# 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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