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

Kavyta Raghunandan

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