take what is valuable to them from the calypso/carnival culture and infuse it into their own ethnic-based expression…They willingly reach for elements of Afro-Caribbean culture…and for the resources of the metropolitan societies to which they migrate. Their demand is that they take their Indianness and femaleness with them.

Yet, Muslim, Christian and middle-class Hindu girls' disparaging views of chutney music suggest that Afro-Trinidadians, "coolie-ish" rural Indo-Trinidadians and labouring groups are similarly aligned with vulgarity and lack of civility. For these girls, Indianness is manifested in a symbolic decorative femininity, (appearance of) asexuality, and alignment with piety and respectability. Class and religion, in particular, mark intra-ethnic difference in what is coded as appropriately modern for Indo-Trinidadian girls.

Interestingly then, the navigation of modernity is marked by competing pulls of the Indian and Indo-Trinidadian.

Young women encounter Indian modernity primarily through the diasporic reach of Hinduism, and Bollywood films, music, music videos, magazines, celebrities and fashion. These are in a relationship of both complementarity and tension. At times, girls clearly identified with icons of piety and virtue such as Sita, Lakshmi and others. At other times, they sought to embody both such a deified morality and more Bollywood-inspired, visible sex appeal. Indian beauty pageants, which comprise both "traditional" and "modern" segments and which require contestants to appear both modest and glamorous, as well as national and spectacularly Indian, are a prime example of this in Trinidad and Tobago (Hosein 2011; Ragbir 2012).

Yet, overall, Indo-Trinidadian young women sought to participate in Indian modernity by being critical of extensive white, western, metropolitan influence on India (Ragbir 2012). In other words, for Indo-Trinidadian girls to navigate Indian honour and metropolitan reputation in Trinidad, Indianness as it is defined by India must more closely represent the nationalists' conception of modern India rather than the Bollywood version that is quickly replacing the India of the past with that of the contemporary. Bollywood can wrongly create and convey an India that is too hybrid and modern for Indo-Trinidadian young women whose East Indian or Indo-Trinidadian modernity requires symbols of authenticity that can be taken into creole modernity with them. As Sampath (1993, 236) and others have noted, notions of racial purity and tradition, and the fixed nature of origins are embedded in concepts of creolization. In other words, what goes on in the culturally heterogeneous creole space is the mixing of the things (from elsewhere) considered pure, seamless and ancestral.

If Indian modernity can continue to retain its middle-class, imagined authenticity, Indo-Trinidadian girls' participation in creole modernity can be re-read as participation in an Indo-Trinidadian modernity that infuses rather than loses "Indianness", and defines the creole through the Indian/modern. This is true for all forms of adolescent Indo-Trinidadian female modernity, along a continuum from participation in chutney music culture to spaces marked by ethnic purity and religious piety. Unlike adolescent males who are compelled to be modern and creole, girls can most safely access creolization without fear or dishonour, reputation, exile or loss of ethnic belonging by being modern *and* Indian, and recoding creolization in terms set by being neither too traditional nor too Bollywood, by extending both the matikor space and middle-class aspirations into the mainstream, by accessing a range of nationally respectable femininities *and* masculinities, and by being metropolitan in ways that expand the options for status within the context and confines of Indian girlhood in Trinidad and Tobago.

To accommodate creolization as girls accommodate modernity would undermine easy resort to stereotypical ethnic markers of femininity, and the pleasures and rewards of community belonging. Unlike creolization, modernity carries multiple meanings, many of which can be acceptably accommodated by Indian girls, providing safe and legitimate access to "creole modernity". These girls seek status through both Indo-Trinidadian notions of honour and modern notions of reputation or freedom from shame associated

with whiteness and Euro-America, women's education and empowerment, and assertive public sexuality. Despite positioning reputation ambiguously as both a source of status and shame, whiteness and metropolitan femininity do not appear to create the fear of impurity associated with creolization. This is precisely because metropolitan femininity is not seen to advance ethnic mixing and aesthetic/phenotypical unpredictability. It can possibly break apart creole modernity by protecting the "convergence between religious and racial/ethnic identities" despite promoting "social-cultural boundary transgression" (Khan 1995, 5). Whiteness can mediate the African as it mediates the modern, creating options for hybridity to be unmarked, recoded in terms of racial and religious purity or even valued positively. Thus, though experienced in different ways across class and religion, modernity enhanced Indo-Trinidadian adolescent female power by enabling girls to access the status of both Indian honour and creole reputation usually reserved for Indo-Trinidadian males.

Even Carnival, the most potent symbol of creole modernity, therefore, potentially becomes another space for assertion of an Indo-Trinidadian female modernity that is neither too traditional, too Bollywood, too western or too African because the associations that each of these has with honour or shame, and therefore status or its loss, can no longer be clearly or dualistically demarcated. While family and religion are particularly influential, the metropolitan and modern mediate these girls' relationship to blackness, both US and Caribbean, to the multi-ethnic and hybridizing creole national space and to the Indian, in India, diasporically and locally. This is how modernity acted as an idiom of generational contestation and change for these young women. It provided shifting and complex meanings regarding white and black US, Indian, Indo-Trinidadian, Afro-Trinidadian and national gender identities. It offered legitimate options for managing the Indian within the Indo-Trinidadian, the Indo-Trinidadian within the creole and the definitional authority of the creole itself. It empowered girls to *legitimately* navigate beyond status or shame.

Implications beyond the turn of the century

This article has sought to explore these Indo-Trinidadian girls' gender-differential and divergent perceptions of modernity and creolization. It has suggested that media and messages regarding Indian honour and metropolitan reputation provided opportunities for girls' creolization without loss of status, and for blurring gender ideals while penetrating young Indian males' privileged freedom from shame. This is why across religion and school group, for these suburban girls living in Northern Trinidad, modernity became the idiom of adolescent Indo-Trinidadian female power that creolization could not equally be. It was not that girls explicitly made these connections about creolization and its racialized meanings, but that this was the historical and contemporary context within which their negotiations and navigations continued to be understood and engaged.

Indo-Trinidadian girls' navigation of respectable femininities and masculinities as well as the blurred boundaries of reputation worked through a separation of modernization from creolization, which resignified those identities and practices which would otherwise have been labelled as lower class, rural or Afro-creole instead of globally metropolitan, cool and liberal, as well as modern, white and Indian. However, these resignifications were not complete because girls remained critical of the public, assertive sexuality of both the

US and Bollywood, and asserted the value of an Indo-Trinidadian femininity that was honourable, pious, moral and traditional even as this construction was *creole,* meaning diasporic, modern and understood in terms of local discourses on race, and even as their own participation in local and regional popular culture suggested that their navigation of modernity and creolization relied on both their interlock and divergence.

When Indo-Trinidadian girls took "their Indianness and femaleness with them", it potentially expanded opportunities for generational bargaining with patriarchy in Indo-Trinidadian and national "creole-modern" contexts. This may have helped change understandings of creolization from the fears of loss of identity to celebration of its infusion in national society, thus creating discourses that Indo-Trinidadian girls could less riskily claim as they grew into their twenties and into more complex and nuanced lives as mature women belonging to different religions and classes. Read as a liberating discourse, metropolitan reputation is problematic because its power results from the globalization of US racial hierarchies, popular culture and capitalism, and their imperialist influence. In this sense, both girls' gender differential experience of creolization and their turn to modernization suggest a need for continuing inter-ethnic, inter-religious and feminist work to create autochthonous intersections, identities and discourses which can reject the stereotypes and disavowals resulting from historical ethnic and gender tensions in the society, while enabling the solace and salience of community to endure.

Looking ahead in a different direction, the risks of creolization that these girls identified may have significantly changed over the past decade. These perspectives from the turn of the century raise questions about the kind of transformations brought about by the Internet, mobile phone and DVD technology, the popularity of "rum" songs in chutney soca music, the decreasing significance and reality of urban and rural differences, and even the political leadership of Kamla Persad-Bissessar, for today's generation of Indo-Trinidadian female teens. From the explosion of a late twentieth century generation of young Indian women into chutney music culture and carnival masquerade, their expanding impact on education, politics and the economy, and even the continued visibility of Indo-Trinidadian beauty pageants, it is clear that girls in the future will increasingly choose navigations that break apart, reclaim and recast the terms within which they come of age.

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[i] "Creole" variously refers to European descendants or French Creoles, African descendants or aspects of the dominant culture. Scholars such as Stuart Hall (1977) and Ryan (1999, 2002) have also noted the ambiguity in the term. It may also be used to refer to globalized processes of interculturation as well as to describe the specific Caribbean case of shared cultural and historical processes (Khan 2001; Munasinghe 2001).

[ii] Ryan (2002) notes dissenting views about whether or not Indo-Trinidadian culture, which has survived in indigenized forms, can be called "creole". From one perspective, distinctive Indo-Trinidadian foods, rituals and cultural forms, brought from India and revitalized and re-established in the new Caribbean environment (see Vertovec 1992), add to the multitude of forms that could be considered "creole".

[iii] For the literature on masculinity and reputation, which I don't engage here, see Wilson (1973), Besson (1993), Miller (1994) and Chevannes (2001).

[iv] Writing about Hindu mythology, and its reinforcement through religion and mythology, Pat Mohammed (1989, 395) notes, "Sita embodies femininity, the ideal of female love and devotion and a lesson to all women on how they should behave in their daily lives. This obsession with female chastity, which condemns a woman even on the basis of the most unfounded gossip, permeates the whole concept of Hindu marriage and Hindu religion. It is the wife's chastity which protects her husband and thereby his honour…Thus the male patriarchal order is configured as contingent on women's acceptance and collusion with the control of female sexuality".

[v] In this regard, claims to the "sanctity" of the Indian or Hindu way of life are paralleled by disparagement of Afro-Trinidadian women for their behaviour and Afro-Trinidadian men for not controlling them.

[vi] Only two girls from Rafeek Memorial TML Secondary School and three from El Dorado Senior Comprehensive School were 17–19 years old.

[vii] Across ethnicity and religion, both mothers and fathers of St. Augustine Girls' High School students were mainly university educated and, secondly, secondary-level educated. In contrast to other groups, most of the mothers of Indo-Trinidadian girls from all religions attending this school were also the only ones in paid employment in the government or a private business rather than self-employment, unemployment or unpaid work. At the other schools, and across religion, mothers and fathers were mainly secondary-level educated and, then in smaller numbers, primary school educated. At Lakshmi Girls Hindu College and El Dorado Secondary Comprehensive School, a small minority of Indo-Trinidadian girls' fathers were university educated. However, no mothers were reported to be university educated. Mothers of all religions at all other schools were all mainly classified as "self-employed", "unemployed" or "unpaid". Thus, educational privilege and school group are seen to correspond to important socio-economic differences among Indo-Trinidadian young women, and to suggest ways that "class" is at work.

[viii] As Laitinen (1997) notes in her study of Afro-Tobagonian femininity and "styles of being", female reputation/shame is gained from particular behaviour considered immoral because it is likely also to be seen as unfeminine. For example, she observed that girls associate "inappropriate" behaviour, such as laughing too loud, quarrelling, being in bad company, cursing and going out too much, not only with a lack of respect for oneself as a female, but also with a lack of "femininity".

[ix] In her study of Indo-Trinidadians in the immediate post-indentureship period, Mohammed argues that Indo-Trinidadian women "colluded" with attempts to re-establish the "classic patriarchy" (1994, 32-33) while also challenging the emerging gender system "through their new wage earning status and their sexuality" (ibid, 33). She defined a gender system as "that system of gender relations which is deemed to exist in any time and around which the cultural construction of masculinity and femininity proceeds" (ibid, 14). For her, the concept of negotiation was useful for exploring the dialectical process of rewriting "the patriarchal contract" (ibid, 34) and constructing gender identities at different historical periods. Gender negotiations were an accretional process of compromises, arguments, collusions, compromises, resistance and subversions over time and changing circumstances, which occurred at both individual and institutional levels. These levels were connected by "a continuous dialectical relationship between individual action, and group or community concerns" (ibid, 38), and were influenced by ongoing social, political and economic changes.

[x] As Ballinger (1998, 18) writes in another context, "The challenging of gender roles and race-based family structure must also be read in the context of neo-liberalism which fosters freely-choosing, socially-autonomous subjects".

[xi] With regard to Canadian South Asian girls, Handa (1997, 8) writes, "…the 'typical' Pakistani girl fits colonial notions of South Asian womanhood: servitude, docility, chastity. In contrast, a 'typical' Canadian woman is seen as sexually active and is associated with 'modernity'. Modern is defined as both intelligent and sexually promiscuous".

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Networks of Empire and the Representation of the 'Queen of Sheba' in W.H. Angel's *The Clipper Ship 'Sheila'*

Mark Tumbridge

Abstract

"Her earnings are worn on her person, the silver coins melted into ornately wrought jewellery made in the style of villages in India, where the goldsmiths in the southern towns had learned their craft" (Espinet 2003, 249).

Captain Angel's *The Clipper Ship Sheila* (1921) charts the launch, preparations, outward and return journey of the ship which brought more than 600 indentured labourers to the Caribbean in 1877. This article analyses the representation of indentured migrants, Indian subjects, passengers, and other subjects on the periphery of indentureship; these are considered in terms of the overarching theme of the author's imaginative relations to his surroundings. The article begins by providing some examples of Angel's world outlook and how his text includes elements of the network of systems behind Britain's global imperial presence; it is within this context that any other representation in the text should be viewed. The central focus of the paper is an extended analysis of Angel's perspective of one particular subject, whom he chooses to single out and elaborate on in his text.

Tumbridge, Mark. 2012. Networks of Empire and the Representation of the Queen of Sheba in W.H. Angel's *The Clipper Ship 'Sheila'*. *CRGS*, no. 6, ed. Gabrielle Hosein and Lisa Outar, pp. 1-17.

Angel introduces her to the text by saying that "Amongst our coolie passengers (she paid her own passage money down) was a fine looking woman about forty years of age" (Angel 1923, 185). She is a formerly indentured Indian woman who travels on Angel's ship as a free passenger. No research in the field has yet uncovered her name; Angel does not provide this in the text and so female nomenclature—for example, 'the free Indian woman'—is used to identify her.

Angel's text seems to be of cumulative value and importance for Indo-Caribbean Studies, not least because of the presence of the free female passenger. A copy of the 1920s publication was drawn to the attention of Brinsley Samaroo and Ken Ramchand who edited and republished it in 1995 with an introduction and an afterword that framed the text from an Indo-Caribbean perspective. Samaroo and Ramchand's edition also featured the photograph of the free East Indian woman on the front cover, whereas in Angel's earlier editions, the photograph faced page 185, more or less in the middle of the book. This shift of the East Indian woman to the foreground is perhaps emblematic of the aims of this article—to re-read Angel's text in the light of this ideological shift, foregrounding and repositioning the free female passenger. Even though the above suggests that she is peripheral or marginalised in Angel's text, she is still represented to an extent far beyond any other indentured subject (male or female) in the other extant journals and diaries of the colonial agents who worked on the other middle passage[1]. This perhaps begins to provide some measure of the importance and value of the Indian woman's presence in the text. As other scholars and artists engage with Angel's text dialogically, understanding the free East Indian woman will become more vital as she grows in significance and aids research that repositions the existing knowledge within the field. Joy Mahabir has said recently that Ramabai Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge* (2003) "relie[s] heavily on Captain Angel's account in the section of her novel where the ship from India stops at St. Helena"[2]. In the light of this information, a detailed analysis of how Angel positions the East Indian female migrant in the text and a reading of the meanings she produces seem timely if not somewhat overdue.

Angel's text needs to be seen in the context of British imperial presence across the globe. The large outline of his text traces the journey of the *Sheila* from its launch in 1877 in Glasgow to Calcutta, from where it travels to Trinidad and British Guiana, returning to

[1] This paper is a modified extract from my PhD thesis, which, in part, examines the journals and diaries of the captains and surgeons aboard the boats that came to the Caribbean from India and China. The other eyewitness accounts that I am referring to here and elsewhere in this article are Theophilus Richmond, *The First Crossing being the Diary of Theophilus Richmond, Ship's Surgeon Aboard the Hesperus 1837-8*, eds. Dabydeen et al. (Guyana: The Caribbean Press, 2010); Captain and Mrs. Jane Swinton, *Journal of a Voyage with Coolie Emigrants, from Calcutta to Trinidad* (London: Alfred Bennett, 1859); and Dr Edward Ely's journal account of Chinese migrants, *Abstract of the Surgeon's Journal of Proceedings on Board the Ship 'Samuel Boddington' During a Voyage from China to Demerara*, which can be found in Parliamentary Papers 1852-1853, (986), Encl. in No. 11.

[2] Joy Mahabir, e-mail to Mark Tumbridge, 13 September 2010.

Merseyside just short of a year after its launch. The text therefore describes the other trade triangle that emerged as the British Empire expanded beyond the more heavily used sea routes to Africa. Along the way, Angel discusses details that reveal the circulation of goods and capital flows, communication routes, technological and other developments of the empire, as well as European hegemony. For example, the *Sheila* takes "dry goods cargo" (1923, 46) (that is, pig iron and bricks) to Calcutta and the indentured labourers—"our living freight"[3] as Angel says—to the Caribbean, from where it collects sugar and rum for Liverpool. One gains a sense of how the capital of the ship as a trading resource was fully maximised for the benefit of the owner and the empire. However, the systems that Angel operated within are unrepresentable because there is always some dependent element of capitalism that cannot be traced—what one sees, according to Jameson, is capitalism's symptoms[4]. A sign of the British overseas presence is a newly laid telegraph cable, which the *Sheila's* anchor is caught on when the vessel leaves Trinidad (1923, 197); the development of the telegraph would enable high speed communications between the British-"owned" islands—a crucial capability, especially during a time of insurrection. Indeed, in the aftermath of the 1857 Anglo-Indian war and the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica, defence against such resistance was an urgent need in a time of "crises in imperial power"[5](Gilroy 1993, 11). Angel's support for the British Empire is strong—he speaks of "the unfair competition of the German, Austrian, and French systems of granting bounties, [and their] cartels" (1923, 240), bemoans the lack of intervention and the laissez-faire attitude of the home government. He thoroughly commits himself as a colonist and is open in his pro-slavery opinions. "African negroes," Angel says, "kept as slaves, were first class working material". He continues, "...but when the great scheme of manumission set in, and they were made free—the promoters of that made one mistake, at any rate—the sugar estates were practically ruined" (1923, 201). The foregoing takes account of the wider British imperial presence, the unrepresentable network of systems, Angel's world outlook and his imaginative relations to his surroundings as they are played out in the text within. The foregoing is essential to understanding representations generally within Angel's text, but particularly so for the main focus and analysis of this article.

Nearly a page-and-a-half is given over to the East Indian woman as part of Angel's episodic narrative; he chooses to enclose the section related to her within chapter 26,

[3] Ibid., p. 204.

[4] This is what Jameson refers to as "the question of capitalism as a totality". One can conceive of it as a dialectically constructed complex whole, but "No one had ever seen that totality, nor is capitalism ever visible as such, but only in its symptoms...Every representation is partial..." So Angel's text depicts the accumulation or circulation of capital, but those goods and capital do not stop there—they move beyond the periphery of the text's representation (Jameson 2011, 6).

[5] Gilroy highlights the close historical proximity of these two insurrections that shook the assurance of metropolitan power to its core.

which begins with the *Sheila* anchoring at the mid-Atlantic island of St Helena[6]. Parts of her story displace the continuity of the time in the narrative—the chronological flow is interrupted by external and internal analepsis[7]. This formal feature enables a reading of the time-structure of Angel's inclusion of the Indian woman passenger within his chapter on St Helena. St Helena is a temporary stopover for shipping in the mid-Atlantic, and even though the open sea is the most liminal of places for a ship, the island is the halfway point in terms of dry land. When organising his narrative, Angel seems to have chosen to place her story within the St Helena cycle and not at any other point in the narrative because he associates her particularly with that time and place. It is this sense of the East Indian woman being positioned 'in-between' and the palpable feeling of division and displacement that both enters the narrative with her presence and features so strongly in the following extended analysis. As the *Sheila* arrives in St Helena, Angel is forced into an analepsis in order to "fill in" her story-events. The only reference that confirms to any degree her former position as an indentured labourer is when Angel says, "She had returned to India from Trinidad, *having completed her term entitling her to a free passage*" [my italics] (1923, 185). This suggests she had finished the required ten years' "industrial residence" (Tinker 1993, 99), the qualifier for the "free" journey for labourers in British colonies. So, she was indentured in India, migrated to Trinidad, then repatriated to India before boarding the *Sheila* to return to Trinidad—this draws in threads and elements from *outside* of the narrative's time frame. The book begins in January 1877 with the launch of the *Sheila* and ends just short of a year later, but her story extends to at least a decade before that to around 1866 when she entered the indentured system. In terms of time, she is the major disruption of the narrative's chronological progress and flow. Madhavi Kale's observation that migrants and their descendants "exceed the narratives that have been proposed to contain them" (Kale 1996, 111) seems wholly applicable to the free Indian woman as she problematises and troubles the time and space of the narrative in this way[8].

Although the foregoing and the implications of this analysis suggest a refocusing of the power relations in favour of the free female migrant, there are still huge imbalances. She

[6] St Helena can be viewed, like the Caribbean, as an interstice, an intervening space, not least, in this instance, because of the presence of the East Indian woman. Perhaps symbolic of its importance in the Atlantic crossings, St Helena has subsequently become the name of a village in Trinidad. Another correlation or convergence is Joy Mahabir's observation that Ramabai Espinet used Angel's text as a reference in particular to the St Helena stopover in *The Swinging Bridge*. Angel's reference to a diminutive St Helena as "a tiny little dot of an island" (1923, 184) takes up a similar focal point to V.S. Naipaul's reference to Trinidad as "a dot on the map of the world" (Naipaul 1992, 237).

[7] This is the formal vocabulary suggested by Gérard Genette and elaborated on by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan to describe what were traditionally known as flashbacks or retrospectives. Internal analepsis is a back-shift of time that stays within the notional time frame of the overall narrative. External analepsis goes beyond that frame to "precede the starting point of the first narrative" (Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 48).

[8] This suggests a similar situation to that which Homi Bhabha encounters in respect of Fanon. She too emerges from "a signifying time-lag of cultural difference...a structure for the representation of subaltern and postcolonial agency" (Bhabha 1994, 340).

is made exotic by captain and crew, and her identity is displaced and relocated through multiple dimensions into black Jewish biblical tales: Angel says that she "got the name among us of the 'Queen of Sheba'" (1923, 185). Renaming the Indian woman in this way is akin to an assault on her identity as it displaces her through dimensions that are not only mythic, but also religious, linguistic, historical, spatial, social and ethnic[9]. Omitting her name textually uncouples her from her ancestral past; it makes tracing her through the archive incredibly difficult[10] and stresses the importance of oral history for the migrants and their descendants. Naming someone is a fundamental ideological act of recognition of the subject's irreplaceable identity in that if "you 'have' a name of your own...you are recognized as a unique subject" (Althusser 2001, 117). This not only completely decentres her identity entangling it amongst those different dimensions listed above, but in doing so it also offers the reader a particular perspective of reality which is mediated and fed through all that mythology; one has to be a critical reader to disentangle her.

The free Indian woman remains unnamed throughout the text, but the reader is told the name she has been given by others. Even on the accompanying photograph[11] of her, in which she confidently and seriously holds the gaze of the camera, she is described as "Coolie passenger on board" (1923, 184-185). At the time of travelling on the *Sheila*, she is not an indentured labourer, but she remains a "coolie" (but also a queen) to Angel. Angel includes the free female migrant with the other indentured labourers when he says she was "Amongst our coolie passengers"[12](1923, 185). So, Angel is careful to ensure that social distance is maintained by including her with the other "coolies", despite her status as a free passenger, while also complimenting her. Angel immediately establishes her status in his eyes as well as her appearance and age, and creates another image of her beside the photograph. He tries to make her image strange, shocking, and excessive—she "was a sight to look at". He re-establishes and extends that social distance by saying that she dresses "according to her ideas" (1923, 185), and in doing so obeys Westminster[13]. Combining a regal name with the image of her ears which have "holes big enough to admit bottle corks" (1923, 186) suggests Angel stereotypes her as a "noble savage". If he is using the polite form in referring to the East Indian woman on the *Sheila* as a lady, he also inserts her (or at least awkwardly equates her) to a level in the stratification of the

[9] These spheres are suggested by Edith Bruder in the "complex search for origins" (Bruder, 2008, 98) of the Lost Tribes of Israel. They apply equally to the displacement being applied by Angel. The biblical Queen of Sheba appears in 1 Kings 10 v.13 and elsewhere in the Bible.

[10] Efforts to trace documents relating to her are underway at the time of writing.

[11] See appendix 1.

[12] In the absence of any other evidence in the text to suggest there were more free passengers besides the one Indian woman, this assumes that Angel is including her with the newly recruited indentured labourers on board.

[13] Ronald Hyam refers to strident "governmental demands of the maintenance of 'social distance'. In the interests of establishing an unimpeachable imperial ruling elite, close contact between rulers and ruled was progressively reduced everywhere" (Hyam 1990, 201).

British class system: "lady" connotes respectability. Then, there is a rhetorical move in describing her clothing: "I must plead," he says, "inability to describe the intricacies of ladies' apparel" (1923, 186). On the one hand, this seems typical masculine posturing, but perhaps it is also related to the idea of the inscrutable oriental. In an attempt to make up for his inability, Angel interpellates[14] the reader and tries to suggest that his view can be relied on; he only goes as far as saying "*you* may depend on it, she was in the height of fashion"[my italics] (1923, 186). These descriptions of the so-called "Queen of Sheba" that construct the textual image beside the photograph are perhaps what led Ken Ramchand to suggest that Angel was "facetiously making more of a spectacle of her than she could possibly have made of herself" (Ramchand 1995, 170).

In the page and a half devoted to her, Angel neglects to mention approximately twenty-six silver dollars that appear on the person of the free Indian woman in the photograph although he does make a passing reference to it later in the text. In the only other mention of her in the book, Angel highlights how important circulation is to the acute capitalist, that is, the government of British Guiana, Trinidad, and Britain, and the planters. In discussing her appearance, which he calls "the rig-out of the 'Queen of Sheba'", and other indentured labourers more generally, he says

> Their wages were paid to them in English silver coins, which they promptly put out of circulation by melting them into personal ornaments of all kinds... It is one of the grievances of the government that owing to this they have constantly to import silver coins to keep pace with the loss...(1923, 200).

Angel's words seem to suggest that the labourers melted *all* their cash which seems to ignore their need of money for everyday survival. But there is something much more complex at work here. Angel uses "circulation" to describe the flow of money that the indentured labourers interrupt by melting some of their coins; this idea of circulation has a particular set of assumptions or ideological relations attached to it. As discussed in the introduction, this is part of the vast, unrepresentable and globalising form of the network of systems that were involved in extracting profits from the very soil of the plantations. The surplus capital not only from the Caribbean, but also the other colonies of Empire, was continually moving through these systems; the surplus was thrown back into circulation ceaselessly in order to provide more surplus and augment value[15]. The Indian

[14] Interpellation is theorised by Louis Althusser. This is when an author (the police in Althusser's usage) hails the reader using "you". "I have called," Althusser says, "*interpellation* or hailing...which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'" [Althusser's italics]. This functions to draw subjects into an ideology in a powerful way. Althusser adds that this occurs "in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects" (Althusser 2001, 118).

[15] Karl Marx: "His [the capitalist's] aim is rather the unceasing movement of profit-making. This boundless drive for enrichment, this passionate chase after value, is common to the capitalist and the miser; but while the miser is merely a capitalist gone mad, the capitalist is a rational miser. The ceaseless augmentation of value, which the miser seeks to attain by saving his money from circulation, is achieved

woman on the *Sheila* and other indentured labourers interrupted this huge process by taking silver coins out of circulation and hoarding them in the form of jewellery; this was seen as being unfair or a permanent annoyance ("one of the grievances") to the colonial authorities and the planters who supported them because it was seen as an act of resistance. As Clem Seecharan has pointed out, this "was, and still is, a sensible form of saving", but it also kept the money out of the banks. "Many clung tenaciously to the ancestral idea that their wealth was safer in their homes" (Seecharan 1997, 252). Those who were in a position to accumulate enough cash (like the "Queen of Sheba") could throw that into their own businesses, which might compete with the planters; it might even put them in a position to channel cash or capital towards other forms of resistance. To bring some perspective to the silver dollars that the free East Indian woman wears around her neck, these are roughly equivalent to about two months' wages for the average labourer at the time in Trinidad[16]. The foregoing argument has placed the free East Indian woman's jewellery within the context of circulation and the wider capitalist systems; this section of the analysis can be extended by turning to the work of Joy Mahabir.

Throughout the period of the indentureship system, Indo-Caribbean women had *some* of the silver shillings they were paid melted down in order to make jewellery. They were able to take their money to the local silversmith and "dictate the designs and patterns of the pieces"(Mahabir)[17]. The photograph of the East Indian woman that accompanies Angel's text can be compared on the one hand to colonial postcards in which indentured women were "made to pose in their jewelry", and on the other to "images of black women laborers surrounded or overwhelmed by tropical landscape and crops" (Mahabir). Mahabir's analysis of these images highlights this "distinct shift in the representation of Indian women laborers" in that "the images of land and agricultural produce are absent". These postcards, therefore, replicate the staging of the photograph of the free East Indian woman, and in doing so "deliberately render invisible the labor" (Mahabir) that she performed; it effaces her relationship to her "real conditions of existence"[18], that is, the dangerous environment of the sugar plantation, the poverty and harsh work, and the bad conditions of housing that labourers inherited from slavery. And yet, when Angel lists the East Indian woman's jewellery, he uses words of excess:

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by the more acute capitalist by means of throwing his money again and again into circulation." (Marx 1990, 254-55)

[16] I am indebted to John Gilmore for this observation. Hugh Tinker also states that as late as the 1890s in Demerara and Trinidad, the average wage of a labourer was still 1s. a day (1993, 185).

[17] At the time of writing, Joy Mahabir's article ("Alternative Texts: Indo-Caribbean Women's Jewelry") was unpublished, but was due to appear in a forthcoming volume of the journal *Caribbean Vistas: Critiques of Caribbean Arts and Culture*. An abstract of the work can be found on the Indo-Caribbean Studies Association's website as follows: Silent Archives: Indo-Caribbean Women's Jewelry (abstract), May 2009. <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/ccs/icsa/contributions/paperabstracts/> 15.09.2010.

[18] This is engaging with Althusser's two-stage definition of ideology. The two stages are "Thesis I. Ideology is a 'representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (2001, 109). "Thesis II. Ideology has a material existence" (2001, 112).

> ...she was *loaded* with jewellery *all over* her person—*immensely heavy* silver bracelets from elbow to the shoulder, also from the wrists to the elbows on both arms; similar from ankles to knees; a kind of diadem on the forehead; *a lot* of rings of all sorts on her toes and her fingers; a pendant nose ring... (1923, 186) [my italics].

If his words point to an excess, he also exaggerates the amount of bracelets she has on her arm in the photograph, which might suggest that Angel views her, or is trying to position her, as culturally inferior, even if, as Mahabir highlights, Indo-Caribbean women preferred "an aesthetic of excess". Mahabir realigns our perspective on the free Indian woman by highlighting that

> Indo-Caribbean women consciously used jewelry to emphasize their role in the economic and social relations of the system of indentureship...[This created] an alternative visual archive through the practice of a materialist visuality that immediately referenced the invisible relations of indentureship.

Mahabir's analysis allows us to resituate and relocate the free Indian woman's subject position as a formerly indentured servant. Her analysis not only helps us think about the similarities and differences between the images of black and indentured women, but also suggests another aspect of the symbolic importance of the East Indian woman. Mahabir's work provides a good segment of the corrective lens through which the rest of Angel's depiction of this subject must be viewed.

Of all those subjects that appear in the diaries and journals of the colonials who worked on the other middle passage, the free female passenger in Angel's text is one of the few—if not the only—(formerly) indentured East Indian subjects whose speech is represented by directly quoting their voice rather than filtering it through reported speech. While discussing the experience of her return to India, Angel says, "her expression and verdict on the subject [is], 'India only fit place for coolie.'" This is as much of her voice as the text allows. She can hardly be said to have escaped the realms of subalterneity. On the contrary, the representation of her speech that emerges is brief and enigmatic when compared with the rest of the information in the text. The quotation seems to displace her identity again into a third space that matches the liminality of St Helena—it does not confirm her pride over the land of her birth, nor does it seem to include her amongst the other migrants. And yet, while in Trinidad as a labourer she had memories of the India that she had once lived in and a desire to see it again—"a longing came over her to return to the land of her birth" (1923, 185). On her arrival, not only had her imagined India[19] changed significantly, but so had she. Having made the return journey to India, she was not inclined to "do heavy penance, and pay a lot of money to get her caste back" (1923,

[19] This is Benedict Anderson's idea of the nation as an "imagined community" (Anderson 1991).

185), and paid out of her own pocket for the journey back to Trinidad on the *Sheila*[20]. She does identify with the labourers though, making "a corner in fresh fish at St Helena by buying up all the fisherman's catch for the day, as a treat for the coolies on board" (1923, 185). She takes charge of the situation and buys the fish and it is her money and action that make the difference not the captain's nor the owner's coffers; this is the only part of her story that Angel connects to St Helena, and it is, therefore, her agency and freedom to act in support of the newly indentured labourers that is central to locating her portrait alongside St Helena. She would have been in a position to tell newly recruited migrants what they could expect on the plantations, to give them tips, specialised knowledge, shortcuts, to warn them of the shortcomings of the system. The Trinidadian authorities grew to abhor returnees and found them subversive[21]; she is on the border between "inside" (though she was never fully that) and outside the indentured system. So, although she does not care to regain her caste or stay in India (she no longer fits into the patriarchal/caste system), her autonomy, agency, and affiliations to both the migrants and Trinidad are not in question.

The quotation attributed to her, "India only fit place for coolie" (1923, 185), seems to reflect both the contradictions of Angel's text and her position as an in-between, liminal subject negotiating her space between inside and outside. Numerous meanings and different perspectives can be constructed around the quotation itself. Firstly, depending on the emphasis one puts on the sentence, either India or Trinidad emerge as the better place to be or live for a "coolie". If one takes the word "fit" to be the adjectival form, she could mean, in a positive sense, that India is the only place suitable for "coolies", but this would place the emphasis on a country which she is keen to leave. Or perhaps she is being derogatory both to India and/or to "coolies"—"only coolies would live in India". This latter suggestion seems to correspond with her preference for Trinidad. Secondly, another meaning emerges if her intentions were to use the word "fit" as a verb—this

[20] The majority of migrants stayed in Trinidad once they got there: of the 143,939 migrants to Trinidad, 110,645, or 78 per cent, remained. The free East Indian woman was not part of that majority. There was "an annual average of 700 repatriates from Trinidad" to India (Ramesar 1996, 193) The number of people returning to the Caribbean after having taken advantage of the "free" passage home was not large either. In the fifteen years after the so-called "Queen of Sheba's" return to Trinidad (that is, from 1877–1892) only 757 re-emigrated a second time (Ramesar 1996, 193). In the light of this information, she seems to fit into a small group who do not let fear guide their decisions but rather make their choices as adventurous risk-takers.

[21] Marianne Soares Ramesar describes the "tightening of opposition to return-immigrants re-engaging as indentureds". They became "steadily unwelcome", "deplored by both Protector and planters". By 1895, a motion had been passed by the Trinidad Immigration Committee to stop the recruitment of returnees. This arose from the Trinidad Protector's complaints "that these were undesirable recruits, who knew too much, and no doubt were less docile, than the new indentureds. They allegedly gave 'bad' advice to shipmates and fellow workers, and instigated disturbances". They could not object to "those few who could afford to pay their way". This is not the case with British Guiana where returnees "were regarded as experienced and valuable workers." All of the information in this note is either paraphrased or quoted from Ramesar (1996, 194).

shifts the meaning from being one that suggests suitability for a purpose to one that aims to describe compatibility of shape and size between two things. Under this meaning, "India only fit place for coolie" would suggest some correspondence between India and a "coolie" akin to the idea of synecdoche, but based more on equality and direct comparison rather than the part standing in for the whole. And as Angel singles out the so-called "Queen of Sheba" in his narrative and refers to her more than once as being a "coolie", the East Indian woman's words seem to equate her symbolically with India.

Her sexuality is similarly symbolic of her agency and independence on the one hand, while on the other hand, the narrative also attempts to envelop and relocate this aspect of her identity. A reading of the text seems to suggest that, in the Caribbean, she became accustomed to sexual freedom, her own choice of partners and husbands, and became a shrewd operator in money matters—she accrued her fortune through "judicious marriage, and partly in her widowhoods, and as a trader"; in keeping with Angel's thoroughgoing capitalist ideology, he domesticates and normalises her trading ability and entrepreneurial skills as "a natural inclination" (1923, 185)[22]. As outlined above, details in the text suggest her experience of creolisation in Trinidad shifted and realigned her perspective on women's place in life and on their right to challenge male authority. Her withdrawal of her labour-power from the very indentured system that Angel so thoroughly supports is a challenge in itself. When he located her image amongst the black people of the Bible (not aligned with those in bondage, but placed on a queenly throne), he also tapped into a powerful seam in Old Testament patriarchy[23].

Having discussed the East Indian woman in the photograph and the text, a number of unanswered questions remain concerning the East Indian woman's background, identity and the circumstances that brought the text together. Is the woman in the photograph the same one that is in the text? One cannot be certain of this. The placing of the photograph in the original text faces Angel's discussion of the woman he calls the "Queen of Sheba" and part of the caption reads "to face page 185"; this suggests that the two are connected but Angel is not explicit beyond these measures. We only have his word that there ever was such a woman on his ship. Where was the photograph taken and who organised this? Most likely, the photograph was taken in a photographer's studio. At this time, taking a photograph required a whole set of heavy equipment and so it would have been impractical to have all of this lifted out on to the ship. One would imagine that, if there was a camera near the ship, Angel would have had photos of the *Sheila* taken, in keeping

[22] At this point, class, gender, and "race" are beginning to seamlessly segue and mingle into each other. A comment from Robert J. C. Young elaborates the point. "The conflictual structures generated by its [the patriarchal drama called 'culture'] imbalances of power are consistently articulated through *points of tension* and forms of difference that are then superimposed upon each other: class, gender and race are circulated promiscuously and crossed with each other, transformed into mutually defining metaphors that mutate within intricate webs of surreptitious cultural values that are then internalised by those whom they define" [my italics—I refer back to these points of tensions below] (Young 1995, 182).

[23] Paul Gilroy discusses patriarchy in close connection with the Solomon and Sheba myth. (Gilroy 1993, 207)

with his bias towards it in the narrative, before he thought of taking a picture of the East Indian woman. The very first picture in the book is an artist's impression, a sketch or water colour, of the *Sheila* which takes pride of place opposite the title page. It is possible that the photo of the East Indian woman was taken in a studio either in India or the Caribbean. If the studio was in India, then it seems logical that the East Indian woman had photograph(s) of herself already in her possession when she boarded the ship and gave one to Angel. He would not have known her before she boarded the ship; if the photos were taken in India, it seems more probable that she organised them there. Or the studio could have been in the Caribbean. Angel may have asked her to sit for the photographs after their arrival—this seems to fit more closely with Joy Mahabir's comparisons with a range of photos of female labourers in the Caribbean. The other possibility is that the photo is just a recycled one or a postcard that Angel randomly selected to fit in with his narrative; this seems to fit with Ramabai Espinet's observation that this photograph became an "iconic, early and much-circulated postcard" (Espinet 2010).

The East Indian woman just discussed returns to the creolised community of Trinidad. What happens to her after she leaves Angel's ship is a mystery at the present moment. Perhaps research in the future will uncover further details of her life. Angel treats her in a similar but different way from other women in his narrative. Not only in Trinidad, but also elsewhere throughout his book, Angel keeps coming back to a transgressive obsession with inter-racial sex, but also directly links this to the means of production, and, therefore, economic exchange and colonial relations[24]. After reaching Trinidad and landing in Port of Spain "to see the sights", he suggests "The greatest of all [sights] from the human standpoint was the full-blooded negroes, male and female":

> As a whole they were here, as physically perfect as human beings can be. The women especially. Their training, and habit of carrying heavy weights of all sorts poised on their heads from early childhood, gives them a perfect carriage, their chests well out (1923, 221).

While there are points of comparison, this construction differs in many ways with his view of the East Indian woman. His biological determination ("full-blooded") speaks of a difference set up around a pure cellular continuity uninterrupted by fluid transactions

[24] Robert J.C. Young frames the argument of colonial desire well: "For it is clear that the forms of sexual exchange brought about by colonialism were themselves both mirrors and consequences of the modes of economic exchange that constituted the basis of colonial relations...The history of the meanings of the word 'commerce' includes the exchange both of merchandise and of bodies in sexual intercourse. It was therefore wholly appropriate that sexual exchange, and its miscegenated product, which captures the violent, antagonistic power relations of sexual and cultural diffusion, should become the dominant paradigm through which the passionate economic and political trafficking of colonialism was conceived" (1995, 182). This also relates to Tinker's assertions that the migrants were "articles of commerce" (1993, 38) and "units of production" (1993, 38).

from the outside[25] (Wright 1994); this coupled with his emphasis on complete ("As a whole") physical perfection reveals Angel's dialectically constructed inferiority complex immersed in desire and fear, on the one hand, while positing cultural superiority and repulsion on the other[26]. This is why when the Barbadian crew member suggests the possibility of marriage with a migrant Angel expresses his displeasure. Angel links their physical form with the work they do and thus associates the plantations to sexuality in keeping with Young's observations above. Mariam Pirbhai's articulation "that sexual transactions are the primary arena in which racial prejudice is most openly pronounced" (Pirbhai 2009, 63) seems to fit with this particular aspect of Angel's text as well. Angel singles out the women ('women especially') and later devalues the men; the women are inaccessible to him in the way they would be if he worked on a plantation, but he makes clear his desire. He goes on to describe "the country ladies... tramping along with their dress skirts, as a sailor would say, 'brailed up' tight above their most ample hips, no shoes on, but affording a liberal display of fine bare legs" (1923, 222) . In devaluing the men, Angel believes the women are "more inclined to work than their men folk—whom they maintain as often as not" (1923, 223). He reveals his fear of the men by saying, "there is no race alive that can be so contemptuously insulting as a truly angry negro; and they can be dangerous, too, not caring a rap for consequences" (1923, 225). In keeping with the ambivalence of colonial discourse, Angel can moralise about other sexual issues in his narrative. He criticises "our Government" for allowing "licenced brothels...carried on by Germans" with "sinks of debauchery and prostitution [that] flaunt[s] itself"; these have an "evil repute" in Calcutta and "other Indian and Eastern seaports" (1923, 127).

Although his opinions are shot through with ambivalence, Angel is transgressive for his time. By the 1870s, attitudes that had prevailed in the mid-eighteenth century that were marked to a greater degree by the absence of a "specific colour prejudice" (1990, 200) had changed completely. An example in this respect is Theophilus Richmond's view of the "Original Native or Negro who are detestably ugly and resemble a combination of Ourang Outang and Nigger, a cross breed as it were between Man and Monkey, more than anything else that I can think of" (Richmond 2010, 35). This is much more in keeping with the changed discriminatory perspective of the mid-nineteenth century, which had intensified by Angel's time and continued to harden while being accompanied

[25] This is reminiscent of that most fanatical and bitter of contamination ideas the "one-drop rule". Although Lawrence Wright says that it was a "peculiarly American institution", Angel's words suggest that the idea was present and circulating in the British imagination by the 1870s, so it had its equivalence of meaning and usage in Britain even if it "congealed" in America. Wright continues: "...known informally as 'the one-drop rule,' [it] defines as black a person with as little as a single drop of 'black blood.' This notion derives from a long discredited belief that each race had its own blood type, which was correlated with physical appearance and social behaviour" (1994).

[26] Ronald Hyam's work has been useful in unpacking the "push and pull of an irreconcilable conflict , between desire and aversion for inter-racial sexual union; desire (which was biological) and aversion (which was cultural) ...perceived black men as *alike* in wanting white women, *different* in being more likely to give satisfaction, in being socially inferior but sexually privileged" [Hyam's italics] (1990, p. 206).

by a similar gradual movement in attitudes toward sexuality[27]. There is no evidence that Angel's male gaze went beyond the imaginary sexual encounter to anything physical: an important point to note here is that the captain's wife accompanied him on the journey[28]. His wife's presence seems to create one of the points of tension that Young speaks of above. One wonders what she would have thought if she had read Angel's narrative or heard him speak about the black women as he does in the narrative.

In conclusion, Angel's inclusion of the East Indian woman in his narrative is without comparison in any of the other existent eyewitness accounts. One is left at the end of Angel's narration about her with a sense of absence; a lost opportunity for words that might have gone further towards standing in for her. While her image is distorted on the surface to a destructive extent, if one can untangle her from so much misrepresentation, a marvellous portrait begins to emerge of a strong, shrewd, fearless woman, who went out of her way to use the freedom she had become accustomed to in order to provide a meal for her newly indentured *jahaji-bahins/bahais* (ship-sisters/brothers).

Angel's writing reflects his belief in slavery and the indentured system; the above analysis takes those beliefs and reveals his imaginative relation to his surroundings. One of Madhavi Kale's wider observations seems to fit Angel's world outlook which he defined quite clearly: Empire, she says, was "predicated on naturalising and reproducing hierarchies of race, class, gender and nation along which ethnically-constituted populations in the colony were continuously, contradictorily evaluated" (1996, 110). The colony that Kale refers to is Trinidad. In the case of Angel, of course, the evaluation

[27] The broad ideas expressed in this paragraph so far have been constructed from a reading of Hyam and Lorimer. Hyam traces these changing attitudes with regard to "race", sex and empire. He says, "The erosion of *respect*, which took place roughly between 1790 and 1840, was followed by the erosion of *sympathy* and the growth of prejudice, which mainly occurred between the mid-1850s and the late 1860s" [Hyam's italics] (1990, 200). While "interracial sex remained common until the 1860s", by the 1880s a watershed had occurred which ushered in "the inauguration of a fanatical Purity campaign" (1990, 201). Hyam is in agreement with Douglas Lorimer. While Lorimer notes the presence of prejudice as "outbursts of individuals, rather than a consequence of institutionalised discrimination", he sees "a larger measure of toleration" in the eighteenth century, with the strict bar existing "not against the marriages of blacks and whites, but against the miscegenous unions between Irish Catholics and English Protestants" (Lorimer 1978, 27). So, Angel is crossing the boundaries of acceptance for his time.

[28] The effects and impacts of the correlation between the presence of wives overseas accompanying their husbands, who were colonial agents, and the emergence of social distance is a point of contention. Ronald Hyam refines the argument by saying that even if "the arrival, in numbers, of resident wives, and the development of 'social distance' (or even an actual colour bar) is a contested conjuncture, the timing remains evidence of a remarkable correlation, to say the least" (1990, 208). Lorimer comments on English wives abroad, too. "Faced with a riotous mob of blacks," Lorimer says, "Englishmen would be forced to follow the precedent of British officers in India. They would have to shoot their wives to save them from a fate worse than death itself" (1978, 194). This begins to highlight the perceived sexual threat that colonials imagined while abroad with their wives and the overtly excessive reactions alongside the degree of fear that this instilled.

started before the migrants even reached the colony, so one can stretch that geography to incorporate the areas analysed above. Angel's is a romanticised and sexualised view; his text can help us to discover the tragedies of indentureship, but can also open up aspects that are less unfortunate.

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To face page 185.

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The Queer Potential: (Indo-)Caribbean Feminisms and Heteronormativity

*Lauren Pragg**

Abstract

This division of our communities and allegiances is a typically colonial strategy. It not only breaks up our movements and the force of our resistances, but breaks those bodies that are marginalized on multiple fronts, making them disappear.
—Proma Tagore

Over the past ten years there has been remarkable growth in studies on sexuality in the Caribbean. One of the most underrepresented areas of these analyses, however, remains the intersection between queerness and Indo-Caribbean women. In general, much of the scholarship concerning Indo-Caribbean women remains tied to indentureship.

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Introduction

In *Maharani's Misery: Narratives of a Passage from India to the Caribbean*, Verene Shepherd details the disciplinary approach within Caribbean Studies to the discussion of Indian women and indentureship:

> Two conflicting, even dialectical arguments…One is that the Indian women's experience of emigration and indentureship was one of extreme hardship, exploitation and "sexploitation". The other…is that emigration was of significant material benefit to those who left India…[and that] emigration was a vehicle of female [(sexual)] emancipation…(2002, xvii).

As Shepherd's classification of these arguments as "dialectical" shows, the line between these arguments is in fact very blurry and better off undefined, as indentureship consisted of both prospects and barriers for even an individual woman.

However, as Alison Donnell writes in *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature: Critical Moments in Anglophone Literary History*, this discourse of both struggle and resistance has been altered in the twentieth century to find Indo-Caribbean women most often "represented as docile, loyal and submissive" (2006, 172). Caribbean feminisms have made important interventions into this narrative in order to complicate and broaden these representations.

What I aim to do here is not simply to acknowledge the existence of interlocking social and political categories of identity and experience, but, rather, to emphasize the possible contributions of a queer framework to Caribbean feminisms in order to make use of these differences. A queer [(Indo-)Caribbean] feminist reading and approach is fundamental in this moment because it is about the presence of a politic, instead of the continued disappearance of lives, desires, and identities. However, it is important to note that my analysis does not end with identity. And for this, I draw on Andrea Smith's article "Queer Theory and Native Studies" to illustrate the value in these interdisciplinary conversations.

Smith imagines queer theory enriching Native Studies through challenging the heteropatriarchal foundations of oppression (2010, 60), but she also sees Native Studies offering the politics of settler colonialism to queer theory. In a similar trade-off, I foresee the possibility of Caribbean Studies offering queer theory the particular lessons of its postcolonial history and present. I will explore this more below through Donnell's iteration of "dougla poetics."

Before that, however, it is methodologically important to look at how Smith begins her piece by highlighting the way "queer theory has made a critical intervention in LGBT studies by moving past simple identity politics to interrogate the *logics* of heteronormativity" [emphasis added] (2010, 41). She goes on to cite Michael Warner, "[queer theory] rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal" (2010,

41). My interest does not reside in oppositional politics for the sake of opposition, but rather in the ways queering Caribbean feminist discourse can actually work discursively to connect marginalities and political issues beyond sexual identity and liberal human rights.

Thus, this exploration will take up discourses of Indo-Caribbean women's sexuality through a queer lens by mapping the arguments made by Caribbean feminists concerning Hindu all-female pre-wedding fertility rituals, known as matikor ceremonies, and the transition of these performances into the realm of chutney music in Trinidad beginning in the late 1980s. As Donnell puts it, "the erotic power of *matikor* [means that]…Indian-Caribbean's women's writing and critical voices become visible on their own terms" (2006, 177). To me, this is what can be developed and extended to include *all* aspects of Indo-Caribbean women's experiences. I diverge from Donnell's analysis, however, because I do not take up matikor as a unique "paradigm" (2006, 177), but instead, I imagine matikor spaces and discourse to act more as an allegory within Caribbean feminism, one that allows for queered conversation. I will conceive of it here as a discursive tool that is rooted in the erotic emancipation, sacred elements, and communal connections of the matikor space, as well as the non-normative embodiments, behaviors, and imaginings it can create for Indo-Caribbean women. This is the potential and value I see most in work on matikor and chutney spaces, as it acknowledges the histories of Indo-Caribbean women, and offers an epistemology that allows for all embodiments of this subjecthood. This exploration also hinges on the present moment in Caribbean feminism in which Indo-Caribbean women remain comparatively underrepresented, silent or silenced in terms of queer identities, behaviors, and experiences, and are working to build connections with Afro-Caribbean feminists throughout the region and diaspora.

By engaging with six key texts on the subject, I hope to offer an overview of the discourse and an analysis of both the troubling and promising aspects of this material, before outlining the potential that can arise when the most moving and transgressive pathways of this work are carried forward into a politics of queer Caribbean feminism. I believe that there is strategic potential in a matikor politic that can help to define and sustain the formation of a distinct *and* interconnected queer (Indo-)Caribbean feminist discourse.

To begin, I will structure my analysis according to thematic development. I shall begin with and focus heavily on Rosanne Kanhai's groundbreaking collection *Matikor: The Politics of Identity for Indo-Caribbean Women*. Kanhai's introduction, Rawwida Baksh-Soodeen's "Power, Gender and Chutney," as well as Kanhai's "The Masala Stone Sings," provide useful starting points and frameworks for the discussion. Following these, Tejaswini Niranjana's article, "Left to the Imagination: Indian Nationalisms and Female Sexuality in Trinidad," offers a unique perspective from her position as an Indian national. Then, Brinda Mehta's *Diasporic (Dis)locations: Indo-Caribbean Women Writers Negotiate the* Kala Pani presents a brief analysis of Caribbean literature and the potential of matikor within that field. In her book, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Culture,* Gayatri Gopinath poses important questions on the chutney debate in relation to heterosexism in Niranjana's work, as well as the role of

home/nation in defining Indo-Caribbean women. Finally, I will end with a discussion of Donnell's text mentioned above, which outlines a theory of double agency for Indo-Caribbean women, advocates a matikor paradigm within Caribbean feminism, and raises the question of the role of a dougla poetic.

The article concludes with an analysis of the political economy and its influences on the discourse of matikor/chutney. It proves valuable to consider the role of the nation and its impact on the epistemological development of Indo-Caribbean female subjectivity and feminism. The work of M. Jacqui Alexander, Jasbir Puar, and Anne McClintock will be used briefly for this exploration. It is my hope that this analysis will offer an outline of key work on contemporary Indo-Caribbean women's sexuality, and an impetus to build on these contributions in ways that challenge the heteronormativity of Caribbean feminist writing and postcolonial approaches to nationalism.

Matikor to chutney: 'Tradition and its transgressors'

...when these women do begin to write they stare their origins of imposed degradation and humiliation in the face, in order to find the wellsprings of their creativity.
—Rosanne Kanhai

It is crucial to begin with the work of Rosanne Kanhai in *Matikor* for the simple reason that such a collection of Indo-Caribbean women's writing has not existed before or since its publication. This text informs the inquiry here based on its deployment of the space and ideology of matikor with the explicit purpose of offering an opening for the creative development of Indo-Caribbean feminism with sexuality at its center. Since the publication of this text, there has been notable growth in Caribbean feminist theorizing on the practice of matikor and its successive cultural entity—chutney.

In explaining her approach to and objective for the collection, Kanhai provides a definition of the matikor ceremonies:

> This festival originates in the oral culture which Indian indentured immigrants brought to the Caribbean, etched in their minds and bodies…**Matikor** provided a rare opportunity for…women to claim a space of celebration and articulation…They shared gossip and jokes, sang traditional songs, and performed dances that were celebratory and sexually suggestive. **Matikor** was a place of healing where women could act out their resistance against the degradation and depersonalization imposed upon them by the ruling class. As a grassroots Hindu festival, communal religious rituals were embedded in **matikor** activities, thus bringing together the sacred and the profane, the carnal and the spiritual, the political and the social (1999, xi).

She explains her title choice by identifying the uniqueness of the iconic space of matikor rituals in which "Indian women do not carry the burden of minority status" within the Afro-centric context of the Caribbean (Kanhai 1999, xi-xii). However, while recognizing the importance and rarity of this space, Kanhai admits that she does not feel as though such an entity exists in the same way for contemporary Indo-Caribbean women (1999, xii).

Her negotiation of the historical foundation of these rituals and their current emancipatory potential begins with the image of the Bhowjee, defined as the literal translation "from the Bhojpuri dialect (brought from India by the immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century) as sister-in-law and is being used here to denote the woman who lives according to the Indian traditions in the Caribbean" (1999, 235). She explains that this familiar Caribbean trope represents both the Indo-Caribbean woman's oppression *and* creativity (1999, 209).

But within the context of modernity, Kanhai wonders where the voice of this woman, so steeped in oral tradition, goes when literary expression takes precedence (1999, 210). Kanhai identifies her main concern as being "less with the perceived silence than with the coming into voice" (1999, 211). The critical opportunity at hand for the definition of an Indo-Caribbean feminist discourse is precisely what Kanhai distinguishes as her purpose: to examine what resources are being drawn on by Indo-Caribbean women in their creative expressions, and to understand what role feminism plays in this development (1999, 211).

While Kanhai primarily examines artistic productions of Indo-Caribbean women, she also details and analyzes the history and possibility that inform these creations. In doing so, she explains the following:

> After sixty to seventy years of indentureship, Indian communities began the process of forging a more positive identity. Educational opportunities, job possibilities, and social status of individuals and families were contingent upon *assimilation* into Western culture, thus discouraging the retention of the Indian heritage. Hindu and Muslim practices prevailed, however, although they were often conducted with a measure of secrecy and/or embarrassment [emphasis added] (1999, 212).

Here, then, we see both the retention of cultural norms and practices, but also the socially divisive splitting that has become naturalized for Indo-Caribbean subjects. In the context of this social position, Kanhai explains, as seen in the epigraph to this section, Indo-Caribbean women work from the very root of their oppression—which often means, their sexuality.

Before delving further into this point, however, Kanhai explains the historical opposition between Indo- and Afro-Caribbean peoples, "thrown together to compete for resources and ontological security in the shadow of white domination" (1999, 218). She quotes well-known Caribbean scholar Selwyn Ryan to point out the hostility that has existed between the groups, whether it be toward traditionally Indian spirituality and rituals, or the "awkward and vulgar" mannerisms of Africans (Kanhai 1999, 218). These racial divisions have been firmly embedded in general Caribbean politics, and specifically within the party politics of countries such as Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago. It has also made the creation of a cohesive, reflexive, and realistic Caribbean feminism incredibly challenging (Kanhai 1999, 218). Nevertheless, Kanhai believes that the poetry and perhaps wider literary contributions of Indo-Caribbean women hold the potential for

"a receptivity to creative inspiration from the dominant Afro-Caribbean culture" (1999, 219). She notes that Indo-Caribbean women have to lead severed lifestyles in which they are constantly negotiating popular culture and the culture of their familial traditions (Kanhai 1999, 219).

In one example of the sexualized creative transgression Bhowjees have always managed to produce within these realities, Kanhai turns to chutney. She explains that before the 1960s, Indo-Caribbeans maintained distance from calypso[1], so for Indo-Caribbean women in the 1980s to defy this tradition was groundbreaking (Kanhai 1999, 220). Through an examination of poetry, Kanhai describes how these acts "[show] the courage of a Bhowjee who uses the calypso stage to make a public act of gender and ethnic liberation…[and how she] celebrate[s] the woman claiming freedom, her body itself becoming an expression of art, an act of creativity" (1999, 220-221). This explicit and conscious inclusion of one's corporeal being within a creative and political statement is an example of the use of the erotic in Indo-Caribbean women's lives, and in this case, scholarship. It also makes clear that the erotic includes much more than sexual acts and can offer a fuller awareness of one's emotional and sensory encounters.

Kanhai's examination of the possibility of matikor ceremonies, spaces, and politics begins with the question, "Steeped as she is in her community and culture, how does [Bhowjee] maintain the forms of creativity that are inherent to her heritage and at the same time liberate herself from the domination inscribed in this heritage?" (1999, 226). To begin that investigation Kanhai adds the following to her earlier definition of the ceremonies:

> Bhowjees got the opportunity to adorn themselves with jewelry and saris and to rub sendoor in each other's hair…Kept within the community, these activities presented no lasting threat, for ultimately they remained under the supervision of the male social managers. Women were expected to return to their defined roles after a brief indulgence…(1999, 226).

This passage displays not only the community building and regulatory structures of matikor ceremonies, but importantly for this paper, it notes the intimacy between Indo-Caribbean women that opens up the historical and contemporary possibilities for queer encounters. In other words, acknowledging, expressing, and uplifting the erotic experiences of Indo-Caribbean women allows for a reflection in sacred cultural terms that does not force a rupture between queer subjects and their collective social history and present.

Here we see connections between the transformation of matikor rituals into chutney performances, and the discourses of morality and control surrounding Indo-Caribbean women's bodies and sexuality. Rawwida Baksh-Soodeen begins her piece, "Power, Gender and Chutney,"[2] by explaining her introduction to these ceremonies as a young Muslim girl growing up in Trinidad (1999, 194). Once her initial shock at the explicitly

[1] "Calypso singing is a predominantly working-class, male, Afrocentered activity and many calypsos, in their celebration of Afro-Caribbean maleness, are openly derogatory to women" (220).
[2] Originally published as "Viewpoint" in the *Sunday Express* newspaper, December 1990.

sexual nature of these spaces shifts into an appreciation, she describes the freedom that is opened up without the ramifications of patriarchal retribution because of their female exclusivity and their "legitimacy" as religious ceremonial rites (Baksh-Soodeen 1999,195). Baksh-Soodeen writes about the origins of matikor as "spaces that [were] probably fought for centuries ago by Indian women to collectively express their sexuality within Hinduism…These dances were all brought by our foremothers from the rural lower caste communities of India to Trinidad and Tobago" (1999, 195). She goes on to say that while the dances are still mainly performed by "lower class women" they "have come to be practiced at Hindu weddings of all classes, whatever their original caste background" (Baksh-Soodeen 1999, 195).

In her exploration of the controversy that developed around chutney music in Trinidad, Baksh-Soodeen acknowledges and explores the public/private debate at the center of the conversation. While the songs and dances performed originate from the long-standing and sacred tradition of matikor ceremonies, "The dances which men were not supposed to view, far less participate in, are now in full view of five to ten thousand people, and further, men and women dance together as they combine the dances performed by men and women at Hindu weddings" (Baksh-Soodeen 1999, 196). She goes on to say "[that] to certain elements of the Trinidad and Tobago Hindu society, this phenomenon represents the loss of control by the individual Hindu male and the male-dominant Hindu community over the sexuality of the Hindu woman" (Baksh-Soodeen 1999, 196).

Much is at play in this summary of the chutney controversy. First, the imposed split between private and public has long been criticized and debunked within dominant discourses of feminism as a way of forcibly confining women, their sexuality and their work to a realm of non-recognition. In this discourse, the public/private separation is also immersed in racial politics. A definite part of the hysteria arose due to the association of public realms of Caribbean life with the dominant African population, and how this was understood as threatening to the Indo-Caribbean population through the purported vulnerability of women via displays of sexuality. This will be elaborated upon further below.

In direct connection to this fear is Baksh-Soodeen's explanation of the middle- to upper-class conservative Hindu reaction in Trinidad. She explains the anxiety that arose due to the loss of control of patriarchal power structures, and she goes on to say that this vocal segment of the population mistakenly sees

> Hindu culture as something which is puritanical, which operates on the asexual philosophy and practice. Surely this is total denial of the powerful sexuality which underpins the Hindu religion and culture…They talk about Hindu culture as something that is static—it originated in India and, as Indians in the diaspora, we are merely passive guardians of this thing called Hindu culture (Baksh-Soodeen 1999, 197).

This passage highlights the dismissal and/or erasure of an understanding of sacred sexuality.

But this passage also points to the imaginary fixing of Hinduism, and more broadly Indo-Trinidadian women in a time/space particularity that requires a specific embodiment of morality, duty, and sexuality. In her examination of Native American communities, Smith writes that "the appeal to 'tradition' often serves as the origin story that buttresses heteropatriarchy and other forms of oppression...while disavowing its political investments" (2010, 46-47). By understanding these roles and behaviors as unchanging or unchangeable, conservative, wealthy "defenders of authenticity" claim the righteousness of Indianness, and expel supposedly wayward Indo-Caribbean women from an established community and history.

Kanhai explains the development of chutney as follows:

> Some younger Indo-Trinidadian women are rejecting the secrecy and confinement of **Matikor** and…have developed a performance, called **Chutney**, which combines religious and secular singing with **Matikor**-type dancing. These public, overtly sexual dances are being performed by young, mainly lower-income Indo-Caribbean women who refuse to regard their bodies as sources of secret shame. Paradoxically, they are accused of "bringing down shame" (1999, 226).

This is a powerful example of the contemporary efforts by Indo-Caribbean women to escape "domination inscribed in [their] heritage" (Kanhai 1999, 226), as well as their unapologetic insertion into a nationally recognized mode of cultural and political production. Kanhai sees a liberation movement. She feels that "No longer can the stereotype of the docile, sexually passive Bhowjee hold sway" (Kanhai 1999, 227). I believe that it is possible for this insertion to reaffirm stereotypes of Indo-Caribbean women as sexually manipulative *and* passive, as they have existed simultaneously in the past. Although I do agree with Kanhai in her assertion that "These women expand the **Matikor** space, drawing creative energy from their familiar surroundings…demanding the right to celebrate their female bodies in a way that denies neither their Indian heritage nor their claim to elements of Afrocentric cultural expression available to them" (1999, 227). And it is this expression of interlocking and transformative social, cultural and political positionality that is captured in the allegory of matikor—and that can offer room for a comprehensive queer discourse.

Modernity and nationalism

Before directly addressing the heteronormative aspects of this discourse, it is important to acknowledge the relationship of Indo-Caribbean womanhood to conceptions of modernity and nationalism. Thus, in a remarkably different entry-point to the discourse, the work of Tejaswini Niranjana's "Left to the Imagination" sets out to challenge the dominant understanding of "the modern Indian woman" through comparison via a context that does not directly favor Western or metropolitan spaces (1999, 223). Niranjana focuses much of her analysis on the history of indentured Indians in Trinidad and their negotiations with modernity. She begins by explaining that for nationalists in India, modern subjectivity was accessed through class status, but for working-class indentured laborers it was gained through their "geographical displacement" (Niranjana 1999, 231). The reaction to this dynamic by nationalists was that the laborers' modernity "would have to be considered an illegitimate modernity because it had not passed

through, been formed by, the story of the nation-in-the-making" (Niranjana 1999, 232). Therefore, the abolition of indentureship seemed to be the only way of dealing with this unconventional progress.

And on whose backs should such a campaign be waged? Why, Indian women in the Caribbean, of course. For nationalists,

> The manifest immorality and depravity of the indentured woman would not only bring down the system but also serve to reveal more clearly the contrasting image of the virtuous and chaste woman at home. As [Mohandas K.] Gandhi asserted, "Women, who in India would never touch wine, are sometimes found lying dead-drunk on the roads". The point is not that women never drank in India…but that for Gandhi and others this functioned as a mark of degraded Westernization and "artificial modernity" (Niranjana 1999, 232).

Therefore, around the 1910s efforts were made by Indians to end indentureship with the victimized indentured woman at the center of the cause (Niranjana 1999, 233). Women in general, and Indian women in particular, were seen once again as the terrain on which nationalism is built, and the nation defined.

In a focused look at the contemporary Caribbean context, Niranjana turns to the chutney debate of the 1990s and highlights the connections. The chutney controversy came around the time of the 150th anniversary celebrations of Indian Arrival in Trinidad, and as Niranjana points out, "One of the reasons for this could be the emergence of new narratives of 'Indianness'…[since the] assertion of an 'Indian' ethnic identity has sometimes been seen as the manifestation of 'Indian nationalism'" (Niranjana 1999, 234).

As noted by both of the previous theorists, and now Niranjana, Indo-Trinidadians are set up as naturally oppositional to Afro-Caribbeans: "One cannot speak of how the sexuality of the East Indian woman in Trinidad is constituted except through the grid provided by discourses of racial difference" (Niranjana 1999, 237). She continues in her observation that "these discourses intersect in various ways with that of 'East Indian nationalism', which is often seen as being at odds with 'Trinidadian' or 'West Indian' nationalism" (Niranjana 1999, 237). A large part of this dynamic comes from the interactions these racialized groups were subjected to and participated in through the violent and enduring history of colonization. Consequently, Niranjana points out the "Afro-Saxon" influence in Trinidad "came to stand in for the West as far as Indians were concerned" (1999, 237).

Niranjana is therefore not surprised when the chutney controversy is framed as a fear of the "creolization and…degradation of 'Indian culture'" (1999, 238). At the heart of the chutney debate lies a fear of interracial sexual relations and mixed-race descendants (Niranjana 1999, 240). For critics of chutney, "Indianness" is seen as a superior form of cultural purity that relies on women's chastity (Niranjana 1999, 241). In fact, Trinidadian Pundit Ramesh Tiwari is quoted as saying that "the concept of the liberated woman" had created a "crisis in womanhood" threatening to the Hindu religion (Niranjana 1999, 242). Niranjana concludes with the idea that a fixed "Hindu" or "Indian" identity stems from colonial and Indian nationalist efforts, but that it is not "Indian patriarchy" that is

exclusively at fault in both the anti-indenture and anti-chutney campaigns, but rather it is patriarchy at large which finds itself in crises (Niranjana 1999, 242-243). In other words, Niranjana emphasizes the overarching structural aims and processes of patriarchy at large that come together in the specificities of Indian and British national desires. Here, then, we see a similar conclusion to Kanhai and Baksh-Soodeen in terms of the "threatening" nature of matikor and chutney spaces and performance. Yet, we also see the continued foreclosures of a heteronormative analysis. Below, I will look at the tendency of Caribbean feminism to gesture to the absence of queer analysis, followed by a failure to pursue it.

Heteronormative foundations

To begin, Baksh-Soodeen's analysis of chutney performance space reveals the implicit heterosexism of Caribbean feminist theorizing. She suggests that a large part of what is feared in these public arenas is the encouragement to act on the sexuality of the performances (Baksh-Soodeen 1999, 196). However, by not recognizing the potential for sexual acts between the previously all-female participants, she maintains a consistent silencing of queer sexualities within (Indo-)Caribbean feminism. This foreclosure of the possibility of queerness limits an otherwise critical text that advocates a fuller and more holistic understanding of sexual being, and the "cultural creativity and renewal" that Baksh-Soodeen identifies in both matikor and chutney performances.

Brinda Mehta's *Diasporic (Dis)locations*, which draws much of its analysis from Kanhai's collection (Chapter 2), offers a necessary intervention through a fleeting recognition of the heterosexist lens of Caribbean feminism. She begins her analysis by stating that while matikor ceremonies have been seen as a form of cultural and sexual resistance, "it must be pointed out that, for the most part, these sexual reclaimings are situated [by Indo-Caribbean women writers] within a heterosexual model of affirmation…" (Mehta 2004, 220). Mehta explains this tendency by referring to the "cultural constraints and…fear of social ostracism" faced by these writers (2004, 220). She ends the chapter by drawing on the work of filmmaker Michelle Mohabeer and positing that the "plurality of sexual experiences and sensations" represented by (Indo-)Caribbean women poets, literary writers, and artists recognizes "the spirit of the erotic" and offers new possibilities for decolonized sexual knowledge and pleasures (Mehta 2004, 225-226). She continues, "Indo-Caribbean women writers have the onerous task of claiming and sustaining decolonized sexual subjectivities through the rupturing of classically defined male and female sexuality" (Mehta 2004, 226). Her analysis demonstrates the disciplinary restrictions (self-imposed and otherwise) that limit the potential and relevance of the erotic, and inevitably limit sexuality to heteronormativity, identity, and/or at most, homonormativity.

Queer Caribbean potentials

The work of Gayatri Gopinath offers the discourse that is the most developed example of a queered perspective. In *Impossible Desires,* Gopinath's sixth chapter, "Nostalgia, Desire, Diaspora," opens with a succinct breakdown of the chutney controversy. She begins by identifying the "colonial constructions of respectable female sexuality and proper womanhood as enshrined within the home, initially consolidated during the period

of Indian indentureship in Trinidad, [and the ways they] continue to resonate in the public culture of the postcolonial present" (Gopinath 2005, 162).

Gopinath then proceeds to address the article by Niranjana through her observation that the latter's analysis is "unable to imagine the ways in which women's sexuality may exceed the heterosexual parameters put in place by these nationalist discourses" (2005, 162). Gopinath finds great value in Niranjana's theorizing on the process of national regulation, but again points out that what fails to be acknowledged is the possibility of queer desire amongst, and between, Indo-Caribbean women (2005, 163).

Gopinath writes,

> Niranjana..., then, inadvertently replicate[s] the nationalist framings of gender and sexuality that [she] set[s] out to critique. [She does] so by enacting the familiar discursive move of equating queerness with men and femaleness with heterosexuality…Within this schema, queer *female* desire, pleasure, and subjectivity is indeed rendered impossible, and the queer public cultural space that the performance of chutney may produce and make available is effaced (2005, 164).

Gopinath's critique acts as an important articulation of modernity's reliance on home or nation being created through the regulation of women's bodies while also alluding to what a queer reading could offer the discourse and lives of Indo-Caribbean women.

This theorization leads directly into Donnell's concept of Indo-Caribbean women as "double agents," a concept she defines earlier in the chapter as "the strange (strained) agency of the oppressed woman" (2006, 159). In relation to matikor ceremonies, and Kanhai's collection in particular, Donnell feels that both the selection of a Hindu practice and the role of the erotic display the ways in which Indo-Caribbean women can resist *within* and against dominant cultural norms (2006, 176). It is important to note here that there is a need to expand this analysis to include other religious practices, their various connections to colonization, and questions about the currency of authenticity. But Donnell's text does well to recognize the *active* methods of expression and sacred practice present in both matikor itself and the analytic discourse that follows.

When explaining the importance of these ceremonies, Donnell writes that sexuality has been foregrounded in discourses on Indo-Caribbean women, and that these women "have seemingly elected to frame their own stories and critical interventions around this issue as they come both to literary and critical visibility" (2006, 175). She sees this as the establishment of "a new archive of creative identities" that can enable and enrich the history and potential of Indo-Caribbean women (Donnell 2006, 175). Those experiences include the "messiness" of the Caribbean social and cultural landscape. Donnell's second theoretical offering to the matikor discourse is her inclusion of the concept of "dougla[3] poetics." She defines this framework as follows:

[3] The term was originally used to refer to "illegitimate" and mixed-race children.

> An indigenous feminist theory that both contests and deconstructs those dominant political and theoretical discourses that frame Caribbean women's alliances as always inevitably fractured along ethnic divides, and their interests and enfranchisements as set in competition with each other (2006, 177).

Therefore, while a matikor discourse creates the space and opportunity for Indo-Caribbean women to engage with each other and their histories in a way that has not yet occurred, the aims and terms of dougla poetics counter the privileging of one racial or ethnic experience over another (Donnell 2006, 177).

In other words, I see dougla poetics working in similar, cohesive ways as queer theory. They both consist of reclamations of marginal identities and oppressive discourses toward the creation of holistic political frameworks that allow for difference and hybridity. When considering the essentialism that can reside in efforts toward universal subjectivity, Smith writes, "the very quest for full subjecthood implicit in the ethnographic project to tell our 'truth' is already premised on a logic that requires us to be objects to be discovered" (2010, 42). The positionality of (Indo-)Caribbean (queer) women is not the same as that of the Native people Smith discusses, but what is highly relevant about this observation is the danger to which subjects who are not normative are exposed in liberal mainstream feminism. It has been shown time and again that difference will be objectified, and experiences and knowledge will be relegated. Simply put, I recognize a need for Caribbean feminism to engage with *hetero*patriarchy, not just patriarchy. There is great value in queer analysis to challenge the naturalization of oppression at this level and to identify its social, economic, and political impacts. I believe that the lived realities of the Caribbean already contain elements of queerness and should be used to further a politicized analysis that moves beyond the hegemony of heteronormativity.

Conclusion

The constant effort toward the constitution of Trinidad and Tobago[4] as properly modern and civilized envelops matters of race and sexuality in its endeavors. This dependence eventually leads to the colonized elites taking on the role of regulator in defense of "proper" sexuality and gender, in an effort to inhabit a fully modern and liberal nation-state (Alexander 1994, 13-14). Since the colonial encounter, part of this regulation has meant that women's relationships to the modern nation-state have relied upon their sexual relationships with men (McClintock 1997, 91). Additionally, the heterosexual family unit has been positioned as the foundation of modernity and the signifier of civility (McClintock 1997, 99). Jasbir Puar explains, "The process of decolonization happens through the shoring up of heteronormativity through the promotion of the 'new' and ever self-generating (procreative) nation that must 'prove' itself to the colonial father in the face of destabilizing global trends" (2007, 4). What does this entrenched heterosexism/homophobia do to bodies? Simply put, it makes some bodies subjects and some bodies abject in the nation's ideological and biological reproductive capacities. M. Jacqui Alexander writes the following about the Bahamas and Trinidad and Tobago:

[4] Trinidad and Tobago gained independence in 1962.

> State managers generated a…discourse invoking nostalgia for a [state] when there were ostensibly no lesbians, gay men and people with AIDS. In this move, heterosexuality becomes coterminus with and gives birth to the nation. Its antithesis can unravel the nation (1994, 10).

In a similar fashion, Indo-Caribbean elites call on a pure and authentic past to regulate the bodies and sexualities of Indo-Caribbean women. So even with the ongoing development of gay and lesbian rights movements in Trinidad, the difficulty in including Indo-Caribbeans as a part of this "progress" is that they are neither "properly" national or diasporic; these subjects are neither Trinidadian nor Indian enough (Puar 2007, 6). Therefore, these peripheral subjects cannot easily enter any form of (homo)nationalism that may exist in Trinidad.

And so, this is an important moment for Indo-Caribbean feminists. Defining ourselves from a place that accounts for the assemblages of time and space; beginning again from a place that accounts for the power and potential of sexuality in all its fullness. In other words, if Caribbean scholars do not begin to recognize and acknowledge the heterosexist frameworks they operate within *and* make room for voices of queer (Indo-)Caribbeans, not only will the same homophobic epistemic violence be reproduced, but the emancipatory potential of a matikor discourse and/or the erotic will be driven further toward the margins.

This analysis has been an attempt at a preliminary exploration into much-needed intersectionality between queer theory and Caribbean feminism, or even Caribbean studies at large. I chose to attempt this through the ritual of matikor and its discourse because it has been firmly established in the field, but also because of its aforementioned allegorical qualities. Matikor captures the racialized, gendered and classed effects of the Caribbean social and political context. I also turned to matikor in an attempt to center the role of healing and the sacred in transformative movements, organizing, and scholarship.

In drawing to a close, one must wonder where a matikor paradigm has gone in (Indo-)Caribbean feminism. While the willingness and ability of Caribbean feminism to address sexuality has been widely acknowledged as slow (see *Sexing the Caribbean*), matikor spaces and the erotic offer rich, rooted and trangressive possibilities for such reflection. Its potential lies within the epistemic space it creates, as well as within our ability to connect contemporary nonheteronormative experiences, identities and embodiments with a sacred and honest past. Or simply put, it shows that queer Indo-Caribbean women are not destined to eternal rupture and dis-ease. But it is up to *all* Caribbean feminists and scholars to recognize the heterosexist assumptions operating within dominant discourses of Caribbean studies, liberal feminism, and postcolonial studies at large. The erotic may offer the means to connect to Afro-Caribbean, trans, mixed-race, and non-Hindu subjects because of its very definition as a full consideration of human experience.

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Hyphenated identities: Negotiating 'Indianness' and being Indo-Trinidadian

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Abstract
The nature of identities in terms of gender, ethnicity, culture and nation has been the subject of significant academic debate, particularly in postcolonial and feminist studies. In order to address the ways in which the contemporary generation of Trinidadian women of Indian descent negotiate issues surrounding identity, it is necessary to interrogate the terms of this debate and redefine key concepts in ways, it is hoped, that may help to expand its scope, as social categories such as "race" and ethnicity, among others, are continually negotiated and contested under new theoretical shifts in postcolonial theory and poststructuralist theory which emphasise fluidity rather than fixity. This paper reviews ways of understanding the female Indian experience in terms of "diaspora", "ethnicity", "hybridity" and "hyphenated identities". It seeks to show that essentialist conceptions of gendered and ethnicised identity are non-productive and that ultimately, the identification of oneself as female, Trinidadian, Indian, or Indo-Trinidadian can be read as discursively constructed.

Keywords: Trinidad; creolisation; hybridity; hyphenated identity; diaspora; ethnicity; Indianness; gender; douglarisation

The historical background of Trinidad, from the era of slavery to the arrival of Indian indentured labourers in 1945 to later arrivals such as the Chinese, Portuguese and Syrian/Lebanese traders, has played a huge role in the making of this country as one of the most ethnically diverse and religiously heterogeneous of the Caribbean territories (Edmonds and Gonzalez 2010), as well as serving as the starting point in showing how the use of "race" in the making of identities, in the personal and political realms, is of tremendous significance. Historically, there have been eruptions of Black-Indian strife as a result of colonial attempts to divide the nation along racial and religious lines (Prashad 2001). Yet, a case could be made that this is decreasing (Bishop 2011) and there are points of interracial and inter-religious solidarity between these two dominant ethnic groups. The emphasis on relational webs and connectivity is a significant part of Trinidadian society despite the contentious history between the two dominant ethnic groups. Shalini Puri (2004, 172) discusses this historical tension and how the replacement of colonial concerns over Black and White mixing with the postcolonial concerns of Black and Asian mixing on the part of political parties has led to "lateral hostility". Whereas it is claimed this tension is still very much in existence, the concepts of mixing, creolisation, hybridity and douglarisation contradict this racialised demarcation. The processes in which these concepts are couched, in addition to the relevance of these to Trinidadian young women will be closely examined in this paper.

The diasporic imaginary

One of the significant building blocks in the defining of a diaspora is "homeland". An influential contribution to diaspora studies was Safran's (1991) article on the Jewish diaspora whose circumstance from their place of origin to their limited acceptance in their places of settlement was seen as analogous to that of other ethnic groups. The members of the ethnic group retained a collective memory of "their original homeland", idealised "their ancestral home" and sought ways in which to "relate to that homeland". (Safran 1991, 83-84). While this article is of great significance, the overemphasis on "homeland" is of concern as it appears not to have included the "possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host societies with a tolerance for pluralism" (Cohen 2008, 17). Avtar Brah (1996, 180) dethrones the idea of a foundational homeland when she argues that "the concept of a diaspora offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins, while taking account of a homing desire, which is not the same thing as a desire for 'homeland"'. Through this intervention of homeland becoming a homing desire which transforms into a placeless place, home becomes open to various interpretations that include place of origin, place of settlement or a matrix of local experiences, such that

> ….home is also the lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, or the excitement of the first snowfall, shivering winter evenings, sombre grey skies in the middle of the day…all this, as mediated by the historically specific everyday of social relations (Brah 1996, 192).

Perhaps a response to the critiques of diaspora is a recognition that diasporas reflect political agendas at a given place and time and concepts such as multiculturalism,

cosmopolitanism, hybridity and creolisation are more suited to particular purposes imbued with different meanings even though these are related. However, in reference to the Indo-Trinidadian population, this definition of diaspora as tied in with an imagined homeland is somewhat questionable.

The Indian diaspora in Trinidad

Looking at the specific development of Trinidad, there have been three major historical phases identified in the process of the formation of the Indian diaspora. The first is the colonial phase, whereby large numbers of Indian indentured labourers left the Indian subcontinent between 1845 and 1917 to work on plantations after the abolition of slavery and settled permanently in Trinidad. The country, which was originally populated by Amerindians, became a Spanish plantation colony in 1783 and a British colony in 1802, and its history traces the influx of French planters, African slaves, and Chinese and Portuguese traders (Brereton, 1996). This was followed by the postcolonial phase after the attainment of political independence in 1962, leading up to the contemporary period, when a second wave of emigration took place which saw and continues to see the outward movements of the descendants of the first diaspora to the major metropolitan areas of Europe and North America.

Both phases closely follow Paul Gilroy's (1993) model of diaspora which privileges a hybrid subjectivity, where the diaspora is no longer unitary, but based on movements, interconnections, and mixed references. The metaphor for this conception of diaspora would then be that of "routes", associated with "'traveling cultures' that break with the essentialism of the anthropological tradition, showing themselves to be diverse and unlocalized" (Chivallon 2002, 360). This theoretical approach is perhaps more useful in looking at second-wave migrants who have migrated to metropolitan cities in North America, Europe and Australia, as a fixed homeland is not evident when a twice migrant subject could look to both India and the Caribbean, in the search for "home". In many discussions on diaspora, the concept of home often acts as a point of departure, whether in the imagination or an actual location. In the Trinidadian context, however, the term Indo-Trinidadian as pertaining to the third and fourth generation could be seen as an homogenizing trope which leads to singular conceptions of a "homeland" as fixed ideas of "Indianness" are brought into being whilst not taking into account the multiple dimensions of an individual's identities. These essentialist and fixed notions of "Indianness" figured in the political arena extensively and had an impact on race relations after Independence as different ethnic groups began competing for political and economic power. Shalini Puri (2004, 172) elaborates on this insightfully when she states the following:

> It is one of the great ironies of decolonisation in Trinidad that racial tensions have taken the form of lateral hostility between blacks and Indians (the two largest groups, with their own different but overlapping histories of exploitation), rather than vertical hostility directed by blacks and Indians together against the French Creole elite, the white ex-plantocracy, or transnational capital.

The social construction of Indianness

This homogenisation of Indianness did not figure solely in the political arena but is also evident in the Caribbean writers' treatment of nature and culture that demonstrates a limited understanding of Indian Caribbean histories. Puri observes that Edward Kamau Brathwaite's non-fiction writings (1974) celebrate a "creole" Caribbean identity that explicitly excludes people of East Indian descent by emphasising the region's African heritage. Braithwaite's writing of Caribbean history refers to "the arrival of East Indian and other immigrants who 'had to adjust themselves to the existing creole synthesis and the new landscape'", whereas the East Indians were actually introduced to the Caribbean as indentured labourers (Reddock 2002; Rooparine 2007). In the writing of Caribbean history, the nature of the Indian diaspora has been somewhat understated. Puri observes that while Braithwaite's narrative serves Afro-Caribbean projects of nationalist reconstruction, the poet Derek Walcott (1992) de-politicises Indian Caribbean heritage in order to present Trinidad as a site of exuberant multiculturalism. Reddock (2002) and Mohammed (1998) suggest that for Indian women, the narrative of diaspora and the fetishising of "original" Indian traditions is a problematic construction, a discursive attempt to establish a Caribbean Indian identity that actually limits the options of Caribbean Indian women.

Considering the political pressures that have been brought to bear on affirming Trinidadian national identity, Indian identity and female Indian identity, the idea that young Trinidadian women of Indian descent feel "at ease" with multiple national attachments seems problematic. Institutional narratives have variously elided the Indian sense of belonging to India as a motherland and to Trinidad as a nation (Parekh, Singh, and Vertovec 2003), as a result of which a process of double exclusion takes place. According to Caribbean feminist theorists (Mohammed 2002; Puri 2004), "boundary crossing …cultural practices" can result in a narrowing rather than an expansion of self-expression for Indian Trinidadian women. The female Indian-Trinidadian experience seems not "fluid" but constricted, as identity becomes the site of political and cultural conflict. The observations of Puri (1997) on Caribbean nationalism and Reddock (2007) on female Caribbean experience belie Caglar's understanding of the experience of diaspora. In her essay on self-definition among people of South Asian descent in Britain, Wenonah Lyon (1997) observes that ethnic, political and cultural identities are self-ascribed by individuals on a tactical basis, depending on the interlocutor and the situation. It seems possible that this reflection is key to an understanding of how Indian women in Trinidad negotiate identities inflected by political debate. Unlike theories of ethnicity and culture that posit diasporic identities as a matter of longing for an original motherland, Lyon's observations locate national attachments in terms of the deployment of strategic essentialisms of ethnicity and race (Spivak 1988).

The florescence of the ethnicity concept can be explained through its applicability to a growing cultural globalisation (Pieterse 2009) and through revisionist approaches to culture and society as fluid and not static. In terms of an ethnic identity as socially constructed in Trinidad, this is seen as largely based on perceptions of history and nation-building post-Independence (Yelvington 1993). In Trinidad's origins as a colonial society, a stratification system was established based on a class-race-colour hierarchy which some argue has set the foundation for present-day race relations and ethnic

competition in Trinidad (Yelvington 1993). While it is beyond the purview of this article to provide an analysis of the salient categories of ethnicity, the usage of this term conflated with race is highly debated. Munasinghe (1997) attempts to provide a distinction between the two in the case of Trinidad by firstly emphasising race as rooted in ideas about biology while ethnicity rests in ideas about culture. She goes on to explain that the term ethnicity is largely limited to the intellectual arena and "has not effectively penetrated common discourse" (Munasinghe 1997, 72). In addition to local conceptualisations and examination of other issues around ethnicity, questions as to the representation and perpetuation of notions of fixed identities and static communities are worth raising. Indeed, one of the common irritations expressed by Indian-descent Trinidadian women is the idea that Caribbean feminist voices represent the authentic voice of Trinidadian women: "Since the dominant discourse within Caribbean feminism is Afro-centric, … feminist analyses of Caribbean society have tended to focus on the black and coloured population and 'creole' culture" (Baksh-Sooden 1998,79).

While earlier works highlight the invisibility of the Indian Trinidadian women, the marginalisation of the voices of Indo-Trinidadian women continued to be an issue which was highlighted during the late 1990s, though considerable inroads have been made in recent years with pioneering works published by Patricia Mohammed (1998), Rhoda Reddock (2001) and Brinda Mehta (2004). Colonial discourse and earlier literature on Indian-descent women, which depicted a homogeneous and definitive representation of the Indian Caribbean woman, were critiqued by Caribbean feminists for their racialised and reductive elements. They were seen as placing emphasis on the subaltern position of Indian women rather than examining the complexities at play in terms of gender and ethnicity (Mehta 2004). The paucity of adequate scholarship, in relation to Indian women, was exacerbated by the existence of totalising discourses on ethnicity which failed to recognise syncretic processes occurring in the expression of identities. In the specific context of discourses on ethnicity in Trinidad, the tendency to rigid categorisation of ethnic and racial groups can be traced back to the colonial era. Writing in the year of Trinidad's Independence, 1962, the Trinidadian writer V. S. Naipaul (1962, 80) quotes the British colonialist James Anthony Froude's views in 1887 on the subject of racial difference in Trinidad: "The two races [African and Indian] are more absolutely apart than the white and the black. The Asiatic insists on his superiority in the fear perhaps that if he did not the white man might forget it." His categorisation of African and Indian groups according to types with seemingly predetermined characteristics demonstrates the continuing influence of colonial narratives of discrete, biologically defined "races" on Trinidadian understandings of identity post-Independence. Despite Eric Williams' exhortation to Trinidadians to recognise a single, common mother in Trinidad, Naipaul presents Africans and Indians as different in "blood", a divergence reflected in their cultural behaviour. Perhaps the concurrence of exhortations to civic unity with the proposition that differences between heterogeneous communities are insurmountable is unsurprising because of the continuing essentialist focus on race and ethnicity.

However, the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha (1990, 211) proposes that ethnicity does not have an a priori existence, but only emerges in moments of cultural translation. Cultural hybridity does not develop from "two original moments from which the third

emerges, rather hybridity is … the 'third space' which enables the other positions to emerge". Trinidad's Independence was and is a moment of multicultural unification which brings ethnic affiliations into creative, relational tension and highlights difference. The theorist Paul Gilroy's account of culture supports the notion that ethnicity is evoked as a matter of relationality: "We do not have to be content with the half-way house provided by the idea of plural cultures. A theory of relational cultures and culture as relation represents a more worthwhile resting place" (Gilroy 2000, 275).

In Trinidad, the traditions, languages, social patterns and ancestry of different ethnic groups were endowed with personal import in response to political context; for example, the People's National Movement was largely regarded as the 'black' party and the United National Congress as the Indian party (Puri 2004, 257). Understanding ideas on ethnic identities as a differential juxtaposition with wider cultures appeared to gain some relevance and an example of this is the following definition:

> A collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry (that is, memories of a shared historical past whether of origins or of historical experiences such as colonisation, immigration, invasion or slavery); … and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2000, 12).

While early twentieth century anthropological theory posited ethnic identity as fixed and culture as bounded, the very existence of the Indian Trinidadian community as translocal demonstrates that ethnicity is spatialised and that people cannot be "defined ontologically before they are described as doing anything" (Parkin 1993, 91). The identifications of Indian Trinidadians must, therefore, be understood as dynamically negotiated in response to cultural and political contexts.

When seeking to understand the lived experience of young Indian Trinidadian women, ethnicity must be figured as a contingent, delocalised construction which is repeatedly claimed in different contexts to be essential, localised, spatialised and even bodily. For these women, ethnicity, religion and gender are mutually implicated identifications, and feminist projects must, in combating discrimination, take into account mutually implicated institutional practices. The ways in which this uniquely situated group, multiply affiliated in a multicultural nation, negotiates issues of identity informs a theoretical understanding of the terms of debates on ethnic, religious, cultural and gendered identifications. Thus, it seems appropriate to examine the use of the concept of hyphenated identities in relation to these women.

Hyphenated identity—an interrogation

> the diasporic location is the space of the hyphen that tries to co-ordinate, within an evolving relationship, the identity politics of one's place of origin with that of one's present home…
> (Radhakrishnan 1996, xiii)

The above statement focuses attention on the fact that in an increasingly globalised world defined by historical flows of immigration and trade, more people are adopting multiple national and cultural identities in an attempt to define themselves as they acknowledge that a variety of cultural, ethnic and national identities can exist alongside each other. The usage of the term "hyphenated identity" has emerged out of this increasing tendency towards multiple identifications and is mostly applied to second- or third-generation ethnic minorities. The term is also part of the recognition in sociology and postcolonial studies that common assumptions about culture as an enclosed and self-contained construct are increasingly inadequate ways to examine emerging identities in an ever-globalising world (Caglar 1997). However, this section will interrogate the efficacy of the "hyphenated identity" in analysing the construction of identity in Trinidad as well as why the term "Indo-Trinidadian" is problematic, particularly so in the case of women of Indian descent.

It must be acknowledged that mainstream academic theorising on hyphenated identity draws from anthropology in linking culture and space together (Gupta and Ferguson 1992): that is, cultures are fundamentally seen as anchored in territorial ideas. Thus, cultures are spatially bounded and rooted in communities (Modood and Werbner 1997) and nations. As such, hyphenated identities such as Indo-Trinidadian refer to both Indian and Trinidadian identities, where being Indian and Trinidadian is implicitly linked to both India and Trinidad simultaneously, with India being the more decisive factor in this identity. It is assumed, therefore, that Indian Trinidadians have a direct cultural link to India by virtue of Indian descent and this figures prominently in Indian Government discourse such as publications from the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs and the Indian High Commission which, in their monthly magazine entitled *Pravasi Bharatiya,* often promote a robust historical and familial relationship between India and its Indian diaspora. This in itself is a contentious point and leads to the important question of whether the spectre of India has any impact on how the current generation of Indian-descent Trinidadians see themselves and whether they embrace or reject India as well as "Indianness" as the main signifiers of their self and community. It could be contended that as they have attained substantial generational distance, India exists only as a memory or through the medium of film and music, and therefore is not actively incorporated in their self-perceptions (Raghuram, Sahoo and Maharaj 2008). This is largely because they have no direct experiences of India and this relationship to their ancestral homeland exists through oral history within the legacies of indentureship and nation building.

According to Parmasad (1995), it has been further argued that "Indo-Trinidadians" attempt to maintain a physically separate community space from "Afro-Trinidadians" in order to build a space separate from the "Afro-Creole" dominated public sphere. This line of argument may have historical precedent as indentured Indian labourers in colonial Trinidad and Tobago were physically segregated from the rest of the population of the colony by British authorities. Furthermore, Indian and "Afro-Creole" labourers were often separated by geography, with many "Afro-Creole" workers based around urban centres and Indian workers living in rural, agricultural central and southern parts of the island. Crown laws also included the requirement that all Indian immigrants carry a Pass with them if they travelled off their plantations. If they had completed their indentureship, they were also required to carry their "Free Papers" or Certificate to prove

that that they had been freed (Mahabir 2009). As such, it is possible to see a distinct Indian physical space that historically existed within Trinidad in terms of rural, plantation life. However, these politically imposed and geographical markers of separation no longer exist, as can be seen with the visibility of the dougla, the mixed-race offspring of Trinidadians of African and Indian descent. Many of these mixed-race offspring do not view themselves as being part of culturally separate, socially bounded communities, because the dougla occupies the space between Indian and "Afro-Creole". Such a person is, therefore, in him/herself not bound to diasporic spatial territories. As the dougla case shows, social categories and community affiliations are not strictly determined by the religion or assumed race carried on the skin. Overall, race and religion tend to be conflated, as Khan observes:

> … my colleague shared with me that in her university classes students frequently "confuse," as she put it, religion and "race" in their essays. Moreover, she said, on forms and questionnaires she has seen them write down their religion when asked to note "race" (Khan 2004, 2).

However, lay discourse privileges race over religion, hence, the prevalent usage of terms "Indo-Trinidadian" or "Afro-Trinidadian" over religion-based forms of identification like "Muslim Trinidadian" or "Hindu Trinidadian". This points to a continuing "race" essentialism wherein hyphenated identities can be seen as totalising, a point which Stuart Hall (2000) expands on: "Biological racism privileges markers like skin colour, but those signifiers have always also been used, by discursive extension, to connote social and cultural differences…" (Hall 2000, 223).

Social and cultural differences have thus come to be read as racial in Trinidad as elsewhere. For theorists like Hall, ethnicity is central to one's sense of self. It is a term that "…acknowledges the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity, as well as the fact that all discourse is placed, positioned, situated, and all knowledge is contextual" (Hall 1992, 201). Therefore, if identity is constructed around hyphenated identities, by the inclusion of race, diasporic connection and nationality, both halves are presumed to exist in co-equal measures. This excludes the inclusion of any other, perhaps more important, mitigating social identifiers like religion and multiple ancestry in addition to the temporality of certain aspects of one's identity which may change over time and space. So ethnicity becomes a marker of racial difference and ethnicity, and therefore, becomes prioritised as a means of identification above all others. Hyphenation is fundamentally rooted in ethnicity, which can easily drift into essentialist depictions of identity (Modood and Werbner 1997) when, in fact, people's lived experiences correspond to categories beyond their ethnicity and are affected by their gender and religion.

Moreover, the identity of "Indo-Trinidadian" arguably assumes that continuity exists between a Mother India and a local Trinidadian community of Indian descent that is either characterised by its similarity or dissimilarity to its diasporic homeland. This presumes India as a reified and unitary cultural homeland, the static measure against which the Indian community in Trinidad can be compared. Jonathan Friedman (1995, 82)

refers to this as a "confused essentialism" because it is "logically predicated on the notion of culture as text, as substance that has properties that can be mixed or blended with other cultures". However, cultures are not standardised texts that can be neatly separated and distinguished from each other. There is no one ethnic group that can be said to have any kind of continuous, contemporary existence. Hyphenated identities are predicated on the idea of ethnic communities having an a priori primordial existence, whereas, as Tariq Modood and Pnina Werbner (1997, 11) put it "a culture is made through change". Intricate cultural histories cannot be collapsed into a singular ideological and cultural construct without sacrificing some of their complexity. Therefore, talk of hyphenated identities implicitly confirms the very notions of cultural essentialism that it tries to avoid. It posits the norm of one culture existing in one spatially located territory, with notions of hybridity and hyphenated identities existing as the exception to this norm (Caglar 1997). The process of hyphenation constructs social identity as one fundamentally bounded by race, ethnicity and nationality and unmitigated by factors such as gender, age or class. In the following section on hybridity, I will observe how such intersectional factors come into play in both the construction and reception of hybridised cultural forms.

Hybridity and the Caribbean

Hybridity is a term that has dominated the postcolonial study of emerging cultural identities. Its usage is most commonly attributed to Homi K. Bhabha, who has written extensively on hybridity in a postcolonial context "as a problematic of colonial representation…that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority" (1994, 162). In its most basic understanding, hybridity describes the emergence and evolution of new cultural forms and identities as a result of contact made between two or more parent cultures (Ashcroft, Griffins and Tiffin 2000, 106) in what Bhabha terms a "third space" (1990, 210). Along with similar terms such as creolisation and métissage, this is seen as an antidote to essentialist depictions of culture and identity as fixed and static entities.

As Mabardi (2009, 2) notes, the term has its roots in philology, "where hybrids are words formed by the juxtaposition of a prefix or a suffix from one language and the stem of another". Now, the term is used in postcolonial theory to refer principally to the "creation of dynamic mixed cultures" (Cohen and Kennedy 2000, 377), drawing from the meaning of the sociological and anthropological term "syncretism", a term used when observing the evolution of "mixed cultures" originating from two or more parent cultures. There is also a biological element to the term "hybrid", referring to the offspring of a mixed union. This further dimension of the word, Mabardi argues, expresses the element of "artificial or forced union", of "coercive or violent contact in the case of colonization and conquest". For this reason, "hybridity" is seen as a term particularly well-suited to postcolonial studies, as concerned as the field is with the study of colonialism and its after-effects in the developing world. However, the use of typical discourses of hybridity to describe Trinidadian society can prove problematic.

Indeed, as Shalini Puri (2004, 2) points out, the Caribbean has "some of the earliest and richest elaborations of cultural hybridity" owing to its complex history of conquest,

slavery and immigration. However, we must first acknowledge that postcolonial studies are still dominated by the shadow of the Empire: too often, postcolonial theory is conceptualised in binary terms of East and West (Said 1978). To this end, the Caribbean and, by extension, Trinidad are often celebrated as an example of hybridity evolving out of neither East nor West, North nor South (Puri 2004) existing as it does in Bhabha's (1994, 227) "empowering condition of hybridity". A common thread throughout much of Bhabha's work (1994) on postcolonial studies is the tension that emerges between the heterogeneous peoples and the homogenizing influence of the nation. Bhabha argues that hybridity unveils and even provides a means of liberation for subalterns. This theme is also seen in work by Paul Gilroy on the Black Atlantic (1997) where hybridity within diaspora works as a means by which people can transcend or undermine the nation-state. Yet at the same time, hybridity is seen as the objective result arising from historical processes and the ever-increasing interconnectedness of a globalised world, that is, hybridity as embodied in cultural practice, linguistics and ethnicity. Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood (1997, 1) thus note how the term hybridity has given rise to a paradox in which it is "celebrated as powerfully interruptive and yet theorized as commonplace and pervasive".

Thus, abstracting a unitary construct of hybridity from the various practices of cultural hybridity is arguably a logical fallacy, and one that imposes an essentialising effect on these historically specific processes. Robert Young (1995) expands on this essentialising effect through his argument on colonial paradigms of racial difference and a continuation of such paradigms in contemporary cultural theory through its usage of terms such as hybridity. Shalini Puri (2004, 3) also notes the essentialising within the processes of hybridisation in the Caribbean, which is far from the academic portrayal of the Caribbean as the "El Dorado" of postcolonial studies. One can argue that the term hybridity imposes a master narrative on various historically specific processes that gave way to a multiplicity of existing hybridities, rather than a singular "ideal type" hybridity. As a catch-all descriptive term, hybridity fails to capture the nuances in which hybridising processes occur: it does not discriminate between the hybridity emerging from forced assimilation and the hybridity emerging from creative intermingling (Puri 2004). Furthermore, typical discourses of hybridity fail to take into account what occurs when hybridity is claimed *by* the nation-state, as has occurred in Trinidad and Tobago. Scholars like Bhabha appear to define hybridity exclusively as disruptions of and challenges to the nation-state. As Ania Loomba (1998) points out, this strips minorities and postcolonials of their agency: their resistance is always cast in relation to the dominant centre, as opposed to any creative agency of their own. But what occurs when these dominant political elites draw on aspects of hybridity as a national narrative? As Eric Williams, the first prime minister, argues, "the only Mother we recognise is Trinidad and Tobago, and Mother cannot discriminate against her children" (Puri 2004, 48).

Following Benedict Anderson (1991) , if we are to believe that nations are "imagined communities" reliant on the creation and maintenance of a national narrative, then Trinidad and Tobago is a nation dependent on the notion of hybridity as a uniting historical and cultural narrative. Contrary to Bhabha, here hybridity actually serves to enable the legitimacy of the nation-state. The discourse of hybridity serves to stitch together a nation of various ethnicities. It is not for nothing that the metaphor of callaloo

is frequently employed as a descriptor of the Trinidadian people: a dish of multiple ingredients, existing in harmony, as opposed to a state of tension. As Tariq Modood (1997) notes, the public recognition of disparate community identities is in itself fraught with the potential for political conflict: political elites in Trinidad and Tobago have chosen to acknowledge hybridity as a singular Trinidadian identity as opposed to multiple Trinidadian identities.

In fact, one can argue that the Trinidadian discourse of hybridity has been politicised for the benefit of ruling elites, who favour this national narrative of unity to an explicit acknowledgement of class anxieties and inequalities (Puri 2004). Writers such as Kamau Brathwaite (1974) and Derek Walcott (1992) imagine Trinidad as a place in which descendants of Indian and African labourers come together to be transformed into a single nation that is then defined by its very transculturation. For Brathwaite, this change occurs with assimilation of the Indian workers into Creole society; for Walcott, the shift happens when Trinidadians come together to resist the homogenizing influence of global political and economic society. Both approaches arguably gloss over the contestations between genders, classes and ethnicities that occur when hybridisation takes place. While theorising hybridity in postcolonial studies can shed light on issues of personal or cultural identity, a problematic around this could be the disconnect between specific places and peoples which arises from trying to reinscribe within Eurocentric grand narratives (Ahmed, 1992).

Steven G. Yao (2003, 363) proposes a more satisfactory approach to analysing processes of hybridity by emphasising states of hybridity as ones fraught with sexual and political violence. He argues that the term "hybridity" carries with it sexual and, therefore by implication, violent connotations of transgressing previously "natural" categories to produce new, hybrid categories by means of a "generative fusion". Thus, hybridity is not solely a means for subalterns to contest the dominant centre, nor is it a purely harmonious intermingling of disparate cultures and ethnicities. It is a term that points towards the inherent associated tensions when cultural identities meet and mix, their struggle for power and dominance, and the changing identities that evolve as a result. However, it would be reductive if one then argues that discourses of hybridity are unsatisfactory because they ignore the latent racial tension between ethnic groups. This struggle occurs on multiple levels, not merely on a racial or ethnic one—it occurs on a generational level, a class level and on a gendered level, and the response it engenders from others is not always positive.

This can be seen with the controversy surrounding Drupatee Ramgoonai's 1988 chutney-soca "Lick Down Me Nani" (Puri 2004, 197) which outraged many Indian conservatives. Here, the creation and subsequent reaction to "Lick Down Me Nani" is an example of cultural hybridity that is far from Bhabha's "empowering" state, or at least, the marginalised people that it empowers are split along generational and gendered lines. Drupatee, far more than her male chutney-soca counterparts, was the subject of harsh criticism from Indian religious groups in Trinidad and Tobago. This is typical of how female involvement in Carnival usually draws the loudest condemnation from such conservative Indian groups. As Puri observes, "policing the behaviour of women is a means of policing the construction of the Mother Culture" (2004, 196). It is tempting,

therefore, to see "Lick Down Me Nani" solely as an expression of cultural hybridity that expresses a challenge to the conservative parent culture. Certainly, it is far from the state-sanctioned hybridity that sees new cultural forms emerging harmoniously from the Trinidadian mix of communities. Such cultural works are representative of the struggle of younger Trinidadians of Indian or dougla descent to carve out their own space from dominant cultural representations. They challenge alternatives to cultural stereotypes imposed by older and more conservative cultural and religious groups. They do not, as Parmasad (1995) would have it, symbolise the violent rejection of Indian culture. Instead, they playfully broaden the idea of what it means to be Indian, and in the case of Drupatee, to be an Indian woman, and reject the static, reified cultural identities imposed on them. As Modood argues (1997), when strong national identities exist, the process of social inclusion is likely to manifest itself not as a challenge to the national identity but as an opening up of the national identity to make way for and include new insertions and hybrids.

Thus, we see that hybridity is a term that operates on many different levels: the idealistic, the political, the cultural, and so on. It does not simply contest dominant ideologies, nor can it simply be imposed as a dominant national ideology. The term is much more complex and its manifestations should be looked at within its specific historical and cultural terms. It is a concept that instead alerts us to the problems associated with our encounters at the borders of intermingling cultural identities: between local and global, between developed and developing world, between self and other. Hybridity is, to this end, not just a mere acceptance that cultural differences can ever shake hands and harmoniously fashion themselves into an equitable merger: hybridity instead points to the difficulty, as Ien Ang (2003, 150) puts it, of "living with differences", and acts as a construct for us to detangle the complex commingling of cultural identities as in Trinidadian creolisation.

Creolised, mixed or douglarised?

Theoretical analyses of creolisation, hybridity and mixing in the Caribbean have sought to dismantle the normative ideal of cultural and racial purity and this is evident in view of the increasing population of mixed-race peoples and discourses around hybridity (England 2009; Moreiras 1999) which challenge racial binaries and racial continua as well as cultural and creative practices such as music, carnival, religion, and language which are all syncretic and interfused.

Trinidad has historically been characterised by the class-colour-race hierarchy. To a large extent, the binaristic model of black/white thinking is of little use, especially given scholarly approaches to identities as fluid and shifting rather than static or bounded. Gradually, there have emerged revisionist narratives and cultural models constituting the callaloo nation as opposed to a creole colony (Khan 2004). There are claims that despite the harmonious representation of ethnic difference, an underlying tension exists between the two models, of callaloo nation on the one hand and creole colony on the other (Ryan 1997). This model can be traced back to the historical context where racial designations, class and notions of femininity and masculinity were mutually constitutive. For example, in the colonial era, the use of colour as a description of race signalled a class position and the values assigned to this position. Therefore, creolisation as process has also served an

ideological purpose which extends to theorising. As Munasinghe (2006, 550) argues, creolisation "is a schizophrenic theory, that is, one in which theory and ideology are conflated". Creolisation must then be understood not as a homogenising process, but rather as a process of contention because:

> The development of creole culture is characterized by the persistence of differences as well as the creation of new phenomena. In the contested process of creolization both continuity and creativity are involved. What is *Caribbean,* in fact, is neither the insistence on mutually exclusive and immutable ethnicities, such as "Indian", "Chinese", "Mestizo", and "Creole", nor the blending of one into the other in a general "melting pot". What is Caribbean is the development of cultures and societies that enable people to participate at different ways in a variety of activities and identities because these need not to be mutually exclusive. The more open and organic view of creolization helps us understand this, as the dialectical view of creolization helps us keep in mind that the various ways people contribute culturally depends on the distribution of power in society (Bolland 2006, 9-10).

To say, therefore, that an Indian's creolisation, in the ideological sense, means he/she has assimilated into the dominant Trinidadian Creole culture becomes a fallacy as it is presumed the "Indian" is a passive recipient of another culture. Many Indian-descent writers such as V.S Naipaul have made significant literary contributions out of their own cultural background, which was in turn influenced largely by Trinidadian creole culture. From this perspective, creolisation is not historically fixed but shaped by specific historical circumstances and continues to develop and shape identities and Trinidadian culture, for example, through douglarisation.

The Trinidadian counterpoint: Douglarisation

While creolisation is often used synonymously with hybridisation, there is a marked difference between the two concepts, with the former rooted in specific places and histories, particularly within sites of plantation slavery. One way of reading the multiple forms of identity specifically in Trinidad is as douglarisation. The ambiguously pejorative term "dougla" signifies the offspring of a union between persons of African and Indian ancestry in Trinidad, while "'douglarisation' denotes the contested processes of Afro- and Indo-Trinidadian interculturation" Stoddard and Cornwell 1999, 332). While the process of mixing is celebrated in Trinidad and attests to its national identity, Trinidadians refer to themselves as a "callaloo nation" (Khan 2004, 8), callaloo being a local puréed dish made of a mixture of ingredients. While this notion of callaloo in relation to creolisation has been critiqued for its exclusion of Indians (Munasinghe 2006), douglarisation enables "the recognition of the Indian influence on Trinidad and not as the creolisation (i.e., loss) of Indian culture." (Stoddard and Cornwell 1999, 346). However, the coinage of this term is not without controversy as it places into sharp focus the definition of creolisation as Afro-centric.

Trinidad prides itself on its ethnic and religious heterogeneity and syncretism. The national symbols of carnival, calypso and steelpan are widely accepted as African-influenced cultural forms but some of the Indian descent population have previously

vocalised their dissent as to what they see as "the dominant 'creocentric' discourse about Trinidad's history" (Ryan 1997, 13). Spokespeople for Hindu-based organisations and Indian cultural nationalists are generally against the label "creole", while others recognise the influences of creole forms on their culture and their influence on creole culture. The slippage of the term "creole" as Afro-centric or a national symbol of the culture of Trinidad and Tobago is an often contested question in Trinidad and Tobago as the term carries different meanings in the wider Caribbean as well as outside of the Caribbean, for example, New Orleans, Miami, Reunion and Mauritius. It is the process of creolisation "as a continuous process of intercultural mixing and creativity" (Reddock 1994, 107) which generally Trinidadians make claim to as a description of their society. A noteworthy observation is that the slippage of these terms is symbolised in the post-Independence party political system created along the lines of ethnic differentiation. In its more generalised meaning, creolisation draws largely on African and French Creole influences which were dominant until the nineteenth century, and in a narrower sense, it is continually creative and open to contemporary and multiple influences within the framework of its complex history which saw Spanish and French ownership, a large number of African slaves and Indian indentured labourers, a West African non-enslaved presence, in addition to a large number of migrants from Venezuela, China, merchants from Syria, and the consumption of North American media.

The complexities of this process are encapsulated in the ritual of the yearly Carnival, in itself a hybrid space synthesising Catholic, Spiritual Baptist and West African traditions (Edmonds and Gonzalez 2010) and seen as the major highlight on the Trinidadian cultural calendar. Though there is a questioning as to the degree of the so-called assimilation of Indian Trinidadians into a hegemonic African Trinidadian creole culture and their ownership of this, as well as an ongoing creative appropriation of national culture as owned by all Trinidadian citizens, this abiding contradiction is encapsulated in the following calypso:

> Indo and Afro Trinbagonian
>
> We should learn to be one
>
> Our ancestors came by boat
>
> Taste the saltwater in yuh throat
>
> (taken from a chutney soca song "Jahaji Bhai" by Brother Marvin,1996)

The significance of douglarisation as a process for women is an area that merits further analysis, as according to Diana Wells (2000), a feminist identity had been constructed in opposition to a creole identity.

> In sum, the differently positioned ethnic groups have distinct relationships in the criticism they are subjected to in connection with European and American ideas of womanhood. The stakes for Indo-Trinidadian women involved in the women's

> movement are different from those of Afro-Trinidadian women. For the Indo-Trinidadian women, claiming the feminist identity is seen as rejecting an Indo-Trinidadian identity because a key aspect of that identity includes a gender hierarchy implicit within the family structure.
>
> (Wells 2000, 190)

While Indian-descent men are generally afforded greater freedom to compete across a range of spheres with African-descent men, Indian-descent women were and it could be argued still are regarded as symbolic gatekeepers of traditional Indian values and norms which revolve around marriage, home and family. However, in view of the dougla poetic sensibility which is a gradual and pervasive process, this will invariably have an effect on the traditional value systems and beliefs of the Indian-descent community. The exploration of the effects of a dougla poetic amidst the backdrop of cultural hybridity and mixing has been steadily gaining ground in Caribbean academic discourse (Reddock 1994; Stoddard and Cornwall 1999).

Dougla and difference

The mixing that is characteristic of Trinidad has been invoked as creolisation, hybridity and douglarisation as explored above. In terms of ethnicity and race, this has called attention to outdated ideas of racial purity. At the level of popular discourse and practices, a number of intellectuals have called for the end of racial categorisation in social science in favour of more nuanced and complex categories, for example, Stuart Hall's new ethnicities (1992, 257) and Homi Bhabha's third space (1990, 210) and a reconstitution of populations as "mixed" or "post-race" (Ali 2003).

Suki Ali (2003, 9), in writing about "mixed-race" individuals, posits that international identities are "problematic in their centralisation of communities, groups and boundaries". Ali suggests, with reference to the work of Judith Butler (1990), that it is possible to understand gendered race as performative, and that this represents a productive challenge to normative cultural frameworks that are potentially restrictive. Ali's ideas and Butler's theories might well be relevant to an account of the experiences of Indian Trinidadian women. Butler's work on ethnicity centres on her analysis of *Passing* by Nella Larsen, an account of the "reading" of appearance and behaviour in terms of "blackness" and "whiteness". Ali (2003, 12) observes that this text considers ethnic difference in terms of race and according to a black/white binary; this makes it inadequate as a theoretical reference point in conceptualising Indian Caribbean ethnic identifications, which in Trinidad are differentiated from African and Creole identities. However, Butler's account in *Gender Trouble* of identity accessed at the level of bodily performance is a useful tool to understand how cultural attachments might be presented among a generation of Indian Trinidadian women who do not have direct migration experience but who are also being called on by conservative Hindu politics to be Indian. In doing this, they engage in:

> … acts, gestures and desire [which] produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this … through the play of signifying absences that suggest

> but never reveal the organising principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures and enactment, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means (Butler 1990, 136).

Aisha Khan's (2004) religious ritual is one such performative act by means of which she describes the way in which Indian Trinidadians can be said to use religious ritual to celebrate Indian history. Khan (2004, 223) writes about how "'religion' can anchor the ineffable and metaphysical to corporeal boundaries—of a group, of a people." For young Indian Trinidadian women, participation in religious ritual is an act that signifies an organising principle of identity. Indeed, Khan (2004, 229) writes, "Among Hindus and Muslims in Trinidad, rituals are both culturally stabilising (reminding practitioners who they are through connection with the past) and culturally transforming (emphasizing who they are through tutorial commentary concerning the present".

Concluding remarks

The Trinidadian national identity may be one of an official state of peaceful hybridity, but processes of hybridisation occur on various levels, from generational to gendered. The Trinidadian woman of Indian descent, thus, is one of multiple identities, all of which exist in a constant state of flux and interaction. Her identity is the site of cultural and political conflict, where "original" Indian tradition and identity is upheld by conservative Indians as a marker of true Indian womanhood, while dougla poetics such as chutney-soca are to be scorned as excessively "Afro-Creole" (Puri 2004).

Whether there is little evidence of a genuine sentiment of diasporic longing among these women beyond a vague allusion to Mother India is a question that must be asked, especially in relation to the Indo-Trinidadian identity where the linkage between India and Trinidad appears familial. Even then, this image of the Indian homeland is one that has little acknowledgement of the complexities of Indian identity as intersected by categories of class or gender. While notions of hyphenated identity may seem to be initially useful in repositioning debate about identity around ethnicity, despite the best attempts of the Trinidadian government to create a national narrative of ethnic and cultural harmony, it falls prey to the same cultural and ethnic essentialism that it tries to avoid. Hyphenated labels may also be chosen to indicate ways in which subjects are not just Trinidadian but have their lives woven into a context which extends beyond the boundaries of Trinidad—specifically India when talking about Indian Trinidadian or Indian Caribbean identities. However, while the complex social processes behind the deployment of such labels may be linked to the dimensions and dynamics of globalisation and contemporary ethnicities, the question of whether or not the "Indian" in this instance connects more closely to the meanings of an ethnic-national identity, a racialised identity or a diasporic identity is one that is important to ask in seeking to understand the contemporary particularities of Indianness in Trinidad as a dynamic outcome of complex social relations which operate at multiple levels, rather than operating from an outdated and archaic totalising model of ethnicity which is an inadequate reflection of present-day Trinidad.

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Words and Work: Education and Work Among Indo-Muslim Women in Trinidad, 1930–1960

Halima Kassim

Abstract
This paper examines Indo-Muslim females' access to education and participation in formal work over three decades, 1930–1960. In particular, it acknowledges that access to primary and secondary education at the micro level was attained in circumstances of negotiation and collusion and in circumstances where there was a growing recognition of the universalistic-achievement values. Increasing female access to education is assumed to enable empowerment. As such, this paper also examines the employment opportunities available to young women. For young Indo-Muslim females, opportunities were generally limited to private and what can be termed the "semi-public" sphere. The existing patriarchal norms which operated served to ensure that marriage and motherhood, though not explored in this paper, were the means by which these young females were fully accepted by society. Using both written sources and interviews with Indo-Muslim females growing up between the 1920s and 1950s, this paper focuses on their education and labour market participation experiences as representatives of the Muslim community. These experiences in the school and in the labour market led to a reimagined and reshaped social order that added layers to their Muslim identity.

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Historical overview of the community

From 1917, if not before, the Muslim community was in a state of flux — straddling several worlds (Western-Christian, Indian and Muslim) and evolving along class lines. Social mobility via land acquisition and education was pursued with some vigour. As generally posited in the recounting of history concerning the migration of Indians starting in 1845 from the subcontinent, an estimated 80 per cent of the migrants were Hindus, 15 per cent were Muslims and the rest were tribal, Christians, Sikhs, and others (Lal 1996.). By 1946, the Muslim population accounted for 31 per cent of the Indian population and 5.8 per cent of the total population (Harewood 1975).

The age and sex of a particular sub-population are of particular significance not only in analysing the extent to which that population would acculturate to the wider society or require services but also in giving insight into the possible aspirations of the actors by generations. The sub-Indian population of school (5–14 years) and working (15–44 years) ages was growing as seen in **Table 1** below and this can be seen as advantageous to the community as it could stimulate a preference not only for increased and longer participation of their children in education but could force a reassessment by the younger cohort of their parents' preferences, thus increasing overall accommodation to the host society.

Table 1: Age Distribution Of Indian Population

1946			**1960**		
Age Group	Indian	Sex Ratio	Age Group	Indian	Sex Ratio
0-4	34,211	994	0-4	51,290	1,017
5-14	50,544	1,022	5-14	88,934	1,001
15-44	83,967	1,047	15-44	123,387	996
45-64	20,483	1,404	45-64	29,602	1,264
65+	6,542	1,153	65+	8,732	1,110
Total	261,485	-	Total	301,945	-

Source: Jack Harewood, *The Population of Trinidad and Tobago*, CICRED Series, 1975, p. 100.

The above-mentioned distribution would suggest that the members were more prone to admitting elements from Western-Christian society that would be likely to support their world views. The younger sub-population may be seen as the means to realise the aspirations of a community as was articulated by Nana, in Peggy Mohan's (2007) novel *Jahajin,* who dreamt of moving his children into the middle class and to take the next generation into the professions. The role of the family was likely to be ambiguous, either supportive in its attitude towards education for females and thus serving as an important "stability factor", or constraining or limiting access and choice.

For Muslims for whom the seeking of knowledge was *sunnah* (tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace) the transition to admitting secular education into their practices should have been seamless. But the dichotomisation which existed between secular and sacred was not acceptable to Muslims as they believed "that the real basis of all knowledge is a faith in the values which are inculcated by religion" (Qureshi 1985).

Education, therefore, was perceived as a site of religious reproduction linked to the survival of the Islamic faith and the Muslim identity. When, among the later generations, secular education gained in importance it was balanced with religious education offered through *maktabs.* For many parents, post-primary and secondary education increased the chances of their children's assimilation into the wider society's culture and values which they resisted. Access to education invariably meant a shift from the private to public domains; a relinquishing of social control and behavioural codes that governed the minority society which might lead to an assimilation of the norms and values belonging to the majority through the process of layering.

That said, there were parents who desired an education for their children, viewing it as a useful mechanism for social/occupational mobility. The Muslim community was one that had a set of prescribed codes, as well as pattern of thinking, acting and viewing the world. The inherent differences in the response to boys and girls receiving schooling was the premise that males needed to be the providers and protectors while females should be home oriented, and if at all engaged in productive labour, they were to complement the male and not be in direct competition with him. Further, education and schooling was often seen as being a means of self-expression and as "a site of resistance against marginalising cultural practices" for the younger generations (Keaton 1999). This fear was also echoed in Seepersad Naipaul's *Adventures of Gurudeva and Other Stories* (1976) in which it was expressed that young girls "learned to write love-letters, then again, they wore knee-length frocks, and — the most shameful thing of all — many of them chose their own husbands." These actions that resulted from education and schooling were seen as contrary to the codes of the community.

Participation of young Muslim females in the education system

Before delving into the conversational narratives that would allow us further insight into the young Indo-Muslim female's access to education, it is useful to look at the enrolment numbers between 1924 and 1930. The Muslim population stood at 32,615 in 1946[1] and attendance by Muslim children at primary schools remained at a constant seven per cent of total enrolment for the period 1946 to 1951 (Census 1946). As can be clearly discerned, the overall enrolment of Muslim children was low and the numbers were likely to be even lower for young girls. This thus hints at the legitimisation/de-legitimisation of access to education and, by extension, to employment opportunities. Consequently, females were more likely to be deprived of or receive limited schooling, influenced by the gendered perceptions of the relevance and value of education to their lives. The next few paragraphs look at the access females had to primary and secondary education which took place as a result of community interactions, negotiation and collusion.

ZMI, who attended the Tunapuna CM School, also reflects on the reason why there was this reluctance to send female children to school: "My eldest sister did not go to school. She was 18, already married when I born. The philosophy in those days was that if yuh educate girls dey would get too sensible and do wrong things."[2] Shaheeda Hosein also recounts a similar experience of rural women who "came of age" in the 1920s and 1930s in Trinidad. So, as a woman in Tacarigua recounts in the following:

> *I never go to school. Those days they didn't use to send we…They send the boys… they say they wouldn't send the girl children, only the boy children… Indian people didn't like to send they daughter to school. Some people say if you send you daughter to school they will meet boys and they going to write letter... It have a story about Saranga and Tharabhij – a king's daughter and a king's son, and two of them go to school. So they write letter (to each other). And the teacher send and tell the fathers, the two kings, "You children done learn"* (Hosein 2004).

SAB, who had no formal secular education and limited religious education, lived in St. James (formerly Peru Village). As a married woman in the 1920s and 1930s with seven children, she was influenced and encouraged to send her six daughters to school by an Afro-Trinidadian neighbour.[3] This is an example of one of the acculturative processes at work in colonial Trinidad, where there was a confluence of social determinants of the minority and majority population. As a result of this influence, her children were the recipients of a formal secular education attaining a fourth or fifth standard education at the Mucurapo R.C. School as well as an Islamic education after school.[4] Utilising monies she acquired from vending, SAB sent her children to school. While SAB's daughters' education was terminated at the primary level, her son received a secondary level education at the Osborne High School, Port of Spain. "It was acceptable for my brother to be educated so he could get a proper job with de government," said SAB's daughter RAR.[5] This was linked to the overarching gender binary classification of provider-protector/producer-nurturer. So, while the girls got married, SAB's son after completing secondary school worked as a clerk in the Red House, then sought employment at the El Socorro TIA School and began acquiring the symbols (car) associated with masculinity and status in society before migrating to the United Kingdom in 1958. The urging by an Afro-Trinidadian that resulted in an Indo-Muslim woman sending her daughters to school was not unique to an urban area alone. JMA of Mausica, whose father was a coal seller, said that her mother was encouraged to send her and her two brothers to school by an Afro-Trinidadian neighbour, Daphne Springer, who was an unmarried teacher at the Arima Government School.[6] The result of these community interactions granted those who benefited from them the opportunity to think, imagine and aspire to a life beyond that which they knew even if their agency and capacity to act and transform was constrained by the parameters of their lives and religious-cultural identity.

AB's mother, HB, was educated in Islam and several languages (Urdu, Farsi, Arabic and English) in her childhood home in Curepe by a family member, just as her mother had been before her.[7] HB's experience made her receptive to the idea of formal education for her daughters though her husband was not so enthralled with the idea. As such, HB sent her children to the Arima Government School. AB, age 13 or 14, was in Standard VII when her brother was at the Arima High School. The primary school hosted a prize-giving function and AB received several prizes for her academic performance, thereby gaining the attention of an official from the Arima High School. The secondary school official approached AB's parents. He knew AB's brother was attending the Arima High School and so, heartened by that, urged her parents to continue their daughter's secular education by offering them financial inducements — a reduction in school fees. AB,

although present at the meeting and excited about the idea of attending secondary school, could not volunteer an opinion. She recalls her mother's difficulty in rendering a decision:

> *My mother's initial reaction was not to send me. She saw no need to educate her daughters to secondary level. They would not go to work. They would stay at home and learn about taking care of the house. Girls of my mother's generation did not work. They became housewives, supporting their husbands. Boys had to be educated at secondary school so [as] to be employable. My younger brother went to CIC [St. Mary's College] as Arima High School did not offer Cambridge Advanced Levels. My mother wanted her younger son to be a "professional"...My mother was concerned about sending me to a mixed school. Such intermixing was not acceptable. My mother, finally, decided to send me. Education for boys and girls was in keeping with the spirit of Islam. Also, my brother was there to keep an eye on me. My father's family did not like it though. They said so, over and over. But, my father accepted it. He trusted my mother's judgment. My father would give my mother his household salary and she would do the household budget.*[8]

The question arises, therefore, whose honour was being protected in this alliance of gender and generation in accessing higher education? The gender dilemma was clear — marriage and motherhood was the destiny for girls, not education which was seen as a "means of self-expression and as a site of resistance". Clearly, there was active support for a distinctly gendered, nuanced way of upbringing girls and boys in that household. Eventually, AB graduated from high school and was employed initially at Arima High School before marrying and retreating to the private sphere. This shows subtle shifts that were occurring within the dominant gendered culture through external forces and the result of individual agency. She eventually attended The University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine campus, in 1962 at the same time her daughter attended. After graduating from UWI she was employed as the Principal of the Haji Rukhnudeen Girls High School in Tunapuna until the death of her husband in 1984.

State-recognised institutions came in for more support, at times, than private educational institutions. This may be linked to the heightened consciousness of the State as part of the continuum of the modernity processes in which State validation and legitimisation of the community is imperative in the process towards accommodation and citizenship. Certainly, this was so among the well-to-do. HMM, who turned five in 1945, was sent to the San Juan CM School, but when the TIA Islamia Private School was given state recognition in 1949, her parents withdrew her from the CM School and placed her at the TIA Islamia School.[9]

Historical writings tend to focus on the irregular attendance of Indian children at school, attributing such to the need by parents for their children's productive labour in the fields or the household. For some parents, their child's reproductive and productive labour was an economic necessity. Responsibilities and obligations were the cornerstones of family life. Mutual supports and responsibilities affecting these larger consanguine groups are

not just considered desirable, but they are made legally incumbent on members of the society by Islamic law. The minimal secular and religious education acquired provided the means for women and men to secure a livelihood and some measure of economic security and supported the continuity of their religious and cultural systems.

The interview with MS also emphasized the influences which led boys also to do what was expected of them and assist with taking care of the family, thereby fulfilling universal gendered norms. He was enrolled at the Barataria E.C. School and irregularly attended school until Standard III, as he had to assist in the household. From age nine, he would assist his father with sewing. MS was 11 when his father died. His mother had never engaged in productive work and was worried about how they would survive. MS had seven younger siblings. MS recalls the conversation he had with his mother following his father's burial:

> *Ma, doh worry. I would help. I would sew the clothes.*
> *But, we dohn't have a pattern. We ain't know how to cut the material for pants and shirts.*
> *Ma, we have a pattern. I know how to cut the material. I watch Pa do it plenty times.*
> *Son, but what about school? I want yuh to go to school an learn.*
> *Ma, dohn't worry about school. I have to help. Sewing would do that.*[10]

MS said his mother insisted education was important and that he must finish primary school:

> *Finally, we agree. I would sew in the morning and go to school after lunch. The best of two worlds. I knew we had to find a means to survive and this was the best. My father had a contract with people like K.S. Abraham, Nabbie's, Habib's and Fakoory's in Port of Spain. We continued to sew for them. Once they were getting the clothes, good quality, good fit and customers did not complain, they were happy for us to continue sewing. We also had private customers. While I was at school, Ma would take the bus or train to Port of Spain and deliver them [the clothes] to the stores.*[11]

Until MS turned 15, on the verge of entering Standard V and required to leave because he was "too old for primary school", he continued to sew in the morning and attend school after lunch. When he restarted school after his father's death, it was June and exams were to be held in August. "I sat the exams and came 17th out of a class of 35. I did well in Spelling, Reading and History, but did badly in Maths. The teacher congratulated me for working hard. I had only begun to attend classes regularly in June."[12] MS further recalls:

> *I really liked school. I wanted to go on to secondary school. All my friends were going to secondary school. I could not go. I had to work. I had my family to look after. They depended on me. I thought to myself that my friends would go on, after secondary school, and get good jobs. I never told my mother how I felt. I thought and thought about it. Finally, I*

> *decided that if I can't go to secondary school and I have to be a tailor, I would become the best tailor that I can be. I also decided that if I can't go to school I would continue to improve myself. I listened to the BBC news everyday on radio and read the newspapers whenever I get, old or current.*[13]

A few years of primary education provided the groundwork for individuals to become self-educated through reading. MS also continued to be actively involved in the Muslim community, eventually attaining the post of Imam at the Bamboo *masjid* (mosque).

MNR attended San Fernando CM School (now New Grant Memorial) and Naparima Girls' College.[14] She, too, participated in the enforced dual education system, attending *maktab* until she completed primary school. For many Muslim children, religious education coexisted with secular education. It not only affirms Muslim identity and ensures the survival of the faith, but may also be seen as diluting any potential risk that may be associated with secular schooling. Nevertheless, the *maktab* which offered instruction on the tenets of the faith, offering of prayers, and reading of the *Quran* by learned men can be viewed as a site of empowerment as it provides, in the words of Aihwa Ong (2006), "alternative ethical norms of humanity".

While primary education had become the norm by the 1940s, secondary education was still regarded not only as a luxury but as the domain of males, by some. Yet, there were some exceptions. HMM sat the College Exhibition at the TIA Islamia School, circa 1952. She recalls the following:

> *Only three students of the entire school were chosen for secondary school. In those days there was an entrance exam to St. Joseph's Convent, Bishops Anstey and St. Augustine Girls'. It cost $16.00 or so a year to attend these schools. I wrote the exams for the St. Augustine Girls', but I did not pass. The Principal, Mr. [Nabab] Ali spoke to my mother and encouraged her to send me to secondary school, saying it is an investment. My mother was a widow, by now. She told Mr. Ali that she would see what she could do. I eventually went to the Progressive Educational Institute here in Barataria.*[15]

Again, we see the influence of external force and individual agency coalescing to provide opportunity for HMM to acquire a secondary education.

The imposition of gendered norms varied according to the socio-economic dynamics within a family. MKS attended the San Fernando E.C. School before entering Naparima Girls' High School. Tragedy struck the family when MKS was in her freshman year at high school; her mother was physically incapacitated. An aunt suggested that she quit schooling to help in the household.[16] Fortunately, MKS' family (her father was a tailor) was able to hire a domestic servant which enabled MKS to complete secondary schooling followed by a commercial course. The story for SMS, another interviewee, was different. SMS went to the San Fernando CM School before attending Naparima Girls' High School. While at high school, SMS' attendance was irregular due to house chores and

having to help her mother look after her younger siblings. After completing third form, SMS left school to do a secretarial course, but never sought employment. Instead, she stayed at home and assisted her mother. SMS recalls her mother's family, particularly her paternal aunt's reaction to her attending secondary school:

> *They fussed about it a lot. They would drop remarks for my mother. They would say things like "with all that education she have she go still have to cook, clean an look after husban an children when she marry"; "yuh wastin time educatin she, she still hav to be wife"; "why yuh doh marry she? if she get too ole or educated no man go marry she". They wanted my mother to hear their opinions so they would make these remarks whenever she was present...No, my father was never around when they made these remarks.*[17]

When SMS' mother, JK, got married at 16, she was illiterate. She could not sign her name. It was JK's husband who taught her to sign her name and the rudiments of the 3R's.[18] Consequently, it was not surprising that JK's family was unsupportive and displeased that SMS was acquiring an education. Although she quit high school, SMS continued her secular learning by resorting to subterfuge to improve her knowledge. Her eldest brother had completed his secondary education and was already working. He would loan her his schoolbooks:

> *I use to wrap them up in old newspapers and hide outside under a tree and read them. I was afraid of being caught by my mother's family. They would laugh at me and make hurtful remarks. They would tell me that "I feel I better than them because I properly educated". My father's family did not say anything.*[19]

Her father's family did not object to SMS' schooling; they were part of the petty bourgeoisie and Trinidad-born Indians and as such, had gradually acculturated to the norms and values of society. JK's parents were India-born and came to Trinidad as indentured labourers and were peasant farmers. Adherence to cultural identity tended to be stronger among the first generation of immigrants.

In 1946, the literacy rate among the Indians 10 years and over was almost equal to that of the illiteracy rate. In simple terms, this meant that 49.5 per cent (65,558) of the total Indian population of 132,363 was literate (Statistical Digest 1935-1955).[20] According to the 1960 census, in the total population there were approximately twice as many women 15 years and over who had received no education: 1.9 females: 1 male (Rubin and Zavalloni 1969, 207). Participation by East Indians in denominational schools has been widely discussed as well as the underlying reasons for such preference over government schools by Shameen Ali (1993), Bridget Brereton (1981), Brinsley Samaroo (1988, 1984), Elizabeth Seesaran (1994), among others. Secondary education continued to remain confined to small numbers up to the 1940s or so, drawing children from the ranks of the socially and economically mobile families. There was the overarching perception of educational attainment as a structural requirement for mobility and, as such, the cost benefit of educational participation increased. There was no exploration of higher

education aspirations in the conduct of this study. Rubin and Zavalloni note in their 1969 study that more students at the government and government-assisted schools expected to attend university. The percentage aspiring to attend university was highest among Indians regardless of type of school attended (Rubin and Zavalloni 1969, 69). The Indian students came from the Hindu, Muslim and Christian denominations; however, on the basis of the survey data, the authors note that the percentage of both sexes aspiring to enter university was higher among Hindu and Muslim students than among the Christian Indian students. Moreover, the Muslim-Hindu group ranked well above the Christian in terms of "striving orientation" and had higher aspirations and expectations concerning their future than did Christian Indian students (Rubin and Ravalloni 71-72).

Class and economic circumstances contributed to determining educational trends. Primary education moved from being non-acceptable for females to being almost commonplace by the 1960s as a result of social mobility, community interactions, negotiation and collusion. The narratives reaffirmed that the Muslim community was not only heterogeneous but subscribed to universal notions on social mobility and conventional yet nuanced notions of gender roles. Judging from the narratives, females were clearly not passive recipients of schooling but played a role in constructing notions of gendered identity. The period, 1930 to 1960, was therefore marked by ambivalence in which external forces and individual agency coalesced to influence notions of identity and patterns of mobility. In this regard, there needs to be further evaluation of the material circumstances of the lives of Indo-Muslim females from the 1930s onwards and framed in the context of wider social issues such as the labour unrests of the 1930s and the shifts from a post-colonial to an independent society.

Despite all of that, it must be understood that the Muslim identity in the context of a Western-Christian society still retained its own characteristics and complexities; they would add another layer, adopt norms and values and develop a certain bonding with their new society but not at the expense of their Islamic faith and Muslim identity. Hence, the reference to the dual education system made earlier. This also presents a new area for research: Muslim identity in the contemporary Caribbean in the context of global Islamophobia and contestation of identities.

Shekels and work

In the previous section, access to primary and secondary education at the micro level was attained in circumstances of negotiation and collusion, in which there was a growing recognition of the universalistic-achievement values. Education readily alters the perceptions of employment and provides opportunities for same. Work is often seen as a cost incurred by those who want to consume the goods thus made available to them. The *Qur'an* and the *Hadith* see work as fundamental to earning sustenance. Hence, work is regarded not only as a right but a duty and an obligation.

The majority of the Indian population was settled in villages, providing seasonal labour to the neighbouring estates, and they remained rural residents until the mid-twentieth century. In fact, the population census of 1946 showed that most Indians resided in the counties of Victoria and Caroni. By 1945, the centenary anniversary of the Indians' presence, it was noted that "many other Indians have from time to time taken up

professional studies abroad and today … are well represented in the legal, medical, teaching and other professions" (Kirpalani et al. 1945). In fact, many of them in the words of the protagonist in Mohan's novel were meeting Brahmins (Westerners) as equals on their, the Westerners' turf. Nevertheless, many Indians remained employed in the agricultural sector. Some were small shopkeepers, moneylenders, tailors, shopkeepers, coal sellers, and coconut vendors. Others sought employment in the semi-urban and urban areas as scavengers, porters, etc. By the 1950s, the Indian community displayed a marked population growth, reconstitution of family life, shift towards urbanisation, development of a peasantry and growth of a small professional class. It may be posited that as the economic power among the population increased, education was perceived as a more valuable commodity by the urban, merchant, Christian Indian sub-group.

For some parents cognisant of the opportunities, education opened up the future for their sons in terms of civil or teaching services or as professionals. It meant acceptance by the wider society. Their gaining these jobs would signal acceptance by the society, improve the family's status and their social and economic opportunities. Women, regardless of socio-economic or educational background, always worked in the private and/or public domain, combining their role as wife and mother and as worker and, hence, asserting their adult identity. As family life became more fully established, women worked to supplement the family's income. Eventually, jobs broadened to include employment in the teaching and civil service and, later on, in the professions.

Women worked to supplement the family's income within the confines of the home, another manifestation of *purdah*. This particular manifestation may be seen as an attempt to restrict women's mobility to within the family, further creating differentiated spheres of activity. It may also be a signal that the family was moving into the middle class and concerned with respectability. The women living in the 1930s had little or no formal education but used their domestic skills to supplement the family income and improve the quality of life and opportunities for the family. AB's mother was forced to supplement the family's income as her husband's salary was too small to meet all the needs and wants of her family including the education of the children. To this end, HB began baking breads and cakes which she sold to a parlour in Arima.[21] This enterprising activity soon became a family affair; the daughters would help their mother with the preparation of the goodies while the sons would do the delivery — again the sexual division of labour defined by spatial interactions.

Females also used their domestic role to make a living. Thus, work reaffirmed the responsibility of females as homemakers. Sewing to supplement the family's income was a little more common. This was certainly the case with HAJ's mother, MJ, who taught people to sew and do embroidering. She would occasionally sew for people of the Warrenville district.[22] SMS's mother would sew Western clothing for people in the San Fernando district.[23]

When ZK and her husband separated, circa 1950, she was left with eight children ranging from twelve to two, without financial support from her husband.[24] To survive, she started to work as a domestic from home, taking in ironing and washing from the neighbours.

This work allowed her to remain at home and care for the children. When the oldest child turned 14, ZK left her in charge and began working as a domestic for people around Port of Spain.

Commitment to ensuring that the family's business was successful constituted part of familial loyalty and was far more important than completing primary school. It also reaffirmed the pre-eminence of the family and placed the burden of its economic security on the elder child. ZM who turned 12 in 1946 was removed from the Barataria E.C. School by her mother because her mother needed help at home with the younger children. Sibling care giving was not unusual then, nor is it in today's economic climate resulting from migration or economic dislocation. Additionally, ZM was being taught to sew. Her brother had opened a garment factory in 1946 and within a few months she was employed there:

> *My brother, the one with the garment factory, wanted me to go to secondary school, but my mother did not think it was right. She wanted me to help at home and help my brother in the factory. My mother felt it was important for her daughters to sew and be good housewives.*[25]

In 1946, HAJ's father and her uncle established a garment factory. With some similarity to ZM, HAJ, 12, was removed from the Warrenville CM School. Unlike ZM, she was sent to work at the factory. At the factory, she was taught the process of sewing a garment. After HAJ's marriage in 1953, arranged by her mother, she continued to work at the factory. "I contributed to the household in monetary terms equally with my husband. He never demanded that I contributed, but I did. That is the way it was."[26] Islamic tenets speak to women's earning capacity and indicate that a wife's income is hers to dispose of as she wishes. HAJ's actions demonstrate sex/gender role configurations and perceptions regarding complementary roles.

In an approximation of ZM's and HAJ's situation, AB's youngest sister did not follow the family's tradition and become a teacher. She gained employment at Kirpalani's, Port of Spain. HB, although wanting her children to work either in the teaching or civil service, did not object as Kirpalani's wife was her first cousin.[27] At the Port of Spain store, Murli Kirpalani was often there, so he could act as protector of his young cousin's virtue.

Young females who had no experience working were forced to work when they got married. JMA had absolutely no experience of agricultural work, although her family had a "kitchen garden and a few animals at home".[28]

After her marriage in 1938, when she moved from Mausica to Caroni, JMA went to work at the Caroni Sugar Estate cutting paragrass the next day:

> *I know nothing about this. I watch what the other women an dem doin, but ah stil not sure. Ah still had to do de work. I get plenty cut from de blade and holding de handle. Plenty blister. When I get home in the evening, meh hands bleedin an*

> *plenty painin. Ah had to go to work de next day, still. Yuh couldn't stay home. I learn. It took ah time but ah learn to cut the grass widout getin cut.*[29]

During harvest time JMA would load cane:

> *I use to reach the estate around 3:30 in the mornin. Some women use to be there already. It was real dark. We would light flambeau. It was hard work. There were snakes an all kinda insects. You finish loadin for day around 5. I get paid fifty cents for loadin a ton of cane. Sometime we would plough the land for rice, too.*[30]

Soon she and her husband left Caroni Estate and began renting land from Caroni. JMA and her husband had to do everything — loading, furrowing, weeding, harvesting and cleaning the blight.[31] Her parents would seldom visit and she, herself, rarely visited them.

> *Life was hard. Ah was working long hours so I never had time. I never say anythin to meh father. But he knew. He never like it, but wha could he do? I was livin wid me husband.*[32]

Maternity leave was not a feature of life in the early twentieth century. Pregnant women continued to work until the very last days of the final trimester. As a woman in Tacarigua coming of age in the 1920s and 1930s noted "you have to climb up dey [ladder to the truck] with that four bundle or five bundle of cane… I do that until I was four months pregnant. When the belly get too big, well then they use to give me bucket, to give water to the others" (Hosein 2004). It was not unusual for the women to give birth and return to the fields very soon thereafter. Maternity and motherhood were luxuries the working classes could ill afford.

Attitudes of immigrants' descendants change over time. The need to improve one's social, economic and political status effected changes in the lives and attitudes of the immigrants' descendants. Their cultural traditions became diluted over generations and as they added layers of Western-Christian norms and practices to the Muslim identity.

MKS was married two years after leaving Naparima Girls' High School. Initially, her husband did not want her to work. In 1953, when the Carapichaima ASJA Primary school was opened, her husband agreed to her working. By this time, MKS had three children. Furthermore, her sister-in-law's family (her husband's sister) lived near the Carapichaima school. No doubt, this was the deciding factor in MKS being able to work. After teaching for more than a year at the Carapichaima school, MKS was transferred to the Princes Town ASJA Primary School in 1955:

> *Teaching at the Princes Town ASJA School was difficult. The journey from home to school was long. You had to do this twice a day. I still had to look after the house, husband and the children. It was hustling and tiring.*[33]

After teaching at the Princes Town school for a term, MKS applied for a transfer which was granted when the San Fernando ASJA Primary School was opened in 1956. MKS

was only able to work within an Islamic environment after seeking agreement from her husband.

Following her marriage, HMM did not work. She became a full-time housewife and in 1960, two years after she married, she had her first child. Shortly afterwards, they left for England so that her husband could study law. While there, she had three more children. It was also the first time she went out to work, leaving her husband free to pursue his studies full time.

> *I went out to work to help out with domestic expenses. I worked at the White Lilies Department store. I had a part-time job sewing toys [soft/stuffed] toys for a factory. The children were at the nursery.*[34]

In 1964, HMM's husband completed his degree and decided to return home with his family. Upon her return, HMM left the public sphere and retreated to the private domain. Her husband stopped her from working "believing it was his duty to look after the family".[35] HMM, having left the ranks of paid employment lost her independent existence, and therefore became an object, once again. She resumed the role and function of full-time wife and mother. Her ability to work and earn had served its purpose, to improve the status of her husband and through him hers and that of her children.

These narratives highlight that women moved from working in the informal to the formal sector but that move was contingent upon family tradition, socio-economic circumstances, class, geography (though this paper does not fully explore the rural/urban significance) and the length of time in which a family was resident in the island.

Conclusion

The narratives which provide a thoughtful sense of individual self also allowed for reaffirmation of the existing literature on accommodation and negotiation within the society by migrant groups. However, the voices of Muslim females are interesting and valuable in the context of the broader narrative of an Indian community in Trinidad that shows nuanced and subtle differences in how their Muslim identity and Islamic faith may have influenced choices. The narratives further demonstrated how females fit their lives into and around the pervasiveness of gendered norms and family values and circumstances and gave some insight into the personal struggles of growing in the dual space of Muslim and Western-Christian.

Agency was both empowering and reflective of structural factors. Women (mothers) were the principal instigators and motivators in their children's education. Educational participation was attained in circumstances of negotiation and collusion. This should be seen as part of the nurturing process. It was a conscious recognition of the worth of education and the attempt by the mothers to ensure a better reality for their daughters. The role of female agency was aided by access to financial resources. Sexual division of labour, which was founded on complementary interdependence, reasserted itself in the labour market participation. The generation of young Muslim men and women, usually third and beyond, who accessed secondary and some level of post-secondary education

were of the emerging middle and upper classes that were gradually adding layers of the norms and values of the Western-Christian society to their Muslim identity.

The level of coincidence between the majority and minority group in settlements undoubtedly facilitated, maybe even accelerated, the diffusion of universalistic-achievement values. Class, education, ethnicity and gender had an impact on the development and influenced the progress of Indo-Muslims, as they attempted to carve out their own "space" as a community separately but also as part of the larger society.

[1] There was no breakdown of the Muslim population according to age in the 1946 Census of Trinidad and Tobago.
[2] ZMI, personal interview, 28 March 1996.
[3] RAR, personal interview, daughter of SAB, 22 March 1996.
[4] In 1936, the Mucurapo R.C. and the Mucurapo R.C. (Indian) were amalgamated and regrouped as the Mucurapo Girls' R.C. and the Mucurapo Boys' R.C. School (Administrative Report of the Director of Education, Council Paper No. 22 of 1936). Consequently, SAB's first two daughters born 1919 and 1921 would have attended the Mucurapo R.C., whereas her other daughters, born between 1923 and 1932, were finishing or starting their education at Mucurapo Girls' R.C. School.
[5] RAR, personal interview, daughter of SAB, 22 March 1996.
[6] JMA, personal interview, 26 March 1998.
[7] AB, personal interview, 21 March 1996.
[8] AB.
[9] HMM, personal interview, 20 June 1996. The TIA Islamia Private School charged a fee of $3.00 per term and together with donations received, the school was able to maintain itself, though it had a mass influx of students from San Juan and its environs that led to overcrowding at the school.[9] (HMM and Mohammed Rafeeq, secretary of the TIA Board, personal interview, 2 April 1996.)
[10] MKS, personal interview, 19 February 1998.
[11] MKS, personal interview.
[12] MKS, personal interview.
[13] MKS, personal interview.
[14] MNR, personal interview, 28 November 1997.
[15] HMM.
[16] MKS, personal interview, 25 October 1996.
[17] SMS, personal interview, nee Muradali. 19 February 1998.
[18] SMS' maternal grandparents were from India. It is, therefore, not unusual that education for the first generation was not emphasised. Her uncles though were given a primary school education. My paternal grandmother, Katiban Juman, was also illiterate. She could not sign her name. Her husband, Abdool Kassim, taught her only to sign her name.
[19] SMS.

[21] AB, personal interview, 21 March 1996. In fact, in the decades of the 1940s and 1950s, my maternal grandmother who lived in St. James would also make use of a similar service provided in the area by her Afro-descendant neighbours. The unbaked goodies would be taken to vendors by the sons of the household and collected at a pre-arranged time from the neighbours. This particular baking business was a bit unusual, but was nevertheless influenced by HB's family who rented oven space in their large brick oven to neighbours in the Curepe-St. Joseph area. Commercial bakeries were not as widespread in those

days. Baking of cakes and breads was usually a family activity. Generally, cakes and breads sold in parlours were haram as they used lard in the ingredients. Although lard was less expensive, AB also indicated her mother used butter because it was halal. The cost increased slightly, but the taste was good. Lard can be obtained from any part of the pig as long as there is a high concentration of fatty tissue and, of course, the pig is unlawful (haram) in Islam.

[22] HAJ, personal interview, businesswoman, 11 December 1996. Her mother, Mehiroon, was born in 1914.

[23] SMS, personal interview, 19 February 1998.

[24] ZK, personal interview, 31 July 1996. ZK and her husband eventually divorced. While divorce was seen to bring shame and dishonor to the girls' family, separation and divorce afforded her the opportunity to define life for herself and her children within the parameters of the existing religious and cultural systems.

[25] ZM, personal interview, 23 April 1997.

[26] HAJ, personal interview, 11 December 1996.

[27] AB, personal interview, 21 March 1996.

[28] JMA, personal interview, 26 March 1998.

[29] JMA.

[30] JMA.

[31] Within two years they began purchasing land from Caroni. The first was two acres and cost $5.00 an acre.

[32] JMA.

[33] MKS, personal interview, 25 October 1996.

[34] HMM, personal interview, 20 June 1996.

[35] HMM, personal interview.

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Changing Symbols of Indo-Caribbean Femininity

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Abstract
Cultural differences determine an ethnic group's expectations regarding women's roles, as well as how the group is perceived outside the community. Over time there have emerged archetypes of femininity but these archetypes also undergo modifications with changes in technologies of production and ideas about gender equality. This essay engages some of the seminal ideas and texts that have shaped the symbols of Indo-Caribbean femininity, with specific reference to Trinidad. It examines how, from the earliest concept of the *jehagin* or the sisterhood of the boat which surfaced during the nineteenth century, to the more submissive concept of the *dulahin*, or the caste-centred one of *maharajin*, there emerged a changing set of symbols and ideas such as *matikor* and *bindi* that have currency today and whose meanings have complicated the simple stereotypes and apolitical notions once attached to Indo-Caribbean femininity.

Introduction

Indian femininity occupies an unfortunate position in Caribbean society. For one thing, while the Indo-Caribbean population is in the majority in both Trinidad and Guyana and is well represented in Suriname, this ethnic group is still viewed as having a "minority" status in the region since it is less visible in Jamaica, St. Lucia, Martinique, Guadeloupe, St. Vincent and Barbados. In addition, Indo-Caribbean femininity is burdened with numerous connotations. It is well established that during the entire period of indenture the number of female migrants recruited never matched the number of male migrants. Those who were recruited and those who left their villages had abandoned violent or much older husbands, or had fled from poverty, and were adventurous enough to seek their fortunes in another land. Because of the liberties they found in the Caribbean due to the scarcity of their sex among this ethnic group, Indo-Caribbean women were soon viewed as being morally loose or being prostitutes, on the one hand, or they were dismissed by the colonial authorities as childlike and needing the protection of their men. These were the first labels attached to Indo-Trinidadian and Indo-Guyanese femininity in the colonial script. Despite the established record of stridency and agency among Indian women in negotiating their gender, sexual and wage-earning status during indenture and in the post-indenture period, a second set of labels was also attached to Indo-Caribbean femininity wherein this group of women were painted as submissive and passive, non-confrontational, collusive and cowed by an Indian patriarchy.

By the last decades of the twentieth century, when the Caribbean experienced second wave feminism, Indian women were considered largely outside of the mainstream struggle for female equality and equity. In *Diasporic (Dis)locations* (2004), Brinda Mehta draws attention to the different status that Indo-Caribbean women occupied in the region and its diaspora. She proposes a "*kala pani* discourse as an alternative analytic framework, or a way of thinking about Indo-Caribbean women writers and their work in order to reposition this marginalized community and its body of concerns as central to questions of national development."[1] Mehta argues that the contributions of Indo-Caribbean women have been filtered through an Afro-centric lens rather than assessed via new tropes that move beyond the race equals identity formula that has characterized colonial and postcolonial scholarship. She proposes the image and concept of the *kala pani*—the taboo or pollution of caste that was associated with crossing the large expanses of water to reach the West Indies—as a liberating one, the shedding of a skin to embrace others who have also made that journey, even if through a different route.

The marginality that Mehta addresses has applied not only to Indo-Caribbean female writers and feminist activism, but also to the representations of Indo-Caribbeans in the fiction of the region, barring a few writers. One of the earliest references to the Indian immigrant population to the Caribbean is *Lutchmee and Dilloo: A Study of West Indian Life* by Edward Jenkins (first published in 1877). Jenkins was an Englishman, born in India. The novel is sympathetic to the concerns of the indentured Indian migrants in Guyana and the other colonies. The novel begins in India with Dilloo and Hanooman's rivalry over Dilloo's young and beautiful wife Lutchmee. Dilloo ends up in Guyana,

[1] Michelle Ramlagan, Review of *Diasporic (Dis)locations: Indo-Caribbean Women Writers Negotiate the Kala Pani* by Brinda Mehta, A*nthurium*, Vol. 7, Issue 1 of 2, Spring and Fall, 2010.

Lutchmee follows of her own volition after she has not heard word from Dilloo, and they manage by luck to find themselves bonded on the same estate. The challenges of estate life, with collusions between overseers, planters and magistrates and those like Hanooman who also ends up on the same estate, lead to a tragic end for Dilloo, who is depicted as both a leader of his people and a strong, righteous man. Replete with archetypes of every sort and for every race including whites and blacks, Jenkins, as David Dabydeen writes in the introduction to the version published in 2003, "is not radical enough to give Lutchmee her own voice, her own emotional and intellectual control over the narrative of her experiences" (20003, 19). Whereas C.L.R. James' *Minty Alley*, published in 1936, has no reference to the Indian population in Trinidad, interestingly enough, the Guyanese-born Edgar Mittelholzer's *A Morning at the Office*, first published in 1950, which takes a comedic look at office politics in a small establishment in Trinidad, brings the Indo-Trinidadian into the plot as an equal actor as the characters negotiate sexual attraction and repulsion, comment on colonial rule, and demonstrate the racial tensions in Trinidad at that time. By the 1970s, Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack Monkey* introduces the closeness of childhood friendships that go beyond race between Tee, the young black protagonist, and Moonie, her young Indian friend. In his 1979 novel, *The Dragon Can't Dance*, Earl Lovelace introduces the male Indian character Pariag. But as Linden Lewis writes, "Unlike the other central male characters in this novel Pariag, or Boya as he was more familiarly called, seems to be groping simultaneously with the definition of his masculinity and his ethnic identity. Pariag seems to be in search of himself in the world" (Lewis 1998, 177).

It was in the work of Indo-Trinidadian writers such as Samuel Selvon and V.S. Naipaul from the late 1950s, however, that we begin to see Indo-Trinidadian characters who are fleshed out with contradictions, humour, frailties, strengths and desires. Perhaps this delay in the introduction of fully rounded characterization of the Indo-Caribbean in literature was understandable as the system of Indian indenture continued until the second decade of the twentieth century and the incoming and outgoing migration of these labourers then and in relatively more recent history gave an air of transience to this population. Earlier colonization and the system of African slavery brought European and African-descended populations into closer, if more antagonistic, relationships for a period of four hundred years before Asian populations began to figure permanently on the landscape. Thus the primary opposition of peoples, the gender symbols and metaphors in the region tended to be those related to the African- or European-descended population. Characters like *Nennen, Ma-Davis* and *Tantie* that Merle Hodge writes about in *Crick Crack Monkey* or the proverbial "white woman" were recognizable archetypes in the mental landscapes of people. Those related to the Indo-Caribbean population retained a less visible or audible presence.

Nonetheless, if one systematically scours the scholarship, fiction and popular songs from the twentieth century, there emerges a distinctive set of terms, stereotypes and characterization that establish the presence of the East Indian population, and in particular, notions of Indo-Trinidadian femininity. It is difficult to identify categorically when and how this evolution occurred. Foreign anthropologists, in particular, tended to pick up some of the earliest nuances. Morton Klass's *East Indians in Trinidad: A Study in Cultural Persistence*, first published in 1961, is very thorough in its inventory of kinship

terms that were specific to the original settled groups. He demonstrates the persistence of these kinship forms of address as late as the fifth decade of the twentieth century. The most dominant form of address internal to the collective ethnic group to describe both the women and men was *jahaji bhai* (male) or *bahin* (female), which was corrupted to *jahaji* and *jahajin*, derived from the Hindi *jahaj,* the latter meaning ship. The transatlantic journey created a bond or a generic brotherhood among those who came on the same boat and who, therefore, crossed the *kala pani* together. The kinship of the boat trumped all other descriptors of family, religion or caste in the earliest settlements of migrants as this was the primary association of the ethnic family from India that began to populate the new territory. A very interesting experience for me, in 2001, was my encounter with an Indo-Caribbean association of women in Queens, New York, who called themselves *Jahajee Sisters.* This was a double take and reference back to the earliest migration and to their own status as first-generation female migrants in New York. The group included some Trinidadians, although they were primarily Guyanese migrants, some born in the United States, many university-educated and professionals and influenced by feminism. The terms *jehaji*, *jehagin* and *jahajee* as used by the various groups described above, carried and carries at present no pejorative connotations about and among the Indian population, despite the dismissive and inaccurate representation by the colonial authorities who managed to lump all Indian women who had travelled as single females into one category—prostitutes (Reddock 1985; Mohapatra 1995; Mohammed 2002).

Klass's inventory of kinship names is, in fact, supported by my own childhood village memory of the forms of address between and among Indian families. All women of a senior age would be addressed as *didi* out of respect. Hindu and Muslim titles differed. Since Hindus were in the majority, the Hindi/Bhojpuri titles became better known than those that were influenced by Urdu. Klass divides his inventory into first and second ascending generations and a first descending generation with differences based on whether a male or female was doing the calling. These forms of address were adhered to fairly rigidly. A young man would not, for instance, take the liberty of calling his brother's wife or even his elder brother by name and instead would refer to his elder brother as *bhe* or *bhai* (phonetically) and his brother's wife as *bhowji*. Calling someone by their given first name was simply not done, again out of respect. Klass notes, for instance, that "many men say proudly they have never called their wife's name aloud" (1961, 94). Pet or nick names could be applied but speaking someone's proper name was a sign of familiarity which was not sanctioned to ensure that distances were maintained within the close-knit household of an extended family. Affectionate displays were frowned upon so as to diminish the possibilities of intimacy and thus the risk of sexual overtures or too close alliances that could lead to potential divisiveness in the family. Klass points out that at the time of his study of village life in the 1950s, East Indians had been living in Trinidad for almost 100 years and only a few people had very large extended families. The closeness of the *jahajee* relationship and the acknowledgement and claiming of kinship of any degree were still very important to this community. To ensure marriage outside of the close kin group, it was necessary to recognize kin and avoid incest taboos. There was nonetheless a discernible "East Indian capacity for indefinite extension of kinships" (Klass 1961, 103). The boat brother and sister relationship remained so binding that pseudo-kin relationships allowed for the expansion

of family networks and thus for a support system that was necessary to a community which depended on its internal resources in the process of early resettlement.

From this early deployment of kinship and a reinvented family or brotherhood of the boat, some of the kinship terms have resurfaced with remarkable frequency. I want to draw attention to these terms as they became common in the marketplace exchange of language and gender symbolism among Indians in Trinidad, as well as among those outside of the ethnic and cultural group. Klass records that among the second ascending generation, either in male or female usage, *nana* (referring to one's maternal father or maternal father's brother) and *nani* (referring to maternal mother or any second ascending female on one's mother's side) were generally used. For the first descending generation, *beta* and *beti* for son and daughter, respectively, of any sibling or cousin; *dulahin* for a bride and *dolaha* for a bridegroom were generally used by all Indians. This was common practice among both Hindus and Muslims, whether rural or urban.

A lived example comes to mind. In the 1960s, an aged Indian woman moved into a house across the street from us in the small, relatively urban district of Princes Town. She was a Hindu of the Brahmin caste. Every now and then, Mrs. Maharaj or *Nani* as we called her would cry out sonorously and insistently from the top floor of her tall two-storeyed house to ours, "*Dulahin... Dulahheen... Dulahheeeen*", when she wanted to attract my mother's attention. Her voice echoed along the slope of houses downwind to the rest of the street's occupants. It was her right, if you like, to demand this kind of respect. My mother who had by then been married for over 12 years remained a *dulahin* to her as the younger woman in this neighbourly relationship. This construct of *Dulahin* for the young wife and *Nani* for the older woman, the implicit acceptance of the power relations between them, was founded on lines of hierarchy and authority that were clearly drawn in the pre-partition India from which all Indo-Trinidadians were descended. It provided the structure and psychological base for the complex jahajee village and increasingly family relationships based on birth, all of which aimed at ensuring kinship ties and respect for women and for men. The primary signifiers within the ethnic community were age, caste standing and marital status for women, while men had access to additional status markers including their occupations or wealth.

For the non-Indians, in particular, who lived on our street, my mother was Mrs. Mohammed and Mrs. Maharaj was Nani. My father called her Maharajin in acknowledgement of her caste. In *A House for Mr. Biswas*, V.S. Naipaul describes a scene that underscores the irreverence yet respect between the different religious groups that comprised the Indian population.

> Seeing the group of three walking Indian file across the plank over the gutter, F.Z. Ghany got up, spat out the matchstick, and greeted them with good humoured scorn. '*Maharajin, Majarajin*, and little boy'. He made most of his money from Hindus but, as a Muslim, distrusted them (1961, 42).

This mark of respect through kinship and caste names, despite the difference in religion, and in deference to age, was implicitly understood among the Indo-Trinidadian community well into the sixth and seventh decades of the twentieth century, just as

Indians also understood and used the term *Tantie* as a form of respect for women in Afro-descended families. And well into the century, young Indian girls were still called *Beti,* and young Indian males *Beta*, almost as a form of affection rather than emphasizing their youthfulness.

By the middle to late twentieth century, a variety of kinship terms came to be understood and appreciated not only within the Indo-Trinidadian community but among the rest of the society. The relationships were clearly laid out—*nani* was one's maternal grandmother; *nana*, maternal grandfather. Even today, the legacy of this hierarchy based on age and gender may still be observed by many. Elders ranked above juniors, and among people of similar age, males invariably outranked females. How these kinship terms came to be major signifiers of femininity and masculinity and were employed outside the Indian community, and how other metaphors were added concerns the story of an evolving feminism among Indo-Caribbean populations: the need for naming is valuable and a recognition of the etymologies of these terms is vital to understanding their liberatory or controlling potential.

Making meaning

Literature from the 1960s onwards conveys the changing stream of consciousness and accompanying archetypes and tropes that pertained directly to Indo-Caribbeanness. Harold Sonny Ladoo's *No Pain Like this Body* (1972) is a novel about a rice-growing Indian family in Trinidad. Its compelling prose echoes the violence of the relationship between Ma and Pa, demonstrating the failure of the Indo-Caribbean family to enact in real-life circumstances the framework created through its protective kinship structures as documented by Morton Klass. Nonetheless, in Ladoo's novel, the characters of Nana and Nani, Ma's parents, stand out as still inherently the keepers of, and consistently observant of, the older traditions of respect. Nani, in particular, is the female bearer of tradition and knowledge, of skill even: she can beat the drums, she attempts to soothe the boy's pain, and Ma still turns to her in times of trouble. In *A Brighter Sun* by Samuel Selvon, set in the 1950s, ideas have shifted yet again as Tiger and Urmilla are married and have moved to the suburban district of Barataria in their own home, away from the watchful eyes of the extended family. Selvon's subtle grasp of the complexities of Indian masculinity and femininity and its changes are excellent—the young couple not only call each other by name but there is an acknowledgement of love and companionship. Despite their marriage being arranged by their parents, they become friends and partners in this relationship, indicating that Selvon had picked up the subtle changes in the nature of the relations and power that women in the Indo-Trinidadian family possessed.

Unfortunately, none, or perhaps few, of these nuances of kinship, tradition, respect or evolution of gender relations emerges in the earlier song forms in Trinidad folk culture. The earliest calypsos that recognized Indian femininity tended to either romanticize the Indian woman as sexually attractive and attainable or, as Gordon Rohlehr writes, "The Indian woman was generally presented against the background of the Indian feast, and many calypsos in which such women appear are really not about the women at all, but about masked interracial conflict, in which the feast becomes a point of, or arena of, ethnic confrontation" (Rohlehr 1990, 261). The generic Indian woman *Dookhani* was featured in a number of calypsos in the 1930s. Interestingly enough, and perhaps not

surprisingly, The Mighty Sparrow's "Marajihn", first sung in 1982, captures the Indian woman in a package that was wrapped with sexual overtones while holding fast to all the stereotypes associated with Indo-Trinidadian women as received from kinship titles and from dress.

You are the genesis of my happiness
You are the one I always dreamed of
How can I exist without your sweet love
When I see you in your sari or your ohrni
I am captured by your innovative beauty
If it wasn't for your nani or your bhowji
I would marry you and tek you in the country
Marahjin, marajihn oh my sweet dulahin
Saucy marajihn, racy marajihn, all right
Dulahin dulahin
Dulahin, hear the sweet music playing

With the rise of the Mastana Bahar competition in the late 1960s, a competition "that was aimed at encouraging competitors, the majority of whom were Indians, to produce innovative music rather than imitate film songs and the traditional folk songs,"[2] Sundar Popo's 1970 song "Nana and Nani" comes out from the belly of Indo-Trinidadian folk culture.

Nana, Nani ghar se nikle
Dheere dheere chalte hain
Madura ke dukaan me
Dono jaake baithe hai
Nana peeye puncheon daaru,…
Charlie's wine aur Gilby wine,
Karire meri Nani.
Aga aga nana chale nani going behind
Nana drinking white rum
and nani drinking wine

Sundar Popo not only linguistically blends the Hindi with English but the introduction of this mixture of types of music, language and content gives rise to the new form marketed as chutney, signifying its origins in Indian culture. As his first and what was to become his most popular song, the characters of Nani and Nana loom large. Unlike the still-sacred space in which Harold Sonny Ladoo holds the male and female ancestral presence, Popo humanizes and locates them squarely in the context of poverty and distorted gender and social relationships that the breakdown of kinship and family structures signified as the society continued to evolve.

[2] From Sharda Patasar's PhD thesis, "Sounding the Landscape: Indo-Trinidadian musical identities in Trinidad 1935-2011". Unpublished draft, University of Trinidad and Tobago, 2012.

With the emergence of the first public female voice in chutney in the 1980s, some of these themes continued—the sauciness of the Indo-Trinidadian male and female population are rendered in Drupatee Ramgoonai's popular *Roll up the Tassa*, in which Bissessar, the male protagonist in the song, is referred to occasionally as *bayta/beta*, referencing that he is a young male, and there is the ubiquitous reference to the *dulahin*. By this time, the idea of the *nani*—the older, wiser woman to be respected in the family—had lost much of its earliest resonance and even the *nani* is associated with both sexual overtones and raucous behaviour, as in Sundar Popo's tune.

When Sita and Parbati
Start a song now in Hindi
But meh nani get on baad
She get the old man stick all hard

While I have only briefly touched on the emergence of popular discourse on Indo-Trinidadian femininity through music, it is to contemporary literature that we must turn for fracturing the archetypes. In novels like Lakshmi Persaud's *Butterfly in the Wind* (1990), Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996) and *Valmiki's Daughter* (2009), and Ramabai Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge* (2003), the characters are modern, nuanced, liberated, more complex in both their sexuality and their needs and desires. In all of these novels, Indo-Trinidadian femininity is central, confrontational even, and certainly not the shy retiring stereotypes dictated by early rules of kinship and gender or inscribed in religion. In Persaud's *Butterfly in the Wind*, clearly autobiographical, the character Kamla is a feisty and challenging young woman who will not accept homegrown truths or religious preachings without questioning their relevance to the current condition of women. In her subsequent novels, including *Sastra* and *Daughters of Empire*, we see a recurrent tendency to establish the potency of female power and to write this into the script, often challenging previous ones like the female characters in the *Ramayana* that depict more submissive models. The female and male archetypes inscribed in sacred texts like Sita and Draupaudi are constantly being invoked as the role models for Indo-Caribbean women, even though conditions and realities have undergone major transformations.

Mootoo's novels are very layered and disturbing, meant to diffuse the archetypes of heterosexuality or normativity as had been signified in the post-indentureship discourse on the Indo-Caribbean family structure. Espinet problematizes the Indian family farther afield. The metaphor of the swinging bridge captures the unsettled nature of the first migrant experience in Trinidad and the persistent tragedies that will follow the family upon its second migration to Toronto, a place where many Indo-Caribbean populations have settled. Mona, the story's narrator, maintains the calm at the centre of her family's storm which has emerged from their turbulent past and a tortuous history of indenture and poverty in south Trinidad. Her female characters are central to the resolution of the plot and by no means extras in a patriarchal play.

What has this more visible and audible presence of Indo-Caribbean women meant for the understanding of Indo-Caribbean femininities? It has created the space for homogeneity of character and the claiming of an "emotional and intellectual control over their own

narratives" (Dabydeen, in Jenkins 2003), but, in my view, the Indo-Caribbean literature has yet to fashion the compelling tropes that allow us a fundamental grasp of the multiple, complex and diverse ways in which Indo-Caribbean women have forged their gender and feminist identities on Caribbean soil. A few examples come to mind for the situation of Afro-Caribbean peoples: the character of Caliban who allows a rereading of the enslaved man from many disciplines; or we can think of the concept of limbo invoked by Wilson Harris, the state of inbetweenity from European mythology recast as the loss of the African limb of culture, and so on. The contemporary English female character cannot now be comprehended without a host of writers and novels which have allowed for insights, drawn from history and cultural precepts that determined English women's sphere for manoeuvring. The novels of Jane Austen in the late eighteenth century and the Bronte sisters in the early nineteenth century have given us tropes for appreciation and for building composite mental pictures of English womanhood. The mythopoetics of the Indo-Caribbean experience remain submerged in the literary novels which, though eloquent, depict Indian women via almost personal narratives of self and exile. One exception that suggests such a mythopoetics of Indian femininity might be the Jamaican writer Olive Senior's "Arrival of the Snake-Woman". "Everything about the Snake-Woman was magical from the start, even the way she arrived without our seeing, though we were all looking," writes Senior. She continues her tale and we are drawn into the web of mystery and romance which she invests in the coolie woman.

> Any thoughts I might have had that she was not a true Heathen vanished when I heard this, for Parson Bedlow had been very explicit about one thing and it was the Heathen's sinful lust for gold—"Their tinkling ornaments about their feet . . . The chains, and the bracelets . . . the ornaments of their legs. . . the rings, the nose jewels"—exactly as it was in the Bible! And yet, I didn't care. I was already half in love with the snake woman, with her nose ring and tinkling ornaments and her outrageous, barbaric ways; I could hardly wait for Cephas and Son Son to go with Moses to the Bay and bring her back to the hills (Senior 1989).

Invigorating feminist tropes

In the light of a body of literature still in its infancy, the symbolic rites and rituals of religion and adornment, the meanings invested in kinship titles, and the originary narratives of the first migration over the kala pani have provided metaphors and inspiration for a discourse that demonstrates the soul of Indo-Caribbean feminism. Some of these ideas about womanhood have been implicit in the scholarship that focusses on this population, which has itself been visible from the 1990s onwards[3]. Sherry Ann Singh's *The Ramayana Tradition and Socio-Religious Change in Trinidad 1917-1990*, for example, though not focussed on femininity, examines the ubiquitous Sita who presents loyalty, support and devotion, in the face of very taxing tests of her virtue.

I focus here on three main tropes—*jahajee, matikor* and *bindi*—that have emerged consistently over the last two decades like a rhythmic drumbeat, and consider how and

[3] See, for example, references by Indo-Caribbean scholars such as Neesha Haniff, Gabrielle Hosein, Shaheeda Hosein, Halima Kassim, among many others.

why the writers or drivers of these have absorbed them into their treasury of concepts that can be transmuted and altered to suit the varied architecture required of differently housed audiences.

Jehajin - Jahajee

The invocation of the term *jahajee* by the Queens, New York, group Jahajee Sisters, comprising Indian women who themselves were migrants from the Caribbean to the US or whose parents were, signals both a continuity and transformation of the concept of sisterhood of the boat. Here the migration stream being recognized is a second one, the growth of a diaspora, another crossing of the water from the Caribbean farther north. The group describes its origins in the publication *Bolo Bahen! Speak Sister!* which was edited by Taij Kumarie Moteelall, Sasha Kamini Parmasad and Purvi Shah and published by the blog Jahajee Sisters: Empowering Indo-Caribbean Women—Sakhi for South Asian Women in 2009. The goal of the activist group is the empowerment of Indian women, in particular the Indo-Caribbean community in Queens. The activity which brought the women together was an interactive series of workshops held from January to April 2009 in Queens under the Arts & Empowerment (A&E) Program of New York City. The workshops focused on the issue of domestic violence, which was explored through the media of poetry, prose, film and dialogue and, like the earlier second wave consciousness-raising groups, the programme sought to harness and develop the voices and the power of women and girls by encouraging them to share their thoughts, emotions, experiences and, crucially, their visions for change. I was invited as a keynote speaker in 2010 to one of their annual events. Upon meeting the group of women, I was impressed by their level of commitment—these were educated, professional women who were striving for personal freedoms as women while being equally concerned with the conditions of their populations, such as the plight of the aged in their communities.

The trope of *jahajee* clearly builds on and is derived from the earliest meanings applied to the term, that of support among the first boat people, and in this case especially women supporting each other. This is confirmed in one of the poems in *Bolo Bahen*, expressing the continuity of this journey from India to the Caribbean to New York, interpreted as another crossing of the kala pani or black waters—this time the Caribbean Sea.

My Jahajee Sisters

Pardesi, Pardesi… I feel you looking for me!
"Don't fret, Coolie Woman, dry your tears"
Riding on the wings of my Jahajee sisters, mothers, grandmas
Gliding over the Indian Ocean, the Atlantic, Kala Pani
Standing firm on their shoulders
Leaning on the strength of my Jahajee Sisters
Leaning on the strength of my Jahajee Sisters

...We *were once caterpillars*
emerging from cocoons
now butterflies with iron wings
soaring to new heights.

The concept of the voyage is transformed, not unlike in Isaac Teale's *Ode to the Sable Venus* (1765) and Thomas Stothard's visual depiction of the ode in *The Voyage of the Sable Venus* (1794), in which women's beauty and strength are privileged over the horrors of the journey and the dehumanizing of their femininity. Uniting the soft and hard edges of this voyage with images of iron wings and silky cocoons, the Jahajee Sisters envision a world in which sisterhood is so strong, it erases patriarchy, ends violence against women and restores balance. Their achievement of justice is dependent on collective power. They have deployed the concepts of brotherhood and sisterhood of the boat, of a shared experience of trauma if you like, its echoes uniting not only generations but Indo-Caribbean populations across geographical borders. While practical in their intent and outputs, the group uses art, music, public support for other causes, and progressive ideas on education and health to empower both themselves and their communities. In this rendition of the jahajee, the sisterhood of the boat, the Jahajee Sisters have responded to the call by Brinda Mehta to engage with the *kala pani* discourse. The journey, first across the black water from India to the Caribbean and now from the Caribbean to New York, further dispenses with caste and status differences, allowing endless possibilities for the evolution of Indo-Caribbean femininity.

Matikor

The trope of *matikor,* perhaps the most dominant and potentially useful one for defining an Indo-Caribbean femininity, is derived from the popular ritual of the maticore ceremony which was held the night before a wedding ceremony. Here, in a primarily female space, the young bride would be introduced to the pleasures and vagaries she must expect of married life, amidst much ribaldry and teasing in the form of song. In this gathering of women, young and old, stories were also shared, experiences passed on through humour, and solidarities built between generations of women. The songs that were acted out, which were both sensually and sexually expressive, became known as chutney songs. By titling one of the first edited volumes dedicated to Indian women *Matikor: The Politics of Identity for Indo-Caribbean Women*, in 1999, Rosanne Kanhai signalled in feminist consciousness and literature a construct that has increasingly attained significance for a characterization of Indo-Caribbean femininity. Drupatee Ramgoonai, the popular female Indo-Trinidadian singer, drew heavily on this imagery both consciously and unconsciously to establish a public stage personality. Kanhai's introduction situates the current and future potential of *matikor* as a valuable symbol:

> Matikor provided a rare opportunity for plantation and post-plantation women to claim a space of celebration and articulation. Adorning themselves with their best clothing, face decorations, and jewellery—brought from India or acquired during indentureship—women could give themselves the beauty and dignity denied to them in the rigours of daily life. They shared gossip and jokes and sang traditional songs, and performed dances that were celebratory and sexually suggestive. Matikor was a place of healing where women could act out their resistance against degradation and depersonalization imposed on them by a ruling class...Matikor exists today, its endurance and transformative capacity providing a lens through which the identity of Indo-Caribbean women can be explored (1999, xi).

Kanhai notes in this introduction that *matikor* remains a closed, ethnic space against the backdrop of the Afro-Caribbean majority and a reminder of the spiritual strength founded in community and tradition as Indian women continue to enter the wider Caribbean and global mainstreams. Like the concept of *jahajee* above, *matikor* is presented as a primarily Indian ethnic space, an affirmation of the creative energy and liberatory possibilities that might be derived from the original maticore ceremonies, although its public presentation through chutney performances offers other creative possibilities outside of a closed ethnic and gender spectrum. In the volume edited by Kanhai, a Guyanese and Trinidadian network of women scholars, activists and writers were encouraged to become a part of this new expression of the maticore space—another exclusively female Indo-Caribbean space created for sharing stories and confidences, insights and challenges across time and space with the aim of empowering each other and successive generations. Parallel in some ways to the abstract space created by the recasted concept of *jahajee*, this new *matikor* does not replace the ritual performance of *maticore* that continues to survive in attenuated form in Indo-Caribbean family weddings. This joyous ritual and the performances around the bride and groom the night before the knot is tied seem universal to all groups. The *maticore* is the Hindu or Indian bridal shower. When marriages were arranged between very young women who had just entered puberty, sometimes to young men who were equally inexperienced, the *maticore* was devised as a means of sexual instruction. Currently, when brides are no longer assumed to be naive about sexuality, the ritual plays another function, that of support and celebration, and, as an offshoot, the site for the creation of new chutney songs.

Kanhai, and increasingly other writers, have begun to use *maticore* or *matikor* to signify shared cultural histories and sisterhood among Indo-Caribbean women. The trope contains possibilities for a recognized concept that might define the unique nature of Indo-Caribbean women's struggles against an Indo-Caribbean patriarchy. It might and should be extended to other arenas of feminist struggles. A longer span of history and their demographic and cultural dominance in the region has given European- and African-descended women a longer period of incubation for their struggles. There was an implicit assumption in the rise of the second wave feminist movement that all women shared similar histories of patriarchal control and social repression, so that considerations of the varied experiences of class or ethnicity did not surface until well into the late 1990s[4]. The rise of post-structuralism and deconstruction, and the admission of postcolonial thought that there were many narratives to be told, has allowed a space for different groups, including Indo-Caribbean women, to articulate the differences within community or by religion even, and to locate the metaphorical and empirical components that speak to these differences.

Bindi

In *Bindi*, Rosanne Kanhai again summons up another icon for Indian femininity—one that is premised not on a ceremonial event but on a decorative tradition that marks status.

[4] See, for instance, Rawwida Baksh-Soodeen's "Issues of Difference in Contemporary Caribbean Feminism" in *Rethinking Caribbean Difference, Feminist Review* 59, ed. Patricia Mohammed, 1998.

Derived from the Sanskrit *bindu*, meaning a drop, Kanhai writes that the "traditional *bindi* is a round dot pasted on a Hindu woman's forehead just above and between the eyebrows" (2011, i). The colour and material of the drop signified age and gendered roles—sandalwood for young girls, vermilion for married women and ash for widows. While the origins are shrouded, it is thought that the vermilion for married women signified the menstrual flow that signalled the capacity for childbearing, especially as during the marriage ceremony this was applied as a stripe of vermilion powder along the centre parting of the woman's hair, leading to the dot or drop on the forehead. Kanhai notes that in contemporary times, the *bindi* has become a fashion statement, highly decorative and multi-coloured, and has possibly lost the original intent of defining the stages of womanhood and what was allowed, or not, at each stage. While the *maticore* was a secretive, separate and highly sexualized space, bindi as a decorative and now less exclusive practice allows for another metaphor of Indo-Caribbean femininity to continue its emergence in a Western context, perhaps literally "bringing Indo-Caribbean womanhood to the fore". Perhaps what is most fascinating about the metaphoric possibilities of bindi is that a decorative device on the body that once signified and controlled women has been appropriated for ornamental use. In its loss of inherent originary meanings, the decorative device has been transformed into a thing of power from that of submissiveness to strict gender definitions of female status.

A discursive space for symbols of Indo-Caribbean feminist identity

Why has it become necessary for a naming of the Indo-Caribbean female experience that defines both Indo-Caribbean femininity and Indo-Caribbean feminism? The emergence of second wave feminism in the last decades of the twentieth century took for granted a collective notion that we were all sisters under the skin, whether this skin was white or black or brown. The evolution of literature, scholarship, activism and practices has revealed that historical, cultural, class and geographical differences cannot be dismissed. They lead to different accesses to power, to privilege, to being visible or invisible, to having the confidence of a voice, or having that voice dismissed, or worse, given no credence. All of the latter are antithetical to the larger feminist goals of empowerment.

The three major tropes *jahajee, matikor and bindi* selected above for scrutiny are linked but are not exclusive to Hinduism. The early Indo-Islamic population was in the minority compared to the dominant Hindu group and, thus, the ideas pertaining to an Indo-Islamic presence has been more subdued. I have attempted to connect to symbols of Islamic women (having been born into an Islamic family) in a paper entitled "Daughters of Khadija" (2001) in which I viewed the Prophet Muhammed's wife Khadija's greater age and financial resources, since she owned the household business, as key in providing her with relative independence and autonomy as a woman. Thus was she able to influence the Prophet's thinking and teachings as the religion of Islam developed. The idea of the highly controlled or submissive Islamic woman, therefore, is not grounded in the origins of this religion. I also found one concept in Islam that seems to parallel the ideas of womanhood under Hinduism and applies to most cultures that have sought to contain female sexuality. The concept of *fitna*, which derived from an Arabic word meaning to seduce, tempt or lure away, was implicitly employed by both the colonial authorities and the male patriarchy in reference to Islamic women to control their sexuality and display of seductive femininity. It is parallel in some ways to the concept of *prakti* in Hinduism.

> The female consists of *shakti* (energy/power, the energizing principle of the universe) and *prakti* (nature, the undifferentiated matter of the universe). The latter is uncultured and therefore dangerous, sustaining the idea that women are impure, easily polluting, and themselves polluted. In metaphorical terms, this has meant that the female, as uncultured nature, must be controlled by the male (Mohammed 2002, 147).

The Indo-Caribbean population was drawn from pre-partition India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and there were far more commonalities in its members' practices and ideas of gender despite religious differences, many of which did not resurface with clarity until both religions became reconstituted in Caribbean villages and communities. Thus, the employment of tropes that derive specifically from Hindu practices does not separate Hindu and Islamic Indo-Caribbean feminism. They relate to more universal ideas of femininity and to the control of women, despite religious difference. There are other symbolic markers in Islam which have emerged in more contemporary times—those of the *hijab* and the *burkha*. The wearing of these crosses ethnic lines, as many African women also currently cover their heads or faces and bodies when in public. What this signals to us is that newly emerging measures of female control need to be scrutinized, even while the older ones such as bindi and matikor spaces have been opened up by women themselves, over centuries of whittling away at their meanings.

Inviting a range of concepts and ideas, of practices and rituals into one arena for investigation, rather than isolating them, presents a potentially fruitful area for expanding our understanding of the complexity of gender and feminist theory and practice. I have underscored two primary sites where these differences have emerged in the definition of Indo-Caribbean femininity. The first is the burgeoning literary space, the second is the conceptual scholarly space. I see the need for more dialogue between these two spaces and for practitioners of both to dig deeper into the unconscious as well as magical and mythical elements of Indo-Caribbean cultural heritage past and present. In order to capture the wider public imagination and idiomatic use among feminist and popular writers and artists, perhaps the concept of *matikor* which seems most promising needs to be mined for its submerged potential. Why did this ritual emerge? What specific purposes did it serve? What unintended purposes resulted from this ritual of a separate women's space? How has the ritual been transformed and why has it persisted in the ceremonies of Indians? All of these meanings must be deconstructed and reinvented by new generations of women who take the concept and the ritual outside of its original site—before nuptials—and into the open, and place it under the scrutiny of a male and a wider non-Indian female gaze. In inviting us to engage with the concepts of jahajee, matikor and bindi, Jahajee Sisters and Rosanne Kanhai have already begun this task. What surfaces from this review is that a collective Indo-Caribbean feminist project has been ongoing over at least two full decades. What remains on the agenda is for those ideas to further crystallize and to become part of a wider dialogue with all feminisms, with the insights shared for the collective good, rather than being viewed as divisive of the feminist struggle.

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The Depths of Rose, 'A Wind that Rose': A Woman called Feroza Rose Mohammed

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Abstract

> *First they came for the communists, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a communist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak out for me* (Pastor Martin Niemöller [1892–1984], as quoted in Mohammed 2009).

"Speak Out" against injustices is the doctrine that guides Feroza Rose Mohammed, a woman many know simply as Rose. It is this belief that brought her the glare of publicity and created a storm of controversy in October 2007, when she protested on Eid day against the placing of wooden barriers to separate men and women at the TML mosque. The words of Muhammad Ali (1942-), "service to others is the rent you pay here for your room on earth", underpin the philosophy of Rose as wife, mother and citizen. Guided by the dictates of her faith, Islam, and the admonitions of the *Qur'an*—"You are the best people ever raised for the good of mankind because you have been raised to serve others; you enjoin what is good and forbid evil and believe in Allah." (3:111)—she firmly believes in the promotion of good which would lead to the improved welfare of Trinidadian society. If one is to be defined by labels, Rose would want the following ascribed to her: Muslim, Trinidadian, passionate, simple, humble, service-oriented, empathetic and tolerant. Most of all, Rose embodies the elusive spirit of the transformative leader.

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Who is Rose?

On the morning of 13 July 2011, I met Rose at her home in Port of Spain. This was actually my first encounter with the matriarch who had become a legend. Before we retired to her breakfast nook for coffee, I was introduced to her family—immediate and extended—via a photo gallery. My interview session also concluded with a look at a digitalised slideshow of family photos. Over morning coffee, I was told slivers of her life story and experiences that contributed to making her Rose—Muslim, Trinidadian and civic-minded but most of all, a person/woman with a voice.

Born during World War II, one of eight children, Rose grew up initially in San Juan and at age seven moved to Port of Spain. Moving from San Juan to Port of Spain meant there was interaction with the wider society beyond the confines of the Indian and, in particular, the Muslim group. In her household, Rose recalls, it was emphasised that everyone is a human being and must be treated with respect. As a child walking to school, she had at least to say "good morning", for what felt like a hundred times before she reached the school gate.

As practising Muslims, her parents ensured that Rose and her siblings received a religious education in addition to their secular one. To that end, Rose and her siblings attended *maktab* (religious classes) at the Queen Street *masjid* (mosque) in Port of Spain. They also attended *Eid namaaz* (prayers) at the St. Joseph TML *masjid* where Moulvi Ameer Ali was the *imam* (priest). As children, Rose and her siblings were expected to read *namaaz* and fast during the month of *Ramadan* (ninth month of the lunar Islamic calendar).

Her parents were active participants in the Muslim community, in particular the movement led by Moulvi Ameer Ali that culminated with the formation of the Trinidad Muslim League (TML) in 1946.[1]

The ideological foundations of the organisation suggested that the principles of rationalism, pragmatism and inquiry would be upheld particularly as it relates to religious convictions and applied to modern-day living. It was this progressive atmosphere that Rose Mohammed inhabited as a child and a teen which would define her worldview as a young adult and a respected elder in our society.

As I learned, her parents were married in March 1936 in what is termed in local parlance as a "table marriage", that is, where the bride and groom are openly seated together on a stage. This marriage took place at a time when it was common among Muslims for the bride and bridegroom not to sit next to each other during the *nikah* (marriage ceremony). Instead, the bride would remain inside her house, while the bridegroom sat before the assembled guests. Witnesses would then carry messages to and fro between them in order that each may be informed of the other's acceptance of the marriage vows. By the mid-1930s, following the return of Moulvi Ameer Ali from Egypt, the practice of "table marriage" was introduced. This practice was seen as contentious by the more conservative/traditional in the Muslim community.

At the age of 17, she gained her Cambridge School Certificate and entered public service as a "temporary public servant" at the Government Housing Loans Board. During that time, she met her husband, Tallim, when he came to review the financial statements of the Loans Board from the Audit Department. In her book, *Speak Out* (2009), she relates how they met, their courtship and early family life. Much of it she repeated that morning. Rose indicates that a strong, deep and abiding love and respect for each other have been the foundation of their marital life. As we chatted, the phone rang; it was her husband just checking in with her before he pursued his round of golf. This led to a discussion of marriage—marriage strategies, finding a suitable partner and getting married. Given her upbringing and her experiences, it is not surprising that Rose has a very modernistic perspective on marriages. While Islam permits Muslim men to marry Jewish or Christian women, Muslim jurists hold that Muslim women should not marry non-Muslims.[2] Despite that, Rose sees no harm in Muslim females marrying non-Muslim men who convert to Islam and, more importantly, treat their wives with respect.

Through the eyes of Rose

One may be forgiven for initially thinking the interpretations and perspectives of the Muslim community that Rose offers are simplistic. But as one delves deeper, or experiences the ways of the local Muslim community and interrogates its *raison d'être*, one appreciates the powerful and keen insights into religion as an institution and its impacts proffered by Rose. Islam, she notes, is a universal religion with a pluralistic face but the Muslim *ummah* (community) is divided. Firmly believing that Islam is a religion for everyone, regardless of class, ethnicity, nationality or gender, she holds that the diversity of the *ummah* is God's way of imposing tolerance and reconciling differences. "This is a deliberate plan by Allah to bring people together in love and harmony," Rose said. She notes that many Muslims do not hold to the tenet "to establish upon earth the unity of Allah and oneness of humanity" because of the perspective that Muslims today must adhere to the pristine interpretations of the early Muslims.[3] It is worth recalling the speech by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia to the Tenth Islamic Summit Conference in Malaysia, 2003, as Rose did. There, he noted,

> *From being a single ummah we have allowed ourselves to be divided into numerous sects, mazhabs and tarikats, each more concerned with claiming to be the true Islam than our oneness as the Islamic ummah. We fail to notice that our detractors and enemies do not care whether we are true Muslims or not* (Mohamad, 2003).

In this frame, the focus becomes less on the *why*—the principles which underlie the words of the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* (words and acts of the Prophet Muhammad, u.w.b.p.)—and more on the *what* of the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah.* The migration of Islam fostered with it cultural creation and, not surprisingly, Muslim scholars and various other spokespersons have attempted to maintain the legitimacy of Islamic knowledge. The philosophical perspective of what is religion and religiosity emerges in the conversation with Rose Mohammed. If the purpose of religion is to build an ideal community in which the adherents achieve social, economic and political wellbeing as well as harmony and peace, then one needs to be more concerned with the substance of faith. To her, the divergences among Muslims are less important than the belief in one God, the observance

of the pillars of Islam, respect for each other and the ability to do good. She passionately advocates for tolerance of each other's right to differ in practice, indicating that in her opinion Muslims agree on over 90 per cent of practices and convictions. The less than ten per cent over which there are differences is the cause of much anger among the Muslim population. "If only we could be more tolerant," she says, "if only".

Acknowledging that the Muslim community of Trinidad and Tobago is insular, Rose firmly believes that the community should recall some of the precepts of Islam such as "let there be no compulsion in religion." Tolerance and respect should be the watchwords which govern the community. The Muslim community needs to be responsive to the changing dynamics of the society; they need to "open up" to others. After all, Islam advocates peace, Rose notes.

For Rose, Islam and the *Qur'an* can provide insight and guidance for societies. Indeed, as Amina Wadud (1999), who has provided an interpretive reading of the *Qur'an* from an Islamic feminist perspective, contends the *Qur'an* can provide not only insight and clarification into gender justice but holds great promise for gender reform and thus, moving society (Muslim and non-Muslim) towards a more enlightened collaboration between men and women. Rose's creed is "not only to read the *Qur'an* but to try to live the *Qur'an*; to show love, caring, appreciation and understanding. This is the *Qur'an* that I try to live."

Throughout her life, Rose respected people's right to be different and lives the dictum "you to your religion and I to mine"; she believes that through friendships and social connectivity across various communities unity will be achieved. Over the years, Rose Mohammed has been a proactive member of multiple civil society organisations representing the gamut of religions, ethnicities, geographies and classes, holding true to the lesson learnt as a child that everyone is a human being and must be treated with respect. For instance, she has been a Board Member of St. Martins Welfare Organisation (Christian), the initiator of the San Juan Senior Citizens Birthday Club (Christian), a foundation member of the halfway house for battered women in Port of Spain, Executive Member of the Trinidad Muslim League Ladies Association (Muslim), co-founder and first President of the Indian Women's Group of Trinidad and Tobago (all denominations), coordinator for the Mission for Charity (Christian), a Board Member of the Aagaman Committee (non-denominational), a Board Member of the Trinidad Muslim League (Muslim), a Board Member of the Hindi Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago (Hindu), and Founder/President of the National Muslim Women's Organisation of Trinidad and Tobago (Muslim) (Mohammed 2009, 79-89).

During the conversation, Rose reminds me that when the *Qur'an* was revealed, the first word was *iqra* (read) and, as such, Islam is a religion concerned with literacy. Raising the levels of religious literacy will make Muslims aware of the centrality of *Qur'anic* teachings and *Sunnah*. Knowledge, it may be argued, encourages the believers to look at the world around them, strengthen their faith and implement that knowledge in order to worship God. Life, Rose notes, is constantly evolving and the Muslim community in Trinidad has changed as a result of education and co-existing in a Caribbean Westernised-Christian society (understood to be more prone to individual rights,

achievement and success). While Rose believes that the *Qur'an* is translated too literally and the parabolic messages are sometimes lost, she is adamant that the *Qur'an* provides guidance on profound beliefs, values and principles and it must be understood in the context of time, as does Wadud (1999) who has asserted that the *Qur'an* does not prescribe one single, timeless and unchanging social structure.

Today, culture is often mistaken for religion, though sometimes the distinction is unclear. Various streams of global cultural practices and customs have had an impact on Islam, which impact, in turn, has influenced the practices and interpretations of the doctrine. The foreign influence of missionaries on the local Muslim community has been strong and has contributed in no small way to Islam becoming sombre, insular and rigid, Rose believes. Rose noted some of the Muslim missionaries who visit Trinidad sometimes "try to introduce different practices because of the culture of the country from which they come but we should compare and see if our ways meet the essentials of Islam". The "silly ideas of the *imams"* which have arisen as a result of the increased Arabisation of Islam should also be interrogated before accepting it as truth. These must be assessed using the essentials of the *Qur'an* and *Hadith.*

To counter the debates on the variances in practice and interpretation, Rose advocates for the improvement in faith literacy whereby individuals would improve their knowledge of Islam. In discussing the potential and constraints of the local Muslim community, Rose notes that the community is insular but there are many bright and intelligent young Muslim females, and they must be willing to raise their voices and not be subject to the authority of the *imama* (priests). They need to think critically and engage fully with the tenets of the faith and counter some of these "silly ideas".

Individuals have minds and intellect, the power of reasoning and the free will to accept or reject knowledge. This rationalism and freedom to inquire are central to the doctrine of *ghair mukallidism,* the creed to which Rose was exposed at TML and continues to hold as truth. Rose encourages local Muslims to engage in self-directed learning and to create an environment in which independent thought and reasoning will thrive. Stating that issues must be examined in their contexts and deductions made using reason, Rose implores Muslims to interrogate the emergent judgmental and orthopractic nature of Islam.

Rose herself has questioned some of the practices. For instance, she interprets the injunction "form a straight line in the mosque" to mean that "when it's crowded we should make room to accommodate everybody and so, people stand close together, but when there is room in the mosque we can stand in any place and read namaaz (prayers) in comfort."

Females, Rose says, must interrogate the social practice of wearing the *hijab* (understood as head covering) and the observance of *purdah* (understood as segregation of the sexes). Rose notes that many of her fellow Muslims are critical of her for not wearing the *hijab.* In response to such criticism, Rose remarks, "I believe I am always dressed decently. If I am attending a business meeting or a luncheon I'll wear a pantsuit; if I am attending a party I wear a modest dress; if I am playing lawn tennis or walking I wear a tracksuit and for Indian or Islamic functions I will wear a *shalwar,* but all times I dress modestly." She

continues, the "important thing is what is in the head not on the head." Some females choose to wear the *hijab* on occasion (e.g., at the mosque or at religious gatherings). Rose says that she prefers the *orhni*, she feels comfortable wearing the style of dress she grew up with, the style of her foreparents. She asks, "Does wearing the *hijab* make my prayers stronger? Would it increase my faith? Would it lead me to heaven? It is what is in the heart." Some females are also engaging in *de-hijabing* that is, having worn the *hijab* for several years they are now choosing not to wear it for a variety of reasons.

She believes that the "deen (religion) of Islam is very strong and that there is a high level of consciousness of Islam among the local Muslim community". Nevertheless, she believes that there is need for understanding Islam in the context of modern society while ensuring that the practices of adherents meet the required essentials and values of Islam. This underscores the importance of *iqra* and *ijitihad* (freedom to inquire) to achieving a progressive understanding of Islam. For instance, Rose queried modern perspectives on leisure in Islam, noting that the *Qur'an* is silent on the issue and many Muslims frown on any participation in music, song, dance and sport, particularly by women. Rose holds that these activities should be acceptable if done decently and modestly. However, she contends that this is an area that requires further investigation by scholars. She candidly states that she enjoys playing lawn tennis and swimming and attending football and cricket games. As a Trinidadian, she sees beauty in the art forms of the Kings and Queens of Carnival Bands and appreciates uplifting calypsos like *The Ganges and the Nile* or even the steelband playing Indian music or *qaseedas.* As a Caribbean-Western-Muslim, Indo-Trinidadian female who enjoys her country's culture and environment, Rose firmly advocates an interpretation of Islam for Trinidad and Tobago, here and now. As Rose spoke, I recalled the ideas of 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nablusi (eminent Muslim scholar and Sufi, born in Damascus in the mid-seventeenth century into a family of Islamic scholars) who passionately advocated for truth and social justice and was open to new social practices (drinking coffee, using musical instruments and public entertainment) and examining them in the context of *shariah.*

Rose sees intra- and inter-faith dialogue as a solution to some of the stereotyping and misunderstandings that exist about Islam such as that it is intolerant, violent, oppressive, etc. Further, the *imama* and *ulema* (religious scholars), regardless of religious sect or school of thought should meet annually and discuss matters of mutual interest and take a common position on national matters affecting the community, she believes.

Faith, truth, patience and righteous deeds are as equally important as tolerance, empathy, respect and human dignity. More importantly, as individuals, we are all part of the human race; there is need to see ourselves mirrored in each other, we are all human beings regardless of the external manifestations. Rose's dream, therefore, is for non-discrimination and respect among the various groups of the human race. "There is need to [re]learn to accept patiently, peacefully and wisely divergent viewpoints from different people," she said.

As Rose spoke, I was reminded of the wisdom of Ibn'Arabi (Abū 'Abdillāh Muhammad ibn 'Alī ibn Muhammad ibn `Arabī, a Sufi mystic and philosopher, in *Bezels of Wisdom*

(*Fuṣūṣ al Hikam*), when he advised Muslims not to discriminate against dissimilar creeds or faiths. He states as follows:

> *Be aware so that you do not restrict yourself to a particular tenet (regarding the knowledge of Reality), for you would forfeit much good, indeed you would forfeit the true knowledge of what Reality is.*
>
> *Therefore, be completely and utterly receptive to all doctrinal forms, for God, the Most High, is too All-embracing and Great to be confined with one creed rather than another, for He (God) has said, 'Wheresoever, you turn, there is the Face of God* (Kakaie 2009).

There is need to reconsider the institutional structure of Islam that places emphasis on separating the private and public spheres as it relates to restrictions in the way people engage and treat with each other. While Islam may have liberated women, according them various rights and entitlements, practices abound globally that restrict their freedom, demean them and inflict suffering on them. Islam advocates a role-based relationship between husband and wife and both are obliged to treat each other with kindness and respect. Her own courtship and marriage reveal those depths of respect and kindness. As indicated earlier, the story of her courtship is told in *Speak Out.* Rose relates that upon being introduced to Rashide Tallim Mohammed, she asked him which name to use. He promptly responded, "Call me Tallim, as it is nearer to darling." Rose indicated that though he asked her out several times she refused. Eventually, she accepted an invitation to a birthday luncheon of a mutual friend and that changed everything, as he showed himself attentive to her needs and well-being. But, she notes, the real turning point for her was on the return to the office. It had rained heavily in Port of Spain and the canals were filled with water. As they approached a canal, he bodily lifted her over the canal and then took out his clean, white handkerchief and wiped her feet and shoes. Within one week of that date, he proposed to her and they were married in March 1963. She also indicated that for her entire married life, "Tallim never wanted me to cook, clean or wash; he hired help to do those things." Rose must have been happy to hear that she would not have to cook. As a child, she recalls, her mother divided the house chores equally between the siblings. However, when it was her turn to cook she paid her younger brother to cook for her. To this day, she said, she can only do the basics in the kitchen.

In narrating aspects of her life and marriage, she told me that up to the mid-1970s, they were a "one-car family". As such, she and Tallim went to work together, had lunch together and returned home together. When her husband changed jobs during the mid-1970s the togetherness they had of going to work together and returning home together changed and for her it was a very sad period, though as she indicated, she adjusted to the change.

In 1980, Rose retired from the public service as a Senior Organisation and Management Officer in the Ministry of Finance. She did this to assist with the management of the newly established family business. She devoted eight years to growing and developing the business before retiring from work. She noted her dream was to study but, like many

women particularly of her generation, she deferred her dream because of work, family and civil society commitments. At age 55 in her role as wife, mother, mother-in-law and grandmother she returned to the classroom to obtain her MBA. Her dissertation was on steelpan music. It would be recalled that earlier it was stated Rose enjoyed the culture of Trinidad and Tobago. Rose Mohammed was not content to achieve her dream: "I may have retired from work but I have not retired from life," she said. And believing that more could be done to promote justice and equality, Rose applied her knowledge and skills to assist civil society groups in their quest to improve the quality of life for others.

During the conversation, Rose mentioned that the Muslim community needs to overcome the shame and stigma relating to domestic violence and incest and address the issues head-on as it has implications for individuals and their ability to functionally normally within the society. She notes that there are women in marriages who are dominated by their husbands, they are not allowed to improve themselves and cannot question their husband because of fear he may retaliate, physically or verbally. She feels that some Muslim men see women as maids; they never treat their wives with respect; they believe they are superior. On the issue of polygamy, Rose states that while "men are allowed more than one wife I often ask my female friends why the principle of multiple partners applies to men only."

The ten-year-old National Muslim Women's Organisation was formed to build sisterhood and promote the advancement of Muslim women in Trinidad. While acknowledging the role of the organisation is to educate and to engage in charity, the organisation also seeks to promote understanding, appreciation and tolerance of differences between Muslims and non-Muslims. There are many bright young Muslim women who need a forum to express their views. "Muslim women must take up our positions in society, as contributors to society," she said. The National Muslim Women's Organisation, Rose agrees, may be well positioned to groom and mentor young women to take up positions in the forefront as contributors to the society. This, Rose said, may include positioning them to be in Parliament. It will mean challenging the cultural concepts and perceptions of the role of Muslim women. Iterating that women are endowed with intellectual capacity and that the first word in the *Qur'an* is *iqra*, she vehemently questioned the lack of female presence on the panels that interpret the *Qur'an* and categorically stated that Muslim leaders should review their perspective on women and allow them to deliver the *kubah* (sermons) and make pronouncements of *tafsir* (Interpretations) *and fiqh* (jurisprudence).

While not a self-proclaimed feminist, Rose articulates the issues of feminism: participation, inclusion, access, voice, equality and self-determination of females. Islam preaches equality but in practice, women are treated differently. She will not allow herself to be treated differently because she is a woman. Women are bestowed with intelligence and have independence of thought and action. Change will come only if women break the pattern of domination, exercise will and voice, educate themselves and express their views, or in the words of Irshad Manji (2011), show "moral courage—the willingness to speak up when everyone else wants to shut you up." If nothing else, Rose Mohammed's life has been one of action and "moral courage". Recall the incident on Eid day, 13 October 2007, when she objected to the placement of barriers to separate the

males and females at the TML Mosque in St. Joseph. Rose Mohammed saw this as a step in the movement towards the beginning of the erosion of freedoms. She pondered that "if I did not speak up could the barriers be higher the next year? Would women eventually not be allowed to attend the masjid, forced to wear the hijab?" To Rose, regardless of the fact that the three-foot high wooden baluster-type railing was placed to define and protect the space for women to pray so as not to be crowded out by the men, it was what the barriers symbolised—the possible erosion of freedoms enjoyed by the women of TML.

The *masjid* is a space of collective piety and, as illustrated by the actions of Rose Mohammed, can be space for contestations, collusions and negotiation of ideological positions. In that specific case at the TML *masjid*, it became a space for consciousness and agency within the framework of Islam but also representative of larger feminist struggles for justice. This action should be seen as part of a larger "contemporary global movement of women to gain equal access to masjid prayers and fellowship" (Reddock 2011).[4]

Generally, in the global discourse on Muslims and, in particular, Muslim females, there is a preoccupation with issues of sexuality and gender relations (dress code, forced marriage, honour crimes, etc.) that ultimately reinforces the eroticisation of Muslim women that would lead to *fitna* (chaos or disorder) or reinforces the view that Muslim women are hidden from the public eye or unwilling to act as subjects in their own right. As such, Rose feels there is need to explore and articulate the ways in which gender and faith have an impact on Muslim women's participation locally.

Women play an important and active role in organising events and gatherings that promote a sense of closeness and friendship—sisterhood—fuelled by deep devotion and a belief and commitment to Islam. This can be a starting point to promoting Muslim women's participation in the affairs of national society: from raising consciousness to advocating a Trinidadian-Muslim female perspective on national issues and policies.

As a Muslim female and a witness to the nuances and complexities of actions and thoughts of the Muslim community, I, too, find it exasperating that women are treated differently. In a view expressed by Maulana Kalbe Jawwad, an Indian Shi'ite cleric, "women are created by the Almighty for rearing children...they are not supposed to ride horses, [be] firing guns or selling liquor or making speeches in the parliament" ("Muslim clerics oppose Women's Bill", *Deccan Herald*, 13 March 2010.) In fact, not only do males hold that view but other women hold a similar view that Muslim females are to play supporting and complementary roles.

As a 70-year-old Muslim woman, Rose wants to continue to live a healthy, active and full life. She believes that she has lived a full life and she has contributed to the development of family and community. She has served multiple communities—Muslim, Indian and Trinidadian—and enjoyed herself. She has stood for her principles and retained her voice; she has stood for her faith and reconciled it with living in Trinidad. As she reminds me, although 70, she has not retired from life and though she will step back from leading roles, she plans to continue practising all that she has learnt to help make Trinidad and Tobago a better place.

She believes that she and her husband have realised their dreams together. She notes that they have lived in the humblest of homes in impoverished areas of Trinidad. They have also lived in the best residential areas. They have experienced some of the luxuries of life and travelled to parts of Europe, Asia, North and South America as well as Mecca for the holy pilgrimage. She believes that as a family they have exceeded expectations, but it has been the result of hard work and honesty. "We are happy and contented; Allah has been good to us," Rose said.

Some final thoughts

As I listened to Rose Mohammed, a matriarch of the community, I cannot help but admire and respect the woman that she is. She came from humble beginnings and it was a struggle to provide for her family, but through hard work, sacrifice and risks, she and her husband now live a life of comfort. Through it all, Rose has retained her humanity and her humility. She believes in service as much as she believes in nurturing another generation. She embodies a commitment to building enduring organisations like the Inner Wheel Club of St. Augustine and the Indian Women's Group of Trinidad and Tobago, while having a sense of purpose and holding true to a set of core values of service and inclusion. When she served and the opportunity either arose or was created, she brought together representatives of the various organisations in which she participated. She acted as a services commodity broker, a connector, facilitating networking and fellowship, creating a chain for the growth and development of individuals and the community organisations in which she was an active member. Though she no longer holds executive positions in these organisations, at a recent event of the Rotary Club of St. Augustine, held in September 2011 at *Botticelli's Restaurant, Grand Bazaar* (Valsayn) representatives of several of these organisations in which she served were there to participate in the evening's activities. This is a testament to her vision and mission of creating a web of social interconnectivity. More importantly, she recognises the cycle of life, thereby knowing when to lead and when to follow and when to relinquish control. As I listened to her story; read her book, *Speak Out*; and reflected on our conversation, the words that come to mind about Rose is that of a "transformational leader".

Rose Mohammed reminds us that the Muslim community is not homogenous, the *ummah* consists of a broad spectrum of ideological perspectives and practices. As Muslims, living in a Caribbean society dominated by a Western ethos, and in particular, as Muslim females, there is a need to negotiate the dichotomy between Islamic/Muslim (wherein emphasis is placed on social responsibility and accountability) and Western-infused Caribbean values. While gender justice is central to the *Qur'an,* it is also subject to human interpretation, usually male. As has been argued by Ziba Mir-Hoseini (2006), a distinction still has to be made between faith (values and principles) and organised religion (institutions, laws, and practices) that is socially constructed and as such, open to negotiation. However, the daily lives of the majority of Muslim women and girls are defined and determined by a set of of beliefs and laws for which divine roots and mandates are claimed, globally, and in some cases, locally. Often times, however, it is only the minority, the highly educated women, who have the luxury of choice to challenge and negotiate the norms and the social structures. Rose was among the

fortunate minority who could choose; her actions are testimony to the right and ability to negotiate that dichotomy of being Caribbean-Western and Muslim while holding to one's truth. She had the will and the courage. The spiritual process of discovering Islam and negotiating its relationship with your lived reality remains critical to negotiation and choice.

Islamic feminism—or even the "women's issues"—has not arisen in any structured way in the local discourse.[5] Is it that the issues are silenced by the community? Or is it that the women and girls in Trinidad and Tobago who have benefited from the colonial and post-colonial struggles for justice and equality see no relevance of the "women's question" to their lives and lived reality? Does gender awareness even exist in the community and if so, to what extent? The contribution of Rose is a small but an important step in raising the issues of inequity and injustice in Islamic practices in Trinidad. Given the global perception that Islam is recalcitrant to modernity, and, in particular, feminism, the actions and exposed thoughts from the conversational narrative with Rose is a foothold for the feminist movement which can be built upon.

The intersectionalities not only of gender and generation but gender and class, religion and ethnicity become important in the discussion on women's experiences, women's voice and women's choices. I argue that the notion of gender equality in Muslim communities requires a strong push from women and girls armed with Islamic knowledge to challenge traditions and practices relating to sexuality, relationships and marriage; gender-based violence; beauty, dress and appearance; religious liberty; gender-based exclusion in public spaces, for example, the *maasjid,* and so on. But more than that, it also requires the development of a more pluralistic and tolerant Islamic ideology that allows for the principle of choice in which there is respect and support for women's individual and collective right to make their own decisions about their bodies, their families, their jobs and their lives. It would be recalled that the right to choose is integral to the feminist pursuit of social, legal, political, economic and cultural equality for women.

Given that Islamic feminism or the gender question in Islam remains somewhat veiled locally, the question arises as to who speaks for the local Muslim community on these issues? While there are a few voices, there is no common platform or rallying point that brings together these disparate voices to articulate and arrive at a consensus on the gender issues that have an impact on Muslim women. As such, the gender questions remain hostage to a preoccupation with rituals, Islam's orthopractic form and its physical manifestations rather than the faith itself and its impact on lives and lived realities and Islam's potential to empower and improve the lives of women and girls to make dignified choices as they negotiate dual realities—Muslim and Caribbean-Western, conservative and modern.

Rose's life provides an example of how one woman can negotiate a dual reality—religious and secular—and contest the imposition of practices, customs and traditions that may be jurisprudentially challenged. Her actions remind us that rules and social practices that have been claimed as Islamic are only the views and perceptions of some Muslims and that they are not immutable. She shows that one can be Muslim and Western rather

than have to choose one or the other. This is especially important in the context of multiculturalism. In fact, it may be that Rose Mohammed like many others, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, demonstrates that it is possible to live a life of religious and cultural hybridisation. Her experiences as well as that of other Muslim women can provide inspiration for young Muslim females to challenge the *status quo* in community and enable them, to borrow from Ziba Mir-Hoseini's words, to go beyond the dogmas in search of new questions and new answers.

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[1] TML was incorporated by an Act of Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago in 1950 to represent the views of *Ghair-Mukallid* or Non-Conformists in Islam. As such, TML does not confine itself to any one of the four

recognised schools of thought on Islam named after their four respective Imams or leaders: Abu Hanifa, Malik, Shafi'I, and Ahmad bin Hanbal. They believed that every Muslim of sufficient learning can draw his own conclusions from the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* and not rely on the opinions and decisions of the classical jurists. Their allegiance remains to *Allah* (God).

[2] According to the Qur'an, it is said*, "(Lawful unto you in marriage) are (not only) chaste women who are believers, but chaste women among the People of the Book, revealed before your time* (5.5)." Also, HQ 2.221, which states "*Do not marry unbelieving women (idolaters), until they believe."* (Translated by Yusuff Ali.) All jurists agreed that a Muslim man or woman may not marry a *mushrik* (one who sets up partners to God). However, because of *al-Ma'ida verse 5*, there is an exception in the case of a Muslim man marrying a *kitabiyya* (among the people of the book). There is no express prohibition in the Qur'an or elsewhere against a Muslim woman marrying a *kitabi* (among the people of the book). However, the jurists argued that since express permission was given to men, by implication women must be prohibited from doing the same. View of Shaykh Khaled Abou El Fadl, http://www.scholarofthehouse.org/oninma.html

[3] It should be noted that the period of pristine Islam is considered to be the time period of the first 300 years after the *Hijra*, or emigration, of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622.

[4] Rhoda Reddock explores this challenge by Rose Mohammed at TML *masjid* and that of the San Juan Muslim Ladies Association and Nur-e-Islam mosque. She contends that the "paradoxical way in which restrictions [were placed] on women's performance of congregational piety result[ed] in the emergence of a consciousness of resistance and feminist agency *within* the paradigm of Islam" (Reddock 2011). See "Up Against a Wall: Muslim Women's Struggle to reclaim Masjid space in Trinidad and Tobago", Paper presented at The Global South Asian Diaspora in the 21st Century: Antecedents and Prospects Conference held at The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago, June 1-4, 2011.

[5] Feminism, even Islamic feminism, is seen by some as antithetical to the ideologies of Islam. The opposition to Islamic feminism stems from the resistance to any changes or perceived changes to eternally valid ways sanctioned by *Shariah* (Islamic Law), also from those who seek to change current practices by a return to an earlier, "purer" version of the *Shariah* and, finally, from those who believe that no other social practice is equal to religious laws and convictions. Feminist scholars have focused their attention on the field of *Qur'anic* interpretation (*tafsir*) and have indicated that the genesis of gender inequality in Islamic legal tradition lies in the cultural norms of early Muslim societies. These norms and social structures impede the realisation of the ideals of Islam, namely, freedom, justice and equality. Consequently, the demand for gender justice can be placed within a religious framework—a brand of feminism that takes Islam as the source of its legitimacy and that can inform political and socio-economic discourses reflecting modern realities and the aspirations of Muslim women.

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Calypso and Krishna's Flute: The Indo-Caribbean Woman's Moving Body

Ananya Kabir

Abstract

…She did not wear saris no more.
Calypso she liked and could wine down
with the best of them. She became deaf
to the melody of Krishna's flute.
she chose Manny, not Lord Rama in her
Hindu epic gone wrong. At her wedding
she never once uttered Ganesh's name,
loosened the grasp of Vishnu's
four hands from around her waist.
…She named Grandaddy
Leon, a good European name, like all the other
rootless Negroes.

—Christian Campbell, "Curry Powder"

Caribbean poet Christian Campbell's (2010) account of his Indian great-grandmother Nita's rejection of markers of her culture and religion for a life with his great-grandfather, a so-called "rootless negro", reminds us of the complex relations between communities of Indian and African origins in diasporic space, as well as of the Indian

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woman's body being used for the maintenance of inter-community boundaries. Indeed, for every Nita who breached those boundaries, there were other Indian women who accepted them and their role as preservers and transmitters of "Indianness". Yet how intact, really, were those boundaries? Did the movements of calypso and the melody of Krishna's flute never mingle? How does Indo-Caribbean feminism deal with the issues of tradition, pleasure, enjoyment and transgression that this poem signals through "calypso" and "Krishna's flute"?

Introduction

In this essay, I reflect on these questions while foregrounding my own subjectivity as an Indian woman, from India, engaged in thinking about the Indo-Caribbean woman's body. I also want to foreground my somewhat unusual academic entry into the Indo-Caribbean: through the route of dancing to a range of Afro-Caribbean musical traditions from Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and the French Antilles. This perspective has brought me rather belatedly to scholarship on the Indo-Caribbean woman, and to her historical and contemporary situation in Trinidad. But it has sensitised me to a socio-cultural zone that some scholarship may either bypass or have to negotiate carefully. This zone is sub-verbal: it exists in dropped beats, transplanted melodies, and bodies moving in and out of time to different ancestral rhythms. Language may try to capture its essence; poetry, such as Campbell's, may well come closest in doing so on account of its own lyricism. If I have been able to sift through "Curry Powder" and grasp those of its symbols that take us to music and dance, it is because I come to the Indo-Caribbean through Afro-Caribbean music and dance, even while retaining, in my cultural and muscular memory, the enjoyment of Indian rhythm traditions.

My reflections on the Indo-Caribbean woman's dancing body derives from my own journey: the journey of an Indian, salsa-dancing, academic *woman*, who has consolidated her space in the world through partaking of a very different body culture than that she absorbed as an embourgeoised Indian girl-turned-Oxbridge academic.. "Hips don't lie": the body does not prevaricate in the way the analysing mind is wont to do. I hope this essay will unfold in the spirit of people dancing together, side by side, face to face, sharing the ephemeral kinetic pleasures that govern the moves and the mood.

Some years ago, I envisaged a research project comparing Latin American and South Asian postcolonialisms. I began learning Spanish, and, as part of that process, resumed listening to some Cuban albums that I had acquired over the years through an interest in "world music". As I tried to sing along to practice my Spanish, I realised that I was unable to predict the music's rhythmic lines. It was dance that would lead me to decipher, with my body, the rhythmic language of the Caribbean and of Latin America. One summer in India, I began salsa lessons, and continued them when I returned to Manchester. This entry into the UK's "salsa scene" inaugurated my journey into the social dance forms of the Afro-Caribbean and their global reception and cultivation. I read voraciously on Afro-Cuban dance and music, on salsa and its antecedents alongside my dance classes. Meanwhile, the social space of the dance floor provoked in me analytical curiosity about gender relationships in couple dances and in constructions of Latinidad and Caribbean-ness; the embodying of slavery and diaspora in song and dance; the conversion of trauma into collective joy; and the biggest conundrum of all: how a

dance form (salsa), intensely rooted in the Caribbean experience, is now enjoyed worldwide, including in India, which has its own pervasive rhythm culture as well as a moral economy of heterosexual contact that is quite at odds with Caribbean-derived dance socialisation. I had found my research project, but I was also finding myself through and in dance.

My interest in Afro-Cuban dance cultures led me to the cultures of other Caribbean islands. Dancing salsa socially, it is impossible to avoid the music and dance of the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico (merengue, bachata, reggaeton); through Francophone dance connections, I became interested in zouk and kompas, the music and dance of the French Antilles and Haiti, respectively. Reading about and listening to these forms, lesser known in the Anglophone world, I had constructed a mental map of the major rhythm systems coursing through the Hispanophone and Francophone Caribbean islands. Ironically for an Anglophone, however, I felt reluctant to extend my interests to the English-speaking Indo-Caribbean. I knew about indentured labour and Indian communities in plantation diasporas, but I took my time to discover their music and dance for myself. My scholarly personality would not allow me to "do the obvious": that is, explore the Indo-Caribbean simply because I was Indian—I have always been driven by a desire to explore that which is not obvious. Nevertheless, being an Indian woman dancing Afro-Caribbean forms triggered certain social interactions and expectations between me and the Latino, African, Afro-Caribbean, and indeed South Asian men I danced with. I thereby became aware of the tensions between "Indian" and "African" that existed wherever the two groups were made to co-habit under colonial and imperial conditions. Because this awareness came to me through dance, I sensed clearly the kinetic distinctions that have been mobilised, by different parties, to keep the "Indian" apart from the "African" in diasporic space.

By *kinetic*, I signal the dancing body, moving in time to musical rhythm. By *kinetic distinctions*, I refer to the movements that the body executes in time to different rhythm traditions. The kinetics of the body create pleasure, excitement and flamboyant performativity. Precisely for that reason, it is expressive of the relationship between the collective and the individual. These ephemeral but powerful pleasures become signifiers of moral codes and inter-community boundaries, their transgressions and breaching. The signifying role of the kinetic is very strong in South Asian societies, which continue to be policed along caste, class and gender lines. In diaspora, these lines assume erratic and unpredictable trajectories, particularly because of contact with other socio-cultural groups. Colonial power-relations produced forced proximities as well as forced separations; they exaggerated inherited moral and evaluative codes as well as the conditions for their jettisoning. The poem above alludes to these developments: Krishna's flute vs. the calypso; "rootless negro" vs. the Hindu epic; the wining that loosens Vishnu's grip around an erstwhile sari-clad waist. Most crucially, it gestures towards a fundamental (if constructed) binary: the Afro(-Caribbean) dances to percussive movements; the Indo(-Caribbean) moves to the melody of devotional songs. For the Indian in the Caribbean, music was an aspect of culture that involved religions with hoary pedigrees and clothes that draped women's modesty (albeit allowing tantalising glimpses of waist). For the African in the Caribbean, displaced earlier and in circumstances that

impeded the preservation of material culture, "rootlessness" was the only condition—alleviated, nevertheless, by the rhythms and oral traditions carried in the body.

The conditions of colonial modernity made sure that these dichotomies, founded on culture's kinetic and somatic dimensions, did not go unobserved by parties in India interested in articulating and safeguarding "Indian-ness". As Tejaswini Niranjana's research has revealed, late colonial and nationalist constructions of bourgeois Indian womanhood did bring the indentured woman into their discussions. Additionally, transnationalism and globalisation, in the form of viral transmission of music and dance trends through not only the film and music industries but, now, Internet-based technologies, ensure that the homeland's gaze registers kinetic developments of Indian rhythm culture within older diasporas. Yet, to date, only Niranjana's book, *Mobilising India: Music and Migration between India and the Caribbean* (2006), and its accompanying film, *Jahaji Music (AKA India in the Caribbean*, 2007, directed by Surabhi Sharma), articulate substantially the significance of that gaze. Both this silence and the way it is broken by Niranjana and Sharma confirm the necessity of analysing rhythm cultures—how they have travelled through colonial, postcolonial and transnational routes of cultural transmission, how they have mutated and syncretised in places of encounter, and what these embodied histories tell us about the relationship of pleasure, gender and modernity, on both global and local scales. These are the questions that I have formulated in the course of my evolving research project, which now stretches beyond the initial premise of comparing Hispanophone and Anglophone postcolonialisms through their rhythms. Within its new, expanded, remit, a site such as Trinidad reveals itself to be of considerable significance.

Notwithstanding the similarities imposed by Caribbean space, each Caribbean island is unique in its mix of culture, history and demography. In the case of Trinidad, its nearly equal demographic ratios of African- and Indian-heritage populations, its equally prominent Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian music and dance traditions, and the tensions between these traditions in the spaces of its public cultures, all make it ideal for my explorations into transoceanic and transplanted rhythm cultures. From my analytical perspective, the way Trinidadian music and dance is discussed in scholarship illustrates the anxieties of Indian-ness that diasporic rhythm cultures present to the Indian from India. Through this realisation, I have located fault-lines in the liberal discourse emanating from Indian scholars and intellectuals, which discovery in turn fosters a self-interrogation of my own assumptions. A rich topic for such double analysis has been Niranjana's and Sharma's responses to the East Indian woman's wining body. This focus may appear a novel entry-point into the dialogue between homeland and diaspora subjectivities, and into the differences and similarities that this dialogue captures. However, the conjunction of gender with rhythm reveals hegemonic and resistive movements within diaspora communities and how these movements relate to transgressive pleasures and anxieties of belonging. This conjunction enables me to re-insert the dancing body into the study of the Indian diaspora; it has also allowed me to converse with Indo-Caribbean feminists who are complexly situated within the ideologically fraught landscape of their kinetic heritage.

I saw *Jahaji Music* during the Rajasthan International Folk Festival, held in October 2010 at the Mehrangarh Fort, Jodhpur. The audience included Surabhi Sharma and her four-year-old daughter. A number of young men, part of the domestic tourist crowd, pressed their bodies through the door to peer at the film. Word had got around the Fort that a rather saucy film was being screened, and many visitors did not want to miss out on this bonus. Their gaze, as they looked at the women wining on screen, mirrored that of the Indian men from India—academics, film crew, pop musician—who had accompanied Sharma and Niranjana on their Caribbean tour, and who, in Niranjana's words, spent their time in Trinidad "trying to figure out what impossible combinations of pelvic movements wining consisted of" (205). Clearly, Sharma, too, had been fascinated by these movements. Her camera focuses on women in Jamaica and Trinidad, African and Indian, moving their booty with agility and verve. On being asked by me about her response to these dance styles, Sharma said that her six months of preparing for the journey by listening to chutney, calypso and soca had left her unprepared for the visual impact of watching women dance to the music. I suggested that it was initially hard for Indians to move in that way, but—as my own experience from dancing Afro-Cuban styles has taught me—it is not impossible. She disagreed: "We women from the city (of Bombay) would never be able to dance like that. In the villages, maybe yes." But Bombay was the home of Bollywood dance and its eclectic repertoire, I pressed. "Maybe, but such dance focuses on hand movements and upper torso," she clarified. "My daughter spent the first few years of her life exposed to the material I had filmed in the Caribbean. She picked up the dance moves—people were scandalised to see her move like that!"

These responses reveal the India Indian's fascination with the female body's kinetic transformation in diasporic space, and the conversion of that transformation into a moral commentary (however much the India Indian may not want to do so because of her liberal politics). This is a discomfort similar to that which Remo Fernandes, the Goan music star Niranjana brought along with her to the Caribbean, also exuded in *Jahaji Music*, and in his musical response to Denise Belfon's song, "I'm looking for an Indian man": "I don't know how to wine/only how to drink it/you be my guru/ I'll be your pupil". Fernandes tellingly aligns himself to signifiers of high culture, both local (the Sanskritic guru-pupil relationship) and global (connoisseurship of wine). This class-based distancing is also evident in Niranjana's account of her journey through the Indo-Caribbean, which systematically separates the Indian, bourgeois, female self from what the Caribbean seems to allow: the public expression of sexuality that she interprets wining as embodying, and the Western clothing and African rhythm on adult, Indian, female bodies. Her honest recounting of an initial bewilderment at Drupatee Ramgoonai's stage clothes voices a reluctance to appreciate the Indian diaspora's aesthetics of "sequinisation" rather than the high culture aesthetic of woven textile (86-87). Technologies of the weave signal ancientness and value that accrue from labour and inherited skill; the superficial glitter of sequinned fabric, which marks diasporic fashion, suggests a cheaper, transplanted version of Indianness that is less Byzantine—dare we even say, less Brahminical—to read and appreciate.

"There are no zenanas in Trinidad" declares a colonial commentator from 1868, whom Niranjana quotes (p. 58). This comment encapsulates the roots of Niranjana's discomfort which spring from the loosening of caste-based patriarchal practices in diaspora space.

Freed from the constrictions of the zenana, the Indian women who arrived, often solo, in the Caribbean, stared at the camera with an unusual (but pleasing) self-confidence, as the photographs reproduced in Peter Jaillal's recent poetry anthology celebrate. In contrast, caste and class have mutually reinforced each other in postcolonial India, although there are constant challenges to this entrenched reinforcement of upper-caste/ class by new vernacular constituencies bearing novel forms of cultural and economic capital. These tensions and challenges are enacted on the female body while it expresses itself in public space. Dancing of any kind, even that performed in ring-fenced urban spaces such as nightclubs, is tightly policed: Who dances with whom? Who moves which parts of the body, and how? Such policing was reflected in the Rajasthan International Folk Festival itself: Sharma's internalised divisions between city and village dancing bodies, a displaced version of a caste division, was reproduced in my experience there at large. The Tamil-British singer Susheela Raman, whose philosophy is, allegedly, "to sing from the vagina", moved like a dervish on stage, while the ladies of the royal family of Jodhpur sat in the front row, the pallu of their chiffon saris lightly covering their heads, politely clapping. Raman's example confirms that diasporic dislocations can potentially free the South Asian woman's body from caste/class proscriptions, or at least from expectations generated by these proscriptions that are duly internalised by us, Indian women in India. I nuance this observation further by focusing on one specific part of her moving body: the posterior.

What exactly is wining? Niranjana is coy about describing or analysing it. She calls up "the body in the voice" (106) but evaporates its materiality via Barthesian theory; she "wonder[s] how much my own feeling of strangeness and difference in relation to the East Indian woman has to do with the unfamiliarity of bodies and tongues", (122) but she goes on to talk about tongues (Tamil, Hindi, Bhojpuri) rather than the body. Such displacement is endemic to postcolonial writing, which symptomatically textualises and metaphorises rhythm and the body moving to rhythm: see no less a foundational text than Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) with its emphasis on the time lag. We also sense a fastidiousness—again, let us call it Brahminical— in the reluctance to name the most taboo part of the woman's body in South Asian cultures, the derriere, whose movements are proscribed even in Bollywood's publicly sanctioned displays of erotica. Female sexuality is expressed through the *jhatka* and the *matka*—the jutting outwards of the hip in time to the beat of the *taala*, or rhythm cycle. But it is the pelvis that is moved in isolation of the rest of the body, in order to circle the buttocks, while moving up and down vertically or diagonally in time to the music (as well as out of time and in between beats), which signifies the most transgressive challenges to the moral economy of South Asian kinetics. This is a challenge that continues to be answered by a moral critique that emerges from the displacement of caste to class: it is noteworthy how often "wining" is ascribed to "lower class Hindu women" by Indo-Caribbean commentators, both those who praise the phenomenon as liberating, and those who proscribe it as immoral or, at the very least, undignified.

For me, most noteworthy about these techniques of isolation are the affiliations they perform between the wining Indo-Caribbean woman and Afro-Caribbean dance repertoires. Afro-Caribbean dance styles demand an aesthetic-kinetic focus on the isolation of the buttocks through co-ordinated manipulation of the hips and pelvis. Salsa

song lyrics call attention to the *nalgas*, *caderas* and *cintura* of the *mulata buena*, which are also appreciated through reference to the woman's seductive walk (Aparicio 1998; Benitez-Rojo 1996). Feminist approaches to salsa find "this visual erotic fixation on the hip and pelvic movements of the mulata woman" a problematic phallocentric gaze that both racialises the mulata and trivialises the historical injustices perpetrated on her body; yet such approaches admit that the Afro-Caribbean/ Latina woman's enjoyment of her body's expressive capacities through dance complicates feminist critique. The politics of pleasure subvert the male gaze and reclaim rhythm for female self-expression; as an Indian woman dancing to Afro-Cuban rhythms, I have felt this reclamation through my body. The critical paradigms that have developed around "female butts and feminist rebuttals" in Afro-Caribbean-Latino culture can help us explicate gender dynamics around the wining woman's body as well as re-situate the Indo-Caribbean wining woman within a Caribbean and, indeed, a hemispheric cultural history. I was excited to discover a number of Indo-Caribbean feminists revelling in the messages of the freed female body that the wining posterior emits, as well as finding Afro-Caribbean spaces and expressive traditions inspirational for an Indo-Caribbean body culture seeking to celebrate femininity through dance rather than repress it through the collusion between patriarchy and cultural preservation.

However, using rhythm to understand modernity is to explicate the entanglement of vectors local and global, regional and transnational. The Indo-Caribbean woman also inherited the unlocked pelvic movements of the Bhojpuri region and its music's focus on the off-beat. These are features of a regional rhythm culture that flourishes under the radar of high cultural traditions. They enter the national and transnational sphere through Bollywood's intermittent showcasing of the Bhojpuri inheritance. Like the aesthetics of sequinisation, they gain new life in diasporic space. The women's *matikor* ceremony in Trinidad was where these Bhojpuri dance moves took on new life—in fusion, I would speculate, with African forms that were being practised in contiguous spaces on and off the plantation (Kanhai 1999). The diaspora's signature rhythm is the dhantal's, an instrument hardly played any more in India; in the Indo-Caribbean, it takes up the off-beat with a sound louder than the "proper" beats of the *taala*, proclaiming an insouciant irreverence for the latter's hegemony. The dancing body fills the gaps between beats with the dropping of the pelvis (as seen in Afro-Caribbean dance forms) as well as its jutting forward in conjunction with raised and alternating palms in the manner of Bhojpuri "little traditions". In the transnational era, these "mutated" forms return to the homeland together with parallel expressive traditions from contiguous regions of the world. Thus, Indian popular culture now incorporates the globalised dance moves of Shakira, even as Bollywood choreographers use new combinations of lower body movements to convey the dissonances of globalisation and revernacularisation. These are all processes in rhythmic dialogue with diasporas old and new. Their broader significance may be captured by an extension, to them, of Shalini Puri's call for a liberatory "dougla poetics" (Puri 2004).

I would like to conclude this essay with some personal reflections on my first visit to Trinidad, on the occasion of a conference at which I presented an initial version of this paper. Moving from Port-of-Spain to the St Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies, driving through the old sugar plantations on a tour of "Hindu Trinidad",

eating food with names (such as dhalpuri) resonant from my life in Calcutta, whose hinterland is the Bhojpuri region, with tastes both familiar and different, seeing kitchen tools such as the daalghotni (swizzle-stick) which we use in our Calcutta kitchen and still call daalghotni, listening to transplanted melodies through the chutney-soca playing everywhere, and also recognising the Afro-Caribbean rhythms underlying that music—my week in Trinidad was a learning experience that included but stretched beyond the conference. Above all, my paper gained from what I observed of Indo-Trinidadian women's body culture in the public spaces of the island, as well as its reception at the conference. While an elderly Indo-Guyanese male audience member commended me for re-telling a story about Indian and African sharing of rhythms that his grandparents' generation recognised, a younger, Indian male academic based in the US could not understand how I, clearly a sensible woman, could find wining anything but "pornographic". It remained difficult for me to explicate to him how a woman, especially an Indian woman anywhere, can find liberation from body-based constrictions by moving her booty in whichever direction she pleases; but I know, from my reading of Rosanne Kanhai's edited volumes and my subsequent conversations, virtual and real, with Indo-Trinidadian feminists, that this apparent paradox is not inexplicable to them. It is in the body that we find our points of political contact despite the other divergences that diaspora has necessarily produced. This paper has foregrounded these points of contact by focusing on a site of pleasure and resistance that is both universal and intensely particularised within different rhythm cultures. In its ability to speak to both the calypso and Krishna's flute, the kinetics of the female posterior can reveal more about the politics and history of diaspora, its antecedents and its prospects, than perhaps first meets the eye.

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'Breaking Silences': An Interview with Jahajee Sisters

Lisa Outar

Abstract
Founded in 2007 and based in New York City, Jahajee Sisters has forged new ground in organizing and attempting to empower a multigenerational constituency of diasporic Indo-Caribbean women in ways that affect their social, political, and everyday lives. They describe themselves as a movement-building organization with a mission of "creating a safe and equitable society for all Indo-Caribbean women." By building alliances with other organizations serving South Asian women in New York and utilizing the arts to foster leadership, community outreach, and political activism, they have emerged as an important site for considering contemporary forms of Indo-Caribbean feminisms. This interview was conducted with two members of the organization's Steering Committee, Suzanne Persard and Simone Devi Jhingoor (both founding members of the organization) between February and March of 2012.

Lisa Outar: Can you tell us a bit about the birth of Jahajee Sisters and what you see as unique about it in the context of Caribbean feminism?

Jahajee Sisters: Frustrated by gender-based oppression and the silence surrounding it, in 2007, four Indo-Caribbean women came together to create a space for dialogue among women in our community. We began organizing the first ever Indo-Caribbean Women's Empowerment Summit. During planning for the Summit, in March 2007, 20-year-old Natasha Ramen, a Guyanese woman from Hollis Queens, was slashed to death by her alleged rapist, also Guyanese. There was no outcry from the community, and it seemed like violence against women had become so widely accepted that a crime as heinous as Natasha's murder did not warrant dialogue or action. Enraged, organizers of the summit grew even more determined. On March 31, 2007, the first Indo-Caribbean Women's Empowerment Summit was held, where more than 30 women discussed domestic violence and cultural perpetuation of patriarchy. Such a gathering was unprecedented, and every attendee expressed interest in monthly or quarterly gatherings in their evaluation survey.

After the Summit, on May 10, 2007, 22-year-old Guiatree Hardat, Guyanese, was shot in the head by her fiancé, an Indo-Caribbean New York Police Department officer. After the death of a second Indo-Caribbean sister, it became clear to organizers that continued programming addressing gender-based violence in our community was crucial. As a result, we formed the "Indo-Caribbean Women's Empowerment Group." Later, joined by activists engaged in anti-domestic violence work, we organized the second annual Indo-Caribbean Women's Empowerment Summit, held in April 2008 in partnership with Sakhi for South Asian Women. Following the 2008 Summit, the group was renamed "Jahajee Sisters" to honor the strength of our female ancestors.

Jahajee Sisters is the only organization in the United States and Caribbean organizing Indo-Caribbean women and supporting their leadership development; organizing Indo-Caribbean women against gender-based oppression; and advocating for their politicization. This is what makes us so unique within the context of Caribbean feminism. Indo-Caribbean women are marginalized not only within the Caribbean community, but also within South Asian communities, not to mention the United States, as a whole. We are facing the same social injustices as many women of color in the United States and it is important to have a movement-building organization that not only understands our distinct culture, but also can advocate for and represent our needs.

LO: Why turn to the image of the boat that bore Indians into indentureship for the name of your organization? How do you see what we may call the Indian middle passage as connected to the experiences of contemporary diasporic Indo-Caribbean communities in New York and elsewhere?

JS: During the period of Indian indentureship (1838-1917), *Jahajee Bhai* and *Jahajee Bahen* (ship brother and ship sister) were terms used by our ancestors to unify and support each other in the midst of the tumultuous voyage by sea from India to the Caribbean. Despite adversity, our ancestors who arrived in the Caribbean were able to forge bonds, survive, and thrive. In this spirit, Jahajee Sisters seeks to build community and power to address critical issues challenging Indo-Caribbean women.

Crossing the Kala Pani from India and coming to the Caribbean was a deeply traumatic experience for Indo-Caribbean people. Yet, the fact that we were able to survive the Indian middle passage and the harsh system of indentureship, which attempted to strip us of our identity and culture, is an example of how resilient our people are. It especially shows the strength of our women, who played an integral role in preserving and carrying on the culture in the Caribbean and again in the US.

Reclaiming the word "Jahajee" in our name and in our work is the way we have chosen to honor our history and live into our resiliency.

LO: In descriptions of the organization's mission, you often mention the importance of ancestral knowledge. Given the multiplicity of ancestors that Indians from the Caribbean can call upon and the heterogeneity of what has emerged as Indo-Caribbean identity, what kinds of ancestral knowledge do you urge Indian women to reach for? Who are the ancestors that Caribbean Indians can and should lay claim to in your view?

JS: The kinds of ancestral knowledge we urge women to reach for is the knowledge of their women ancestors (mothers, grandmothers, great-grandmothers) and learn their stories, as much of our history has not been written but has been passed down through oral tradition. These are the ancestors that we can and should lay claim to, the ones who are in our own families who spent most of their lives in the Caribbean, worked on the sugar estates, took care of the families, and preserved the many traditions that we now call Indo-Caribbean culture (North Indian Hindu, Bhojpouri, Madrassi/Tamil, Muslim, and Christian traditions). We also recognize that the idea of "family" is often over-simplified, and given the historical fracturing of so many families on plantations—for example, children that were separated from their homes and placed in orphanages or estranged from their biological families—there is chosen family, which is present in the form of community.

We urge women to learn about the ancestral knowledge of Ayurveda, decentering the Western approach to health that is more about treatment of symptoms versus holistic healing and balance. In intergenerational spaces, we invite practitioners to present information on Ayurveda within the context of dialogues on Reproductive Justice and Health, focusing on topics like childbirth, marriage, menstrual cycles, and sex.

We believe in facilitating such conversations with women in our community to begin breaking the silence around subjects that are considered taboo. Through much of our work so far, we have noticed that women do not speak about their reproductive stories within their families, some of which may be traumatic, and this is connected to many of the injustices that do exist in our community such as violence and sexual assault. We believe that breaking the silence around what we call women's reproductive stories will begin a process of supporting younger generations of Indo-Caribbean women to make the most informed choices regarding their bodies and their sexuality.

LO: What particular moments of Indo-Caribbean history do you think are important for Indo-Caribbean women to retain and mobilize in quests for social justice?

JS: The parts of Indo-Caribbean history that are important for Indo-Caribbean women to retain in their quests for social justice are the heroines like Rajkumari Singh and Kowsilla, who were great activists and revolutionaries. Remembering their stories is a source of inspiration to women in our community who may not have realized that there were women leaders in the Caribbean who raised their voice, stood up for what they believed in and as a result were able to effect change.

The other part of our history that is important to retain is the memory of what our female ancestors endured through the experience of indentureship and working on the sugar plantations, much of which is rooted in violence and trauma. For example, during the early stages of indentureship, there was a shortage of women laborers in the Caribbean. The ratio was 1 woman to 10 men and this significant imbalance often resulted in men staking a claim to a woman whom they marked as theirs. This could be done through chopping off her nose or her hand to make her less desirable to other men. Women were also sexually assaulted and raped on plantations by overseers, while sexual violence was also prevalent in families and in the Indo-Caribbean community itself. This is a part of our history that needs to be critically explored to understand the way historical trauma continues to affect women and families within our community.

Through our annual Women's Empowerment Summits, Jahajee Sisters has lifted up the stories of these women who are an important part of Indo-Caribbean history. Our first summit honored Kowsilla, who advocated for fair wages on a sugar estate in Lenora, Guyana, and died a martyr for her organizing efforts. Our second summit also honored Rajkumari Singh, Guyanese artist and activist, who is often described as "one of the first Indo-Guyanese women writers to speak to both the ethnic and gender issues facing Indo-Caribbean women."

LO: Can you talk a bit about what you mean when you say Jahajee Sisters is working to introduce the concept of reproductive justice to young women?

Reproductive Justice is a movement that works to ensure we have the social, political, and economic power to self-determine our gender, bodies, sexuality, and families. It recognizes that all forms of inequality limit our ability to control our reproductive destinies. In sum, it says that we, not people in power who don't represent our interests, need to set the agenda for the issues that matter most to us.

During the 1990s, the Reproductive Justice movement was started by women of color who felt that the pro-choice movement, focused on abortion rights, failed to address the ways reproductive injustice and oppression manifested in communities of color like ours. For example, the impact of economic disparity, immigration policy, and discrimination based on race and sexual orientation on women's decision-making was ignored by the pro-choice movement. Reproductive Justice has a more holistic, inclusive vision for women and girls.

Jahajee Sisters recognizes that Indo-Caribbean women are facing many of the same injustices as all women of color—including, but not limited to, sexual assault, harsh immigration policies, and poor access to healthcare. To address all of these intersecting

issues, we began using the Reproductive Justice framework in our work to end gender-based oppression and violence.

LO: What kinds of grassroots organizing does Jahajee Sisters do and where does this occur? What are some of the goals of your community organizing?

JS: Jahajee Sisters organizes women around ending gender-based oppression and violence in the Indo-Caribbean community in Richmond Hill, Queens. We envision a world in which sisterhood is so strong it stomps out patriarchy, ends violence against women, and restores balance. Our journey for justice embodies collective power every step of the way.

It was actually through conversations that arose amongst ourselves and in our Young Women's Leadership Institute that we realized, as Indo-Caribbean women, we had not received the information we needed to make the most informed decisions regarding our bodies from our moms or from the schools we had attended. As a result, we decided to launch an organizing initiative in the community called the Campaign for Healthy Youth because we recognize the need for young women to understand their bodies and know how to keep themselves safe.

We are also aware that education policy and cultural stigma can prevent youth from getting all the information they need to be healthy. With this in mind, the Campaign for Healthy Youth is an effort to ensure young women are learning about their bodies, how to prevent disease and unwanted pregnancy, what a healthy relationship is, and how to maintain emotional health in the complicated world they are navigating today.

Some of the tangible ways we are implementing this initiative [includes] having inter-generational dialogues between mothers and daughters at monthly Sister Circle gatherings, conducting a needs assessment to explore our community's values, as well as ensuring the proper implementation of a comprehensive sex-education mandate, which was passed in New York City in August 2011, in our middle and high schools.

Below is our formula for how we approach our community organizing work to end gender-based oppression and violence:

(1) Self-Awareness – establishing a strong identity as Indo-Caribbean women, understanding our history and our ancestors who have paved the way for this work, and realizing that a true revolution happens from the inside out.

(2) Empowerment – fostering sisterhood and solidarity, honing inner resilience, developing circles of support to heal trauma, developing a shared analysis of intersecting oppressions ingrained in the systems that shape our society, and giving voice to our lived experiences and visions for change through art and cultural work.

(3) Community Organizing – honoring the notion of "each one teach one," we focus on leadership development, political education, and introducing the principles of community organizing. We utilize the arts and activism as a catalyst for change by creating awareness of the issues that affect us as a community and inspiring direct action at the grassroots.

LO: What are the challenges for organizing within the Indo-Caribbean community? What are the particular forms of organizing and outreach that seem to work best with Indo-Caribbean women?

JS: Our biggest challenge for organizing within the Indo-Caribbean community is the very thing we are trying to undo—patriarchy. The historical practice of silence and acceptance is so ingrained in our community, in our culture, and in our women, that it is hard to get women to come out and break the silence. And, we are dealing with a situation where we are seen as being "man-haters" by people in our community rather than folks understanding the need and legitimacy of the spaces we create for women. However, once we do get women to come out, understand the work we are trying to do, and participate in our programming, they do open up and it is the most powerful thing to witness—women sharing their stories, speaking their truth, and excited to become an agent of transformation within their community.

What has been working well for us so far are our monthly Sister Circle gatherings, a base-building effort that was first launched in December 2009. The gatherings have become our key strategy for introducing more women to our work, fostering community building, and providing political education. There are also opportunities for women from our base to step into leadership. Each gathering is organized by a different member of Jahajee Sisters who invites her personal network of friends and family, as well as the broader community. This makes each gathering an exciting mix of older and newly joined constituents, totaling about 30 women each month. And, a coordinator from our steering committee works in close collaboration with each host to create and facilitate the evening's agenda. Each gathering includes structured activities that incorporate the arts and culture as well as time to network and connect with each other. Recently, we have been using our Sister Circle gatherings as a space to hold the intergenerational dialogues we are facilitating between mothers and daughters as part of the Campaign for Healthy Youth.

LO: Can you talk about the role of the arts in your organization? What is your vision for how the arts can bring about social change?

JS: Jahajee Sisters utilizes the arts in all of our programming from our summits to our Sister Circle gatherings. We recognize the role of the arts (poetry, theater, music, and movement) in supporting women in our community to not only heal from the trauma of violence, but also to serve as a catalyst—cultivating awareness and inspiring action.

In 2010, through our Young Women's Leadership Institute (YWLI), we engaged a core group of young women, ages 14–23 in an intensive leadership development and political education program around Reproductive Justice. The purpose of the program was to create the next generation of Indo-Caribbean activists and organizers equipped with RJ and gender justice analysis, who could plug in and lead our organizing work.

The young women created public service announcements highlighting various reproductive oppressions they had experienced in their families and lives. We first screened the PSAs at our summit in 2011 and since then at various other community events as part of our Campaign for Healthy Youth. The PSAs have been a great way to

spark open and honest dialogue among mothers and daughters about sex and reproductive health.

In 2009, we also published ***Bolo Bahen! Speak Sister!***, an anthology of poetry produced by participants of a 10-week Arts and Empowerment Program, co-sponsored by Sakhi for South Asian Women. For 10 Sundays, women across three generations from Guyana, India, Jamaica, Pakistan, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United States gathered at the Blue Star Center of New York to heal wounds, reclaim identity, and build solidarity. By releasing stories kept sheltered for too long, week after week, we witnessed transformations in ourselves and each other.

During a workshop session on community engagement, program participants coined the following definition of Arts Activism: *Using creative expression in the form of writing, drama, and performance to fight for a cause, battle resistance to change, and inspire community empowerment and equality.*

We will continue to integrate the arts in our work as an integral component of our community-organizing work.

LO: What are the models for feminist action that Jahajee Sisters draws upon? How has Caribbean, American, or South Asian feminism informed the organization's goals?

JS: Jahajee Sisters has drawn from models of feminist action that are rooted in decolonizing feminism, while resisting normative notions of Western feminism, and acknowledging that even the term "feminism" might be problematic for some of our constituency. As Patricia Mohammed has said, Indo-Caribbean women have historically been viewed as marginal to the Caribbean feminist movement, so Jahajee Sisters is revolutionary and reactionary in our stance to centralize Indo-Caribbean women at the heart of our struggle. Feminism in the Caribbean assumed a very different trajectory than in the West, and when speaking about feminism, we think it is important to recognize what we might deem "feminism"—the shortcomings of language, cultural differences, and Eurocentricism—should not delimit our work; for example, our great-grandmothers might have been the epitome of feminism, though they might not have called themselves "feminists," and acknowledging this is so important to resist dominant narratives of what exactly constitutes feminism. For Jahajee Sisters, feminism is rooted in the self-empowerment and self-determination of Indo-Caribbean women.

We organize grounded in the truth of M. Jacqui Alexander's theory of the Caribbean nation-state as expecting a kind of "servile femininity" whereby women are always expected to be the caretakers and domestic heads of household, whereby heteronormativity is the "norm" for our women and our community, and we call out the deleterious effects of cultural, historical, and religious systems that have perpetuated heteropatriarchy in the Indo-Caribbean community. We organize inspired by the traditions of Afro-Caribbean women, who have, for hundreds of years, developed their own survival strategies and deployed female networks as modes of self-preservation in

the face of colonization. In the tradition of Audre Lorde, one of the most famous Caribbean poet-feminists, we affirm that our silence indeed will not protect us, that "when we are silent, we are still afraid so it is better to speak remembering we were never meant to survive." It is in this spirit of breaking silences that Jahajee Sisters survives.

LO: What kinds of alliances do you have with other Caribbean or South Asian groups here in the US or elsewhere? In your community organizing, how do you deal with the misrecognitions/stereotypes/tensions that sometimes pop up between South Asian immigrants direct from the subcontinent and Indo-Caribbean immigrants?

JS: We have built alliances with South Asian groups, including Sakhi for South Asian women, and SALGA (South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association), Chhaya CDC, and SAYA (South Asian Youth Action!). Since Sakhi is a direct service provider for women in domestic violence situations, we refer women who are in need of direct services to Sakhi; Sakhi has also been very intentional about their desire to reach more Indo-Caribbean women, which is a significant endeavor since there are no direct service providers for Indo-Caribbean women in New York City. The historical tension between the Indo-Caribbean and South Asian communities is very real, but we have been able to forge genuine alliances with these groups, many of which have been intentional in their inclusion of Indo-Caribbean individuals in their own community spaces. Of course, because of the historical differences between migration and indentureship, as well as discrimination Indo-Caribbean people have endured in South Asian communities, there has been a definite attempt by Jahajee Sisters to educate these communities about Indo-Caribbean culture and our community, and calling attention to the ways in which we have been marginalized in particularly South Asian communities. We have noticed a generational shift, too, noting that the Indo-Caribbean and South Asian youth today are more likely to work and learn alongside each other, respect each other's differences, and unite under the banner of common cultural threads, in a way that was definitely less likely, and often impossible, for our parents' generations.

LO: Retention of Indian identity in diasporic communities is often bound up with certain expectations of women and female bodies. What are the prevalent expectations of Indo-Caribbean women and girls that you see among your constituency? How is the organization attempting to intervene?

JS: Our constituency is mostly composed of women from Jamaica, Guyana, Trinidad, and Suriname, who are multi-generational, come from several religious backgrounds, include members of the LGBTQ community, and have many different ways of relating to Indo-Caribbean identity. There are definite expectations that Indo-Caribbean girls are particularly challenged by, including the pressure to live up to traditional heteronormative roles of getting married (to a man) and having children; pressures to conform in their gender identities; pressures to "preserve" their religion and traditions; pressures to be "pure," to not talk about taboos like sex and sexuality, to not engage in conversations

about subjects like domestic violence and gender. Within so-called "progressive" Indo-Caribbean spaces of religious and civic engagement, young men are nurtured and recognized as the leaders of tomorrow in ways that young Indo-Caribbean women are not. Additionally, in the Indo-Caribbean community, the experience of being a subject of the diaspora is especially complex because there are so many markers of Indian authenticity that our generation is expected to retain and preserve and, often, these markers of authenticity are oppressive. As far as interventions, the work we do is a clear way in which we are attempting to shift the paradigm of the traditional expectations thrust upon Indo-Caribbean girls and women, to support and nurture their leadership potential, to provide opportunities for them that might not necessarily be supported by their own families or religious communities, and to emphasize their empowerment through self-determination.

LO: Do you do any outreach to Indo-Caribbean men?

JS: We have been asked this question a lot in the last five years that we have been doing work in the community. Our work centralizes the experiences and struggle of Indo-Caribbean women, and although we are an organization for women, we see men as allies and, consequently, a population that our message is central to. The first day of our annual women's empowerment summit is open to all community members, including men, but most of our other programming focuses on Indo-Caribbean women. We believe that men must recognize the power they have as allies to women in their families and communities, and ending gender-based violence and oppression is not just a women's issue—it's a cultural and societal issue. Men play such an important role in transforming gender-based oppression and decentering patriarchy. The work begins by Indo-Caribbean men speaking to their fathers and sons and brothers and uncles about violence against women, about domestic and sexual violence, and having conversations about challenging male supremacy in families, Indo-Caribbean culture, and ultimately society. In fact, a phenomenal collective called the Challenging Male Supremacy Project emerged in New York City a few years ago to challenge heteropatriarchal paradigms and to serve as a space for men who want to become involved in this work.

LO: Performances of Indo-Caribbean identity both in the Caribbean and in the diaspora tend to highlight heteronormative, traditional, Hindu images. How does Jahajee Sisters take into account the sexual, religious, national and socioeconomic differences within the Indo-Caribbean community in your pursuit of your goals?

JS: Jahajee Sisters has recognized the role of Hindu hegemony in Indo-Caribbean culture, as well as the role religion itself plays in forging authentic yet sometimes oppressive links to our community and heritage. We are a secular organization, with members who have no religious beliefs or affiliation, as well as members who are Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and other religions. We have tried to navigate the delicate lines of religion and tradition—though these lines are often blurred in Indo-Caribbean culture. Our annual summits have ranged from our conducting Hindu religious rites out

of respect for a spiritual healer, to centralizing the experience of Muslim women at our upcoming Muslim Sisters' Leadership Institute. We have also repeatedly engaged in dialogues about the importance of not alienating women with no religious affiliation in our spaces, noting that because of the close cultural-religious lines our community straddles, some of the symbols or representation or attributes of our work might belong to a particular religious tradition but we are a secular organization. At our annual summits, we assert the fact that we are a secular organization, so that the cultural aspects of some of our programming aren't simply read as our privileging of one religion over another.

As far as the heteronormative branding of Indo-Caribbean culture, we are inclusive of all women-identified individuals, which include queer women, transgender women, and gender non-conforming women. We are LGBTQ-inclusive in our domestic violence and sexual violence work and intentional about this inclusion, so the LGBTQ Indo-Caribbean community is included not as an after-thought but a central part of fighting patriarchy and violence.

With regard to socioeconomic differences, we have seen few hurdles among the women with which we organize, as violence affects all of our families and communities, regardless of socioeconomic standing, and has served as a common trauma uniting the women in our organization.

LO: What does Jahajee Sisters contribute to the larger conversation about immigrant identity here in the US? Has there been an impact on the constituency due to forms of racial profiling that have increased since 9/11?

JS: Jahajee Sisters organizes within a population of Indo-Caribbean women that are mostly first-generation US immigrants. Some of the challenges immigrant women within Jahajee face include having to work, sometimes more than one job, and care for their children, run their households, etc., so it is difficult for them to organize in the community when their time and energy are scarce. This, essentially, reflects the intersectionality of being an immigrant woman as well as being Indo-Caribbean and working class; Jahajee organizes within an "intersectional" framework, meaning all our oppression is interconnected: immigrants' rights are related to women's rights; racial justice and LGBTQ justice are related. As Indo-Caribbean women, as immigrants, as LGBTQ women, as a marginalized people in the United States, we live at the "intersections" of multiple identities and have many systems to navigate, in addition to gender-based oppression. Post-9/11, there has been a definite increase of racial profiling, particularly within Muslim communities in New York City, and especially for young Muslim students. At our Muslim Sisters' Leadership Institute this summer, we will be discussing the impact of Islamophobia on the Indo-Caribbean and South Asian communities and, particularly, how this racial profiling is linked to patriarchy, reproductive justice, and gender-based oppression.

LO: Does Jahajee Sisters attempt to coordinate efforts at organizing women in the diaspora with those in the Caribbean?

JS: Jahajee Sisters has focused on organizing women in the US, though we have been in touch with women organizing feminist movements in the Caribbean and some women who have been a part of our constituency have returned to the Caribbean to organize around social justice issues. Other women who have been a part of our constituency have gone back to places like Guyana and Trinidad and expressed a desire to have an extension of our organization there, though we have not directly been involved with any specific transnational activism. We've all spoken about returning to our respective homelands in the Caribbean and having a presence for Jahajee there, but transnational organizing is a complex issue, particularly because we are all living in the US and we are wary of replicating a narrative of West-Global South narratives whereby we would somehow be transporting our brand of organizing to the Caribbean. While we are all Indo-Caribbean women, the nuances of geopolitical activism are challenging to navigate and we recognize this. Needless to say, we are definitely open and always excited to engage with regional Caribbean activists and their own work and successes back home.

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Kamla at the Apex: Reflections on Indo-Caribbean Feminism

Rosanne Kanhai

Abstract
May 2010: Kamla Persad-Bissessar is elected Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago; it was overwhelming for Indo-Caribbean women of my generation for we had not dared to expect that this could happen. Yet we realize that the ascendancy of Kamla (as she is known throughout the country) is the fulfilment of the steady progress of Indo women in all walks of public life. This is a moment to reflect on the group identity that has an outstanding figure at its apex, and on the implications for women's concerns under a female Prime Minister.

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Physically located in rural communities that grew up in the plantation belts, ridiculed and discriminated against for cultural practices, demographically outnumbered in the region, people of Indian descent have been marginalized in the Caribbean and, because of patriarchal family and community structures, Indo-Caribbean women have had an added layer of subordination. Ironically, for many of my generation, advancements have come from this place of marginalization. We were goaded to excellence by constant reminders that we would "get nothing" easily in this country (Trinidad and Tobago). Business was dominated by white and off-white communities and the Afro-dominated government was partial to Afro communities. We had to work three times as hard, and females had to do it within the boundaries of gender roles. We internalized these messages to push ourselves forward and, in some cases, exceeded family expectations.

How do we now re-think identity as we move from the margins to the centre? How do we recognize the long-term effects of marginalization but at the same time not allow historical resentment and/or insecurity to inhibit us? How much of our baggage do we lay on the backs of our daughters and our colleagues? How can we contribute to charting trajectories of Indo-Caribbean feminisms relevant to contemporary contexts and concerns?

One way to think through some of these issues is within the frame of class. For the first time in our short but fast-paced history, there is discernible Indo-Caribbean class stratification. Some of us have pulled ourselves up by the proverbial bootstraps, and some of us are left behind—too traumatized by physical and mental challenges to free ourselves from the grips of poverty and its ill effects. One model of social work in Trinidad's history is colonialist charitable organizations that maintained the status quo of privileged (typically whites and up-and-coming non-whites) and under-privileged (typically non-whites). This is certainly not the structure we want to adopt; in any case, the groups typically identified for assistance were urban Afro-Trinidadian groups. It is up to contemporary women activists to speak out on behalf of women who cannot, for a variety of reasons, articulate their needs or who do not expect that assistance can come their way. We need to organize ourselves, generate funds, and utilize our skills to develop networks that offer safety, life skills and tools of empowerment. Historically, Indo-Caribbean communities preferred to manage problems within the family. Unfortunately, the family structure can itself be a source of subordination; nevertheless, the centrality of the family in the community is enduring. Women's issues cannot be separated from family and community. For example, analysis of and rehabilitation from alcohol-related domestic violence must be applied to the entire (extended) family within the history and norms of the community, and facilities (such as women's shelters) must be culturally sensitive.

While I acknowledge the significant work done by women's NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations), it behoves Caribbean women's organizations to draw also on state funds, integrating women's issues into national politics. There is no better time than now to make gender a national issue.

> As a public figure, Kamla does not downplay gender. From her attractive clothes, hair and make-up, to the attention she gives to the concerns of women and children, she is feminine and she is a feminist. Highly educated, professionally successful, with political savvy honed through experiences encountered from the grassroots up through the ranks of party politics, she is a self-made woman. Yet she is an Indian woman and her stature catches Caribbean feminism, historically propelled by Afro-Caribbean concerns, by the throat. Indo-Trinidadian women experience the schizophrenia of not daring to feel secure about Kamla's success and simultaneously confirming to ourselves that we always knew we had it in us. Some of us have developed the habit of distrust—always looking over our shoulders for indications that our ethnicity is being devalued, or that there is a racially charged backlash against us. However, cognizant of the fact that social structures to support women must include all women, we must reach across ethnic lines. Indo-Caribbean communities have been somewhat closed and, as we become more mainstream, issues arise such as: do we hesitate to reveal problems within our own communities lest they be used as evidence of our racial/cultural inferiority? Can we explain and celebrate how Indo women have been empowered by ethnic practices without seeming smug or triumphalist? How do we make efforts to understand other communities so that we can make intelligent and sensitive contributions to the welfare of all women?

I was introduced to Caribbean feminism in the 1980s via the Caribbean Association for Research and Action (CAFRA). There, I was stunned at the ideology of Caribbean feminism as a moral responsibility to address the issues of lower income Afro-Caribbean women. It was as if women of Indian, European, Chinese, Middle Eastern or mixed descent had agreed not to put on the table the issues of women in their own families and communities. I rationalized that this might be okay for European, Chinese and Middle Eastern women (or any mixture thereof) since, generally speaking, they were not experiencing the extreme material, psychological and social long-term traumas of plantation labour. But why were the hardships of Indo-Caribbean women not a matter of concern? And why were the achievements of Indo-Caribbean women, historically and in contemporary times, not celebrated by the Caribbean feminist movement? I saw Afro-Caribbean women bringing Black affirmation from the global stage into a context of Afro victories in national politics and as the major ethnic groups jostled for cultural space. Was I, an Indo woman, expected to join the tide of Black celebration? Afro-Caribbean women could draw on burgeoning African-American feminist discourse; there was no parallel for Indo-Caribbean feminists.

Such was my passion when I embarked upon the collection *Matikor: The Politics of Identity for Indo-Caribbean Women* (St. Augustine, Trinidad: University of the West Indies Continuing Studies, 1999, 2002)—a self-conscious coming into voice for Indo-Caribbean women. More recently, I conceptualized, recruited contributions and edited *Bindi*: *The Multifaceted Lives of Indo-Caribbean Women* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2011) to document the on-going analyses on Indo-Caribbean women. At this point in time, I take stock of the Afro-Caribbean women who have been friends, colleagues and mentors, and who have genuinely listened to the protests of Indo-Caribbean women. They have made room for us and they have worked to dismantle ethnic divisions and omissions. On a personal level, I can assert that CAFRA actively

supported *Matikor*, just as non-Indo women at The University of the West Indies, at Women Working for Social Progress (Working Women) and at Redthread have consistently welcomed me and my ideas.

I would like to go a step further to ask about Afro-Trinidadian women's understanding of Indo-Trinidadian women as a group that has moved toward the centre. While Afro women have deliberated on the multiple aspects of their identity as Black women globally, I do not recall articulations of how the Indo presence has influenced the construction of Afro-Trinidadian women's identity even in locations where Afro and Indo communities have co-existed for generations. I ask: are we to be included only when we claim marginalization? Is our role that of being the group that other groups can be "better than?" Is there anything about Indo women that Afro women find admirable or inspirational? We must be doing *something* right.

Perhaps we need to articulate more openly the sources of our strength and support. As minorities in a predominantly Afro-creole region, we have been confused and silent about the very aspects of Indo-based culture that heal and empower us. Indo women have not known what to do with the shame heaped on the foremothers whom they knew to be strong and creative. We have not adequately acknowledged males who supported and mentored us and, in some cases, took risks to challenge Afro-creole structures and discourses. Encouraged to disparage our ancestral teachings and practices, our context has been a community in the shadows, our cultural streams stymied, and our attempts at self-representation sidelined. However, resistance has been on-going, with increasing self-assertion and confidence within the community during the last 20 years or so. Now we have the figure of Kamla, openly embracing Indo-based practises. Whatever the political risks as Prime Minster of a multi-ethnic country, she has not left behind the Indo identity which propelled her into power. She holds her own on global platforms, confirming to us that we need not give up performance of ethnicity to make our way in the world. The Indo-Caribbean identity was born when the first ship carrying indentured labourers docked in Guyana in 1838. It is an identity that is geographic, historical and economic. We own this identity; what feminist praxis can we develop from this place?

As a writer, I place importance on the discursive for it reveals not only what we think but *how* we think. Can we develop a way of thinking and expressing ourselves that rejects colonial poetics and instead evolves from our identity as Indo-Caribbean? In an e-mail to me, Dr. Gabrielle Hosein, Lecturer, Gender and Development Studies, UWI, St. Augustine, says of Kamla "she is the ultimate warrior-mother-goddess figure, destroying her rivals like Kali, bringing the wisdom of Lakshmi, being the ordinary mother and grandmother we all grew up with in our homes" (August 30, 2011). Observe Hosein's analysis of Kamla in terms of Hindu mythology. What is demonstrated here is Hosein's spontaneous use of metaphors not drawn from the Western literary tradition—similar to the way I used matikor and bindi as critical lenses through which to explore Indo-Caribbean women's reality. These are examples of bringing Indo-Caribbean poetics into feminist discourse. We can think of all Caribbean feminists as "jihajee" sisters. Literally translated as kinship forged during the indentured labourers' passage from India, the term "jihajee" articulates concepts such as the rupture from ancestral

landscape and culture; reconstruction of kinship for material, social, and psychological well-being; the courage to survive and to maintain dignity in the hardships of plantation and post-plantation life; embracing of the Caribbean environment in spite of the circumstances that brought us here. Since these concepts apply to Caribbean peoples of diverse ancestries, jihajee sisterhood prompts us to honour each other's pains and hopes as foundations for collaboration.

As a mother/grandmother figure, Kamla brings inflections of female domestic/spiritual roles, as defined in many Hindu and Hindu-influenced families, into the public arena. The Hindu home, more so than the mandir, is the central location of religion, and typically, the mother/grandmother is the spiritual and moral guide. She carries the power of Hindu goddesses as she passes on ancestral stories and rituals, offers emotional and physical sustenance and, in many cases, holds the family's purse strings. Yet her power has been de-legitimized through the colonial and postcolonial processes that gave us Christianity as the state religion and secularized Christianity as the cultural norm. Indo-Caribbeans know too well the stigma of paganism accorded to our ancestral religions, and the history of discrimination against practitioners of these religions. Even if we are not currently aligned to any religion, we understand the symbolic significance of Kamla's open practice of Hinduism and we admire her courage. She legitimizes the use of religion-impelled practices and networks to deal with women's issues.

Also, since religions are global, Indo-Caribbean women can contribute to and draw from the rich resource pool of global women who are subverting religious practices for gender liberation. In connecting with religious-based groups across the Indian Diaspora, Indo-Caribbean women defy and dismantle the boundaries of colonial empires. I am suggesting neither a pan-Indian-ness, nor an Indian nationalism where India is the "homeland". I am defining a Diaspora that is marked not by a scattering from India, but by a recognition that hybridized consciousness cannot go back to a pure Indian-ness. We are globalized Indians who can syncretize the traditional and the modern at our own pace and according to our own needs.

Kamla does not mimic male leadership styles nor that of other female leaders. She publicly works out how to handle herself as an Indo-Caribbean woman in national, regional and global arenas. But since neither female-ness nor Indian-ness is the norm in Caribbean leadership, Kamla is constantly under scrutiny. The racialized hostility against her and her Indo-dominated government saddens and shocks us. Even when racial undertones cannot be proved, we suspect that some of the vitriolic dissent to what she says and does is race impelled. Additionally, there is gendered hostility (from non-Indos and Indos, from males and females) against her. Verbal attacks on her Indian female body have been horrific.

The double-edged sword of gender and race is vicious. Does Kamla repeatedly have to prove her legitimacy (and that of her government) in a way that does not apply to Afro-Trinidadians? Is a woman's body to be the site of violence in a way that does not apply to a man? Is a woman never "absolved" from the "shame" of her womanhood? Are Indo-Trinidadians not entitled to walk the hallways of power?

For those of us who have lived most of our lives under Afro-dominated governments, the historical pain of marginalization takes on new intensity now that the race-inclined attacks have found a high profile target. However, we, as Indo-Caribbean women, must caution ourselves not to make excuses for Kamla when her policies seem unjust or illogical. We must keep in mind that we betray our Caribbean sisters if we give Kamla a free pass. We need to do more than give her a "buff". If Kamla counts on the ethnic and gender loyalty of my demographic, it is up to us to be critical of her from that place of loyalty. If we psychologically enjoy insider status, then let us critique from the inside. We must let her know that we have not given up our ability to think and to speak out. We will not be blinded and/or gagged by overt ethnic and gender markers. If we see her as bringing herself as Indian and as female to the office of Prime Minister, then we must examine the extent to which she genuinely draws on her grassroots identity.

Kamla has stepped from the cane fields and rice paddies of rural Indo- Trinidad to inherit the infrastructure of mostly Afro-dominated governments that centralized national development in urban locations. If Kamla is the "country bookie" come to "town," then she has done so in grand style. But we must also demand that she facilitate bringing the "town" to the "country" in terms of improved facilities such as health, education, potable water, telephone and Internet connectivity, credit and banking services, recreation and cultural venues, and government services. Simultaneously, we must value the ethics and skills of rural Indo-Trinidadian women who were the foundation of the group's advancement. These women must be brought out of the shadows to stand side by side with professional women in contributing to national development. For example, rural women can be pivotal to grassroots agriculture that lessens our dependence on imported foods. "Making garden" literally put food in the mouths of families, and an entire cuisine evolved in the hands of women. Chances are that Kamla ate from the kitchen gardens of her mother/aunts/grandmothers; now let us put it to her government that national food policies must be informed by grassroots knowledge and skills.

Twenty-first century Trinidad and Tobago reaps the benefits of a petroleum-driven economy, yet we are an unevenly developed society under a siege of crime. We are vulnerable to global power structures and influences (formal and informal) that do not always bring positive growth. We wring our hands in despair. We agree that the ideologies and practices of Western capitalist democracy were not developed for societies such as ours. Where do we look for ideas? In our own Afro and Indo grassroots histories, there are (sometimes overlapping) pools of resources from which to draw as we try to figure out how to know and how to be.

From women in our families we get ethics such as respect for family and community; satisfaction deferred for future generations; emphasis on education; entrepreneurship in the face of tremendous odds; thrift and financial planning; dignity and endurance in all of life's challenges; and the boldness to achieve more than what is expected. These were the qualities that helped us move from margin to centre. Nowadays, there is a critical mass of educated Indo-Caribbean women who can also draw on what women activists are thinking and doing globally. If we find ourselves in positions of privilege and leadership, we can work with our Caribbean sisters to organize and institutionalize grassroots practices, giving them power through funds and technology.

Last but not least, I invoke domestic violence as a measuring rod of the social and emotional progress of the Indo-Caribbean community (and, by extension, the Caribbean region). I use the term domestic violence to include all types of physical and mental abuse that happens within the home, with varying levels of complicity from the extended family and community. Domestic violence, in particular alcohol-related domestic violence, has plagued the Indo-Caribbean community since the days of indenture. Historically, women developed coping mechanisms within the home and community, and educated their daughters to escape the possibilities of domestic violence. In recent times, factors such as the increasing numbers of self-sufficient women, gender-sensitive laws, women's organizations and feminist consciousness-raising in the Caribbean region contribute to a climate in which women are less likely to tolerate bodily harm for themselves and their families. Undoubtedly, Indo-Caribbean women have benefited from the gains made by Caribbean feminism. However, as long as there is one woman applying salve to her wounds or one child traumatized by incest, we are forced to look inward (at our community) and confront the necessity of collaboration among male leaders and women activists. We need male leaders to speak out against violence against their sisters, mothers and daughters; to work with women activists in programmes to dismantle domestic violence; to mentor young men in developing gender relations of mutual respect; and, generally, to construct an Indo-Caribbean masculinity that is not based on gender domination, and community structures not based on hierarchy. For example, if a teenage girl becomes pregnant, instead of beating the young woman, or throwing her out of the home, or marrying her off, we can develop co-parenting arrangements between the young couple and older folks. We also need a network of community attorneys, medical professionals and counsellors to work with victims of rape and other bodily crimes.

Let us not hide dirty secrets of gender and other types of abuse that were bound up in group survival. We cannot use marginalization as an excuse for nasty behaviour. The community has mainstreamed and prospered, yet there are some of us who tear each other apart with petty jealousies and malice, like stray dogs fighting for scraps. Some of us are in the throes of ostentatious living and would rather show off on each other than lend a helping hand. Kamla cannot "fix" our problems but her presence at the apex of our community compels us to see the broken, bleeding, hungry woman as her alter ego. This metaphor extends to all of Trinidad and Tobago. Let us assiduously critique ourselves; engage in moral and compassionate practices; assume the dignity that we have earned; and temper individual, professional and economic ambitions with the development of community networks. From that place of honour, we can contribute to the wider Caribbean community.

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What If Khadijah Did Not Work and Aisha Did Not Speak? Reflections of a Young Indo-Trinidadian Muslim Woman

Sarah Nabbie

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to offer for discussion my experiences and negotiations as a young, Muslim, Indo-Trinidadian woman and former Board Secretary of a community masjid in Trinidad. My life revolved around masjids (aka mosques). I went to a Muslim primary school with a masjid in the compound. I attended Maktab (classes that teach Arabic and Islamic studies after school/weekends) in every one of my neighbourhood masjids from toddler to adulthood. There is one particular masjid, however, that I consider myself a true member of and that is my first and current community masjid. It is my relationship with this masjid in particular that I will be discussing in this article[i].

I have prioritised my relationship with my community masjid for over a decade because of my childhood connection to this place and what it signified in my life. My parents separated in 1994, and subsequently my father took my sister and me to live with him until early 1998 when I returned to my birthplace to live with my mother. Within this four-year period, I moved more than 12 times, shuffling around between approximately six different locations in the triangulated area of Sangre Grande, San Juan and my birthplace in the St. Augustine constituency. Despite my constant relocations and the access to masjids within my new neighbourhoods, this masjid was **the single** constant in my life: no exaggeration.

There is a hadith[1] by Prophet Muhammad (s.a.s.)[2] that "the world is a masjid". I take this to mean that practising Islam is not limited by space or designated places and that the earth is a place dedicated to the practice of Islam and serving Allah. My community masjid, however, exemplified that a masjid can be a school, a shelter, a doctor's office, a playground, a safe haven and a true home away from home. Needless to say, I have a bond with this place that I constantly feel but cannot fully grasp and truly articulate at times. Yet, the events that have taken place within the last six years have affected me so deeply that I currently question my sense of belonging and purpose within my community masjid and even my purpose as a Muslim woman.

My shift from being an active, young community member to being a member of the masjid's then Management Committee occurred in July 2005 with a phone call from the Imam who was newly appointed at that time. He was one of my former Maktab teachers but I hardly ever spoke to him outside of the masjid setting. I was honoured that he thought I was mature enough and capable to sit on the Committee but I was stunned beyond belief that he wanted me to act as Secretary. The significance of being a masjid's secretary is that the Secretary is the go-to-person when one cannot contact the Imam; contrary to any gendered stereotype that secretaries are usually female, I request of you the reader to do a simple background check or even ask the next Muslim you see if masjids' secretaries are male or female. I am very interested in this because I once had an official letter rejected by a recognized Muslim organization because they do not recognize female secretaries from masjid boards. Despite my desire to assist in the growth and development of this masjid, deciding whether to accept this role was truthfully one of the most complicated, difficult and downright scary decisions I have had to make in my life.

The first reason was my age. I was 20, which is relatively young. Growing up in this masjid, I knew almost all of the regular members of the masjid. Most of them had taught me at some point in Maktab. Apart from one woman, all of the members of the Management Committee were male. My father even served in various positions at different times. These people were my Maktab teachers at some time and they were all my "uncles". They knew me from when I was a toddler and I was being asked to sit and

[1] Hadith is a compilation of the acts, sayings and approvals of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.s)

[2] This is an abbreviation for *sallalaahu alaihi wa salaam*, which is a salutation of respect that is mandatory for all Muslims to make when the Prophet is mentioned.

discuss masjid issues as a colleague? To put myself in that situation was intimidating to say the least.

Secondly, my life was becoming more hectic. I was a full-time student at the University of the West Indies in St. Augustine and I had just started driving, and my responsibilities and duties at home had increased significantly. Living with my mother, who did not drive and was self-employed, meant that my time was just not my own. Where and how I spent my time outside of my classroom was dictated by the needs of the family. At that age, one is involved in self-discovery, adjusting to adulthood and balancing between independence and the fulfilment of duties and responsibilities. I knew being Secretary would mean sacrifice, commitment and even more responsibility and to take on the role was a prospect that scared me.

Ironically, the above were also some of the reasons why I chose to accept the position. One of the benefits of growing up in this masjid was that I learned that sex, age, race and status are not obstacles in performing one's duty as a Muslim and that community activism and participation were encouraged by my teachers. I also drew inspiration from two significant Muslim women in Islamic history. They are Khadijah and Aisha, the Prophet Muhammad's (s.a.s) first and last wives, respectively. The story goes that Khadijah was the Prophet's employer, his senior, his first and only wife during her lifetime. During the time of the first Revelation of the Qur'an (Islam's Scripture or Book), it was Khadijah who supported and encouraged her husband to accept this new role as Allah's Messenger. She was an astute business woman and a prominent member of her society.

Approximately a quarter of all ahadith (plural of hadith) were narrated by Aisha. Aisha is recognized as a major source of many Hadiths and, due to her, large amounts of Islamic knowledge are available, along with the efforts of those who spent their lives researching and compiling the Prophet's (s.a.s) Hadith and Sunnah[3]. She was brilliant, had an excellent memory and was a spirited leader. In other words, the actions, efforts and contributions by these women have been recorded throughout Islamic history and it is mainly due to these women that I found myself accepting the role of Secretary to my community masjid. I thought to myself that this was an opportunity to show that the understanding and practice of Islam had evolved and progressed. Yes, it was a sign of progress. And though I did not choose to be "mover and shaker", I thought that my presence on the Committee and my representation as a young, educated, Muslim woman would be interpreted as a symbol of progress in gendered understandings of Islam from a local perspective.

I believe that some members of the Committee did share this view. They expressed that the inclusion of a youth, another Sister, was a cause for celebration and an act of progress. Others were clearly disappointed that someone of my "credentials" was a replacement for the outgoing "Permanent Secretary". Before my appointment, there were very few members who held the position of Secretary and one person in particular held it longer than most. He was the outgoing Secretary and soon after my appointment excused

[3] Practices of the Prophet (s.a.s)

himself from the Committee altogether. I do not say this to offend or attack any person(s), but I assumed that everyone from the masjid would have perceived the appointment of a younger member of the Jamaat (masjid membership) as a means to enhance the feelings of inclusivity among the younger members of the Jamaat as well as to create an opportunity for the younger Muslims, males and females, to gain some experience in the managing of the masjid.

Overall, the request to be Secretary erased any notion of a "glass ceiling" I may have had about the political and managerial participation and contribution of women in a masjid. I do not know enough of the management of other masjids in Trinidad to know if this is a shared feeling among Muslims, but on a personal level I believed this meant that this new role in a masjid was women's right to choose, if they so desired.

I eagerly served as Secretary for six years. I would like to think that I performed well, but I will admit at times I felt that I was thwarted in carrying out some of my duties. Two incidents in particular come to mind.

The first was the unauthorized substitution of my signatures on official outgoing correspondence. As Secretary, I was expected to write or review and sign any official documents. The Imam is the only person who can supersede this duty and even he was not consulted on the issue. The board members in question explained that it was an "urgent" matter, but considering the advances in communication technology, I found this reasoning very suspect and disrespectful.

The other major incident was the scheduling of an important meeting at 5:15 am (after the first morning Salah/prayer performed at masjids). The other female board member and I openly objected to this for safety reasons since we would have to drive ourselves to the masjid and I had no one to accompany me at that time. No decision was made during the discussion, but I later learned that a meeting was held at that time without us (the female members).

The highlighted situations made me question the motivation behind these actions. Was it personal, sexist, anti-feminist? To this day I am uncertain. Like any other critical issue there can never be one reason. Do I think I faced objection and difficulties because I was female? I do not believe so. One of the main reasons is that one of the first members of the Committee was female and she had served the masjid for approximately two decades. Her input was well received and her recommendations and contributions can be noted in many of the masjid's programmes and activities. But I cannot overlook the other Board members' disregard for our presence at the previously described meeting. I know now that a high-status position such as masjid Secretary is one that the entire Jamaat holds in very high esteem and is a very coveted and contentious position. I personally believe that this was a play for power. During meetings, I sometimes could not tell the difference between members listening to and patronizing me. Sometimes I felt completely irrelevant. As time passed, however, I became more confident and vocal in my convictions and it was easy to realize that my support and my vote were generally and openly favourable to the Imam's position. This, of course, did not bode well with those resistant to his direction. I also know that my participation in the youth group meant that I

could readily inform the younger Jamaat members. Strategically, therefore, I can understand their rationale for diminishing my involvement.

These setbacks were not the reasons for my resignation. I resigned after a new Imam was appointed. The Imam who offered me the secretarial position had resigned as leader, but continued to serve on the Board. However, when the public was not involved in an election for the new Imam, I removed myself from the Board because I could not support the ignoring of election procedure.

I wish to emphasize that growing up and attending the Maktab at my community masjid taught me to believe that all Muslims, male or female, have a right to perform any job or task at hand. I thought and I still believe that I was exemplifying all that I had been taught to believe. My teachers (and some of them are current members of the Board of Directors) encouraged me to face the world's obstacles and not to listen to people who wish to deny me opportunities. And I think that this is still the position held and taught in the masjid. Experience has taught me to understand that teachers and elders are people too, and I should not judge them too harshly on their feelings, personal positions and reactions to issues affecting them on a personal and perhaps an intrapersonal level. The circumstances I faced and differing levels of support and resistance from the other members to my being Secretary revealed another layer to the Muslim and feminist debate with respect to women in the public sphere. I ask myself, how do these men of authority see me and by extension other Muslim women? Are we not members of a culture where our heroes are Khadijah and Aisha as well as the Prophet (s.a.s)? We are taught to learn about these women but where are the opportunities to manifest and demonstrate these qualities? I believe that the Imam who sought me out saw this and believed this. And it is strange for me that in one sample of people I have examples that both support and contradict my beliefs and understanding about Muslim women in an organizational and political setting.

History taught me that women have held powerful, influential positions and are crucial to our understanding of Islam today. Contemporary facts about the Muslim world are that women are still forced to enter undesirable marriages and are unable to vote. So to be allowed to serve on a masjid Board among male and female members is an indication that Muslim relations in Trinidad are to be understood as a separate entity from other parts of the Muslim world. My appointment as Secretary was both feminist and Islamic. I have Khadijah and Aisha for two models of powerful Muslim women. I have mixed emotions regarding my departure from the Board. At one level, I felt secure knowing that I had a right to stay and fight or leave at any time. On the other hand, I felt defeated when the new Imam was appointed and not elected by the larger Jamaat. But I always had a choice and, for me, that made all the difference in the world.

None of these experiences has shaken my positioning as an empowered Muslim woman. I am a Muslim by choice. One of the first issues in Gender debates is the need for a distinction between Sex and Gender. I subscribe to this theory that one is purely biological and the other is socially constructed. I was born female but I grew into a woman. My ancestors were East Indian but anyone who knows me well would say and have said to me that my voice and my views are not representative of the traditional East

Indian woman. What does my experience in my community tell you about Indo-Caribbean feminism? For me, it indicates that Caribbean Indo-women have become a distinctive collective group within the feminist community. We are unique in our historical and cultural development and should be treated as a separate unit of study if we are to understand fully the developmental change of the Indo-Caribbean woman, especially in relation to social and cultural issues such as religion, political or organizational participation and expanding our understanding of gender relations in this geographical sphere of Trinidad and the wider Caribbean.

[i] The actual name of the masjid was not used because of legal issues of confidentiality.

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An Ongoing Journey in the Pursuit of Agency: The Hindu Women's Organisation of Trinidad &Tobago

Brenda Gopeesingh

Abstract
"Where women are honoured,
There the Gods are pleased:
But where they are not honoured,
No sacred rite yields rewards"
So declares the Manu Smriti (111.56) —a text on social conduct.
In reviewing the attempts of the Hindu Women's Organisation (HWO) of Trinidad and Tobago to address the issue of domestic violence, this paper will briefly consider the power relations within the Indian household. It will define what is meant by "regendering the state"—a term introduced by Mindie Lazarus Black in her research paper "The (Heterosexual) Regendering of a Modern State: Criminalizing and Implementing Domestic Violence Law in Trinidad" (2003, 980-1008). It will also reflect on the role of the local women's movement in advocating for the introduction of the Domestic Violence Bill of 1991 in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.

Introduction

In this paper, I examine some of the reactions of prominent Indian men when, for the first time in the English-speaking Caribbean, the state sought to address an issue which perpetuated inequalities against women. As I recount some of the interventions made by the HWO, I will cite examples of how two of our leading members were subjected to victimisation, as well as two examples of our organisation's vigorous bid for inclusion in the national/international arena. In addition, I will focus on the rejection of our major publication by the male Hindu leadership and highlight the introduction of a new strategy in reaching out to our target audience.

The silence of Hindu and Muslim women's organisations during the 2011 debate of the Marriage Act will be explored as I look at the interventions of the Institute for Gender and Development Studies and the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development. I will focus briefly on a public discussion initiated by the HWO which was planned to bring about "more widespread attention to this contentious issue as we lobby for change".

The foregoing will be presented against the backdrop of our women's transition from their isolation in the rural areas to their entry into the workplace and urban life in the search for ways to create a more equitable arrangement in our community institutions and organisations.

As a founding member of the HWO, I am well positioned to utilize the methodology of participant observation in the articulation of our interaction with a cross-section of Hindu women and to describe what level of acceptance our work received as a women's activist group within our own community and the benefits derived from networking with other women's groups.

Background

Early indentured immigrants to Trinidad recreated the joint family system within their homes as it existed in India. Women and men were expected to follow the moral codes of Brahmin tradition as they negotiated Indian femininity and masculinity. As occurred in the home country, men remained the religious leaders while women perpetuated "their traditional role as transmitters of their gender imagery which travelled from India". Patricia Mohammed notes that by the late twentieth century other influences inserted themselves "between the symbolic understanding of what was male and female, and the day to day practices of individual men and women" (1999, 62-95). Sometimes, as many as three generations would live in one household where the mother-in-law would maintain control while the daughter-in law undertook the domestic chores. Understandably, such an arrangement would restrict women's activities in the public sphere which would have provided them with more visibility and possibly more voice. Traditional family values dictated a deep respect for authority so that there was a general acceptance of a status quo where male members were held in high esteem. The father was the authority in the family and when he became handicapped by old age or illness, the eldest son took charge (Khodabaks-Hasnoe and Habieb 1999, 32-38). These practices reinforced the patriarchal system and set the stage for the oppression of women.

Women's role in the "regendering of the state"

According to Lazarus-Black, the passage of the Domestic Violence Act of 1991 became a reality because of a coalition of political, social and economic forces. The emergence of professional women as a result of their success in higher education, a temporary oil boom and the networking of international organisations with the local women's movement all contributed towards this development. Intense lobbying took place between1988 and1991 through letters to the newspapers, media articles, public gatherings, petitions to lawmakers and a dramatic "silent" protest in Parliament when all the women wore black (Lazarus-Black 2003, 980-1008). Interestingly, however, religious organisations were not part of this groundbreaking approach. It has been documented that leading members of our organisation, as they addressed gatherings in their own communities, highlighted the wretchedness of women's existence in that Indian women were faced with wife-beating and alcoholism (Mahabir 1992).

Lazarus-Black defines the term "regendering the state" "as the process of bringing to the public and legal attention categories and activities that were formerly (and formally) without name but that constituted harm to women, denied them their rights, silenced them, or limited their capacity to engage in actions available to men" (2003, 980). She goes on to explain that she uses the term "regendering" because "historically, many of the processes and policies of the state actively promoted inequality of men and women". In her view, a regendered state recognises the fact that some citizens are male and others are female and as citizens, they should be treated equally. "For the first time, the Domestic Violence Act provided a person who was physically or emotionally abused by a family member or an intimate or formerly intimate partner, the legal right to apply to a court for a restraining order" (Lazarus-Black 2003). Previously, incidents of domestic violence were treated as criminal assault and battery, but generally, the policing authority tended to retreat from what was considered "husband-and-wife business". With the passage of this Act, domestic violence was criminalised.

Responses by Indian Men—Hindu and Christian

When the Domestic Violence Act was passed, there was a sudden spate of wife murders with many of the victims being Indian women. The Act allowed women to claim 50% of the assets owned by the couple if the woman wanted to end the marriage or to obtain a restraining order if the marital home was given as settlement. Neisha Haniff notes with interest that "Indo-Trinidadian male leaders were defensive of the killings that took place" (Haniff 1999, 18-31). Basdeo Panday, who was Opposition Leader at the time, commented that "the psyche of the Trinidad male was such that he would 'lose his cool' when forbidden to enter a house which he may have built, in which his wife and children live and in which other men may be welcomed" (Chouti 1994). Dr Hari Maharaj, prominent psychiatrist working out of the St Ann's Hospital, now Professor, commented that "women were not behaving in the best interest of their families in seeking restraining orders and were therefore provoking violent responses from men" (Yawching 1994). Haniff asked, "Where are those Indian men whose mothers and sisters were being murdered?" She suggested that if high-profile men like Cheddi Jagan, Basdeo Panday and Shridath Ramphal as well as other well-placed men in regional organisations such as the University of the West Indies were to advocate for this cause, then attitudes might have been different (Haniff 1999).However, since no such advocates were forthcoming, it

became increasingly clear that our women would have to undertake this advocacy on their own. In a recent conversation I had with Pandita Indrani Rampersad, she pointed out that our women should have lobbied for their intervention if we thought it was important as politicians do not get involved in these issues unless they are asked. While this statement has some validity, it should be observed that ours was a fledgling organisation, a mere three years old and we were less knowledgeable about this process than we are today.

HWO's earliest attempts at addressing violence

It is important to note that our organisation was not as vibrant as it could have been because our work was entirely voluntary and the double shift to which our women are subjected had to take priority over community affairs. It was not until 1994, the year the UN declared as "The International Year of the Family", that the HWO made its first collective effort to address the issue of domestic violence. This took the form of sponsoring a young woman to pursue a course in Basic Counselling so that she would be equipped to lend some assistance to the women who attended the temple where she worshipped when they were faced with problematic relationships. Difficult cases would have been referred to social services. The idea had the approval of the Executive of the temple in which she was the Secretary. However, on completion of the course, the same Executive did not permit the presence of a Counselling Arm within its premises. Such a contradiction can be interpreted as perpetuating a policy to suppress women and to maintain the traditional norms of women as followers, not leaders.

By this time, too, the organisation became a member of the local Network of Non-Governmental Organisations for the Advancement of Women and began participating on a regular basis in its activities on days like 8 March, International Women's Day, and 25 November, the day the UN set aside for the observance of the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Our sustained links with other women's organisations such as the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA) and Women Working for Social Progress enabled us to work together on matters of common interest at a national level.

As the Fourth World Conference on Women was due to begin in Beijing, China, in September 1995, the preparatory work being done in the Caribbean brought the issue of domestic violence sharply into focus. I was the organisation's lone representative at the Beijing Conference and I was also the President of the HWO at the time. The Beijing Platform of Action motivated the government of the day, through the intervention of the Ministry of Culture and Gender Affairs, to initiate a Public Awareness Campaign throughout the island. This took place in 1996 and as part of that programme, the HWO made a thrust to raise awareness within its community. From then on, all our exhibitions on the occasions of Indian Arrival Day and Divali included a module which dealt with domestic violence.

The organisation was so concerned about Violence Against Women that our members found it imperative to address the august gathering of the World Hindu Conference, which was held at the University of the West Indies in St. Augustine in 2000. In reflecting on our organisation's progress, I observed that our "carefully drafted objectives

would be inoffensive to the acceptable norms of our highly traditional culture." I continued, "Little did we realize that both the spoken and unspoken directives of our religious community would dictate the issues we were likely to pursue." As Public Relations Officer of the HWO, I outlined a few proposals for addressing violence in an appeal to our elders to collaborate with us. Under the heading "Prioritizing The Issue of Domestic Violence on the Hindu Agenda", the elders were told that "the failure which pervades the male-female relationship within the Hindu community, apart from alienating its following, would lead to more gruesome deaths." I stated that "our women excel at all levels of our society—in government, in banking institutions, in the legal system, etc. It is time for the Hindu authorities to draw on their (the women's) unlimited resources in developing a multi- dimensional approach to violence." I also suggested that "the time had come to borrow strategies from the Roman Catholic church with whom Hindus share space at the Inter-Religious Organisation (IRO) of Trinidad and Tobago in reference to the Church's general counselling services and in particular to the pre-marital counselling which takes place prior to marriage ceremonies being conducted"(Gopeesingh and Nagpal 2007, 26-28). Because the issue was a crucial one, I expected the Maha Sabha, which was the main organiser of the conference, to heed my calls. Again, in conversation with Pandita Indrani, she observed that conference organisers hardly make responses on presentations and that the membership should have presented a resolution. Interestingly, the HWO presented two papers to the conference but these sessions were presented simultaneously. It is my opinion that our women had not sufficiently grasped the severity of the issue of Violence Against Women as to warrant their presence at my presentation. It therefore became impossible for a resolution to be tabled, especially since none had been prepared.

Publishing pamphlets and booklets

The HWO had begun publishing pamphlets since its first Divali Programme at the Mid-Centre Mall in Chaguanas in 1990. Every time we held an exhibition, there was an accompanying pamphlet aimed at raising awareness and building consciousness on matters pertaining to women. In the year 2000, we published a booklet entitled "Understanding Gender" which was distributed at our exhibition on the occasion of Indian Arrival Day. In 2001, the inaugural issue of the HWO magazine with the title *Confronting Our Own Reality* reached the public. In July 2002, we launched *Pathways to Self-Discovery*. One thousand copies were published for each issue and widely distributed to Hindu women across the country free of charge. There were many encouraging remarks about the magazine; however, upon my entry to The University of the West Indies in 2003 to pursue a degree, our membership did not assume responsibility for the publications' continuity.

Encouraging expression through writing

In 2001, the Hindu Women's Organisation introduced a short story competition for the observance of Indian Arrival Day. Its main objective was "to sharpen the social and cultural consciousness by widening the space for creative expression of Indo-Caribbean women". Although it was not intended to address domestic violence, the majority of the stories expressed the distress of women in oppressive, violent situations. By this time too, the organisation was able to attract the support of Professor Kenneth Ramchand as the Chief Adjudicator of the competition. When the results of the competition were

announced at the Learning Resource Centre of the University of the West Indies in St. Augustine, he spoke out publicly on Violence Against Women. One of his comments was "so men, your numbers are being called. These stories are not just about women, they are about men and they force us to see ourselves as women see us" (HWO 2010). In reality, the stories submitted had raised a hornet's nest for the men were portrayed in a negative light. The HWO was faced with a barrage of criticism when two of our high-profile male invitees expressed their outrage since they regarded the exercise as one for "bashing Hindu men" (Gopeesingh and Nagpal 2007, 35). Our intention to publish these stories never materialised as our request for funding from the Ministry of Culture and Gender Affairs which had funded the competition was rejected.

HWO obtains international funding

In 2002, after several months of discussion and fine-tuning, the HWO won the approval of the Canadian International Funding Agency (CIDA) to implement a 5-Day Workshop aimed at addressing the prevalence of domestic violence within Hindu communities. Women from various Hindu organisations benefited from popular education techniques which infused them with enthusiasm and group solidarity. Rosemarie Dipnarine, a former President of the HWO, discussed her use of "pichakaree songs as a medium for warning women against violent relationships ". The second phase of this programme took us into the communities where we gathered information that became part of a publication which discussed family violence.

When the book, *The dynamics of family violence and working with our women: How to make workshops a success* (Gopeesingh and Nagpal),was launched in 2007, it was well received by the representatives of several prominent groups such as the National Council of Indian Culture, the Hindu Prachar Kendra, Swaha, the El Socorro Mandir, the Bharat Vidyas Mandali, the Maha Vishnu Temple and the Raja Yoga Centre. There was also representation from CAFRA, WINAD and the Institute for Gender and Development Studies.

Male rejection of our publication

It took a while before any review of the book appeared in the press and when it did, the sensational headline "Rice, Dhal, Bhagi and Licks" generated such dissatisfaction within one leading organisation that a male teacher from a Hindu Secondary School responded. This took the form of a letter to the Editor of the *Daily Express* of 20 February 2008. The author appeared to be overly concerned with what the non-Hindu public reading the article would conclude rather than with the urgency to address the reality that every so often, marital violence erupts into murder and the entire population is outraged. Consequently, since we did not have the wholehearted support of the school and temple authorities, promoting the use of this book through schools and temples—the target group for which it was intended—was significantly reduced.

We were then forced to admit that in continuing our struggle for a violence-free society, we must develop a more direct approach. We could not depend on the middleman—in this case, the temples and the school authorities. We continued to work with other women's organisations and in 2008 participated in a march in Chaguanas that was led by CAFRA in which several women's organisations took part. The UN theme for that year

was "Women and men unite to end violence against women". We recognise that women are receptive to welcoming the transformation of society where their choices are opening up and freedoms increasing. Many of our religious leaders are not so willing to accept the possibilities of change as it would diminish their control over women. The HWO continues to experience the reluctance of male leaders to engage in a collaborative effort to ensure the gradual decline of Violence Against Women as our major objective.

A new strategy

On behalf of the HWO, I developed a series of slides which were aired on *Gayelle The Channel* in 2009 during the "16 Days of Activism", where viewers were exposed to relevant information that have an impact on family life and encouraged to perform actions which would promote harmony in the home. In 2010, we delivered eight messages to the public during the 16 days between 25 November and 10 December, Human Rights Day. These were aired on WINTV.

Our messages were aired 5 times per day, for a total of 80 times. The slides included shots from the march which was organised by CAFRA in 2008. A similar programme was effected in 2010 for that year's "16 Days of Activism". These announcements were funded by members of the organisation. This method of funding ourselves with a minimum of fund-raising events has its limitations. In contributing their personal funds, members are more likely to support charitable work instead of activist causes.

Working with a cross-section of women

Much of our literature states that membership in the Hindu Women's Organisation is open to all Hindu women irrespective of class. In fact, it has been publicly stated that "we recognize the necessity for our membership to cut across class lines" (*Trinidad Guardian* June 1998). From our earliest days our membership was described as consisting "of professional middle-class women with its headquarters in Valsayn". However, all Hindu women were encouraged to join. We have a small number of clerical workers among our members, a couple of factory workers as well as one or two store clerks. It is not always practical for them to attend meetings but they are always very helpful when their time permits. Despite the setbacks, our organisation has maintained close ties with these women who remain members and have manned our booths at exhibitions, assisted in formatting our publications and staging our exhibitions. There are others who have given wholehearted support to our involvement with other groups, assisted in our fund-raisers and who interact with members of our group intermittently. At some point, we carried out a mentorship programme which, although short-lived, benefited a few young women. Remedial classes for children in a depressed area were introduced by Kamla Tewarie, a former president. What is relevant here is that when three grassroots members were elected to the Executive in 2006, they served for a short while and then gradually lost interest. The reasons for their dropping out are unclear and the issue of class interaction within our organisation needs to be deliberated upon more fully.

The National Council of Indian Culture generously provided us with space to conduct our exhibitions during their annual Divali programmes and we have enjoyed the hospitality of the management of the Mid-Centre Mall in hosting a few exhibitions there in observance of Indian Arrival Day. In both venues, we freely distributed our pamphlets and booklets.

A wider distribution could have been officially organised through the temples but this was not possible since our efforts were not formally approved of by the temple authorities. Generally, distribution would take place by giving the reading material to individual temple members who would share the publications with other women. While the women were pleased to receive them, there was never any discussion between temple officials and ourselves. We would have the odd Pundit saying "you are doing good work" and we would obtain approval if we were to distribute schoolbooks and clothes for the underprivileged or flood victims. We were highly applauded when we staged a Blood Drive led by our President Henny Charran in June 2010, and we received coverage from Radio Jaagriti for this humanitarian effort (*Newsday* Section B, 16 June 2011). However, there has been little recognition of our work in the cause of Violence Against Women. Clearly, activism has never been on the agenda of the temple authorities for their female membership.

Victimisation of our Hindu women leaders

Examples of "a nurturing yet repressive and male-dominated Indo-Trinidadian community" (Kanhai 1999) abound but this paper will cite two examples of how our founding members were subjected to victimisation as they sought to address the unequal status of women in our community.

During the 1990's, Amrika Tiwary, the legal adviser of the HWO, advocated for the increase of the legal age of marriage for Hindu women to 18 years (*Trinidad Guardian* 22 April 1987). According to the Hindu Marriage Act of 1945, parental consent is required for marriage under the age of 14 for females. The most prominent Hindu leader in Trinidad treated Tiwary with contempt in one of our weekly newspapers. This was a clear attempt at silencing her. The Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) had in 2000 established 18 years as the legal age for the marriage of females as marriage at an earlier age presents serious health consequences for girls. It should be noted that despite the fact that the government of Trinidad and Tobago had signed on to the Convention, both the Hindu and Muslim authorities rejected the idea, choosing instead to maintain the already existing statute. Rhoda Reddock raises the point that although marriage under the age of 18 rarely occurs, leaving the law as is represents a symbolic act (Reddock 2008). In her view, there is no other reason for its importance except as a symbol of patriarchal control over the women of those groups. On the other hand, Pandita Indrani Rampersad regards keeping the existing provisions in the Marriage Act as a safety net for protecting young girls who become pregnant from having babies out of wedlock. As she observes, common-law unions and children out of wedlock are not sanctioned by religious bodies. The rejection by Hindu and Muslim authorities to changing the law became part of a national dialogue in November 2011.

In the other case, intense pressure was brought to bear upon Indrani Rampersad, the first president of the HWO, as she pursued the spiritual path of becoming a Pandita in a ceremony organised by the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Trinidad in 1993. The debate raged for weeks despite the fact that Rampersad belonged to a sect which permits a female pundit. The Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha, the largest Puranic-Hindu body in the country, objected vehemently to women being in the role of pundits (Rampersad 1999, 140-143).

Several religious leaders supported Rampersad's move citing the Vedas as their authority. It was stated that the Arya Samaj was founded in 1875 and was described as "the first to educate women and denounce superiority on the grounds of birth, race, gender and so on. Equality and mobility had to be achieved by actions". Ravi-ji, the leader of the Hindu Prachar Kendra, supported Rampersad's ordination as did Raveena Sarran-Persad, the president of HWO at that time (Hinduism Today).

While women are fully accepted as swamis and yogis, there are severe restrictions surrounding the performance of rites and rituals as they relate to the menstrual cycle. There is an added dimension to these attempts at the exclusion of women from performing priestly rites and rituals, since monetary compensation is given upon completion of these performances. Consequently, women are deprived not only the privilege of serving in the role of pundits but also of the remuneration that accompanies their service. It can be said that much ambivalence exists among male authoritative figures, for while women's success in education is applauded, limits beyond which they should not venture are determined by the hierarchy that governs their role in Hindu society in Trinidad.

Strong protest action in our early years

The Hindu Women's Organisation was formed in May 1987, an offshoot of the Second East Indian Conference held at the University of the West Indies, St Augustine. In what must have been an unprecedented event, at our organisation's initiative, "some twelve Hindu Organisations presented a joint position on what they call the growing incidents of 'Hindu bashing' in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean." Raveena Sarran-Persad (Public Relations Officer) stoutly defended our religion in response to the telecasting of a programme entitled "Caribbean Crossroads" that was aired on Trinidad and Tobago Television (TTT) in September 1990. "The controversial programme brought a wave of protests from Hindus and non-Hindus alike, causing the television station to immediately suspend further transmission" of this series (HWO 2001). Sarran-Persad said, "The Hindu community is still looked upon as one with strange and peculiar practices. People with limited knowledge of our scriptures...continue ridiculing our religion."

In a joint statement reflecting the consolidated position of the Hindu Community, Satnarine Maharaj, leader of the Maha Sabha, said, "In view of the very tense situation existing in the country as a result of the incidents occurring on July 27, 1990, it is imperative that we take all steps to foster a feeling of unity, brotherhood and patriotism. Secretary of the Inter-Religious Organisation (IRO), Pundit Sadanan Ramnarine, said that "the IRO denounced this type of insensitivity towards any religious organisation".

I now refer to an article which appeared in the *Trinidad Guardian* in September 1988, entitled "Hindu women protest cultural imbalance in Sunday Sports Aid". This article refers to a statement of protest by the HWO regarding the absence of Indian cultural items on the Sport Aid 88 programme which came off at the National Stadium (*Trinidad Guardian* 9 September 1988). Raveena Sarran-Persad, Public Relations Officer of the HWO, said that "750 million television viewers around the world got the impression that most Trinidadians are of African descent, and that no other type of culture exists other than calypso, steelband and Carnival."

Through letters to the Editor in the daily newspapers and sometimes through press releases, we protested against the degrading calypsos against women and the indignities meted out to our community. On a couple of occasions, the women's movement also took up this issue on our behalf. Many of our letters went unpublished.

The constant pursuit of equality, whether it is within the precincts of the mandir/temple, on national television or on the international stage, makes insurmountable demands on our time. Inasmuch as such activity cannot be anything but voluntary, there are severe limitations to what can be achieved. Often, because of time constraints, we find it necessary to engage in more practical matters instead of expending our energies on such long-term aspirations as equal space in the land of our birth.

The silence of Hindu and Muslim women during the national dialogue

Having presented a record of its Human Rights obligations to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in October 2011, the Trinidad Government agreed to provide a response to the Universal Periodic Bureau by March 2012. This commitment is in keeping with recommendations "that the government amends the national legislation to ensure that the minimum age for marriage is in line with its obligation under the Convention on the Rights of the Child" (*Daily Express* 7 November 2011). These include the right to health, the right to education and the right to freedom from abuse and exploitation. In the quest to fulfil this mandate, the Institute for Gender and Development Studies held a public forum at the University of the West Indies on 3 November 2011 while the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development hosted a "Stakeholder Consultation on the Standardization of the Legal Age of Marriage" on the following day. Although several speakers presented, there was no official position put forward by either the Hindu or Muslim communities in which early marriage for young girls occur most frequently. The leader of the Maha Sabha, the most prominent Hindu organisation, simply pointed out that "Hindus and Muslims did not ask to change the law. It is you Christians that want to change it" (*Newsday* 6 November 2011).

Like the Muslim Women's Organisation, the Hindu Women's Organisation remained silent as the discussion reached its climax in the media in the early days of November 2011. I cannot say why there was no response from Muslim women but I turned down the request to be part of the panel organised by the IGDS as I was deeply involved in the development of two projects, their deadline being 25 November. It is noteworthy that the Hindu Women's Organisation was not invited to the Stakeholder's Consultation, especially since we were invited to and attended a Proposal Workshop a few weeks earlier. That is not to say that there would have been representation from the HWO.

The HWO makes a late intervention

An edited version of a discussion paper on the Marriage Act from the HWO appeared in the *Daily Express* on 16 November 2011, while the complete article was published in the *Sunday Guardian* on 27 November 2011.

In their efforts "to promote faith-based organisations' role in increasing awareness to change attitudes and influence behaviour amongst people from all walks of life", UN

Women funded the HWO to carry out two projects for the "16 Days of Activism". We produced eight new Public Service Announcements for televiewing as well as a booklet entitled *Hinduism—An overview and rejecting violence against women* (HWO 2011). We used the opportunity to bring the Marriage Act into a community discussion in order to raise awareness about the issue.

The injurious effects of early and forced marriage were deliberated upon by using facts which became available from the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the Centre for Research on Women (See The Royal Commonwealth Society Briefing Paper, October 2011). The consequences of girls being involved in early sex and childbirth before they are mature physically were reported as they appeared in the *National Geographic* Magazine of June 2011.

The booklet was launched at the Divali Nagar, Chaguanas, in early December to a cross-section of Hindus and to other organisations representing the wider community. Subsequently, the Mayor of Chaguanas, Orlando Nagessar, kindly consented to host a public discussion on the topic of The Marriage Act 1945 on 29 February at the Auditorium of the Borough Hall, Chaguanas. The HWO invited members of the Christian, Muslim and Orisha faiths to participate in the public discussion which was held on 29 February 2012, at the Borough Hall, Chaguanas. Our panel comprised Dr. Pandita Indrani Rampersad, Anusha Ragbir, Rose Mohammed, Sarah Nabbie, Angela Brown and Ann Marie Sirju.

Here we expected to formulate a resolution for presentation to the Prime Minister and the Members of Parliament but one group expressed the need for further deliberation on the issue. During the discussion we were informed by Senator Lyndira Oudit that ratification of the Convention would take place in June. Consequently, it was decided to hold three monthly sessions which would explore the legal, medical and psychological implications of early marriage. The HWO will be partnering with the Trinidad and Tobago Medical Association and the National Council of Indian Culture to bring more of our citizens into the dialogue.

Accounting for Hindu women's reluctance to confront social issues

From its very inception, it was not uncommon for Hindu women to shy away from what was perceived as an activist organisation which is what our vision articulated. Our women were very active in temple groups and our expectations were to network with Hindu groups throughout the country. Their lack of interest in joining an activist organisation indicated an almost ingrained indifference to social issues. The issue of class may also have been a deterrent. Despite this, we have had and continue to have some support through their attendance at functions and their assistance in our charitable work but with little input in addressing issues.

As documented by Basmat ShivPersad, it is the Afro-Guyanese women who have taken the lead in prioritising women's rights in Guyana, while Indian women were comfortable with their participation in religious bodies and women's arms of political parties (Shiv Persad 1999, 40-59). A similar situation exists in Trinidad where African women lead the drive towards gender equality. Although there is an increase in Indian—Christian, Hindu

and Muslim—participation in political leadership, their interest in issues which are primarily women's issues is not a priority.

In her seminal work *Diasporic (Dis)locations*, Brinda Mehta contends that the objectives of a colonial education coincided with the goals of Hindu patriarchy in relegating women to the secondary role of wife and homemakers. Moral codes of the Victorian era were perpetuated by both Presbyterian and Catholic schools. Indian culture was rendered incompatible with Western education and was viewed as being primitive and backward (Mehta 2004, 43-45). It therefore becomes feasible to conclude that Indo-Caribbean women experienced feelings of inferiority and alterity which can account for their reticence. Even when so many of them have achieved tertiary levels of education it remains difficult to confront social issues which when pursued vigorously can result in controversy. In fact, there are several instances where our women were subjected to personal attacks when they dared to voice their opinions. One case that readily comes to mind is that of Rajnie Ramlakhan, a journalist from the *Trinidad Express* Newspapers who had the boldness to criticise the calypso "Bottom in de Road" in one of her columns. Ramlakhan had her body parts dissected in an article in the *TNT Mirror* of 5 December 1997.

When the observance of the 153rd Anniversary of Indian Arrival Day was organised by the Mere Desh Committee/Edinburgh Temple, as the Public Relations Officer of the HWO, I was invited to address the gathering. I recalled that when a Bill for the Incorporation of the Hindu Women's Organisation was piloted by Senator Amrika Tiwary, objections were raised by a male member of our community (a Pundit) (*Hansard* Trinidad Parliament 1 October 1991). I further stated that "sentiments such as those expressed in the Senate reflected the serious misgivings which were harboured against the reality of an organisation of Hindu women which would be neither male-oriented nor male-dominated." I observed that "a long time had passed before it became clear that it was not our aim to erode our traditional values but rather to raise our visibility and our voice in matters pertaining to women and on national issues" (*Trinidad Guardian*, June 1998).

To give the impression that all male leaders were against the advancement of women would be inaccurate. In an article entitled "Looking at the changing roles of Hindu Women" which appeared in the *Trinidad Guardian*, 31 May 1991, Pundit Ramesh Tewari's view was that "the transformation of the Indian woman must not be viewed as a departure from tradition but rather as an evolution". Suruj Rambachan, who was one of the organisers of the Second East Indian Conference, was very supportive of the formation of the HWO which was initiated by Indrani Rampersad. The National Council of Indian Culture has always supported activities undertaken by our organisation and the Hindu Prachar Kendra actively promotes the advancement of women in their leadership.
Yet another disadvantage we faced was that the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs had no clear policy of equality in assisting all communities, so that the HWO suffered from lack of funding. While large amounts were being dispensed to various organisations, our organisation's pleas resulted in the receipt of such small sums that after a while we decided that the returns on the energy expended were

just not worth it. Our hopes have since risen with the introduction of the new Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development.

When the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) was held in Trinidad in 2009, all NGO's were invited to participate. The experience of the HWO bears some relevance to the reluctance of our women to participate in national events. We were given a slot on 25 November 2009 along with the YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) to make a presentation of our work. Our enthusiasm peaked when we realised our programme was being highlighted on 25 November, the Day for Elimination of Violence Against Women. Some of our members applied for leave in order to be present. We awaited our turn with much anticipation, only to be told at the last moment that we and the women from the YWCA had to give up a few minutes of our time because Prime Minister Manning was promoting his drive towards the Environmental Conference Commonwealth Summit which was to take place in Copenhagen shortly after the Commonwealth Summit here in Trinidad (HWO 2010). At the end of it all, we, along with the women of the YWCA, were completely excluded from the programme. What shoddy treatment of women and on 25 November too! When we, Hindu women, are rebuffed in this manner, almost as if we do not exist, how does this encourage our participation in national events?

Conclusion

Through their educational achievements, many Hindu women have broken barriers in the workplace; they make major decisions within the household, mainly because of their capacity to earn, and have made great strides in the political field. Others exercise their sexual freedom contrary to the expectations of parents and scriptural dictates. Still others confront the tribulations of domestic violence on a daily basis. It is here, within the family setting, a supposedly safe space, that our women and girls are most vulnerable.

As Chairperson of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2011, the Prime Minister, the Honourable Kamla Persad-Bissessar, proclaimed the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) 2005–2015. She fused the observance of International Women's Day 2011 with Commonwealth Day in Trinidad and Tobago, and at the Diplomatic Centre in March, made strong pronouncements on the advancement and protection of women and girls. Her address at the New York Meeting of Female Heads of Government in June 2011 rejected Violence Against Women in such a forceful manner that one could perceive an almost immediate softening of the Hindu authorities in working with our organisation. Dr Vidya Gyan Tota-Maharaj, our President at the time, was invited by Radio Jaagriti to discuss Violence Against Women on an hour-long radio programme. This did not, however, alter the position of the largest Hindu organisation, the Maha Sabha, in its stance on early marriage of young women and girls. Having articulated its dreadful consequences in our recently published booklet, we sought means by which we could engage our women more directly in expressing their views on this issue.

The public discussion planned for 29 February was one very tangible outcome of being funded—in this instance by UN Women in the Caribbean. The HWO recognises how important it is for women to study the issues that affect them in a dispassionate manner and to lobby for changes which will improve their status. Our invitation to Muslim,

Orisha and Christian women to collaborate with us was the first time the HWO engaged in such an initiative and we envision prospects for further collaboration.

Currently, the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development is in the process of renewing discussions for the adoption of the National Gender Policy and will hold discussions with organisations in specific categories. Our participation in this exercise becomes imperative in our mission to maximise our role as an integral part of civil society. In evaluating the Ministry's outreach into our community, we estimate their involvement as being insufficient to address the plethora of ills which affect its constituents. Perhaps there should be more direct interaction with community organisations in order to evaluate their interventions within their communities. This may remove the systemic blockage of much needed funds to serious organisations that seek to address issues of abuse of women and children—and of men.

We need to educate our teachers on how to identify child abuse, how to report it and how to get swift action. We need to develop self-esteem in our youth—both boys and girls—and to sensitise them to the need to respect each other at an early age. Our organisation which survives only through voluntary work cannot adequately address such pressing needs when an enormous amount of energy needs to be spent on raising funds. Institutions must facilitate us with some portion of funding if we are to serve at our optimum.

The stereotype of Hindu/Indian women as passive, docile and subservient no longer applies. They have made the transition from the family unit into the public domain with small steps over many years. No longer are they confined to the rural areas, immersed in traditional values and apprehensive of venturing into the wider society. Nor are they content to live in the shadows of their husbands' successes, in the secondary role of wife/ homemaker and helper in the informal sector. Mehta's interpretation of women's status in our male-oriented and male-dominated institutions and organisations is indisputable. She declares that "although women's participation in community building is actively solicited, their commensurate recognition in the form of equal citizenship and direct participation in communal policy making has been largely ignored" (Mehta 2004). Those of us who have claimed agency for changing our own lives need to reflect on our journey and recommit ourselves to the daunting task of eroding these inequalities within the very institutions which should be predisposed to our involvement in diffusing the prejudices and discrimination which our community faces on the national level. It will do our leaders well to deliberate upon the pronouncement of Ban Ki-Moon, the UN Secretary General: "When women are denied the opportunity to better themselves and their societies, we all lose. Let us work with renewed determination for a future of equal rights, equal opportunities and progress for all" (Ki-Moon 2010). For the sake of our women, our children and our men, the Hindu Women's Organisation should no longer be confined to its present peripheral role in serving its community.

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CRGS
CARIBBEAN REVIEW OF GENDER STUDIES
A Journal of Caribbean Perspectives on Gender and Feminism

Issue 6 – 2012

Ohrni and Cutlass

Andil Gosine

Ohrni
Gold embroidery on lace and cotton

Gosine, Andil. 2012. Ohrni and Cutlass. *CRGS*, no. 6, ed. Gabrielle Hosein and Lisa Outar, pp. 1-3.

A collaboration with Leor Grady
Single edition
From the *Wardrobes* collection “Khala Pani”

I am not quite sure yet how to properly and fairly characterize an “Indo-Caribbean feminist aesthetic” but I am certain that *Ohrni* and *Cutlass* are examples of it. Both replicas of complicated objects, they are as much markers of oppression as they are evidence of the creative agency of women who lived through miserable conditions of colonization and the still-patriarchal postcolonial process of nation building that followed.

The two women for whom these were made are also responsible for their making: they were the early trainers of my own aesthetics and feminist politics. This *Ohrni* is for my father’s mother, Jasso. However much of Jasso’s “covering up” was her compliance with social norms, the way she recreated the experience was her own. Neither a daily nor necessary habit, she brought out her ohrni on special occasions like prayer rituals and family visits. She might have worn it because that was what was expected of her, but she also wore it simply to dress up, and to feel beautiful. I remember the care she took in placing it over her hair, tucking the ends, weighing how loose to let it fall. That embroidered gold anchor falls just along her arm, matching her own tattoo.

Cutlass
Brooch in Silver or White Gold
From the Wardrobes collection “Khala Pani” (2011)
Edition of 20 in silver, 20 in white gold

The cutlass is mired in blood—it's all of the Caribbean's history: the violence of slavery and indentureship, and all that followed too; reports of the cutlass being used in murders of spouses, strangers, and family members are still common across the region. This *Cutlass* brooch references that misery, but it also aspires to match the elegance of the ways my grandmother Ramadai wielded hers, a disposition that carried through in the conduct of her life despite its limiting conditions. Ramadai raised 11 rambunctious children, cared for a demanding husband and extended families, and tirelessly served her community. Nevertheless, like Jasso, Ramadai conjured aesthetic practices—like the way in which she used to cut cane and coconut—that not only created pleasurable experiences out of imposed duties in her daily life, but also resisted those inflictions of social forces meant to suppress her will.

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The University of
the West Indies
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Development Studies

CRGS
CARIBBEAN REVIEW OF GENDER STUDIES
A Journal of Caribbean Perspectives on Gender and Feminism

Issue 6 – 2012

Visually and figuratively, this woman is a symbol of strength, beauty, and self-confidence as she twirls around celebrating Phagwah. (All photos courtesy Jennifer Pritheeva Samuel 2012)

Home Away from Home by Jennifer Pritheeva Samuel

These photographs are part of photographer and filmmaker Jennifer Pritheeva Samuel's Home Away from Home Project, an in-progress multimedia project about the global South Asian diaspora. This body of work, which combines photography, video, and audio, explores the issues facing diaspora populations as they migrate from one culture and adapt to another. Samuel addresses ideas of identity, race, transnationalism, and belonging through the lenses of history, politics and culture. Thus far, she has photographed South Asian communities in South Africa, Kenya and Trinidad. The photographs here were taken during her first visit to Trinidad in March 2012.

Samuel, Jennifer. 2012. Home Away from Home. CRGS no 6, ed. Gabrielle Hosein and Lisa Outar, pp. 1-7.

Kiss of Life

Dress Rehearsal

This photo considers the commodification of Indian culture and how it is accessed by people of Indian descent in Trinidad. While helping one another get ready for weddings and special occasions is usually reserved for a closed circle of women, we find this man in the non-traditional role of dressing a woman in her sari.

Behind the Scenes

I visited Mrs. Rampersad because I heard that she, an Indo-Trinidadian woman, is one of the primary makers of carnival costumes in Trinidad. I was really impressed that behind the scenes, she is one of many who make Carnival what it is.

These images gesture at the wide variety of classes, religions, and backgrounds encountered in Trinidad, and the continuing significance of spirituality to Indian women's sense of self, relationship and place.

These images were taken in the work place and yet they have a very familial (top) and dreamy (bottom) feel to them. The expression and colors of the two women in the foreground below are strong, natural, and bold, despite all the giggling that took place before they agreed to be photographed.

Another strong woman framed in the context of her workplace.

The Battle

Ria Ramnarine, a female fighter of Indian descent, has had to wage many battles, both in and out of the ring

This image demonstrates the love of family and the multiple identities of women at different stages of their lives -- daughters, mothers, aunts, etc.

The signs of this woman's poverty -- washing her clothes at a stand pipe and living in a simple wooden house -- are in stark contrast to the general wealth seen around Trinidad and depicted below. Regardless of class, there is still "women's work" (above) as well as women's camaraderie (below).

Beauty, strength, and Trinidadian diversity personified.

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Development Studies

CRGS
CARIBBEAN REVIEW OF GENDER STUDIES
A Journal of Caribbean Perspectives on Gender and Feminism

Issue 6 – 2012

POEMS

Chandini's Thumbprint

Chandini holds the pot spoon wherever she goes.

In her bedroom, she makes vows
before sunrise,
singing to herself;
all to keep her bosom calm.

At the fireside, tired
from sleepless nights before;
she makes *dhal* and rice and *bhajie*
to nourish her husband,
blessing the food in saucepans
for his journey into the canefield.

A woman has no time for afternoon breeze on the verandah.

The vegetable garden awaits her strong
hands.
She fills her basket and makes her own path,
walking barefeet for miles to the market;
all to earn her own wages.

Why are those hands so heavy and red
across her neck? Answer me!
Answer me now!

In her belly, unseen torture
silence!
Again and again.

She counts the days and thinks
of her children on the edge,
She buys pencils and books and shoes
for their entrance to school.
Her only consolation is this privilege:
to push for their education, her girls
especially.

Chandini knows limitations, but she works out everything.
She looks for the moon every night.

Now comes her husband's silence,
she puts her thumbprint
on the front door, on every window,
high up on the ceiling;
She walks for miles –
Every step she takes
for the house and land in her name.

Gone are the days of outrage.
Each step, a breath of fire!
Each step, the woman who dares!

—Janet Naidu

Trails of Treasures

Not so long ago,
roses whispered the gentle song of your name,
and your mother held you close
in her arms, her eyes and heart listening.
Her garden widened with sunflowers
across promises of a fragrant future
like a vessel at harbor –
with every comfort for the journey.

I slip into memory
and catch your enduring years
in a basket of floral keepsakes –
a birth marks a mother's grace
like a velvet sky at nightfall, looming.
Every glance unfolds another moment
captured by the boldness of wings,
by the freshness of paintings.

The soft pull of eastern drums
echo and warm your heart,
like an infant on its mother's bed.
The sun follows you through the fields
where your name is planted, grown
among the women, girls too
adorned in colourful head ties.
Their grass knives swing in the sun
cutting new grass without malice.

But their moments cannot pass
without the wild songs and rhymes
that ring of lessons in pride: of survival
in the way some work shortens play.

Your heart missed a privilege,
only fingertips away
where skipping ropes and hop scotch
swelled in girlish giggles.
Not even a day of A and B or C
made it your way – but pages at night,
not even another alphabet, in your veins
–
but eastern languages at wasteland.
Still, not one leftover book,
shortened pencil
or unmatched ribbons in your hair
for only a day.

I hear the penalty in your voice,
deep void as your head leaned
against the school – in the yard alone,
hiding your face from the rain.
There, you glimpsed a pressed uniform,
girls ten years or so, clapping a rhyme.
The small of the window left you gazing
into the ways of the school room.
But the grass bundle you carried
remained at your feet, waiting.

Each sunrise caressed your steps
across the long distances
in weight upon your head

Now, I walk with you – in your hand,
along the length of your feet
carrying the unwritten words
in my heart.

I feel your time – your golden heart
hiding its silent wish – to read.
Our nights move, slowly receding
long after the sun closes her door.
your gentle walk nurtures my spirit,
In a way, like a waterfall
constant, voluminous in flow.
Still, like a sunburst,
your eyes smile a thousand gifts.

—Janet Naidu

Ammani's Cushion

In courtship, he reveals his dreams
pouring out daily doses of deep nectar
to sweeten her and nurture some sense
of domestic bliss.

She too had dreams concealed,
bursting like midday hibiscus,
She too walks the earth.

He gathers himself, many sleepless nights,
aching heart and lonesome days.
The equation: he knows the wind carries
bare branches
missing the fruits of necessity,
the comfort of family.

Restlessly, he approaches her in the garden.

"I who am strong,
like a lantern post,
Should a storm prompt me,
Should lightning torment me,
I would fall, I know.
Without you, I cannot go on."

Ammani leans her head
against the bark of the golden apple tree.

"I know you are only feeling this today,
when the sun is low and the clouds are dark.
These days, you must look for the rare moon
to shine in your heart,
the wonders that are before you,
dreams perhaps of this new place.
I release you from this state of darkness
by virtue of divine love."

She upholds the doctrines of friendship
between man and woman, similar to godly
affection.

Anand cups his chin with both hands,
despondent
that Ammani wants to remain by herself
and not merge with him in a matrimonial
bond.
He did not know that from her childhood
days,
she had witnessed much turbulence, distant
attachments.
Anand sees his pensive and sorrowful eyes
evenly reflected in Ammani's.

"I don't know why I suffer like this.
I am happy you are my friend
But I need more – a wife to cook sweet
dishes
like my mother, the devoted goddess.
A man's future is in the blessing of a wife,
the heart of home and family."

Ammani, unaffected by blissful temptation,
hears the call of the Bluebird,
like a clock ticking inside her body.
Love comes after midnight, soundless and
shapeless.

"I am not made like a hammock
but a little cushion, not big enough for two
in days of rest and time alone."

He now sees light rain at her window:

"I have waited many moons to break
My silence of deeper thoughts.
Since childhood, I felt sure
you would come to me.
Long ago I was strong,
tilled the land since a teenager,
reaped rice harvest.
But now – now I want to pursue higher
knowledge
for better work, family…
I want to rest near you
as a husband who comes home
to his wife for tenderness."

She wraps her arms around the tree trunk
like a soft cushion against her bosom.

"Like a lantern post
should a storm impel me
I would surely fall, I know;
But these days
The sun comes regularly,
The clouds dance."

Anand appears pensive:
"My dear friend, in divine love,
I feel your strong heart near."

Ammani gazes at the tree top:
"Like a lantern post,
I too dream of higher knowledge
For better work.
My arms are strong
and I think of higher beings."

Anand's eyes hold a steady gaze, welling up:
"Oh dear goddess, freedom washes your feet
to dance in the sunlight
to make pathways for your own being.
I understand this new dance of life
To love – togetherness and as separate self."

—Janet Naidu

Tower of Babel on the Suriname River

I who wrote
about your world
am deaf and dumb
in the language
that you speak

I who live by discourse
disputes and diatribes
weave webs of words
learn to *look*
in your presence

You play with silence
paint with your eyes
tell stories with your body
you translate yourself with jewellery
tight tiger leggings
long fuchsia nails
you talk in monosyllables

I say something
you ask what it is
I reword my question
you answer another
I speak of cooking
you talk of roasting—
tongues converse
—Gloria Wekker

Paramaribo/Amsterdam,
October 1997.

Naidu, Janet; Wekker, Gloria. 2012. Poems. *CRGS*, no. 6, ed. Gabrielle Hosein and Lisa Outar, pp. 1-4.

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CRGS
CARIBBEAN REVIEW OF GENDER STUDIES
A Journal of Caribbean Perspectives on Gender and Feminism

Issue 6 – 2012

'Habitable Identities'— A Review of *Bindi: The Multifaceted Lives of Indo-Caribbean Women*

Lisa Outar

Our understanding of the complex journeys of women of Indian ancestry through several centuries in the Caribbean and its diasporas is expanded in valuable ways by Rosanne Kanhai's 2011 collection *Bindi: The Multifaceted Lives of Indo-Caribbean Women*. In a collection commendable for its multidisciplinary nature, we learn of the particularities of Indo-Caribbean women's agency in areas as varied as literature, art, beauty/cultural pageants, rural domestic work, religious performances, traditional healing, and their coping with the conditions of contemporary life. There is an unevenness to the collection as it moves across this disparate terrain, but in the strongest of the pieces, which include the work of Shaheeda Hosein, Gabrielle Hosein, Anita Baksh, and Paula Morgan, we depart from essentialized notions of what constitutes an Indo-Caribbean female subject to complex discussions of the multiple positionings that Indian women utilize in their engagement with concepts of femininity, Indianness, citizenship, individuality, and communal belonging.

One of the most striking aspects of the collection and one that makes a key intervention in the thinking about forms of feminism is the extent to which the contributors reread venues of action that seem to be associated with tradition, continuity, and conservativism and find the nuanced ways in which Indian women transgress norms and clear space for the achievement of individual desires. In her essay "Unlikely Matriarchs," for example, Shaheeda Hosein redirects potential thinking about feminist goals from a focus on the quest for individual liberation to that of the self-sacrificing actions of older rural women who had set their eyes on opening up possibilities for the next generation. In so doing,

Outar, Lisa. 2012. 'Habitable Identities'—A Review of *Bindi: The Multifaceted Lives of Indo-Caribbean Women*. *CRGS*, no. 6, ed. Gabrielle Hosein and Lisa Outar, pp. 1-3.

Hosein and the other contributors push back against the stereotypes of docility and passivity that are imposed on Indian women from both within and without their communities and offer, as Anita Baksh puts it, examples of "resistance [that are] enacted in forms that evolve within their own culture" (209).

Essays in the collection dealing with religious identity like those of Sherry Ann Singh and Halima Kassim are also useful in questioning some of our common assumptions about sites of female empowerment, suggesting as they do that, for the Caribbean, notions of feminism do not go hand in hand with secularism. Once again, subtle cues are found for women's empowerment as when Singh notes in "Women in the *Ramayana* Tradition in Trinidad" that, in local Trinidadian Hindu culture, more aggressive and independent models of femininity such as Lakshmi, Durga, and Kali were admired rather than the long-suffering and virtuous Sita (35-6). In a Caribbean context in which Indian women's empowerment is often read as a loss of cultural integrity, it is particularly suggestive that these essays show the ways in which women attempt to work within certain cultural forms rather than discarding them altogether. The essays also reveal, however, the extent to which Indo-Caribbean feminisms are marked by hybridity and transnational considerations and often reference other forms of identity in which Indian women can frame themselves. In Valerie Youssef's piece on self-conceptions of Indo-Trinidadian female students, for example, we find an Indo-Muslim woman comparing her situation to that of women in Saudi Arabia, thereby complicating assumptions that Caribbean Indians are primarily oriented towards the subcontinent when it comes to understandings of identity.

The interviews that pervade the collection ensure that we hear a wide variety of female voices from various generational, religious, educational, class, and regional positionings. With its unique blend of autobiography and analysis, Gabrielle Hosein's extremely self-aware narrative about being Miss Mastana Bahar 2000 stands out in particular for its insights about the contradictions of Indo-Caribbean subjectivity. Her emphasis on the way Indian women "transgress as well as reproduce hegemonic meanings simultaneously" (141) serves as a reminder of the unpredictable terrain upon which womanhood and girlhood are shaped in the Caribbean. Her focus on the way Indian women tend to perform different identities in different spaces provides us not with an understanding of what it means to be a young Indian woman in Trinidad, which she rightly challenges as too generalizing a perspective, but rather highlights the paradoxes involved in the various negotiations of Indian women between public and private spaces, individual desires versus community ones and ever present middle-class expectations of respectability.

Anita Baksh's and Paula Morgan's considerations of the nuances of Indo-Caribbean women's literary production both from within and outside of the region are particularly strong in emphasizing the diverse and provocative ways in which writers depict personal and historical traumas and crises of belonging and how they challenge the particular burdens of ethnic representation that are placed upon women. Their work and Brenda Gopeesingh's interview of the Guyanese artist Bernadette Persaud reveal how women's creative work insists on recognition of the heterogeneity of Indo-Caribbean women's experiences and attempts to forge alliances across differences.

Kanhai presents *Bindi* as a follow-up to her influential collection, *Matikor: The Politics of Identity for Indo-Caribbean Women*, published over a decade earlier and, indeed, in it we find evidence of the development of the field of Indo-Caribbean studies, with the contributors engaging with the work of other scholars and writers who helped carve out spaces for thinking about this community and their contributions to the intellectual and cultural life of the region. This very development of the field to ever more nuanced understanding of the diversity of interests within this community, marked by both inclusion and exclusion, is partly what makes me uncomfortable with Kanhai's use of the bindi as the overarching symbol for this collection and with the emphasis she places on it as a universal icon belonging to all women. As we see in the Caribbean and in the diasporic spaces that Indo-Caribbean women inhabit, the wearing of a bindi is usually tied up with specific performances of belonging and religious and cultural positioning. Descriptions such as "[T]he bindi rejects no one. Just as fashion cannot be owned by any one cultural group, the eternal female, represented in the earth goddess Kali, is beyond culture" (2) and "the intergenerational continuous female self" (12) belie the complexity contained within the essays themselves, which for the most part reject notions of universal womanhood in favor of the culturally specific and contested manifestations of femininity and arguments about femininity that we find in the context of the Indian Caribbean. A different symbol would have served this worthy collection better than one Kanhai problematically describes as "an eternal and universal facial marking of femininity" (5).

Kanhai acknowledges the limitations of her collection in assessing conditions across the Indo-Caribbean geography given the lack of contributions from Guyana and the Francophone Caribbean and other areas with smaller Indo-Caribbean populations. This is a limitation shared with this Special Issue and, along with her, we reiterate our desire to see more work on the lives of women in the lesser known sites of the Indian diaspora in the Caribbean. In the meantime, the collection significantly furthers our understanding of what Paula Morgan calls the "habitable identities" that Indo-Caribbean women imagine and create for themselves and use to push back against the stereotypes about them.

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