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

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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

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[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

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[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".