The dougla poetics of Indianness: Negotiating Race and Gender in Trinidad

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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I was always fascinated by the journeys of the old Indian diaspora. Whatever experiences of the indentureship heritage that I carry are thanks to my elders. Although my siblings and myself are removed from that experience, my parents have not been unaware of their ancestors’ heritage and have sensitively engaged with it. While the diasporic movement during that time reads today as a matter of historical archives only for me, and I imagine most people in their late 20s, it is a legacy that should always be remembered. I felt a tangible reminder of this legacy during a visit to the UNESCO world heritage site Aapravasi Ghat, formerly an immigration depot where after months of suffering the harshest travelling conditions by ship from India, the indentured labourers disembarked to start their new life in Mauritius. After this experience and in an exploratory conversation with Shirley about the historical similarities between Mauritius and Trinidad, this brought me to a novel by Peggy Mohan (2007: 204) who said “….the migration came across to me as a story of women making their way alone, with men in the background, strangers, extras. In the history books it had always been the other way around: it was the men who were the main actors. But there was also this unwritten history of the birth of a new community in Trinidad. And it was women who were at the centre of the story.” Having been profoundly moved by this novel, I decided to embark on my Trini adventure to look at contemporary Indianness in that part of the world. Though I am neither from nor located in the Caribbean, I sincerely hope my thoughts are a contribution to a vibrant intellectual community in which Caribbean scholarship has touched me in profound ways and in which works on gender, racial and sexual relations will undoubtedly influence for a very long time.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the meaning and negotiation of the category 'Indianness' for a group of Indian Trinidadian young women through a dougla poetics framework. It looks at the intersecting categories of race and gender as lived and configured through discursive processes and through an engagement with a raced gender performativity (Butler, 1990, 1993; Tate, 2004). Using data drawn from interviews, the focus will be on the young women's racialised, gendered identities and identifications. Through each of the chapters, I unpick the poetics of dougla to show how hybridity, creolisation and mixing are part of Indianness but also removed from these concepts. The dougla poetics of Indianness shows how while on one hand race and racialisation are erased under the deployment of hybridity and creolisation as meta narratives and fluidity is invoked under the national slogan 'all we is 'one' where mixing is seen as quintessentially Trinidadian, race also continues to operate as a distinctive marker of difference across domains such as trans-religious practices, desires and sexuality, beauty culture, carnival activity and music consumption. All of these areas which are explored in the chapters carry a racialised component. While I am not talking about the dougla (mixed Indian-African) body as such, the main discussion throughout the thesis speaks to how the poetics of dougla works at the level of culture and nation and interrogates the limits of creolisation and hybridity in the Indian Trinidadian context.

Through a black feminist ethnography, I draw on individual interviews and group conversations, to explore how the young women construct their identities and identifications as linked to socially constructed norms and practices. Their talk revealed fluidity in varying ways with respect to their raced gendered subject positions.
but they also spoke about their fixity along the lines of racial and gendered hierarchies.

I argue that in Butler's performativity theorising, discussions of race have been largely absent and I turn to dougla poetics (Puri, 2004), a specifically Caribbean take on mixing, as a more nuanced and significant way of opening up thinking about identity and raced gender in Trinidad. Through this combination of dougla poetics and performativity, I use this as a way of responding critically to ways of understanding Indianness and the fluidity and fixity present in this. For instance, Indian as a specific identity category holds specific privileges and oppressions as well as norms that if one transgresses from carries sanctions and if followed carried rewards.

Given the colonial history and present day context of Trinidad, this makes us question Butler's theorisation of fluid identifications and based on these considerations, I use dougla poetics to explore all of these connotations. While I theorise raced gender in its shifting and performative sense, I also wish to foreground the fluidity and fixity in the young women's talk. To that end, I use dougla poetics, as a 21st century notion, to attend to this double positioning and in combination with race gender performativity and to explore how such poetics re-inserts Indianness into Trinidad and Tobago as a nation across these five areas.
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Chapter 1
THE DOUGLA POETICS OF INDIANNESS:
NEGOTIATING RACE AND GENDER

Introduction

This thesis explores the ways in which Indianness takes on meaning for Trinidadian young women. This category exists for these young women at a crossroads where multiculturalist discourses of creolisation, hybridity and dougla (mixing) meet with essentialist ideas of Indian identity created by the collective Indian descent community in Trinidad. Through approaching this iteration of Indianness with a dougla poetics and raced gender performativity framework, this thesis aims to show how these young women navigate the complicated dimensions of their own identity and identifications in Trinidad.

The concept of identity has been theorised in a variety of ways and Caribbean identity in particular has been studied in the context of its ‘mix’ — racial and ethnic. This region is seen as hybrid and creolised (Benitez-Rojo, 2001; Bolland, 2006; Glissant, 1997; King, 2011; Walcott, 1992). While productive in some ways, hybridity and creolisation run the risk of reifying essentialist positions of identity and a conceptualisation of “original or originary culture” (Bhabha, 1994). This thesis proposes a different framework for approaching Trinidadian identity in addition to hybridity and creolisation. Instead of a series of fixed variables that, when combined through creolisation, merge and produce a hybrid form, this thesis approaches Indian Trinidadian identities and identifications as both fluid and fixed.
This analysis relies on two main concepts of identity: performativity and poetics. This thesis will examine the potentially productive application of Judith Butler’s (1993) gender performativity theory onto this Trinidadian data set attempting to apply it to ‘racial’ aspects of identity as well as gendered ones (Tate, 2005; 2009), referring to the many and obvious ways in which the two cannot be disentangled. Race gendered performativity will be discussed in particular with Shalini Puri’s (2004: 221) concept of dougla poetics which is envisioned as “means for articulating potentially progressive cultural products de-legitimised by both the Afro-Creole dominant culture and the Indian “Mother Culture””. This thesis will demonstrate that performativity and poetics allow for an analysis of what Indianness means to these young women while avoiding the reifying pitfalls of more standard creolisation and hybridity theory.

As intersecting categories, race, ethnicity and gender are lived and configured through material and discursive processes. In this thesis, these processes are explored through an engagement with the raced gender performativity of dougla poetics where the fixed lines around race and ethnicity discourses become more permeable. Thus, we can theorise about gendered readings of ethnicity and race through both fluidity and fixity rather than concentrating on a universal category of Indianness which has often been read in essentialist and/or ‘traditional’ ways with its own ‘original’ referents.

Using data drawn from interviews with young Trinidadian women of Indian descent, the focus will be on their racialised, ethnicised, gendered identities and identifications. As such, this research departs from theorising on race, ethnicity and gender in the Trinidadian context exclusively in terms of creolisation and hybridity, the two concepts which have been constructed as master narratives in the Caribbean. Instead, this research
theorises raced gender (Tate, 2005) through the framework of performativity and dougla poetics as they act upon and create a raced, ethnicised, and gendered Indian body in the post-colonial island-nation of Trinidad.

The empirical work is influenced by a black feminist ethnographic approach focused on placing young Indian women, aged 18–25, at the centre of analysis. Three key institutions of society in which social identities are constructed and reinforced for these young women were used: The University of the West Indies (UWI), religious spaces such as The Susamachar Presbyterian Church, Swaha Temple and a home-based Muslim space of one respondent (Anisa, 25). This enabled the collection of narratives across contrasting settings on interpretations and meanings which young women use to construct their racialised, gendered, and ethnicised identities identifications.

**Research question**

This research holds that a critical exploration of the young women's understandings and lived experiences is necessary when looking at contemporary raced, ethnicised and gendered identities and identifications in Trinidad. Therefore, the following research question was central:

How do young women of Indian descent navigate Indianness and Trinidadian-ness, that is, the dougla poetics of national/individual identifications through raced gender performativity?
While dougla in Trinidad refers to a mixed-race individual of Indian and African descent, I use this in two senses in this research. First, in reference to mixing at a bodily level and secondly, mixing at the level of culture.

**Contesting Indianness in Trinidad**

The islands of Trinidad and Tobago, ‘Trinbago’, comprise one nation which has a population of 1.4 million people and Trinidad is one of the most prosperous and economically developed countries in the Caribbean largely as a result of its oil and gas industries (BBC, 2010). The twin-island republic gained independence in 1962 from the British. While English is the official language, there is much linguistic diversity, with Trinidadian Creole and variations of Hindi being spoken and this is also a reflection of its population which has ancestors who arrived from West Africa, India, Europe, China and the Middle East (Yelvington, 1993; Winer, 2008). This research located its fieldwork solely in Trinidad and there will not be a discussion on the social context of Tobago as this island has developed along different lines to Trinidad (Yelvington, 1993).

Historically, Trinidad was sighted by Christopher Columbus in 1498 and remained under Spanish rule until it was captured by Britain in 1797 (Dabydeen & Samaroo, 1996:5). The colonial background of Trinidad, from the era of slavery to the arrival of Indian indentured labourers in 1845 to 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 (Yelvington, 1993) with
various syncretic cultural practices located in religion (Orisha), music (parang, chutney-
soca, rapso), and cuisine (doubles, callaloo, roti). The people of Trinidad and Tobago are
mainly of African and Indian descent, though the latter are also known as East Indians or
Indians in everyday parlance with ‘African’, ‘Creole’ and ‘Black’ referring to the African
descent population, with Indo-Trinadian and Afro-Trinadian being commonplace
in academic and political discourse (Munasinghe, 1997). While the terms ‘Indian’, ‘East
Indian’ and ’Indo-Trinadian’ are commonly used to refer to the same group of people,
in this thesis I use these terms with caution as each carry different connotations. For
example, ‘East Indian’ was a term used to make the distinction from the indigenous
population also called ‘Indians’ and from the existing ‘West Indian’ populations and
is used in this research only to make reference to the era when it signified a marginal
and subaltern position in relation to the national identity of Trinidadian. The term
‘Indo-Trinadian’ is frequently posited as an alternative to this position and is seen as
encompassing both an ethnic and national identity. However, this is critiqued in Chapter
3 when I discuss the validity of the connection between diaspora and the hyphenated
identity of ’Indo-Trinadian’ in relation to lived everyday experience. The more popular
term, ‘Indian’, is the one I shall be largely using in this research to refer to a raced and/or
ethnicised identity in addition to ‘Indian Trinidadian’.

These two ethnic groups are dominant in Trinidad the population of which stands
at 35.43% Indian, 34.22% African, 15.16% Mixed (Other), 7.66% Mixed (African-Indian),
6.22% Not Stated, 0.59% Caucasian, 0.30% Chinese, Other Ethnic group 0.17%, 0.11%
Indigenous, 0.08% Syrian/Lebanese and 0.06% Portuguese (Central Statistical Office, 2011).
The term race is commonly used in Trinidad “to differentiate between the major ancestral
groups — African, European and East Indian — and to describe the relations between
them. The term “ethnic”, however is largely limited to the intellectual (and sometimes) political arena. It is not a term that has effectively penetrated common discourse.” (Munasinghe, 1997: 72). Ethnicity may be the globally legitimate term when looking at different ethnic groups in multi-cultural nation-states but the local conceptualisations of ethnicity and race are different as highlighted by Munasinghe (1997) in the above statement.

Culturally, the Trinidadian landscape is characterised by musical forms such as steelpan, calypso, soca and chutney. The latter two are frequently theorised as representing a hybrid national identity, particularly among the younger generation of Trinidadians. Moreover, gendered, raced and ethnicised identities are changing amid a background of cultural, political and global transformations and the hybridized musical form of chutney in addition to “the invention or modification of certain rites and activities, and the embellishment of others” (Vertovec, 2000: 67). To give another example, carnival, which is regarded as the definitive national event in Trinidad (Riggio, 2004) is another dynamic, hybrid cultural arena in which race performativity (Tate, 2005) comes into effect as integral to the cultural politics of Trinidad. It has become a reflection of the entire society, nation and culture in addition to being an important marker of national identity. However, Carnival is also contested by conservative Indian religious organisations such as the Sanatan Maha Sabha and the Trinidad Muslim League. They view this event as an erosion of traditional Indian values, unrepresentative of Indian culture and as a force of creolisation and mixing in terms of dougla, which in its ideological sense, is seen as detrimental to Indian culture. The incorporation of Spanish, French and British colonial culture with African and Indian elements as the foundation of the country’s hybrid culture has led to the necessity for constructing a national culture
based on the ideal of the ‘rainbow nation’ (Carmona, 2014) even within continuing racialised, ethnicised and political contestation. If in political terms hybridity and mixing were foundational tropes, then in theoretical terms, East Indians and later arrivals such as the Chinese, Syrian-Lebanese and Portuguese migrants were extraneous in a predefined landscape where these ethnic groups were largely absent from the emerging discourses of Trinidian-ness but regarded as sufficiently represented through anthropological and ethnographic studies. As a consequence, the Indian experience in Trinidad was predominantly theorised in terms of ethnic and cultural distinction either through retention or assimilation (Khan, 2004; Munasinghe, 2006; Roopnarine, 2007).

There have been eruptions of Black-Indian strife as a result of colonial attempts to divide the nation along racial and religious lines (Khan, 2004; Prashad, 2001). Yet, there are points of trans-racial and trans-religious solidarity between these two dominant ethnic groups. For example, the Muslim religious festival Hosay is frequently attended by Hindus and Christians, Blacks and Indians who also participate and volunteer in activities such as food distribution (Korom, 2003). The syncretic festival of Sipari Mai held on Holy Thursday and Good Friday is also frequently attended by devotees from a range of religious backgrounds and the venerated black statue is conceived of as La Divina Pastora (the Virgin Mary) and Kali Ma (a Hindu goddess) (Pulis, 2013).

The emphasis on transcultural and transracial connectivity is a significant part of Trinidian 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 of Black and White mixing with post-colonial concerns of Black and Asian mixing on the part of political parties has led to “lateral hostility”. While it is
claimed by the young women in this research that this tension latently exists, mixing and hybridity is frequently deployed under multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism by the state. This is done in at times cunning ways, to reveal trans-racial and cross-cultural practices but which also do not necessarily address the racialised demarcation that is part of the British Empire’s legacy. There is a body of discourses on hybridity in the Caribbean region with a range of terms with particular connotations and also politicised applications (Kaup & Rosenthal, 2002; King, 2011). The designations ‘Creole’ and ‘Dougla’ are a case in point in the Trinidadian context. This is where Puri’s (2004) work should be read as highly important as it focuses on spaces of contestation and celebration between Indians and Africans.

Since the post-independence area of the 1960s, the ways of thinking and theorising on Indianness were altered (Parekh, Singh & Vertovec, 2003). There was a shift from the binary oppositions of assimilation and retention prevalent in diasporic conceptions of East Indians to hybridity (Munasinghe, 2001), creolisation (Mohammed, 1998; 2002), coolitude (Carter & Torabully, 2002) and douglarisation (Stoddard & Cornwell, 1999). Much of this theorising explored the challenges facing East Indians and their social status as various cultural adjustments were taking place under the guise of modernisation, and subsequently creolisation (Mohammed, 1998).

Though there has been a proliferation of theories and concepts elaborating the ‘mixed’ and ‘hybrid’ contexts of identity and culture in the Caribbean, these have often failed to address the particularities of raced and gendered bodies and the variability of race inside and outside of a given, heterogeneous culture. The dissonance between hybridity as social reality and theoretical discourse could be read as one of the limits of hybridity.
theorising. Therefore, it becomes a necessary intervention to sketch exploratory engagements with a range of practices of identity in a way which does not solely rely on notions of identity based on singular distinctions of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality or ethnicity. Poststructuralist theory has significantly contributed to dismantling these distinctions by demonstrating that subjects were socially produced through language (Lacan, 1977), as an effect of historically constituted discourse (Foucault, 1969), and in the process of becoming (Hall, 1996). The subject is no longer fixed, stable or centred and concepts such as hybridity and difference became fashionable in their assumed suitability to the task of theorising the construction of subjects and identities. It is notable that the creolisation thesis, illuminated by notions of difference, hybridity and diasporisation, were almost entirely theorised through the African and European experience within the Caribbean (Burton, 1997; Khan, 2007).

This thesis seeks to find a new way of approaching the under-theorised phenomenon of Indian Trinidadian identity, not simply as a biological body, but at the level of culture and nation. Though I am focusing on Indian descent women, I argue that dougla works as a cultural identity in terms of their identifications as more nuanced and complex. I initially set out to use race with inverted commas to highlight this as contested, constructed and contingent but ethnicity and gender are also understood in the same way. For legibility purposes, I am not using scare quotes for these three concepts but I highlight the social meaning attached to these. In attempting to analyse the salience of race and gender in the young women’s lives without re-endowing the concept in its essential sense, I turned to the work of Judith Butler (1990) on gender performativity and Shalini Puri’s (2004) on dougla poetics.
In her influential book, *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler argues that the categories of sex, gender and sexuality are culturally constructed through the repetition of stylised acts over time. Butler invokes Foucault's discourses and regulatory regimes in which he claims that power and knowledge control and regulate the behaviour of individuals through the phenomenon which he refers to as “governmentality”. Butler extends this idea of discipline to examine how “frameworks of intelligibility” and “disciplinary regimes” work to dictate in advance the “possibilities of sex, gender, and sexuality [that] are socially permitted to appear as coherent or ‘natural.’” (Butler, 1990: 71–190). Through repetitions of stylised bodily acts, an essential “core” gender is established. Butler (1990: 24–25) explains,

> Gender proves to be performative — that is, constituting the identity it purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed .... There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender ... gender is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ which are said to be its results.

Gender is a performance; as it is performatively produced, it operates as part of a cultural script (Butler, 1990). Cultural scripts change over time and ideals of masculinity and femininity are also subject to change with one set of ideals possibly rendering an alternative or historical set obsolete. At this juncture it is useful to turn to the definition of performativity as an aspect of discourse “which brings into being what it names”, (Butler, 1993: 2). In a more explicitly political engagement, performativity is part of the construction of subjectivity: “the process of submitting ourselves to socially constructed norms and practices.” (Alsop et al, 2002: 99). A critical part of gender performativity is the heterosexual matrix in which a female or male body is naturally followed by a certain sexual orientation (desire for the opposite sex) and a social role and identity (Butler, 1999).
While Butler focuses on the creation of sex, gender and sexuality categories through performativity, can this same theory be applied to race? Are concepts of race results of cultural repetitions and citations in the same way that sex, gender and sexuality are? Can Butler’s formulation read as “There is no racial identity behind the expressions of race ... race is performatively constituted by the very expressions which are said to be its results”? Indeed, discussions of race have been largely absent from Butler’s (1993: 18). theorisation even though she asserts that “[t]he symbolic — that register of regulatory ideality — is also and always a racial industry, indeed, [it is] the reiterated practice of racializ-ing interpellations”. She goes on to ask “How is race lived in the modality of sexuality? How is gender lived in the modality of race? How do colonial and neo-colonial nation- states rehearse gender relations in the consolidation of state power?” (Butler, 1993: 117). Notwithstanding this, Butler does not make a compelling argument for race in her analysis. Gender, sex and sexuality are analysed in terms of how these are interpellated, assumed and performatively constituted as I have highlighted in the earlier quotes. Yet race does not receive the same in-depth treatment as a product of interpellation, in spite of her acknowledgement of “racializing norms”. That race was kept at a distance in Butler’s work has been addressed critically through the works of E.Patrick Johnson (2005), José Esteban Muñoz (1999) and Shirley Anne Tate (2005, 2009) who denotes one of the features of race performativity as the “interaction of both agency and subjectivation. That is racialized subjects bring into being what they name within the reiterative power of discourse on race” (Tate, 2009: 8). This perspective hints that though race may have been conceived of as having a biological basis in the Caribbean where racial groups were derived on the basis of phenotypical characteristics, there is a lot to be said about the naming of race and the powerful meanings assigned to this. For Frantz Fanon (1967: 109), it is through utterances such as “Look, a Negro” that the body is brought into a
system of racialised meanings which is an on-going performative process. It could be said, in a similar vein, that through utterances such as “Look, a Coolie”, that the body is brought into a particular system of racialised meanings.

In examining the intersectionality of race and gender, this thesis draws on black feminist thought to propose that racialised ideas construct gender in the same way that gendered ideas construct race (Crenshaw, 2011; Hill Collins, 2000). Peterson and Runyan (2010: 2) observe that “gender is typically racialized (models of masculinity and femininity vary among Africans, Indians, Asians, Europeans) and race is gendered (gender stereotypes shape racial stereotypes of ‘Africans’, ‘Indians’, ‘Asians’, ‘Whites’)”. Furthermore, it is argued by Caribbean scholars that race is and remains sexualised in the Caribbean region (Kempadoo, 2004; Sheller, 2012). Rather than being in the realm of sexual relations, desire and pleasure, the acts of being sexualised are ways of stereotyping and transposing this to another. In spite of this, Butler (1999: xvi) questions if performativity can be transposed to race and whether the latter can be theorised like gender, potentially undercutting theorisation on how race is gendered in the global South. It is more helpful in this sense to look at ideologies and ideas of race and gender as inextricably connected rather than separated. Thus, in this thesis, performativity is expanded past Butler’s original usage to encompass ‘raced gender performativity’ (Tate 2005). As part of my wider objective to engage with the post-colonial feminist project of de-Eurocentralising narratives, I position dougla poetics in combination with raced gender performativity in its attention to the local and specific and its potential to address questions about identity in a fuller manner.
Poetics

In common with Butler’s performative approach, dougla poetics regards performative citations as doing things, with both approaches viewing discourse as central to the construction of raced and gendered identities. If identities are “performed texts which are produced in talk and which are written in, into, and onto social reality by actors” (Hall, 1996) which are constituted by reality but also come to constitute that reality, then it could be said that Indianness is performative and takes shape in talk. In the telling of the young women, the discourse on race and gender within Indian communities in Trinidad shows that these are subject to multiple readings and enunciations from different positions and is also spoken and unspoken, named and unnamed, made and re-made at various points in the talk. This process constitutes what I call a poetics of dougla. Shalini Puri (2004) develops the concept of dougla poetics in pursuit of a model for identity that avoids reification, and imagines permeability and change as fundamental to social relations. While Puri attempts to refashion hybridity and creolisation, which has defined New World culture and the post-colonial Caribbean, by constituting dougla poetics as a 21st century notion which explores mixing, I expand on her poetics to look at how boundaries are revealed and reconstructed in the conversations. Puri looks at literary texts, cultural productions and political manifestos in her sound scholarly analysis of Indian Trinidadians but I build on this by exploring the performative discourse in the noughties. The poetics is the weaving together of the discursive, emotional and interactional in the narratives of the young women who are talking about their lives and experiences. In this, a dougla poetics emerges in which Indian is marked in contradistinction to Black. Dougla then is revealed as a form of identification, a cultural identity which foregrounds the Indian element, one which expands hybridity and creolisation theorising which has
been critiqued for omitting Indians, but one which also traverses the terrain of race in discreet ways. Additionally, performativity and poetics, both reject mutually exclusive positionalities and this is quite significant in the Trinidadian context where race relations have been historically characterised in binaristic oppositions. We see, in the discursive repertoires of the young women, how they performatively produce mixity (dougla) and Indianness simultaneously. Dougla poetics tells us what mixing does and does not do at this point in modern Trinidadian history. But what is this mixing about? It is not just about bodies as my thesis goes on to show, but about culture. However, the poetics does show that racialisation is still present in a nation-state that relies on an ideology of calaloolo, cosmopolitanism and 'all we is one', which erases race from the national equation. Through the poetics, we see how this thinking on race is enacted among the young women.

So why turn to dougla to explore the poetics of Indianness? As Puri (2004: 220) explains, the triple discourse of illegitimacy that has haunted Indo-Caribbean history; the colonial state’s policy not to recognize Indian marriages, which therefore deemed Indian children illegitimate (a policy from which several Creole constructions of Indians as outsiders with no legitimate claims upon Trinidad took their cue); an independent India’s rejection of the requests of some Indo-Caribbeans for repatriation, which rendered Indo-Caribbeans illegitimate children of India; and finally Indo-Caribbeans’ own exclusionary and disciplining pejorative that demonizes the mixed descendants of Indo- and Afro-Caribbean as illegitimate.

The term dougla then, I would argue, is a more relevant way of elaborating discourses on contemporary Indianness then because much like the mixed-race dougla body, the Indian body faces continuing essentialist notions of race and gender for inclusion within the larger Trinidadian national psyche. As such, it is critical to avoid globally appropriating these concepts of race and gender as the historicity can get lost, and theories have different ontologies hence why dougla poetics works as a productive and enriching way
of theorising raced and gendered identity by encompassing locally specific elements and specific to Trinidad.

Also, a significant part of race identity has to do with the awareness of members of that particular group of both the negative and positive characteristics it is attributed by society. This thesis goes on to unpack how this is enacted across the Indian communities in Trinidad, but how does dougla relate to Indian in this context? The term ‘dougla’ carries particular connotations. Historically, this was used as a derogatory insult in Northern India meaning bastard which carried the negative connotations of illegitimacy and taboo. This came to be used by indentured labourers who had migrated to Trinidad (Reddock, 1994) but now commonly refers to a person of mixed Indian and African descent. By and large, the majority of Trinidadians are aware of these connotations and some socially manoeuvre around these by attempting to negate the implications of the term held in the collective, national psyche as I explore in the thesis. One way of doing this is the embracing of the term to signify cultural mixing, which is one of the main revelations of this research.

The different implications of the term dougla demonstrate that the spatiality and temporality of race performativity is of critical importance here, hence the need for a continual examination of the raced gendered body. As race is perpetuated through continuing performativity, it promotes models of what is normative within each area of race or gender or sexuality. In so doing, it implies that the identifications are not fixed (Tate, 2005). Identification requires repeated re-presentation and subjectivation. As such the expectations of what it means to have a specific identity must be reproduced without transgressing the borders. So while from this, I advance the view that a raced gender
performativity is indispensable and marks an advance in the fields of largely termed gender studies and critical race and ethnic studies, dougla poetics, as coined by Shalini Puri is similarly potentially useful in Caribbean studies. It is not proposed as a substitute for other concepts such as hybridity and creolisation, but as a way of opening up strands of enquiry which those concepts have a tendency to limit. For example, to enact fluidity as frequently seen in hybridity discourses, this requires a measure of classed social mobility. The power imbalances present within classed structures of who gets to access social mobility and who does not affects who is seen as performing the hybrid, fluid, modern citizen. So in addition to the lack of addressing power imbalances in hybridity theorising, in creolisation there is marked exclusion of other ethnic groups such as Indians, Chinese and Syrian/Lebanese and the dissolution of difference into a perceived positively valued and consensual culture of syncretism and fusion.

While Butler (1990: xii) claims that sex and gender are denaturalized in a fluidity of identities, the possibility of if, or even how, race could be denaturalized in raced gender is omitted. Raced identities are not exclusively and definitively fluid because the racialisation of Indianness in the Trinidadian context also fixes and essentialises. It is at this point that a dougla poetics framework works well to explore the fluidity, as consciously performed by the young women, and the fixity of identifications, as derivative of the hegemonic society. I posit this is a more productive framework in that it attends to Caribbean specificities of mixing at a less abstract level but also interrogates and challenges dominant hybridity and creolisation models. Puri deploys dougla poetics in her work to attend to the theoretical impasse in the hybridity and creolisation models by looking at difference and equality in response to postcolonialism’s positive valuation of cultural hybridity as a remedy to racial discourses of purity. She (2004: 220) says, “creolisation as a figure for hybridity
has exhausted its radicalism in contemporary Trinidad […] now serving status quoist class agendas and perhaps racially exclusive ones.” In this context, it could be argued that an academic theorisation of hybridity and creolisation does reach an impasse in its covering up of gendered and raced inequalities. Puri suggests dougla poetics as a more radical way of understanding hybridity and influenced by this, I extend this formulation to my research on these young women’s fixed and fluid identifications.

To conceive of raced identities as fluid without acknowledging the existence of racialised fixity, through stereotyping for example, is to deny its existence and consequently, there is not a need to contest the disciplinary power. This is where the idea of ‘post-race’ or a cosmopolitan ‘racelessness’ (Khan, 2004) is highly problematic. This thesis looks at how discursively produced Indianness de-familiarises this celebrated idea of fluidity and hybridity by exploring the spectrum through which race, ethnicity and gender impact upon one another through the use of a dougla poetics framework. To clarify, if performativity solely relies on a continuing repetition, then dougla poetics in a broader sense, works to call attention to both the fixity and fluidity in the construction of identities. Puri (1997: 156) mobilises “the figure of the dougla” so as to “provide a vocabulary for figuring disallowed Indian identities; furthermore, it could offer ways of reframing the problematics of black-Indian party politics, and race and gender relations.” Here, dougla poetics is a way of visualising the Caribbean beyond the white/black binary positionings which excludes mixed-race or other positionings. The scholarship on creolisation has largely stressed the primacy of European and African descent positionings and experiences which had characterised the Indian descent population as culturally disconnected from Trinidad and rendered it marginal in the making of the nation (Khan, 2004). The usage of dougla poetics as a way of thinking of race, not in
essentialist or ‘pure’ terms, opens up avenues for critical dialogue and expansive cultural awareness which in turn enables the articulation of multiple identities and postcolonial subjectivities. The possibility of a cosmopolitan ‘racelessness’ in the Trinidadian context is problematic as indicated in the talk of the young women throughout this thesis, where the policing of the boundaries of racial identities and the signification of bodies remains pervasive.

By co-opting Indianness into the concept, Shalini Puri’s highly influential coinage of dougla poetics works to challenge and interrogate articulate creolisation as it is not linked to cultural assimilation but can also be used to interrogate the limits of hybridity. This framework is a relatively recent addition to the Caribbean’s discourses on mixing and hybridity, and draws attention to existing meaningful relations between Blacks and Indians and so provides a “rich symbolic resource for interracial unity” (Puri, 1999: 221). Her claim is, however, that the dougla identity or dougla poetics is not a representation of an ideal hybridity (which in some ways presents a static understanding of raced identities) but that identity, whether Indian, Black or mixed-race, is constantly transforming as indeed all identities are.

The distinction she makes between dougla poetics and other multiculturalist tropes such as callaloo, Spanish and perhaps Creole is “the ability of the term to place cultural hybridity in relation to equality” and the potential to “unmask power and symbolically redraw lines” (Puri, 1999: 221). I want to posit dougla poetics as allowing an articulation of Indian women’s “identifications in process: as multiple, dynamic, fleeting with each passing word, whilst at the same time reproducing a contingent essentialism. It also allows us to see the negotiation of identity positionings and simultaneity of sameness
and difference so central to hybridity.” (Tate, 2005: 6). Dougla poetics offers a more appropriate and refined conceptual and contextual framework from which to look at Indian Trinidadian specific raced gendered processes precisely because it is generated from the context of Trinidad and Tobago.

Puri (2004: 222) writes that “The unstable and diverse functions of different mobilizations of a dougla hybridity caution against making inflationary generalization and point instead to the need for more careful contextual and conjunctural claims for cultural hybridity.” She not only emphasises the importance of localising hybridity but makes the distinction between racial and cultural hybridity and how these have been used for political ends in Vasconcelos’s (1997) theory of a Mexican cosmic race which promoted a futuristic form of racial hybridity, rather than a cultural one. Indeed, Viranjini Munasinghe (2001: 269) argues that “Indo-Trinidadians reject the callaloo model of national culture, in which all ingredients blend into one taste, in preference to the tossed salad, in which all the ingredients maintain their distinctive flavours.” How this “tossed salad identity” is present in individual identifications represented in Trinidad and the wider Caribbean has hardly been explored contemporarily save for studies on identity politics and national identities. However, within this “tossed salad” of Trinidad an often contentious identity is that of the dougla. This mixed-race group occupies an ambiguous position and the incorporation of the dougla into Indianness in Trinidad is still somewhat of a question mark.

The acceptance of a dougla into the Indian community is contingent not solely on attitudes, but on factors such as socio-economic status, family background, class and colour (Reddock, 1994). In other words, despite a general acceptance and at times celebration of the dougla identity, it is not a universally accepted one. As we saw above,
some theorists have drawn on the figure of the doula as a panacea to exclusionary and archaic discourses of cultural purity (England, 2008; Stoddard & Cornwell, 1999; Puri, 2004). However, though doularisation is offered as a way of including Indians who were unable to participate in Caribbean creolisation, much like hybridity theorising, there is a reification of race and essentialism and it is largely a divisive concept which has not gained much currency among the young women I interviewed in this research. Furthermore, creolisation and hybridity places limitations as those who are deemed “not creolised” or “less hybrid” than the state-sanctioned model are discounted as are groups who are hybridised, creolised or douglarised in unrecognised ways. These observations made here serves as Puri’s (2004) point of departure and her study seeks to debunk much of the celebratory aspects of hybridity through an attention to the local.

Though the term doula might be read as restrictive in terms of scope with its primary focus on Indian and African Caribbean groups, Puri’s (2004) work in my view should be read as highly important and one of the few which foreground spaces of articulation in addition to showing the multitudinous ways in which both Indian and African Trinidadian women enact multiple identity positions. In looking at the intersections of slavery and indenture, whilst maintaining their distinctions, the cultural assimilation implied in creolisation and hybridity, are challenged through the doula poetics framework. Moreover, there has been considerable scholarship on the processes of resistance and ‘cultural persistence’ of the ‘Indian’ in relation to accommodation in the ‘Creole’, and at times Dougla framework. Yet one line of interrogation which has not been fully explored is the African descent experience in response to the figure of the Dougla as an identity in which biology and culture become located. While I will not pursue this line of interrogation in this research, I will place a lens on the contemporary
Indian perspective on this identity space in which the biological and the cultural, the personal and the political become implicated. Moreover, while Puri focuses on the performances and cultural expressions of Indianness such as chutney-soca and literature, I ground her framework within the context of quotidian understandings on areas such as trans-religious practices, sexuality and desire, beauty culture, carnival practices and music consumption as forms of articulation and claiming authentic Indianness. In doing so, the chapters speak to and across one another in intersectional ways. Although these do not account for the full range of multitudinous ways in which Indianness is performatively produced, they do offer a way through which to continue a productive discourse on race and racialisation in Trinidad.

Puri’s study is mainly concerned with post-nationalism and the potential of re-working hybridity for political action but I extend her ideas in my argument that dougla poetics is highly useful as part of an engaged sociology of race and ethnicity that is specific to Trinidad and privileges a unique position of inclusion and exclusion within the nation. The sites across which race, ethnicity and gender converge in the talk of the young women offer a different perspective from which to understand changing identities through the prism of the raced gender performativity of dougla poetics.

Chapter outlines

In engaging with an on-going discourse on race in the Caribbean and contributing to new ways of reading raced gender Indian Trinidadian identities, this thesis will work
through eight chapters. In this chapter I have set out a brief background on contesting Indianness in Trinidad, my theoretical framework in approaching identity in the region, and the research questions through which I will examine the raced gender performativity of dougla poetics.

Chapter 2 (Trini Talk: Black Feminist Ethnography and Writing Race) sets out the methods I developed for the research drawing on Patricia Hill Collins’ (1990) black feminist epistemology. In order to explore the research questions, I was drawn to a black feminist perspective which uses talk as meaning and a way of making sense of the social world. The talk, as part of the data, was gathered across the University of West Indies (UWI), Susamachar Presbyterian Church, Swaha Temple and a Muslim gathering at a young woman’s house (ASJA Ladies Society). I discuss the data collection process, the research issues which emerged from this and rationale behind ‘talking Indian’, i.e. the importance of looking at the young women’s talk in order to understand the intersection of race, ethnicity and gender at the level of the everyday.

Chapter 3 (Religion and Establishing Difference) takes religious practice as a fundamental aspect of identity in Trinidad. This chapter explores the link between racial and religious identities. In the first section, I will focus on the limits of hybridity and hyphenated identity theorising to account for the divergent positions on religious practices by the young women and will turn to mainstream Hindu practices and what is perceived as an alternative form of Hinduism called Kali worship. In the second part of this chapter, I will explore the discourse of race in the context of a society where trans-religious relationships are socially sanctioned but trans-racial relationships are contested.
Chapter 4 (The sexual side of race and desire) explores how sexualities are raced and how racial norms are enacted not only in heteronormative hegemony but across non-heterosexual sexualities where desirability is racially coded. I use the doula poetics lens to interrogate heteronormativity as the model which dominates most studies on Indian feminine sexuality as the scholarship regarding the sexualities of Indian Trinidadian women is still rather under-developed. I go on to look at how normative Indianess for women is imbricated with notions of respectability and heterosexuality.

Chapter 5 (The colourism of beauty and ‘high colour’) moves to examine the complex ways in which beauty is defined by the young women. I explore why specific physical signifiers such as skin colour and hair have symbolised and continue to symbolise the boundaries along which Indianess is defined by these young women, thereby attempting to unpack how colourism, that is the valuing of light(er) skin, is enacted. I turn my discussion to beauty pageants to look at this matter through the lens of doula poetics and, furthermore, how the evocation of the ‘Spanish’ or ‘Mixed’ look works to articulate hybridity but also reify race.

Chapter 6 (The Body Contours of Carnival) sets up carnival, a national event, as a contested space currently of both liberalism and tradition. I explore the sexual politics of carnival and the doubled way in which agency, articulated locally as ‘free-up’, is enabled and disabled through the performance of the raced gendered body.

Chapter 7 (Chutney Currents) broadly notes how chutney soca is an important phenomenon where the parameters of Indianess, or what is considered authentically Indian, become marked. The basic issues of representation and authenticity of Indianess
come into relief in the talk of these young women on sonic spaces, particularly chutney soca, which is a locally produced syncretic musical genre. By juxtaposing the consideration of chutney-soca in narratives of creolisation against the stigmatisation of this music due to it explicit drinking, sexualised and ‘horning’ content, this chapter will explore how the young women negotiate raced gendered discourses and how doubla poetics is enacted in the sonic space.

The final chapter concludes by exploring the notion of a cosmopolitan ‘racelessness’ as hinted at in some of the talk and in national discourse. The current Prime Minister Kamla Persaud-Bissessar once said of Trinidad’s “rainbow past”: “That is what gives us our peculiar nature in this country; our cosmopolitan, very tolerant society, where everyone has an equal space and an equal opportunity in the country…That is what our Anthem says.” As the prime minister supports this cosmopolitan idea with a non-racial focus, I reflect on how the discursive resistances and contemplations of the young women provide nuanced understandings of the cultural and political interface and how indeed, a raced gender performativity of doubla poetics helps to read the multiple dimensions of race and nation as a future research direction. I also look at the potential of doubla poetics to explore
Chapter 2

TRINI TALK: BLACK FEMINIST ETHNOGRAPHY AND WRITING RACE

Introduction

This project entails attempting to uncover the ways in which a group of young women in Trinidad come to identify along lines that have been approached both academically and colloquially as the boundaries of race. In the introduction chapter, I discussed the theoretical frameworks through which I approach the concept of race. I advanced that race is a concept that takes on meaning through performativity. Race is constructed and made salient through discourse, which in turn produces raced subjects such as ‘Indian’, ‘Black’ or ‘White’ with their defined phenotypical characteristics. Through engaging with performativity, dougla poetics then emerges as a way to approach how these young women might attempt to navigate the pre-determined racial definitions that they and others attribute to themselves as Indians, or as Trinidadians. A black feminist ethnography (Hill Collins, 1990) was then identified as a more relevant and appropriate way of unpacking their discursive repertoires. The methods related to this type of ethnography involved entering the field, liming (a process which I describe further on), relationalities, and engaging in a relaxed, informal dialogue with the young women. Before I embark on the discussion on the techniques methods which I pulled out of a black feminist ethnography, I will begin with a specific consideration of the micropower dynamics present in the research interaction, that is between my position as the researcher and the young women as the researched.
**Research issues**

Within feminist research, there has been a longstanding concern with bringing private lives into public knowledge, particularly when organised around hearing and representing voice (Edwards & Ribbens, 1998) as well as the power dynamics inherent in relationships between the researcher and researched (Phoenix, 1994). The interplay between epistemology and research has been paid attention to carefully as they “signal that there are issues around our ability to hear what is being said about private, domestic and personal and then to speak it again (represent it), retaining its meaning and context, in a public forum.” (Edwards & Ribbens, 1998: 17). Likewise, the reflexive turn can question how the researcher represents her participants and simultaneously how she is affected by her research. In my role as a researcher, this raises questions as to the selection of stories, the presentation of stories, the ordering of what I see, and the theories which I applied to the accumulated data. As a post-colonial feminist project, reflexivity requires that I demonstrate a self-conscious effort to be attentive to the trajectory of my ideas; “to be reflexive is to have a sense of diverse paths and patterns that are evaluated so as to arrive at different outcomes” (Tate, 2005:94).

In this section, I explore a similar concern in my discussion on my positionality as a researcher, engage with dominant understandings of what constitutes ‘reliable’ and ‘valid’ knowledge, and discuss the transcription process and ethical issues.
- Positionality and voice

The positionality of a researcher, that is how one is situated through the intersection of power and the politics of social factors such as gender, ethnicity, race, class, language, age and so on, is a highly important consideration and as such, I was compelled to think about my researcher identity and what influence this would bear on the data collection process and indeed the data. While positivistic research paradigms obscure the researcher identity in seeking ‘objectivity’ and ‘validity’, I take the view that the former does have a tremendous effect on the nature and outcome of research. This is, however, not without its limitations, as in recognising my position and where I am situated, I am identifying where I am not. This points to, much like identity, a continual process of shifting and the intricacies of articulating and analysing my position in a way serves as a reminder of how margins and centers are present but shifting. For instance, a personal consideration of my own life as “marked by diasporic inscriptions” (Brah, 1996:1) was related to a shared similar cultural and ancestral heritage to most of the young women in this research project and while at first glance it may appear that a social proximity was subsequently afforded which would perhaps not be achieved with an ‘outside’ researcher, the fact remained that I was in a privileged position as a British doctoral student working within the UK academy, despite my race, gender, national origins and accent locating me in the minority of British culture. It can then be argued that argue it is not possible to achieve complete parity with an respondent by virtue of the institutional power carried by the researcher, but I did attempt to navigate these contours in my emphasis on relationality and collaboration for example through offering the young women a copy of the transcripts from the one-to-one interviews and focus groups and encouraging them to contact me if they were uncomfortable with any aspect of the data collection. None of them took up the offer.
Before and during the research collection process, I began to acknowledge and attempt to understand my own Indianness, my privileged position and the implications of this. Although I am in a subject position quite similar to some of my respondents (in terms of race, gender and ethnicity), I do not want to propose a reflexive account as a way of highlighting my position through what Skeggs (2002: 360) calls the “tendency to think that the problems of power, privilege and perspective can be dissolved by inserting one’s self into the account and proclaiming that reflexivity has occurred in practice.” Put another way, Sara Ahmed (2004: 40) writes “We cannot simply unlearn privilege when the cultures in which learning takes place are shaped by privilege”. Agreeing with this statement, I do not wish to write my self by fixing others. Nor do I wish to labour the points of an ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ status which has been extensively debated and in my mind bears a subtle notion of essentialising a particular community to which one either belongs or does not. Rather it is hoped that this would be a contribution to Caribbean studies, Critical Mixed Race Studies and Ethnicity and Race studies which engages in critical interrogation rather than description. This research aims to approach these diverse issues by eschewing a model that would present a researcher who ‘knows’ and studies ‘the other’ while hopefully avoiding the pitfalls of using reflexivity as a quick fix solution to the asymmetrical power dimensions of social science research.

This critical engagement of the self also made me think about the feelings that the young women have about the research process, which led me to the question of knowledge production. In trying to disrupt this idea of ethnographic authority, I follow Collins’ (1990; 2000) work on black feminist thought which considered mine as well as the young womens’ positionality as a legitimate standpoint from which to engage in research and epistemology. The research then, by using their talk, upholds dougla poetics as a discursive
and interpretive space but I also viewed it as an opportunity to critically engage my own experience as a part of the knowledge search.

To come back to the idea of present and shifting margins and centers in the context of my researcher identity, the constructs in this thesis of researcher and respondent are positional as well, in that they signify shifting relationships — that of knowing, unknowing, empowerment, expertise. The task then became to find a researcher identity, in line with the tenets of a black feminist epistemology as part of a wider post-colonial feminist project, which does not enact hierarchical notions of knowledge in my role as a budding scholar, nor relinquishes a kind of privilege in the name of a common ‘sisterhood’ with the young women. In trying to grapple with the dilemma of power politics, I came to see my role as positional, not solely based on my own history and engagement with scholarly work, but deliberately attempted to model my researcher identity as both a learner and a knower, and evolving with the young women. By encouraging them, the young women often became placed in a position of power themselves as they spoke with expertise for each other around specific topics.

However another dilemma surfaced when I found myself asking what would the young women gain by sharing their lives with me? Even though the respondents and myself were university students and we shared a similar ancestral heritage a lifestage in a post-colonial setting, I was in a privileged position and paradoxically the closeness highlighted awareness of social divisions. There was a distinctive dynamic which was strengthened before and after the data collection event where, as I stated earlier, spent a significant period of time with the young women travelling on excursions, day trips, having coffee at the university campus and so on. This also meant a greater access to our private selves
and while initially I was faced with the dilemma of “Why would these girls want to talk to me or give up their time for this?, the answer began to unravel during the liming process. What I discerned was that in the initial encounters, there was a strong leaning towards selling the nation in the most positive way possible, to a foreign scholar such as myself, and hence the resistance to the term race. Gradually, as I disclosed my own personal history and experiences, there was an expansion into the sensitive area of race and gender and further accounts and viewpoints on raced gender in Trinidad. I was never asked if my research would make a difference or if it would lead to any tangible outcomes, but given the energy and vigour with which all the young women spoke over the course of time I spent with them, I concluded that the discursive spaces in many ways acted as a form of catharsis in the way that they talked about their lives and experiences for hours, providing a sense of relief and freedom in which they could talk about particular issues in an anonymised way outside of their immediate environment. These could also be read as an explicit commitment to challenging power relations and is relevant to the politics of the self and nation. By centralising their experiences, they also bring to the fore the imbrications of race, gender, sexuality, religion, ethnic identities as multi-faceted and complex which in turn came to form the basis of my chapters. Yet, while their voices informed the data chapters to tremendous effect, I encountered another dilemma around power dynamics which emerged during the transcription process.

- **Transcription, interpretation and analysis**

After the data collection event had taken place, I recognised that problems could still arise in terms of representation as “when the researcher produces representations for an outside audience, control of the data and its meanings shift very much towards the researcher
[..] so even the most deliberate discourses are likely to be re-interpreted.” (Cameron, Frazer, Rampton & Richardson, 1992: 32). Further through the process of analysis, the narratives will become subject to “interpretive retelling, vulnerable to challenge from other interpretations as the vagaries of self-representations of an individual” (Brah, 1996:10). The act of transcription then is not only the stage of analysis where enlightening, pleasant and personal encounters with attendant non-verbal communication features become distilled to a text stripped of its intonation and other subtleties, but is not a full representation of the narratives in their entire form. I stated earlier that I selected parts of the talk which were related to the theorisation and I cannot claim to provide a full voice for these women. Approaches such as an ethnomethodologically inclined discourse analysis (Tate, 2005: 4) offer useful technical forms of rendering a conversation, and I have attempted to convey some sense of the tone in my analysis by simply reproducing some of the quotes and noting where emphasis was given to particular expressions. I note, however, that though feminist research talks about voice and giving voice to women, this in somewhat truncated as I have selected parts of their narratives in my analysis. Despite being given permission to use all of the data, I have chosen parts that were largely related to my theorisation. Voice, then, is somewhat limited in terms of its applicability and I am not therefore making a full-fledged claim that I am giving voice to these women but rather that I am giving voice to my interpretations of their data.

My interpretations of their talk may not necessarily be an accurate reflection of what they are saying and I do not posit this methodology as a neat way around the complex issues of power, positionality and privilege, but I would position this research as relevant, as the topics were guided and brought to light by the women themselves, and conducted responsibly, that is by not placing them in a dominated or oppressed situation. Given the
complexity of Trinidad today, discursive and academic practices must be sophisticated enough to explore the contours and contradictions, fixities and fluidities that pervade particular discursively produced identities. To claim dougla poetics then, is to engage in a powerful discursive and cultural practice.

- **Ethical issues**

In the field, it was particularly crucial to be mindful of responsibilities and obligations concerning the protection of the young women. Though the sample group was aged between 18–25 and not classified as minors under the State law, it was also crucial to be mindful of safety and liability issues which could include, for example, the handling of potentially sensitive information divulged by these young women. As some of the interviews brought certain sensitive or charged topics to the surface, there was the possibility of revelations about personal crises. In the event of this, I had a prepared resource sheet on hand with national telephone numbers offering advice on a range of potential issues. However, these potential issues were not brought to light during the course of the fieldwork.

Where recording was not possible due to issues of confidentiality, I had kept detailed, rigorous notes. The young women were made aware of the aims of the research project and their names were altered to maintain anonymity so that confidentiality was assured. However, if permission was given, all the interviews were recorded and coded confidentially. Verbal and/or written informed consent to conduct interviews and to record them was sought from the young women and the leaders or managers of their institutions. During the interviews, I ensured these took place in confidential and public
settings where they felt that the research was being undertaken in safe conditions and in spaces that are easily accessible and familiar. There was a constant attention paid to details such as this means and the research findings.

The research interactions

On further reflection, I drew on my impressions of the young women, how some produced their narratives while attending to how others did not. Reluctance in naming certain ideas which I discussed in the introduction (particularly referring to the sensitivities surrounding the term race) also figures in this analysis: notions of racism, sexism, power and difference are often alluded to without explicitly using these terms. Looking at a diverse sample of young women from different religious backgrounds was a strong starting point to explore similarities, differences and resonances amongst these young women.

At the end of each conversation and focus group interview, I encouraged all of the young women to express anything that they felt to be important that was not covered in the talk. In my attempt to make the process as conversational as possible, the young women in their roles as interviewees were allowed control and flexibility as to the pace of the session. I searched the transcriptions for themes based on the talk, and through re-reading the transcriptions and listening closely to the tapes the salience of the douglapoesics framework emerged. What might at first glance appear to be devoid of any use may lead to complex questions of silences. This brought me back to Tate's (2007: approach
to analysis based on using what she calls “ethnomethodologically inclined discourse analysis (eda). Eda” which “uses conversations as data and shifts the focus from hybridity as fusion/raceless chaos to hybridity as a process of identificatory movement in talk facilitated by the translation of identification discourses.” By drawing on this approach to analysis, the extent to which personal accounts and stories are raced and gendered was revealed. Although I paid careful attention to follow best practice recommendations, there were limitations to the study.

The young women I talked to frequently drew on physical differences as racialised differences albeit within a discourse where racism, although not named as such, was seen as unacceptable and as antithetical to Trinidadian culture. To these young women who make up the subjects of this research, how are these racialised differences seen and understood? The methodology of this thesis was designed to access their conceptualisations of the role of race and gender in their identities and identifications in as sensitive a manner as possible. Through preliminary research, I learned that race as an explicit concept is a sensitive topic. Therefore I did not directly address the questions on race as I believed this would be counterproductive to my research. I opted for an indirect approach which in the end opened up a range of themes which subsequently became the basis of this research. As Floya Anthias (2002: 492) says in her work on ethnic minority groups in Britain, “It is best to allow subjects to talk about themselves; their lives and experiences, and their ‘identity’ will emerge through this narration.” In this chapter, I will explicate the research project’s methodological framework, which is aimed at grasping how the categories of race and gender take on meaning amongst this selected sample of the Trinidadian population. This methodology section will provide a brief
overview of the epistemological frameworks that I have chosen for this study, before moving onto a description of the project design.

**Reliability and validity**

As this was a qualitative study focusing on meaning and the subjective experiences of a small sample of the Indian Trinidadian population, measures of reliability and validity normally associated with positivist and quantitative research did not apply directly. As mentioned in the section on research design, Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 11) question the meanings of these terms as

The linguistic turn makes possible two key assumptions of qualitative research. The first is that qualitative researchers can directly capture lived experience. Such experience, it is now argued, is created in the social text written by the researcher. This is the representational crisis. The second assumption makes the traditional criteria for evaluating and interpreting qualitative research problematic. This is the legitimation crisis. It involves serious rethinking of terms such as validity, generalizability and reliability.

This statement is a reminder that one can never make any ‘objective’ claims about capturing lived experiences because what is being researched is constructed through the researcher, as I mentioned earlier in my discussion on micropower dynamic, privilege and voice. Rather, what I explore in my research should be regarded as my interpretations of the data gleaned from talk.

It is also possible to critique the concept of reliability because it was not my intention to seek ‘truth’ in these conversations with the young women. It was always a possibility
that the young women may have fabricated certain elements or re-imagined certain experiences in their retelling. In terms of interviews as a form of knowledge, this is also seen as a limitation with regards to authenticity. Thus, as Suki Ali (2003: 29) postulates “All events are ‘remembered’ and therefore reconstructed over time, and as a result there will always be fiction in the way that life stories are told and retold and are constantly reworked through the additional life experiences of the narrator”. The conversations will undoubtedly contain a certain element of fiction in the retelling, so there will be no truth claim, but rather an acknowledgement that there are multiple truths.

These techniques all helped me to ascertain the social biographies of the female participants in this study. This was useful because of what it revealed about social life in Trinidad through the conversations with the young Trinidadian women.

The individual’s biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the on-going ‘story’ about the self. (Giddens, 1991:54)

For Anthony Giddens (1991), identity narratives are not truths neither are they falsehoods but continuous productions of the self. These productions are located within a specific time and context; this pertains to Trinidadian notions of Indianness, which have undergone changes from the plantation era to the multiculturalist callaloo nation (Khan, 2004:2). Exploring social phenomena within the contingencies of particular locations and points in time must be factored into analyses.

In terms of the claims to validity, the use of interviewing and personal conversations can be understood as contributing to a fairly high level of validity as it was structured
around the young women’s personal biographies. The young women introduced their own discourses and for the most part had control over the direction of the conversation. Rather than imposing abstract or potentially irrelevant themes, their discourses were highly relevant to their lives.

The acknowledgement that narrating the self is shaped and reshaped in the telling and that these ‘tellings’ are intrinsically as spatial as they are temporal and social, ties in with black feminist epistemological considerations on knowledge and validity. This epistemological stance asserts that the biographies of these young women are products of the present time, and are by no means definitive because the biography of the self is on-going. So while approaching the talk of the young women as a constructed self, this positioning made me think of not only how Indianness is produced in accounts, but also my own experience and positionality in relation to this.

A Black Feminist Ethnography

- Epistemology

As a project that looks closely at race, ethnicity and gender which “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 and situated, and all knowledge is contextual” (Hall, 1992:257), this methodology draws on an important feminist paradigm. That is, Patricia Hill Collins’ (1990) black feminist epistemology. Collins’ black feminist epistemology propounds lived experience as a way of knowing alongside talk as dialogue,
not adversarial debate. I have also drawn on her situated knowledges perspective in trying to understand competing accounts of social reality. This perspective locates knowledge as partial and situational which means that there is no one truth and that all knowledges are marked by the contexts in which they emerge. As Patricia Hill Collins (2000: 27) writes,

> Each group speaks from its own standpoint and shares its own partial, situated knowledge. But because each group perceives its own truth as partial, its knowledge is unfinished. Each group becomes better able to consider other groups’ standpoints without relinquishing the uniqueness of their own standpoint or suppressing other groups’ partial perspectives.

While the understanding of the partiality of truth forms the basis of this analysis, it is important to understand that many groups do not perceive their truth as partial. Partiality here is a concept of analysis, not a concept that necessarily arises in the practice of these informants. Given that socio-economic groups are unequal in power, certain groups that belong to privileged positions may have vested interests in suppressing or negating the knowledge produced by other groups.

Patricia Hill Collins (1990) sets out four tenets of black feminist epistemology in her influential work *Black Feminist Thought*. These are:

- Alternative epistemologies built upon lived experience and not an objectified position — While the validity of lived experience as a form of knowing was previously denied by Eurocentric, positivistic schools of thought, this research aims to gather narratives in order to upend the binaristic understandings of race, ethnicity and gender that have historically dominated public perception in Trinidad. Dougla poetics is offered in this study as an alternative epistemology which challenges these binaries in its exploration of the fixity, as derivative of the
hegemonic society, and also the fluidity as consciously performed by the young women.

- The use of dialogue rather than adversarial debate — In black feminist epistemology the story is told and preserved in narrative form and not “torn apart in analysis” (Collins, 2000:258). Emphasis is also placed on the content of a text: ‘what’ is said more than ‘how’ it is said, the ‘told’ rather than the ‘telling’. (Jupp, 2006:186).

- Ethics of caring — The holistic approach which does not separate the researcher from her experiences nor assumes a separation of thought from feelings can validate an argument. “Emotion indicates that a speaker believes in the validity of an argument” (Collins, 2000:263). Following on from a post-colonial feminist theoretical view which challenges binarisms such as man/woman, black/white, categories such as reason/emotion will not be looked at as binaries. Instead, emotion will be seen as an integral aspect of the research process.

- Personal accountability — This is the researcher’s responsibility for claiming knowledge, ethics of caring, personal empowerment and societal transformation. The framework of doula poetics involves investigating how these women navigate their identities in their everyday lives. This suggests that the researcher herself must pay attention to how she deals with the respondents, which I fully intend to do.
• This project and its research questions were inspired by this holistic approach which centres on concrete lived experience. Considering that lived experiences are highly diverse, it is important to stress that “no homogeneous Black woman’s standpoint exists” (2000:28); similarly no homogeneous Indian woman’s standpoint exists. A further examination of the epistemological frameworks that this research uses will demonstrate the ways in which these categories will be de-reified.

The Method of Talk

These tenets of black feminist epistemology are not only abstract recommendations. They have inspired a particular methodology for research. In black feminist epistemology, a method has emerged that approaches ‘talk’ not as a mode of representation but as a form of knowing in itself as bell Hooks (1990: 147) illustrates in this statement where she speaks about her efforts to speak different knowledges,

It is no easy task to find ways that include our multiple voices within the texts that we create — in film, poetry, feminist theory….I feel it even now, writing this piece when I gave it talking and reading, talking spontaneously, using familiar academic speech now and then, ‘talking the talk’ — using black vernacular speech, the intimate sounds and gestures I normally save for family and loved ones. Private speech in public discourse, intimate intervention, making another text, a space that enables me to recover all that I am in language, I find so many gaps, absences in this written text.

What Hooks is suggesting is that talk, who speaks how and where, is structured by power relations and argues that a new voice must be found in which difference is structured not through the construction of the pathologised ‘Other’ but through a more respectful,
less charged manner of conveying the complexity of one’s identity. The use of talk as a method of data collection, in this sense, is powerful in exploring lived experience and the mediating vectors of difference structured through race, ethnicity and gender because it demonstrates that ideas about a particular social world are constantly being revealed, revised and reconstituted. In this way talk acts as site of critique in its challenge to the coherence of universal knowledges. Moreover, ideas that are expressed in talk are not representations of ‘true’ inner ideas, but are the concepts themselves that are being constantly (re)formed. Talk provides a site for “elaborating strategies of selfhood — singular or communal — that initiate new signs of identity.” (Bhabha, 1994: 1–2). It allows us to see “women’s identifications in process: as multiple, dynamic, fleeting with each passing word, whilst at the same time reproducing a contingent essentialism,” (Tate, 2005:6). Talk as something that is constantly in flux allows the researcher to avoid reifications of identity in his or her own analysis, although it allows the researcher to approach the sites where the research subjects may engage in their own constructions of self.

The research method of talk allows and encourages a researcher to listen to his or her interlocutors in a particular way, avoiding any attempt to sort out the ‘truth’ of their accounts from ‘mystification’. By constructing their narratives, hearing the narratives of their peers in the group sessions and subsequently engaging in on-going dialogue, the power of talk becomes visible. It not only communicates information, it creates a relationship. By asking young women to talk about their race and gender, the young women respondents and researcher engaged in a process of co-learning on experiences of subjectivities and Indianness in relation to representations, consumption, social practices and different kinds of intimate relationships. This helped to flesh out how
different forms of Indianness are produced and how this in turn produces racialised bodies. It should be reiterated at this juncture that the singular moments of talk only allowed for a snapshot of identities in talk as identities are contingent and constantly being produced. While my focus is on how raced gendered identities are discursively produced, I do not explore how these are performed in broader social contexts. The following section will describe how this analysis of subjectivities will be put into practice through a description of the project’s design.

**Project Design**

**Overview**

This research design is qualitative in line with a black feminist perspective. It approaches talk, as a site of meaning making, where people make sense of their social world. Given this focus, it was not sufficient to conduct qualitative research interviews which explicitly addressed race as I mentioned earlier. Furthermore I was not interested in testing hypotheses, hard data or “thick descriptions” of culture (Geertz, 1973). Looking at Denzin and Lincoln’s (1994) five moments of ethnographic research, my study would echo the fifth moment where “the ethnographic scientist had to see his or her attempts to represent as only one out of several possible stories, and itself situated in the field” (Denzin, 2002 page). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) believe that a researcher needs to look at multiple methods and criteria in their epistemological endeavours. In this sense, feminist ethnographic work has made a huge contribution in that their works speak about culture as connected with text, language, and narratives that people use to explore cultural meanings.
Having established the methodological framework, I sought to incorporate individual conversations. This does not restrict my analysis to isolated accounts but instead these are telling of the broader social world inhabited by the young women. George Rosenwald and Richard Ochberg (1992: 82) note that:

> To the sociologically orientated investigation studying narratives is additionally useful for what they reveal about social life — culture ‘speaks for itself’ through an individual’s story. It is possible to examine gender inequalities, racial oppression, and other practices of power that may be taken for granted by individual speakers. Narrators speak in terms that seem natural, but we can analyse how culturally and historically contingent these terms are.

With the value of talk in mind, the data was collected through conversations from contrasting settings with the aim of collecting accounts of multiple perspectives. These conversations were recorded when I had the women’s consent, or accompanied by hand-written notes when they did not give their full consent to recording. The conversations were then transcribed, and the themes of analysis came out of those transcribed results.

Initially the research sites were selected based on where young women of Indian descent congregate in particular locations in Trinidad. Through working with various gatekeepers and through publicising my research project, a number of young women were selected as interlocutors (these choices are discussed further below). After identifying and recruiting the young women, I handed out a preliminary identity exercise questionnaire (as can be seen in Appendix 1), which led onto individual conversations and focus groups. The rationale behind these three methods of data collection is that personal experiences and collective experiences, while mutually interdependent, may vary considerably. As Avtar Brah (1996:89) claims, “To state the obvious, collective experience
does not represent the sum total of individual experiences any more than the individual experiences can be taken to a direct expression of the collective.”

As productive as the notion of talk is, this cannot be seen as wholly representative of the lives of these respondents as mentioned earlier. This talk was collected and used as data at a particular time in which these subjectivities are produced but this also is a rich resource from which to draw to look at racialised and gendered practices. The sample of young women respondents also provides a multi-layered perspective, although some young women repeatedly drew upon a very limited range of discourses. Sameness emerged alongside differences and these were read with great interest among young women in conversation along lines of gender, race, national identity, ethnicity, class, religion and age. These similarities contributed to the determination of the organisational themes of this thesis.

While the sample was accessed through a mix of personal contacts and organisations, the themes of the interviews were loosely designed through a short identity questionnaire, one-to-one interview and subsequent focus groups to reflect questions and issues around raced and gendered identities. The short identity questionnaire was distributed to all the young women individually, after which interviews were conducted for approximately an hour. Informal focus groups were then organised at a later date at UWI, and religious spaces such as the Swaha Temple, Susamachar Presbyterian Church and ASJA Young Ladies Society. In total 29 young women were contacted and interviewed over a period of six months between February and June 2011, with interviews lasting on average half an hour, including the occasional repeat interview when a particularly relevant point for further examination came up in conversation.
If the respondent was happy to develop their interviews further and consented to take part in the focus group, they were then selected and contacted at a later date to meet up for this. This made up another significant methodological part of this research. These focus groups consisted of between 6 and 11 women sitting in a room with myself for an hour, where I had informal questions predetermined to guide the conversations.

**The gate keepers**

The key respondents in the course of my background research were established with the help of the Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS) at UWI where I was granted the opportunity to audit a selection of courses. Professor Patricia Mohammed and Professor Brinsley Samaroo also provided indispensable assistance with regards to contacts.

Reverend Harold Sitahal granted access to his younger congregation at the Susamachar Presbyterian Church where activities, classes and functions are organized. Professor Samaroo pointed me in the direction of ASJA where one of the main committee members allowed me to interview her younger membership of Muslim women in her home. Finally the management of the Swaha Hindu centre in St Augustine offered much support in terms of accessing the Hindu young women and also invited me to some of their activities such as the leather back sea-turtle watching as part of their environmental conservation initiative. Secondary informants were also contacted such as Annalise Hee Chung of Harts mas band who spoke to me at length about carnival in Trinidad and allowed me, to briefly observe behind the scenes, how the costumes are designed and the workshop space. The designing
process is shrouded in secrecy as the final theme of the costumes are announced with great pageantry at a later stage in the year which is why I was not able to stay for long on the site due to confidentiality issues. Furthermore, many of the masqueraders were identified at UWI which is why I chose the interview setting at the university rather than the mas camp. Dr Malay Mishra, the Indian High Commissioner, also lent a different perspective on Indianness in a conversation I had with him in addition to fruitful conversations with Dr Dylan Kerrigan (UWI) and Dr Jeanne Roache-Baptiste (UWI).

The locations

While the research sites were located across Northern and Central Trinidad, the respondents came from diverse locations. The sites were selected for being locations where different types of Indianness and Trinidadian citizenship were inculcated in addition to being viewed by the larger public as designated “safe spaces” (Collins, 2000:10). Patricia Hill Collins identifies three primary safe spaces for Black women and these are primarily black women’s relationships with each other in formal and public spaces such as black churches and women’s organisations. This thesis selected locations of empowerment, mentoring and where the “passing on [of]… everyday knowledge” (Collins, 2000:102) occurs. While these were indeed understood to be ‘safe spaces’ by the young women, there is another way to approach these sites that is equally important for this thesis. These sites have also acted as spaces of oppression, where women who wanted to access the benefits of social advancement, had to evince a highly specific form of womanhood that was dictated by others (Niranjana, 2006).
Historically, all these are important sites of the production of Indian womanhood in a post-colonial context and are present-day key institutions of socialisation. Whilst being ‘safe spaces’, these are spaces which affirm an ethic of participation and identification as a Trinidadian which in turn influences identities and identifications. The similarities across these sites are their long-standing history and influential roles played in the making of Trinidadian society. Logistical considerations narrowed my ethnographic research to the urban area in Northern and Central Trinidad and a select few spaces in the South due to the difficulty of access and financial resources. Though this was initially seen as a limitation, during the fieldwork period a decreasing significance of urban and rural differences became apparent as young women from San Fernando often travelled to UWI. It became evident that what was historically conceived as the rural South has now considerably changed to include areas of relative oil wealth.

**UWI (The University of West Indies)**

While this research sought to capture a range of responses from Indian Trinidadian young women, as an initial point of entry into the fieldwork, UWI seemed an appropriate place to start. This institution proved to be productive for two reasons. Firstly, it largely cuts across class, religion, ethnicity, race, generation and socio-economic status and is comprised of a diverse range of young women who view this institution as one of their spaces where they are afforded a degree of freedom with engagement that was not always possible in their home and community environments. Secondly, access to the sample was considerably facilitated through my primary contacts at UWI. The young women were approached and contacted through varying means from initial contact through the UWI student societies to establishing personal contacts with colleagues who in turn put me in
touch with their relatives, peers and friends. This proved to be the most productive way of contacting young women as my initial contacts had multiple interconnections in that they were friends, had studied at some point on the same course, or were members of certain groups.

The University of the West Indies, St Augustine is one of the four campuses of this premier tertiary level educational institution across the Caribbean region. The St Augustine campus was first established in 1960 and the mission of this institution was envisioned by Eric Williams as being that of the “conscience of the nation” which “would allow for all persons in Trinidad and Tobago, civil servants, teachers and ordinary citizens of diverse backgrounds and talents, to have access to a university education. A university that would not be an intellectual enclave but rather, a central part of the wider society, bringing together persons from all parts of the country in pursuit of light, liberty and learning.” (Sankat, 2010: WWW). It has a total enrolment of over 18,000 students at the St Augustine campus and consists of a culturally diverse cross-section of local, regional and international students. Tuition is free for all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and therefore this institution was a very interesting site in which to conduct research as it cuts across socially understood lines of ethnicity, race and class. The campus could also be conceived of as a microcosm of the larger society where the synergistic relationship between the university and society, fondly referred to as ‘gown and town’, as well as the cultural politics taking place within the grounds of the university reflect what is happening societally and regionally. The considerable reach and influence wielded by UWI across the Caribbean region is therefore of significance within the context of this research.
**Swaha Centre**

The Swaha (Society Working for the Advancement of Hindu Aspirations) Centre in St Augustine is a Hindu based organisation that was established in 1993 to provide training, education in traditional academic subjects, and religious instruction to its members (Singh, 2012: 28). This centre is part of Swaha International and is one of fifteen centres and branches located across the country. Though embedded in the orthodox thread of Sanatan Dharma, the members of Swaha engage in many charity and humanitarian projects. For example the leatherback turtle conservation trip, which I was invited to join on, is one of many projects conducted at Swaha.

**Susamachar Presbyterian Church**

Founded in 1872, this Presbyterian Church located in San Fernando is revered in Trinidad not only for its religious instruction but through its establishment of Naparima College, a secondary school which was one of the first to provide education to Indian Trinidadians. This institution was seen as playing a large role in the making of the Indian Trinidadian middle classes (Bissessar, 2012).

**ASJA Young Ladies**

ASJA (The Anjuman Sunnat-Ul-Jamaat) was established in 1936 and is the largest Muslim organisation of Trinidad and Tobago (Korom, 2003). The organisational structure is community centred and divided along various geographical areas. The young women respondents had either attended one of the ASJA schools or were members of one of their committees. Though this was a formal ladies group, I had conversations with the young Muslim women at a respondent’s home.
Selection of Respondents

Given that race is a construction and that racial categories are far from fixed and uncomplicated, it may be surprising that recruiting young women to participate in this study who identified and were positioned as Indian was a relatively straightforward process. However, one of the main tenets of a critical approach to race is that, despite its constructed nature, there are often common understandings of what a certain racial group is, and who belongs to it. Also there were instances during this research when the self-identification of a respondent was not as clear. For example one young woman, Jamie (25), whose mother was dougla and the father was Indian, resisted being categorised as Indian and claimed a Trinbagonian identity in lieu of the former. Though she expressed interest in the study she was conscious of what she perceived as a “lack of Indianness.” What this suggested was how visual differences play a large role in the construction of race, and that racialised discourse works to render racialised subjects in varying ways. So for the purposes of this study, I selected young women based on their own self-positioning and identification as ‘Indian,’ rather than young women who for reasons such as national or religious identity consider themselves to exist on the borders of Indianness. However, throughout this thesis, I note that the intersectionality between raced, ethnicised, religious and national identities are mutually reinforcing in a multitude of ways.

There were 29 young women who were willing to participate in my study and met my criteria for analysis.
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<td>Anisa's house (ASJA)</td>
<td>St Augustine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raadiyah</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Anisa's house (ASJA)</td>
<td>San Fernando</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maariyah</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Anisa's house (ASJA)</td>
<td>San Fernando</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salma</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Anisa's house (ASJA)</td>
<td>Chaguanas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The initial sample of 10 young Trinidadian women of Indian descent, aged 18–25, was in the first instance pulled from UWI, after which a separate group was identified and interviewed at the Swaha Centre, Susamachar Presbyterian Church and ASJA. Despite the multiple interconnections of the women, there was a possibility identified early on that a respondent may appear more than once at a particular site. A criterion was set whereby if a respondent was encountered twice or thrice, she would not be included in the focus group more than once.

As this research aimed to gather a wider range of responses, this allowed varied data.

In keeping with the principles of a black feminist epistemology, a relationship was built and maintained with the participants after the formal interviewing process was completed in order to bridge estrangement and the “distance of difference” (Gunaratnam, 2003: 80). This attempt to treat the data with respect as highly personal, guided by a particular epistemological framework, was manifested in the data collection process.
The Data Collection Process

While it can be argued that processes and questions of identification and dis-identification are more suited to participant observation which is “usually taken as the archetypal form of research employed by ethnographers” (Davies, 1999:67), the data in this study was collected through the different approaches outlined above (in-depth interviews, questionnaires, focus groups) to yield a more rounded, broader insight into the negotiation of Indianness. The focus was on what Indianness meant to the young women rather than what the researcher determined as an external theorist, as is frequently the case in participant observation.

As this methodology follows a black feminist approach, it was my contention that in order to understand a certain institution or culture one has to familiarise oneself with its norms, behaviours and vocabulary. This is not simply meant in regards to spoken language but also the cultural interactions of the group. Therefore, upon entry into Trinidad, in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of some of aspects of local culture, the initial two months were spent acclimatising and socialising with some of the young women (a crucial social act in the production of identity, as will be discussed below) and other community members, in addition to auditing occasional classes at the University of West Indies. Socialising revolved around a process referred to locally as ‘liming’. This constituted the point of entry into the field which enabled the gathering of material as well as gaining a broader insight into the cultural politics of certain parts of Trinidad. There is no English language equivalent to this term but the act of liming is seen as a symbol of Trinidadian culture and roughly translates as follows:
The concept of liming encompasses any leisure activity entailing the sharing of food and drink, the exchange of tall stories, jokes and anecdotes etc., provided the activity has no explicit purpose beyond itself. As such, it may seem as though liming occurs in most societies. But whereas idling and inactivity are frequently seen unequivocally as shameful and slightly immoral kinds of social situations, liming is in Trinidad acknowledged as a form of performing art; it is a kind of activity one wouldn't hesitate to indulge in proudly. Liming, as a leisure activity subjected to the rules and constraints outlined, is very widespread in urban Trinidad.

(Eriksen, 1990: WWW)

Through ‘liming,’ not only did I as the researcher become acclimatised to the people who were to become the main interlocutors of my research, but this was also a reciprocal process whereby the young women became acclimatised to me. After we were acclimatised to one another, we began the preliminary identity exercise.

Preliminary identity exercise

Once the sample was identified and recruited through the gatekeepers, the young women were made aware of the research project. Before the individual interview, a form was handed out which featured a list of 20 open-ended identity statements e.g., 10 “I am... and 10 “I am not......” which the participant completed as an icebreaker in order to contextualise the research project to the participant. The data on these forms helped to establish what the primary identifications among young Trinidadian women were, and assisted in formulating questions for the individual interview which were conducted approximately a week after this exercise. The latter was also designed simply as an opening to larger conversations as this exercise alone would not be adequate in looking at the research questions centred on race and gender. It became apparent that attitudes...
towards race were a sensitive subject when reluctance to engage with this issue was expressed in individual conversations.

**Individual conversations**

Individual interviews were conducted in order to expand upon the identity statements that these young women provided in earlier exercises. The semi-structured, informal interview was designed to allow young women to answer in their own words as “there is a need for greater depth and detail about personal experiences or beliefs, because one-on-one conversations allow more time to generate richer narratives.” (Jupp, 2006:122). Therefore with this in mind, individual conversations with the sample yielded additional information that enriched understandings of identity negotiation. In-depth interviews are also a tried and tested method for producing qualitative data. These conversations were designed to enable a relationship of trust to be built between the respondent and myself, which in turn assisted in collecting nuanced data through their narratives and the ensuing focus group sessions.

These conversations lasted for approximately sixty minutes, and in some cases longer. Barring the tape-recorder, these took on a relaxed tone and were often interspersed with social chat. With the exception of one conversation which took place in a home setting, most of the locations were informal and took place during recreational hours when some of the young women brought coffee or lunch to the session. The informal feel of the conversations was an advantage, and in some cases led to identifying
additional young women respondents. Though I was aware that all of the respondents had differing timetables and other commitments, it was reassuring to hear that they enjoyed the conversations and that they found themselves, during and thereafter, engaged in a process of reflection.

The initial ten minutes of the interview was an exchange of introductions, at times stilted from their end or mine, but after this the conversations became more informal. After the interviews had taken place, these were transcribed. One of the aims of the interviewing process was to obtain information in a safe environment where discussions would depart from the more prescriptive questions that characterized the discussions that took place in the focus groups (described in more detail below). In terms of disclosure of personal information, it was important to provide information about myself and my position as a researcher to facilitate more open dialogue. I addressed this in all the interviews. Indeed, Ann Phoenix (1994: 50) supports this position when she talks about the emotional dynamics of interview situations of particular interest to feminist researchers and states that the “willingness of the researcher to give of herself by answering any questions the respondent poses can create a situation of emotional intimacy which feels (and perhaps is) less exploitative and more equally balanced in power terms.” In the case of the women who wanted to speak with me more, they were selected for further participation in my research through focus groups.
Focus groups

Focus groups provide a “valuable resource for documenting the complex and varying processes through which group norms and meanings are shaped, elaborated and applied” (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson, 2001:17). With this in mind, focus groups proved to be a highly appropriate method for yielding data pertaining to group and individual understandings of social concepts. Additionally this method of data collection had a practical advantage over participant observation: focus groups are less time consuming (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson, 2001:8). A set of questions were devised after the preliminary identity exercise and individual conversations which were related, but constructed around clarifying collectively held theories and ideas. These focus group sessions took place on campus and the three religious sites mentioned above. The focus groups lasted for approximately two hours and were audio taped and fully transcribed. Refreshments and snacks were offered to encourage participation, to convey an informal approach and to thank the respondents for helping me as a researcher.

A criticism that can be levelled against focus groups is their tendency to produce normative responses especially when conducted amongst a group of young people (Jupp, 2006:122). However, focus groups can also elicit discourses on dominant social and cultural values, as well as providing a forum for voicing issues of concern to the participants. By this stage, the young women had developed a deeper interest in the themes which we were discussing. This permitted a free-flowing exchange of information and anecdotes about our personal lives, which brought to the fore surrounding issues which did not emerge in the previous data gathering methods.
One focus group consisting of 11 participants was conducted at UWI, one focus group of 6 young women occurred at Susamachar, one group of 6 young women participated at ASJA, and finally one group of 6 young women at Swaha which brings the total sample to 29 young women. The focus groups were conducted within 3–4 weeks from the individual interview in order to maintain continuity and interest. The themes discussed in the focus groups were drawn from the responses collected in the identity exercise and individual interviews, with the aim of exploring how these young women negotiate their identity and Indianness. By drawing on the black feminist epistemological approach and asking young women to create data, this allowed for a helpful and insightful way of examining these young women’s identity negotiations. This permitted a focus on “local practices through which identity is produced in particular times and places” (Phoenix, 2008: 65). Lastly, a personal fieldwork diary was constantly updated to record the field settings, emotions surrounding the interviewing process and interaction with the participants. All of these processes were conducted according to best practice dictates.

**Limitations of the Research**

Working from a black feminist frame which places a strong emphasis on orality and the primacy of standpoint, the collection of talk was conceived as the most suitable approach to examine the research questions centred around race and gender, particularly as these are continual, socially produced, heterogeneous processes of being and becoming (Brah, 1996). However, these findings are in no way a representation of the entire Indian descent population, nor can the young women’s talk be regarded as wholly representative.
of their lives. I do not claim this study to be the representation of all young Indian Trinidadian women but rather a snapshot of their social world within a particular time and space and dougla poetics works to great effect in exploring the contemporary temporal and spatial intersections of race and gender. Identities and identifications are spatial, partial, temporal and fluid. Therefore I draw on these specific discursively produced subjectivities to provide material on identification in addition to the larger themes of racialisation, as well as raced gendered practices.

Summary

This research was designed to collect as many impressions that the self-describing and identifying Indian population sample of Trinidad could offer about the different aspects of how race and gender overlap and intersect to produce their identities. Through questionnaires, exercises, interviews and focus groups, different anecdotes and narratives were collected. Through this material, relevant themes were discerned and selected which will be discussed further in the following chapters.
Chapter 3

RELIGION AND ESTABLISHING DIFFERENCE

Introduction

In discourses of the callaloo multicultural nation, hybridity is often presented as an important hinge for the identities of the ‘mixed’ population of Trinidad. However, this is by and large in reference to raced mixing and some aspects of cultural mixing. People in Trinidad are seldom framed by a discourse that celebrates religious hybridity. While there is some work on syncretism which “refers to religious fusions or traditional symbolic environments” (García-Canclini, 1995: 11), in terms of everyday cultural engagement (Khan, 2004; Pulis, 2013) there are scarce references made to how Indian young people mix, integrate and exchange different religious beliefs, practices and value systems. Therefore through the dougla poetics framework, this chapter examines raced gender performative ideas on religious practice for Indian Trinidadian women as a way out of the thorny concept of hybridity as well as diaspora.

By departing somewhat from hybridity, this is not to say that important differences across Indian, Trinidadian and mixed groups are not meaningful to these women. This thesis aims to show that while difference in Trinidad has mostly been theorised in terms of the Creole populations, Indian descent groups are equally diverse. However the ways in which their differences (both from one another and from other population groups on the island) are created and expressed reveals extremely different models of social interaction. Examining religious difference through dougla poetics and raced performativity will
reveal a deeper level of how race is brought into being in the ‘mixed’ national body of Trinidad.

A Critique of Hybridity

Hybridity as a concept insists upon an idea of pre-existing, reified racial groups coming together to produce a combination of the original parts. In examining the role of religion as opposed to race (as it is understood by these young women respondents) in the formation of identity, it becomes apparent that religious aspects of identity among these women do not support a model of hybridity. While hybridity dominates discussion of racial difference in Trinidad (traditionally framed largely around the differences between European and African, that is ‘creole’ groups), hybridity as a concept falls short for discussing the modes of difference that these Indian women use to self-identify. This chapter examines how other modes of difference are imagined by these Indian women, namely how religion pertains to this discourse.

One of the ways in which the shortcomings of the hybridity theory of difference become clear is through the examination of everyday experience. Khan (2004) argues that hybridity as a concept relies on dialectical readings of purity and mixing. In terms of everyday experience, this dialectical analysis is irrelevant. individuals do not generally perceive themselves to be composites of different reified traits that need to be parsed out to their origin points. If instead identity is approached as something performed and enacted through everyday experience, the overly dialectical emphases of hybridity
are remedied. This is a prime example of dougla poetics, through which identity emerges as a constantly negotiated, permeable and changing thing. This dougla poetics approach to identity foregrounds religious practice as something that allows for more flexibility than hybridity does. But also, it signals the racialised component of religious practice which has largely been overlooked in the national psyche. So while religion and race are separate, they are mutually constitute as I go on to explore in the sections below.

Importantly, I am examining religion not as an object of theological enquiry but rather in terms of ‘practice’: through rituals, traditions, beliefs, value systems, and experiences and not simply affiliation or belonging.

The limitations of the concept of hybridity will be examined through different cultural expressions, all of which arose in the exercises, interviews and focus groups that made up the empirical research of this thesis. In the following chapter, I will first examine the role of religion in Indianness in the nation of Trinidad, focusing on how it has changed across time. This will then develop into a discussion of how Indian religion and culture are imagined today in this historical context. These ideas of religion are not as fixed as certain officially recognized models would suggest, and this is discussed in a section dedicated to religious permissibility in dougla poetics. This permissibility is distinguished from earlier concepts of identity that are expressed in the concept of the hyphenated identity, which is the focus of the next section. A section that examines Indianness and Trinidadian-ness together ensues, followed by a discussion of authenticity, purity and the callaloo discourse. This leads onto a discussion of the ways in which these Indian young women respondents explicitly compare their racial and religious differences. In particular, this discussion will look at how these women compare the boundaries and acceptability
of ‘trans-religious’ and ‘trans-racial’ marriages. While religion as an organising principle in matters of marriage and relationships may appear to be relatively insignificant to some of the young women in this study, the difference between their ideas about trans-religious and trans-racial marriages provides an important insight into how ideas of race and religion impact their intimate lives.

**The Role of Religion in Trinidad and Indianness**

The arrival of the indentured labourers from India who crossed the Kala Pani (black waters) between 1845 and 1917 made Indian sociocultural systems a part of the Trinidadian religious landscape (Vertovec, 2000; Edmonds & Gonzalez, 2010). As a result, the Indian presence in Trinidad has had a deep influence on local practices and religious symbolism. During this era, Hinduism and Islam came to be key symbolic resources in the reconstitution of plantation life. Temples and mosques were considered Indian spaces where Hindu and Muslim worship took place and also become the de facto community spaces for Indian Trinidadians. These religious buildings became particularly important for the women of these communities because temples and mosques acted as one of the few ‘safe’ spaces where Indian women would socialise (Mohammed, 2009).

Following the end of slavery and indentureship, many people of African and Indian descent sought to move beyond the confines of the plantation through education. Along with adopting Christianity, leaving the plantation was regarded as a marker of respectability and upward mobility. Conversions became a consequence of this
desire for educational achievement as colonial authorities believed it easier to create a homogeneous society where the value systems would be the same and therefore the society would be easier to control and regulate (Dabydeen and Samaroo, 1987).

To this end, religious organisations such as the Canadian Presbyterian Church in Trinidad pursued missionary work with the Hindu and Muslim Indians and established schools for them, resulting in many conversions. This period is seen as the beginning of the elite Indian middle class (Dabydeen and Samaroo, 1987). This was further developed through the mid-20th century. The independence of India in 1947 had a tremendous impact on Indian descent people in the Caribbean where a heightened sense of Indian pride led to the erection of visible structures of Indianness in the 1940s, such as the schools established by Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha, the governing Hindu body in Trinidad, and also the Muslim Anjuman Sunatul Janaat Association (ASJA) which founded the country’s first Muslim secondary school ASJA College at this time (Brereton, 1996).

This period of religious institutionalisation, which developed during the post-independence era, led to the marking of religion as a cultural feature of the social mosaic of Trinidad. In 2011, the population stood at 21.5% Roman Catholic, 18.1% Hindu, 33.4% Protestant (including 5.7% Anglican, 12.0% Pentecostal, 4.1% Seventh-day Adventist, 3.0% Presbyterian or Congregational, 1.2% Baptist, and 0.1% Methodist), 5.0% Muslim (Central Statistical Office, 2011). The religious landscape of present day Trinidad consists of various public celebrations such as Diwali, Eid, Hosay, Shouter Baptist Day, Christmas, worship within religious buildings such as temples (mandirs), mosques (masjids), churches, and fire passes (people walking in a trance on burning coals) among others, as well as home-based rituals (Rambachan, 2004). Schools such as the Sangre Grande Hindu School, Parvathi Girls Hindu School and Lakshmi Hindu College are examples of Hindu-based
institutions as well as the Divali Nagar and the National Council of Indian Culture of Trinidad and Tobago (NCICTT). Naparima College, which is regarded as one of the most prestigious secondary schools in the country, is a further example of a religious based institution which is run by the Presbyterian board, and there are other religious based schools run by the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Baptist and Seventh Day Adventist boards (Edmonds & Gonzalez, 2010).

These schools have traditionally provided both secular and religious instruction to their students and served as rallying points for the preservation and propagation of religion, languages and cultures in the region (Brereton, 1996). Though the main Hindu body in Trinidad is the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha and the majority of Hindus in Trinidad are Sanatanist, there are various Hindu religious movements such as ISKON1, Brahma Kumaris, Swaha International and the Chinmaya Mission which also operate in Trinidad (Singh, 2012). Whichever group one claims membership to, the staging of Indianness takes place in religious institutions in Trinidad, albeit institutions with different affiliations.

How does this institutionalisation of the relationship between Indianness and religion compare to other groups in Trinidad? Rhoda Reddock (2002:70) talks about the trend to identify common cultural practices between Indian and African Trinidadians as “parallel root traditions” which reveal nodes of affinity. While these may be present, this emphasis on parallel traditions is perhaps misleading. As Aisha Khan (2007: 61) explains,

> In the Trinidadian context, religion has been Indo-Trinidadians’ alterity, that is, the marked category largely definitive of the Indian “race.” A major reason for this

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1 ISKON stands for the International Society for Krishna Consciousness and is a spiritual institution.
difference is the fact that by 1845, when Indians arrived in Trinidad, Trinidad’s black-white continuum included (and arguably emphasized) a shared Christianity.

As Trinidadians of Indian descent struggle to be seen as Trinidadian while maintaining their Hindu or Muslim practices, a constant negotiation emerges between attempts to belong to the national body and attempts to preserve religious heritage. While racial difference, theorised mostly in terms of a Black/White/Creole continuum, has been described in Trinidad in terms of hybridity, religious difference presents something entirely different. Aisha Khan (2004) is cautious in her analysis on her view of Indian Trinidadians’ in which religion and race is separate but mutually constitutive. These “articulation of discourses” as she describes them therefore requires a model that explores these contradictions such as religious hierarchical difference versus an “all we is one” desire for equality, and authenticity as expressed in religion versus modernity.

**Indian Religion and Culture in the Callaloo Nation**

Bhikhu Parekh (2000) offers a model of cultural difference that presents three different cultural ways of being. First, some strive to lead a culturally ‘authentic’ life within its confines and ideals. Second, some take a more mixed approach by combining aspects of their culture and borrowing from another thereby broadening their own. Third, some are “culturally footloose’; they float between cultures, picking and choosing, creating an eclectic way of life, becoming ‘nomadic cultural voyagers’” (Parekh, 2000: 149–150). I argue that while understandings of racial hybridity preclude such an open concept of culture, focusing instead on religion and its effects on Indian identity demonstrates that
people in many cases make agentic, individual decisions about their cultural identities. The majority of the young women in this research can be described as falling into the second definition, simultaneously holding onto their cultural roots whilst embracing elements from other cultures. This is illustrated beautifully by one girl’s description of her religious upbringing:

“Well my dad is Muslim, my mother’s Hindu but she converted to Pentecostal when she was young. I dunno know why but she did. So I grew up following that but I know a lot about Muslims coz of my uncles and dad’s side. And I was at Naparima so have a lotta Presbyterian friends. You’ll find a lot of situations like that here. My dad travel a lot and he tell me that Trinidad is the only place where you’ll find so much religious mixing and Indian Presbyterians. I think the only country in the world. The Christians in India are either Catholic or Pentecostal. But people don’t just follow just one thing I think. I know non Hindu people who go by pundits when there a problem like obeah2 or black magic or things like that.”  
(Radiyah, 23)

Radiyah describes a model in which she can pick and choose from a variety of different practices for different purposes. Rather than a model that presents difference as the result of historical mixing, which effectively engenders an idea of culture as a fixed inheritance, this concept of difference prioritizes choice, agency and the many different and complex ways in which one can navigate between the different cultural options. While obviously this model is only an ideal, it is a very different ideal indeed than the one conjured in ideas of difference that are used to describe racial hybridity.

In examining religion in terms of practice, it becomes evident that this ‘pick and mix’ approach to religious rituals and festivals does not always entail participating in these practices as a religious devotee. Participating does not necessarily ask those involved

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2 “obeah is most often publicly represented in largely or entirely negative terms, as a form of sorcery or malevolent witchcraft, even though there is widespread acknowledgement in more private contexts that the spiritual powers to which it refers are — perhaps in the majority of cases — sought out and employed for positive ends, such as healing and inducing good fortune.” (Bilby, 2012: 47). In this extract, it refers to folk magic and sorcery.
to ‘believe’ as much as to partake. One Hindu respondent talked about her participation in Ramadan, a month long sunrise to sunset fast, to experience the pains and suffering of deprivation felt by the less fortunate. The reason she did this was because many of her Muslim friends suggested this may work as a link between religions and her attempt to raise money for Haiti, a project carried out by the Islamic Relief Centre. This fast came to symbolise an attempt to enact a humane principle in a meaningful way, regardless of religious affiliation. Sattee (21) explains this in further detail,

“I don’t have a relationship to India. I’m a Hindu. But the way my parents brought me up was more the spiritual aspect of it than the religion. My fasts for Divali and stuff, going to temple and sitting there. If you stay home but you know right from wrong or you do one good deed per day, then I’m good with that. I don’t really see myself as being attached or having to must do rituals. They don’t really encourage that. I fast for Eid too coz some of my family are Muslim. I observe Lent too. I’m vegetarian so fasting is not a big deal ’cause I simply don’t eat meat! My friends were doing this thing for charity in Haiti and I joined. I believed in what they were doing. It was a Muslim organisation and they were doing such good work. So I also did the fast. It made me appreciate what I have. And what other’s don’t have. I don’t care if it was Christian, Buddhist, whatever. It’s more to do with spirituality.”

Shoma (25) spoke about her involvement with an organisation called the Hindu Prachar Kendra and their attempt to give a different dimension to a religious festival:

“Hindu Prachar Kendra began pitchkaree⁴. They made a lot of the Hindu festivals relevant to the Trinidadian landscape and culture. For example the Ganga Dhaara festival which is basically a festival of the Ganges, they made it an environmental festival. So instead of making it we’re coming to worship the Ganges, we’re coming here to pay homage to the environment and also pay homage to elder persons in the village. Not necessarily someone who is prominent but maybe a midwife or someone who cooks at festivals or weddings and so on. For her work, that is the work of an elderly woman. For her work in that area, the community life. That’s an example of how they work with rituals in Trinidad. For them this is not just Hinduism and we are not Indians from India, we are Trinidadians and we are Hindu at the same time.”

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⁴ An Indian Trinidadian musical form named after the long tubes used to spray coloured water during the Spring festival of Phagwah. The songs also act as a form of social commentary and are influenced by folk music, calypso and old Indian melodies. (Ramnarine, 2001)
Presenting these festivals as “environmental” rather than “religious” allows for broader participation. Many of the respondents spoke about this in terms of a perceived difference between being “religious” and being “spiritual”. Vaasha (23) told me “I really don’t see myself as Indian as much as Hindu. The value systems from which I operate has more of a spiritual rather than religious base but also what makes more practical sense to me, like questioning traditions.” Similarly Amy (21), who has a Muslim and Pentecostal background, said that she would go to a Ramayana festival although she claimed: “I not religious, I spiritual.” Yet another respondent, Rhea (21) said “Spirituality is on a whole different level. Religion is more of a social thing whereas spirituality is more of the God aspect.” Thus, in the context of religion, Indian identity is not limited to a particular set of practices. This openness of choice is discussed in terms of hybridity but that presents a very different hybridity than that of race. While racial hybridity entails essentialised groups coming together and creating a fixed combination of traits, religious syncretism as Aisha Khan (2004) describes it here is discussed in terms of a permissive selection. Through concentrating on how religion is experienced and performed by these young women, the openness of their categories of identity emerge.

Religious hybridity, in contrast to racial hybridity, has often been theorised in terms of the agency involved in navigating the options available. Homi Bhabha in his essay “Signs Taken For Wonders,” (1985) invokes the example of Christianity in India. He describes a scene where local Indians “under a tree, outside Delhi,” (Bhabha, 1985: 29) may appear to be readily accepting Christianity and what appears as a case of conversion is not usually that. Through religious hybridity, Bhabha indicates it is not a simple embracing of a foreign or imposed religious belief system, but that the reference point of the Bible and Jesus is an addition to their Hindu pantheon. In the same way, I make a similar point
that the purity and separation argument that is often used to define Indian Trinidadians (Stoddard & Cornwell, 1999: 339–340) is largely inadequate when looking at contemporary lived experience of Hinduism and Islam in Trinidad. Dougla poetics emerged as a model which offers an alternative to this focus on purity and separation.

**Religious Permissability in Dougla Poetics**

Dougla poetics can act as a productive model in highlighting the internal differences and contingent positions of the Indian community regarding religious practice which is no longer monolithic. Hindu and Muslim, as well as other religious categories can co-exist. Historian Brinsley Samaroo theorised in a personal interview as to why many of the hostilities between Hindu and Muslim people that are present in India are not present in the Caribbean. He argued that this peaceful relationship developed:

“Because they came together. They were all jahajis (people who came on the ship). They worked together and there was a common union in terms of suffering. They have always observed each other’s festivals, openly interacted and inter-religious marriage is quite common.”

This presents an idyllic relationship between all the different religions that Trinidadians of Indian extraction have access to. However, religion among Trinidadians is not necessarily as open to choice and navigation as the above quote presents. Some of my respondents spoke of being perceived as ‘more Indian’ or ‘less Indian’ than other groups both within Trinidad and outside and this is explained in further detail in the section below on authenticity, purity and callaloo discourse. Within Trinidad tropes such
as vegetarianism, goddess worship, language and rituals are used in explaining Indianness but Samantha (25) gave a further account of how this varies in a global context,

“I find it funny that some people make this drama about who you pray to or what make you less Indian. I don’t judge if one way of praying helps you, do it. This is quite common here that different people will go to different religious event. But I noticed that in Canada for example, an Indian Trini woman is more likely to go for a Trini man, whether he Black, Indian or whatever ‘cause the culture is the same. Same in UK. An Indian from India or a Pakistani wouldn’t understand Trini culture. It becomes more common when you look at Trinis living abroad. But here.....I mean as I said inter-race happens but maybe not as much as abroad. Really, I think they do it like as a short-term thing, not a serious relationship. Rebellion. Coz the girls are hiding in the corners with these fellas, so how serious can it be right?”

Samantha’s (25) passage reveals how while certain markers may indicate various ways of Indianness, it is simplistic to reduce this to just rituals. She opens the narrative to the spectre of mixed-race relationships and how an outsider’s perspective would not fully comprehend the dynamics in Trinidad but how this also is altered in outside of the home setting. Yet also she says that while there is religious hybridity, there is one boundary which emerges and that is race. So while religion may at once be read and present a more open approach to identity and as an identification, this cannot be extended fully to that of race. For example the talk does show an idea in many of my respondents’ worldviews — Hindu, Christian and Muslim alike — that to be Indian is to be closely aligned Hindu, at least in the public imaginary. For example Najma (22) says, “I wouldn’t call myself Indian. I am Muslim yes. But you’re asking me if I define myself as Indian… well my ancestors are….But I don’t know what part they come from!” Riana (22) forwards, “One lecturer at UWI used the term Asian to talk about Indians and Chinese in the Caribbean. But you come from UK right, do you use this to talk about Chinese?

Keerti: “Not really, no.”
Riana: I suppose the term Asian might be ok when talking about non-Hindus but I don’t think the Indian Christians would like that very much! I think Asian won't be used like everyday. Just like race. When I'm studying ethnicity I know what they are really talking about is what we call race.”

Cherisse (21): “I see what you’re trying to say. But generally, most people, the public, when you say Indian, Hindu and Muslim is what comes first to mind.”

Religious identification then carries a raced element and ideas about who practices what along with Samantha's idea of different people partaking in different religious activities.

Although religious identification in the responses did not supersede nationality, with the exception of one respondent, all of the young women explicitly talked about non-Indian Muslims or non-Hindu Indians. Discussions about Indianness generally assumed a Hindu perspective which is in contrast to the heterogeneity of religion which forms part of the multiculturalist rhetoric of Trinidad. The Muslim and Presbyterian group confirmed this conflation of Indian as Hindu when asked about their understandings of what it means to be Indian, for example Najma (22) states “I wouldn't call myself Indian. I am Muslim yes. But you're asking me if I define myself as Indian...well my ancestors are....But I don't know what part they come from!” This is about distancing herself from Indianness as she talks about ancestors. Her lack of knowledge of origin shows disidentification. There was a great deal of agreement that the categorisation as 'Indian' is largely seen as stridently aligned with Hinduism and does not take into account non-Hindu Indians.

So while dougla poetics presents a model through which individuals can navigate between different practices, there is still an understanding that one belongs to a particular religion. Unlike race, it is possible to participate in other religious practices and to adopt parts of that set of sub-cultures, even if only for a time. Underneath that sense
of choice, or perhaps alongside it, there is an understanding that fundamentally one is of one religion. Those religions lend themselves to various hierarchical constructions. Above it was discussed how Hinduism is seen as the ‘real’ Indian religion. Another point for the construction of a hierarchy entails comparing the place of Hinduism and the place of Christianity in the larger Trinidadian context. Anisa (25), provides a further commentary on this when she says that:

“.... looking at how people talk about religion...You have to be careful. Hindus always get criticised for praying to statues and other things. I guess because the Christians are generally unaccepting of Hinduism, they always criticise idol worship that’s why I very specific about who I’m talking to about religion. Very careful. But when you look at the history of how they came to Trinidad and how they converted Hindus against Hinduism, that kinda hasn’t changed.”

Anisa locates Hinduism as counter to Christianity at the level of everyday practice and contradicts the one of tenets of religious hybridity in which one can ‘pick and mix’ and carry out different practices without necessarily practising the beliefs as indicated in the young women’s talk. In the callaloo nation, it becomes questionable how otherness in the guise of religious practice becomes included in the Christian multiculturalist, callaloo state. (Khan, 2004)

The overlap of religious identity and racial identity is complicated in Trinidad. One way to examine the difference is to look at the claims made in the name of each category and what can be mobilised on behalf of claims made in the name of ethnicity. On the other hand, what can be mobilised in the name of religion? Rhoda Reddock (2012: WWW) discusses this difference by focusing on how the different categories are used. “Religious identities often serve as proxy for ethnic identities but they are seen as more legitimate. In other words, it is more legitimate to make religious demands than ethnic
or racialised demands.” In part this is because these religious differences are largely perceived as more innocuous, as the above discussion demonstrates. Religious difference is about complementarity and choice, an exciting navigation process through which one can sample all that the nation and culture of Trinidad has to offer. Racial and ethnic difference, on the other hand, is seen in biological terms. Therefore it is seen as fixed and unbending. These identities are not changeable, and they are therefore more provocative as tied into the fear of miscegenation and changing ‘fixed’ group boundaries. As Aisha Khan (2004) points out though, religion and race may be separate but they are mutually constitutive.

While Reddock (2012) may argue that certain political parties have deemed it more effective to make claims in the name of religion over ethnicity in part because of the more innocuous understanding of religious difference, that is not to say that religious identity is stronger than racial identity. In fact, I caution rather strongly against this partly because I view the two as intricately connected but also because of the on-going saliency of race in the contemporary Trinidadian context. Identity labels in Trinidad tend to foreground ethno-racial markers such as Indo-Trinidadian, Afro-Trinidadian, Sino-Trinidadian and academic scholarship 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 as Stuart Hall (2000: 223) insists, “biological racism privileges markers like skin colour, but those signifiers have always also been used, by discursive extension, to connote social and cultural differences…” This is best exemplified in the predominance of the hyphenated identity that proposes only national-ethnic categories. If identity is constructed around hyphenated identities, by the inclusion of racial diasporic
connection and nationality, both sides of the hyphen 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. Hyphenation is fundamentally rooted in ethnicity, which can easily drift into essentialist depictions of identity (Werbner, 1997) when in fact, people’s lived experiences correspond to categories beyond their ethnicity and are affected by their gender and religion. The following section investigates how these racial and ethnic hyphenated concepts of identity work to present a specific notion of Indianness, one which many of my respondents question along the lines of both race and religion.

Hyphenated identities: Being Indo-Trinidadian

“We use the terms Indo, Afro and so many other terms which you must have heard by now! But from my point of view, apart from watching the films, listening to the music, I have no connection to India. I know the history of my family and I read about a lot of this in history books. I consider myself Trinidadian first. You asked an interesting question. I never think much about why we get categorised Indo-Trini but we are both. I don’t think one is superior to the other.” (Vaasha, 23)

The complexity of religious syncretism and the multiplicity of ideas on religion versus spirituality as well as religious identity as hybrid have been looked at in the women’s talk. The prioritising of a national identity over a religious identity in their talk was demonstrated in the fact that the label Indo-Trinidadian is often used in the social construction of Indianness. However, the diasporic implication of the hyphenated identity is highly abstract. Radha Radhakrishnan (1996: xiii) wrote that “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.” This statement focuses attention on the fact that in an increasingly globalised world defined by historical and continual flows of immigration and trade, more people are adopting multiple national and cultural identities in an attempt to define themselves in an acknowledgement 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 are 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, as much as the hyphenated identity offers more flexibility than earlier concepts of identity, it still does not accommodate many factors that are debatably of more importance to individual identity than diasporic history or ethnic group: namely religion. A poetic approach to identity, through dougla poetics as an example, therefore would eschew these identifications, albeit that they are more flexible than others.

Mainstream academic theorising on hyphenated identity draws from anthropology in linking culture and space together (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992). According to these theories, 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 are implicitly linked to both India and Trinidad simultaneously, with India being the less 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 Trinidadians of Indian descent see themselves and whether they embrace or reject India as well as “Indianness” as the main signifiers of their identifications and community. Based on the young women’s talk, what can be deduced is that they have attained substantial generational distance as Vaasha(23)says earlier, as Kavita(19) and Shanta (20) say also “It’s history. It part of us but we don’t go back there. We don’t travel to India. I don’t feel that connection like maybe other people.” For these women, India exists only as a memory of their ancestors or through the medium of film and music. It is 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. This is a notion that Sattee (21) agreed with earlier when she stressed: “I don’t have a relationship to India.” Like hybridity, the concept of a diaspora as an important factor in identity assumed a great deal of importance in the past. Focusing instead on the experienced, performed aspects of identity, perhaps belonging to a diasporic community becomes irrelevant. Or at least it becomes a signifier not about the relationship to the imagined ‘homeland,’ but as an identifier of the community to which one belongs entirely in the present. Being ‘Indian’ in this context is not about a relationship to India, but a relationship to other Indians within Trinidad and the Indian diaspora.
One of the most influential contributions to diaspora studies was William Safran’s (1991) article on the Jewish diaspora whose circumstances from their place of origin to their limited acceptance in their places of settlement was seen as analogous to other ethnic groups. The members of the ethnic group retained a collective memory of “their original homeland” and idealized “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 to have not included the “possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host societies with a tolerance for pluralism” (Cohen, 2008: 17). The young women’s critique of India as a religious source of knowledge (and the correlating Muslim discourse that separates Trinidad from the Middle East) sits in contrast to the scholarship on Indian Caribbeans which insist on a perceived diasporic link with India as the ‘homeland’. Salma (19), “There were some guys who came here to talk on…, I think IBN. They came from Saudi, I think. The guy was basically insulting us. He say like ‘Oh I didn’t know all this about the West Indies. We should follow real Islam. That everything we do is haram.’ Why? Because we dress differently? We talk different? They call you brother, then preach like they God or something.” Maariyah (24) offers, “Coz the women there wear burqas, they think they higher status or something. It’s not that. It’s just some things have changed. I know a lot about Hindu rituals and sometimes I go church. This don’t make me a worse Muslim. We do the kitab4 but I guess for the orthodox people in Middle East, this is wrong. I don’t care.” In a parallel fashion, Christal (20) talks about the difference with India from a gendered lens and the issues specific to each region,

“Well, women always are worse off right? I mean I went to visit my relatives in UK and there were all these stories in the papers about honour killings in,... I think

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4 Reading of the Islamic sacred text, the Koran, at the homes of observant Muslims.
North England? Yuh think if this is happening in UK, in countries like India, Pakistan it must happen like everyday. This thing about shame and honour is always put on women. You ever hear of a man shaming a family? No. I suppose we should be lucky it’s not too bad here. We don’t have dowry like in India where brides get hacked to death if their family don’t pay up. We have a safety and crime issue in Trinidad yes...but our parents or uncles wouldn’t kill us or throw acid on us for disrespecting them. I never hear of this happening in Trinidad. But religion here, from what my uncle tell me, is a little different to India.”

While Stuart Hall’s (1992: 33–38) approach to diaspora as “articulated” — as structured combinations of elements related through their differences as well as their similarities, Avtar Brah’s (1996: 197) “homing desire” is perhaps of more relevance here as it suggests that not all diasporic people sustain the ideology of return to the place of ‘origin’.

She 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”” (Brah, 1996:180). This alternative homing desire can find an expression in douga poetics, which works through contemporary socially and culturally recognized forms of sameness and difference rather than perhaps through diaspora with its focus on the colonial past and ancestral homeland.

Through this intervention of homeland becoming a homing desire which transforms into a spaceless place, home becomes open to various interpretations to mean 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)
Diaspora then must be, to a large extent, disqualified as an aspect of identity for these Indian descent women. For them, their homeland is Trinidad rather than India. The concept of diaspora has limitations for its ability to explain further Indian Trinidadian and Indian Caribbean identity. Just like racial hybridity, it insists on a fixed relationship to the past. The performative aspects of dougla poetics, on the other hand, focus entirely on how an identity is produced and experienced in the present moment.

The identity of ‘Indo-Trinidadian’, which 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, can readily be contested. This is because of the assumption of 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). To go back to Shoma’s (25) statement where she uses the example of the Ganga festival to disidentify with India as a source of her religiosity, Avtar Brah’s “homing desire” as different from “a desire for homeland” (1996: 197) works as a better critical tool in looking at Indian Trinidadians as it allows us to inscribe a homing desire “while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins” (Brah, 1996: 193)(italics in original).

Much of the scholarship on Indian Caribbean people reiterates the link between India and Trinidad but this is by no means a linear process of transplanting religion and culture in a diasporic space. This is where I contend that dougla poetics as a concept works to contest and negotiate fixed identities. In contesting the diasporic link, it is instructive to look at dougla poetics as this destabilises the Indo-Trinidadian label in terms of connectedness to India as homeland and turns attention instead to the ever changing present.

**Indianness and Trinidadian-ness**

I argue that the term Indo-Trinidadian when thinking of the position of young Trinidadians today could be seen as a homogenizing trope which leads to singular conceptions of a ‘homeland’. This brings about fixed ideas of ‘Indianness’ whilst not taking into account the multiple dimensions of an individual’s identities (Raghunandan, 2012). We see this in the colonial discourse on religion in Trinidad and hints at this homogenised construction in some of the young women’s talk.
However, there are some alternative ways of thinking about religious practice in Trinidad. For instance, it could be argued that in the pre and post-indenture period, religious identities were anchored in the concept of “roots”, which in the Caribbean context has been frequently deployed to represent Black cultures. “Roots”, in this context however, is linked to race, culture, tradition, and having ancestors from India. So while the image of a sacred India in the creolised society of Trinidad became a means of ethnic preservation and dignity, this also created a means of passing on ancestral customs and traditions.

The question then arises of the extent to which this roots concept still is relevant in the present day. This was a notion that was initially propounded by VS Naipaul (1964) in An Area of Darkness. He states that the Hinduism and the India of the minds of Indian Trinidadians does not correspond to the subcontinent of India and that the efforts to sort out the differences between the motherland and the cultural heritage of Trinidad are an on-going and onerous task. Though India is the geographical foundation of Hinduism, there are no sustained links as such and the performance of Hinduism in Trinidad does somewhat vary compared to that of the ancestral homeland and other countries (Vertovec, 1992). So while the Hindu and Muslim religions do play an important role in the everyday lives of Indian people in Trinidad, these are not the same roles that the same religions (at least nominally the same) entail in India. The religions practices in Trinidad vary greatly from what is practiced in India, Pakistan and the Middle East. There are a series of traditions which are not practised across India but take place in Trinidad, for example matico or night, a female-only event where the bride is instructed on her wedding night on matters of sex through dance, song and humour. Conversely, some practices in India such as the sacred thread ceremony for Brahmin men does not take place in Trinidad.
due to the non-caste-based nature of the Hindu Trinidadian community. The practice of dowry, sati and female foeticide which are critical issues in India do not have any significance whatsoever in Trinidad.

In the complex cultural setting of Trinidad, it is difficult to say whether a particular feature of the Indian culture can be described as having an Indian (from India) origin, or whether it should be regarded as a local Trinidadian development (Rambachan, 2004). Indeed, many of the respondents expressed difficulty in trying to establish a relationship with their ancestral homeland. Rani (21), talked about trying to establish friendships with her counterparts in India via social networking and found there was a significant difference between herself and Indian citizens.

“They seem to think we are, like, too Westernised or not in touch with our religion or culture at all. And the girls I chatting to had no idea where Trinidad even was! I don’t think they are taught about the old Indians who left the country to come here or Guyana. They really have no clue about us, who we are, what we about, or the culture, how we are Hindus and that kinda thing. Sad.”

This statement recreates India as provincial and unaware of the rest of the world, whereas Trinidadians are aware. It also reiterated Naipaul’s (1964) and Niranjana’s (2006) argument of the difficulties and differences that arise between the two countries. Therefore it can be argued that while Indianness is global, in that many people who claim to be ‘Indian’ can be found in many different places, Indianness is certainly not homogenous, nor does it entail the same set of evocations of India herself.

What is it then to be ‘authentically’ Indian? This category must be perceived as a political claim, rather than a self-evident notion itself. Along with discussions of authenticity, an idea of ‘purity’ of Indian descent also proliferates in ideas of what it is to be Indian
in Trinidad. The following section will examine how these further complicate ideas of Indian identity.

**Authenticity, Purity and Callaloo discourse**

Despite the many years of separation from India that most people can claim, ideas of purity and authenticity still proliferate in Trinidad. Interestingly, these ideas of purity and authenticity go along with, and in fact support, the official insistence on mixing and the mixedness of society as a progressive move within a callaloo nation. To be ‘callaloo’ there must be a fundamental difference between the different metaphorical ingredients. Therefore state-sanctioned multiculturalism as embodied in callaloo in fact reifies categories and supports notions of racial and ethnic purity, as has been discussed above.

Talk of purity is particularly dominant in the discourses of the difference between high Hindu and low Hindu practices. This is not meant in the sense of caste which is no longer a category of difference amongst Trinidad Hindus. Rather this appears through practices such as vegetarianism where this signified a ‘higher Hindu’ for some of the young women. This idea of religious purity, however, was not accepted but explicitly contested by other respondents. Asha (22) said “It don’t make me less Hindu if I eat meat.” Therefore the notion of purity and authenticity that implicitly underlies the metaphor of the callaloo nation is questioned by some of these young women. This insistence on claiming the definition of one’s own identity arises in the space that I label as that
of dougla poetics: the ability to shift, evoke and align as agent (albeit under certain constraints).

In the earlier section on religious hybridity, I briefly explore how religion and its practices have taken on different meanings and new forms of expression in Trinidad. In a nation defined by its ethnic and religious heterogeneity, the metaphors and realities of mixing are found not only in linguistics, dress codes or racial mixing but manifest in religious traditions also where organised religions such as Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. Some of the young women have at various points in time interacted with varied practices from not necessarily their own background as we see from some of the examples. However, the degree to which a ‘mix’ has arisen, and should arise, is contested. Just as Christianity has different denominations as practised in Trinidad, Hinduism also has its variations with orthodox perspectives. These are promoted by the major Hindu body, the Sanatan Maha Sabha5. Orthodox explanations are often placed in opposition to ‘folk’ (Niehoff & Niehoff, 1960: 158) perspectives. Like any conception of a hierarchy of purity, the distinction between orthodoxy and folk explanations takes on a strong class element. It becomes embodied not only in ways of practising Hinduism, but also in the importance of maintaining a good reputation through prescribed behaviour. High Hindus are ‘good girls’ who marry within the same ethnic group, while low Hindus ‘marry out’ hence the dougla individual’s position outside the margins of mainstream Trinidadian Hinduism.

5 After India’s independence, the heightened sense of identity and flourishing cultural activity became incorporated in 1952 under this single, national Hindu body. The Maha Sabha worked towards complete co-ordination of temple activities and standardization of ritual procedures in all parts of the island (Vertovec, 2000: 71).
This discussion on ‘high Hindu and low Hindu’ can be anchored in the purity discourse (Khan, 2004). Since the 1950s and the emergence of a nation-state framework for governance in Trinidad, issues around representation and staging of an authentic Indian culture were heightened in the struggles and efforts of the Indian Trinidadian community to be included on the national stage. This was accompanied by class ideologies as in their efforts to move away from the stereotypical images of ‘rural Indian’, Hindu practices became mainstream. One of the results of this effort to become a part of the mainstream of Trinidad politics was the marginalisation of regional practices such as Shakti worship.

The identification of lay and elite dimensions of religiosity in Hinduism has been conceptualised by Steven Vertovec (1994) as official and popular Hinduism, the latter maintaining elements of what is viewed as ‘folk’ or non-Sanskritic. The folk in this context being Shakti worship which occurs predominantly in the South. States of possession or manifestation occur in this form of worship which is also looked down on by some of the young women as a lower form of Hinduism and ‘backwards.’ Rather than the Christian state acting as the main instrument of repression of these practices as was the case during colonial times, it is now the governing Hindu body that works to eradicate these practices today.

While the differences between textual and lived traditions is reflected in the categorisation of ‘folk’ Hinduism versus orthodox Hinduism, it could be further posited that in the same way that ‘high colour’ is held in high esteem, ‘high culture’ in terms of Hinduism is embodied in the Sanatanist practice related to mainstream deities. Alternative modes of Hindu worship are associated with being from a ‘lower culture’. This pertains in particular to the cult of the goddess Kali who embodies the Shakti (power) energy. In the south, rituals of healing and sacrifice to Kali and Dee (the guardian of the house)
were part of Hinduism in Trinidad since the days of indentureship. This Shakti puja was regarded as an alternative, what Keith McNeal (2011) calls ‘subaltern’, to mainstream Hinduism as the puja of Kali takes place only within certain temples. The central religious ritual involves a person falling into a trance and “manifesting” mother Kali. During these manifestations, a term which is preferred by some of the respondents rather than ‘possession’ which is commonly used, the person who is manifesting advises or counsels the devotees who have come to attend the service. Some of the young women who claimed to have manifested did stress that the Kali temple which they attend does not practice blood sacrifice but sada practice (vegetarian). This insistence could be seen as an expression of these notions of purity and cleanliness as an axis by which to measure the authenticity of one’s religion.

Even in the south, where orthodox Hinduism is not practiced as often as these perceived alternatives, the constructed categories of folk and Sanatanist carries an implicit idea that the rituals of the higher castes are in opposition to the ‘little’ traditions emanating from the rituals of the lower class groupings (Khan, 2004). Though the category of caste was not acknowledged by the respondents as having any bearing on their daily or religious lives or having any current relevance, there is a strong belief in the low ranking of ‘folk’ practices. While caste may be rendered irrelevant to some extent, class affinities come to the forefront as the folk/elite divides are not transcended in the way that is propounded by scholars who talk about religious hybridity (Colin & Clarke, 2010) although Aisha Khan (2004: 118) does attend to this demarcation through “simi-dimi,” or superstition, the ‘high culture’ of South Asian religious traditions and ‘low culture’ of Indian Trinidadians perceived as illiterate and rural. While this research does not entail an explication of class distributions amongst the Trinidadian Indian population,
it is still important to draw attention to these class discourses for their implications for the concepts of ‘authenticity,’ ‘purity’ and hybridity. If hybridity is conceived of as a mixture of fixed entities, there are stakes in claiming to enact the pure form of that fixed identity. If Trinidadian religion is a syncretic, whose Hinduism counts? This is another pitfall of the hybridity model. Yet again, the performativity of dougla poetics allows a concept of the lived experience of these ‘alternative’ Hinduisms to emerge as equally legitimate to any other set of practices, regardless of claims of a continuum of authenticity and purity and we see this in the discussion of Kali Mai worship where Shivani (24) says “I enjoy the normal temple stuff and Shakti Worship. Maa Kali is the only reason why I am here today and alive today. A lot of things happened in my life that I’m not proud of. I owe everything to her. I can’t really talk about it or express this but it is very very important to me.” However, this positioning of the goddess mother as a symbolic resource is thought of by Christal (20) somewhat differently, “If it helped you I can’t judge that. But this idea of manifesting and blood sacrifice. I know Shivani don’t do that. Some pujaris took it to a different level. It’s not real Hindu.” What Christal describes as ‘real’ can be closely linked to the idea of purity in light of her discomfort with blood.

‘Purity’ here has another significance: as in many cultures around the world, women are constantly culturally policed in terms of their ‘purity’. Sexual purity may appear to be a different category all together than the above concepts of racial, cultural and religious purity. However, it must be understood that many of the processes of mixing that are imagined in the hybridity model take place through heterosexual reproduction. Therefore the politics of who is marriageable, and how to act in that marriage are significant for the implications of identity in a callaloo nation.
Marriage and the boundaries of Indian identity

In a nation where the ideal of hybridity is so pervasive, it would be easy to assume that ‘mixed’ marriages would be common. However, religion and race in combination deny this possibility.

In terms of state policy, there are four pieces of legislation with govern the relationships of the 1.3 million citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. The four marriage acts which apply to different religious sectors are as follows:

1) The Marriage Act (Chap 45: 01) — which governs civil and Christian marriages and sets the age of consent at 18 for males and females.

2) Hindu Marriage Act (Chap 45: 03 Section 11) — Minimum age for marriage is 18 for males and 14 for females. In the sample forms, the wife’s occupation is not asked for. Remarriage of widows is not allowed.

3) Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act (Chap 45: 02 Section 8) — This governs Muslim marriages and divorces and sets the age of consent at 16 for males and 12 for females. In the Muslim registration form, there is no column for the wife’s occupation but only for the husband.

4) Orisha Marriage Act (Chap 45: 04 Section 9) — reflects contemporary revalidation of traditional African religions. Minimum age for males is 18 and for females 16.
There is also the Co-habitational Relationships Act (Chapter 45: 55) which is the only secular act recognising the existence of intimate consensual, heterosexual, non-legal unions. Though marriage by virtually all the young women was seen as a private endeavour, it also appeared to have a larger social and political significance. One of the statements put forward by the young women, Shoma (25) summarised this succinctly, “There are people you lime⁶ with, and people you marry.” Marriage therefore becomes a symbolic signifier of difference despite the religious hybridity posited by the young women.

One of the main points that emerged in my research about what mixing is common and what mixing is not, is that trans-racial mixing is far less common than trans-religious mixing. This was both observed in my interaction with people, and also articulated by these women themselves. While much of this chapter has been dominated by discussions of Hindu Indian identity, one of the most explicit examples of this discussion of common and uncommon mixing arose in a focus group of Muslim women. While some of the young women commented on the flexibility of trans-religious marriage in contrast to trans-racial marriage, they also commented on the unlikely possibilities of a female of Indian Muslim descent marrying a Black Muslim male. Salma (19) elaborates on this when she said “They practise in a different mosque to what we pray. They have their own…I guess their teachings also different to what I learn. I see a few in our functions but you don’t see an Indian and Black Muslim marry, no.” Raadiyah (23) contributed in response:

“It does happen from time to time but it is not very common. I know of such two couples personally, but i think generally, it is still an uncommon practice.

⁶ Liming is a local term meaning to hang out informally.
Part of it may be the fact that the majority of Black Muslims tend to go to their own masjid like Salma is saying as opposed to one where the majority is Indian Muslim. So, given that the number of Black Muslims are less than Indian Muslims, and they tend to congregate in their own communities, this is why there a small number in this type of marriage. Culturally too, a majority of Indians (both Muslim and Hindu) only consider other Indians as marriageable.

So there is a distinction between the permeability of religious and racial identities. This is in part a reflection of common understandings of race and religion: one is a biological category and one is a social category. The racial boundary is never crossed, although occasionally people of different races may marry. The religious boundary on the other hand is flexible in these stories. It is even more so with the Hindu young women, many of whom offered stories of members of their family who officially subscribed to a different religion, but who were encouraged to attend the Hindu ceremonies in which their families and friends partook.

Judith Butler’s (1990) concept of performativity undermines this distinction between a biological and a social category. With gender and sex, there is no ‘true’ essence that is communicated through behaviour. Instead, the behaviour and the categories that contain it are gender itself. So while different people may have different sex organs, the gathering of individuals into categories according to those organs is a cultural construction. It takes on meaning through the performance of the types of behaviour we as humans are all raised to embody. So an individual is not born male or female, girl or boy. Instead, through adapting from birth the cultural categories that proliferate around them, and learning how to represent those pre-existing categories, one performs one’s gender. This thesis argues that the same can be said about race: it is no more a biologically determined category than sex or gender (Tate, 2005, 2009). Racial groupings are entirely social constructions that divide people by certain phenotypes.
These groupings take on meaning through lived experience and performance, so that a young Trinidadian Indian Muslim might perceive that a Black Muslim is of an entirely different sort than she is.

While certain hybridities are imagined as acceptable and others are not in terms of marriage selection, (namely trans-religious over trans-racial), behaviour within marriage is filled with as many points where identity must be navigated and performed. In many ways, the ‘type’ of Indian that you are, and the religious affiliations that you subscribe to, are expressed in how you behave in a marriage. For instance Shivani (24) below highlights how what she terms ‘town Indians’ from the North differ from ‘country Indians’ from the South where there is a stronger leaning towards Hindu religious practice and attendant expectations and ideals:

“the more urban centred Indians would not have this sentiment as opposed to somebody who comes from South. Because South and Central still have a very strong Indian awareness of themselves.

Vaasha (23): “You’ll find this comes out in marriages a lot. A lot of Indian women do not follow this traditional approach to marriages. There is a sort of movement towards equality in relationships and they are not willing to remain in marriages which put them at a disadvantage like it was with our mothers and grandmothers.”

Shivani (24): “But not with all Indian women. ‘Cause Even though you’re supposed to do cooking, cleaning and tending to children and so on. Some of my friends say that the Indian men do not understand the meaning of equality. They are expected by in laws now….when you get married now it’s not just the guy you’re marrying but the family you get into right. So the families, the guy may not demand it, but the family play a big role in how the girl’s marriage life will go.”

Seema (19): “That’s true. But the change is still there. I mean look at the population of UWI. There are more girl graduates coming out than guys. One lecture I was at on visual arts, the lecturer said “I don’t really care for the boys. They just foolish and they can do whatever they want. They hardly attend the classes anyway.” Maybe that could mean change in attitudes and awareness or the fact that girls no longer depend on guys.”
In this focus group interaction we can see differences within Indian culture based on social class and also the gendering of Indianness. While Ashley talks about the progressive changes made for women, Shivani and Vaasha in the same discussion highlight the gendered expectations for women in spite of their educational advancements. Though within all the conversations with the young women, limits were not expressed in strictly dichotomous terms as in the case of their British Asian counterparts (Katherine Hall, 2002), or South Asian diasporic young people in the USA (Sunaina Maira, 2002). In these instances, the discourse of ‘culture conflict’ or ‘identity crisis’ still pervades, the gendered expectations of young women as guardians of Indianness and religious integrity, whether Hinduism, Islam or Christianity, were recognised and reinforced.

As the following quotation suggests, the respondents had different opinions on these ideals and expectations. Some felt it was a way of preserving “we tradition” and most expressed certain competencies alongside certain concerns, for example, their dismay at their lack of Hindi and Urdu language skills. Some felt particularly strongly about their gendered and perceived roles as keepers of their culture, particularly in regard to matters of relationships, reputation and marriage. For example, Cherisse (24) says:

“For me there is great honour in looking after the family. I agree with independence and not having to depend on someone for your livelihood but I do also believe that God has created a role for us women and it says so in the Bible. It is not an inferior rule. I do believe that men are created to lead the household but that does not make women inferior. It just makes us having a different role that he cannot fit. (Everyone agrees). So when it comes down to it, yes it is good to be independent but at the same time I believe this does create problems.”

What Cherisse and Kavita’s extracts indicate is the role of religion in constructing particular gender norms and it revealed a great deal about how young women navigate notions of family as well as marriage. As these women inherit ideas of how they
should marry, who they should marry and how they should behave in marriage, these are not ideas best understood in terms of models of hybridity and multiculturalism. The boundaries between black and Indian, the boundaries between high and low Hindu and country and city Indian, all of these sets of distinctions do not pre-exist the women who enact them. Hybridity as a model depends on an idea of these features pre-existing the modern cultural expression that they take on. Performativity instead emphasises that these distinctions only come to be through the ways in which individuals express them. Therefore these young women are not acting according to differences that pre-exist them: by acting in certain ways, by discussing certain social classifications, and by enacting a sort of behaviour that accords with what they believe is best, these differences emerge. Dougla poetics and performativity allow for this concept of the women themselves as creating the categories that they embody.

Within these marriages where the differences of race, religion class and culture take on such meaning, how might these women envision belonging on the national level? Some of the young women hint at their dilemma in affirming their ethnoreligious identity. Najma (22) reveals, “I am a Muslim and a Trinidadian. They aren’t two separate things.” She is navigating between competing communities of belonging and citizenship. The process of negotiating one’s membership in different spaces because different things are demanded reflects how these hurdles are more complex for Indian descent women who want to affirm their cultural identities while rejecting unequal power relationships between men and women as Vaasha (23) and Seema (19) say in their passage on women in marriages. This is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter on sexuality where Rani (21) gives an account of a situation in which the man would be given more leeway
in a situation where she was penalised. To give another example is from Esther (25) who gives an interesting account of the gendered dimension of religious hybridity,

“I think now everybody realise that it’s up to their child to choose who they want to be with. Obviously if the person choose just real bad guys then the parents will step in but now as I say it’s that the give the child a chance to choose. And if they see that the choice is bad then they will intervene. So it’s not like arranged marriages anymore. The majority of people get to choose who they will marry.
I grew up in the Hindu religion. Whichever you are born into you should keep it. A lot of people convert. Christianity may be more popular than Hinduism but it is important to be who you are. I like my religion. I wouldn’t change it for a guy. One of my best friends converted to Christianity. For Divali her husband didn’t want her go to the Hindu events or even go anywhere near Chaguanas. I mean I like my religion seriously! I wouldn’t change it for a guy and I know there’s lots of fasting but I would not change it for a man. I think there’s an expectation for girls to convert in a mixed marriage situation. This would not be the same case for the man. That expectation is not there. But it depends on upbringing. Nowadays things are different. I was brought up in a strict Hindu household but girls who don’t come from strict homes are more likely to marry out.”

The double standard here that Esther is saying in this passage is an example of the unequal power dynamic and asymmetry in what at first glance is a positive representation of religious hybridity. Trans-religious practice and marriage may be welcomed and common but who gets to enact it agentically is questionable. The basic power asymmetry is enacted in relation to the expectation of who can do what or practice what in a relationship.

What can be teased out from these extracts is how difference operates in marked terms despite the implementation of the multiculturalism policy which was announced “to give greater voice to the diverse cultural expressions of our common desires for individual and national identity and to promote a realignment of policies including resource allocation, to allow for a more equitable recognition and fulfilment of needs of the diverse proponents of our culture” (Persad-Bissessar, 2010:1). In the opening chapter, I briefly explored how
mixing has taken place in Trinidad since the colonial era and as anthropologist Dylan Kerrigan (2012: WWW) writes in a newspaper article, “What we’ve had here for a long time is a living multiculturalism. One that didn’t need to be legislated for because it just worked.” The ways in which marriage is legislated for could be seen as reflecting a way of responding to ethnic and religious diversity based on the recognition of difference. Rhoda Reddock (2012: WWW) in a recent lecture argued that

This is one of the examples of state responses, for example others are the public holidays, multicultural politics which has characterised Trinidadian society long before the Government declared multiculturalism as a national position. History has already shown, if you look at the making of the nation, Trinidad had already become a multicultural society. Although the difference between being multicultural and multiculturalism as a doctrine is something that should be explored further.

If marriage in this sense becomes a marker of difference, then it also becomes a mark of distinction engraved on women’s bodies through tropes of respectable Indianness which in itself is rooted in religious hetero-patriarchy.

The social validation by some of the young women of their roles as not only reproducers of their religious traditions but annexed to attendant aspects such as family, honour and respectability were quite apparent. Though a large number did not fully identify with the ancestral culture and did not regard religion as a largely influential concept in their everyday life in comparison to spirituality, the latent tensions in terms of racial limits within marriage and relationships play up to a patriarchal heteronormative framework. Thus,

Molding individuals’ self-understanding, opportunities and constraints, marriage uniquely and powerfully influences the way differences between the sexes are conveyed and symbolized. So far as it is a public institution, it is the vehicle through which the apparatus of state can shape the gender order. The whole system
of attribution and meaning that we call gender relies on and to a great extent derives from the structuring provided by marriage. (Cott, 2000: 3).

If marriage, therefore, as a mechanism for not only distributing the responsibilities of citizenship works to discipline the production and reproduction of people through the institutionalised gender order as Nancy Cott (2000) elaborates, then it is equally true to state that it is instrumental in articulating distinctions in Trinidad. Amidst the rhetoric of cultural pluralism, multiculturalism and callaloo, based on the young women’s talk, mixed marriages are not as simple as depicted in the social imagination as we see from Esther’s account of her best friend’s religious conversion and Raadiyah’s observation of trans-religious but same-race unions.

**Conclusion**

“I think the girls end up settling. When I used to work in a shop in Debe, there were plenty girls coming into the shop, real beautiful girls with a fella who..... ugly-lookin! I mean fat, old, buss men who you just think....how a man like that get such a woman? So I find that women in Trinidad end up settling, maybe ‘cause of security or they wanna be looked after or even society pressure. At the end, most of the time they end up settling with someone of the same race. The guys and girls will say they love the Spanish or Red ‘cause they our neighbours and that. In the whole Caribbean, there are mostly Latin people and Trinidad is the only place where there are most Indians. So for us it’s exotic. They check ‘dem but in the end, they marry their own. And if not their own, then it will be someone of their same religion.” (Asha, 22)

What the dougla poetics reveals is that race is performatively constituted by religion, in spite of the valorisation of the latter as hybrid and syncretic. As the above statement and various young women signal, the constitution of the Indian subject takes place through the citation of the “marry their own” norm. Performing Indianness as a viable Indian
subject is then given room for different possibilities in the realm of religious practice as we see in the enjoyment and pleasure expressed in taking part in trans-religious practices such as Sipari Mai, Easter and Eid, which can be interpreted as an example of dougla hybridity.

But the boundaries that are drawn in matters of marriage are very much along the lines of race, religion and gender. Then, on one hand we have the dougla and fluid leanings of religious hybridity, on the other we have the everyday realities of fixity in which one can marry out of one’s religion but not race, so that would be socially acceptable for an Indian Muslim woman to marry an Indian Hindu or Christian man but not a Black Muslim Man.

The racialized component is a significant part of religious practice, as like we see in the beginning of this chapter, Indian is aligned with Hindu and Muslim despite a high number of Indian Christians and trans-religious identities. Spirituality is a model of cultural and religious difference which is embraced and there is a navigation of various traditions yet there remains an underlying belief that Indians ‘belong’ to a particular religion. This does however counteract the purity discourse which comes to the fore in the low Hindu/high Hindu categorisation.

The dougla poetics illustrate a contestation of the diaspora concept as we see in the section on hyphenated identities, where the Indo in Indo-Trinidadian is implicitly linked to the ancestral homeland of India, the teleogy of return and the notion of diaspora. This was largely articulated as an inadequate way of talking about newer generations of Indian Trinidadians. The identification with dougla as a way of reflecting Indian mixedness was of significance here.
Throughout this chapter, the young women valorised and celebrated the multiple convergences and distinctions that arise through their practices of religion. In this chapter, doula poetics responds to the problems inherent in religious hybridity and diaspora theorising, which as I foregrounded in the introduction, entails fixed categories which maintain their boundaries even as they mix. While the later generations of post-indentureship Indians were approached through hybridity and a narrative of purity or loss from the diasporic homeland of India, these models have not been adequate for attempting to understand the complexities of the particular social, cultural, and economic relations within which the later generations were constituted.

In order to foreground the many different complicated ways in which religion, race, class and other factors come to be understood in the construction of Indian identity today, this thesis recognizes that a theoretical framework that focuses on the lived experiences rather than fixed categories is fundamental to understanding the lives of these young women. Performativity, extrapolated from a theory of gender and expanded into accommodating differences among all of these variables, especially including race, has been offered as a new way to grasp these intricate and intimate concepts of difference. Along with an idea of poetics, these new methods allow for a way out of the fixity that a concept of hybridity enshrines. In the next chapter, a discussion of categories of sexuality and desire will reveal another dimension in which the model of difference that hybridity presents has only limited application to the Indian descent groups of Trinidad.
Chapter 4
THE SEXUAL SIDE OF RACE AND DESIRE

Introduction

…..it seems crucial to rethink the scenes of reproduction and, hence, of sexing practices not only as ones through which a heterosexual imperative is inculcated, but as ones through which boundaries of racial distinction are secured as well as contested. Especially at those junctures in which a compulsory heterosexuality works in the service of maintaining hegemonic forms of racial purity, the “threat” of homosexuality takes on a distinctive complexity. (Butler, 1993: 18)

In Bodies that Matter, Judith Butler asks us to consider how sexual and racial imperatives intersect to produce normative subjects and how sexual and racial prohibitions, which underpin the basis of the hetero sexual matrix, restrain or limit identities, sexualities and subject positions. This critique does not reify those social identities, but instead highlights their contingency. Through approaching these identities as constructed and performed and through focusing on the poetics of these identities, these inter-dependent contingencies emerge. This approach therefore brings up issues about what identities can and cannot exist in this matrix. Butler (1990: 17) writes:

[The] cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of ‘identities’ cannot ‘exist’ — that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not ‘follow’ from either sex or gender

It is impossible to speak of the heterosexual matrix in isolation from processes of racialisation, particularly in the context of Trinidad, where the categories of who could and could not reproduce with whom were foundational to its colonial and post-colonial legacy. In this chapter, I look at raced sexuality as a salient marker of otherness and as core
aspect of in the structuring of gender inequality. I also look at one respondent’s narrative of how race and sexuality intersect in a non-heterosexual context.

Talking sex and race

Over the last few years, studies of sexuality by Foucault (1976) and Rubin (1984) has called attention to sexuality as a social construction and as a discrete area of study which does not largely fall into the remit of gender studies. Concomitantly, there emerged a focus on deconstructing binary divides of man-woman, heterosexual-homosexual, masculine-feminine (Butler, 1990). This deconstruction framework did not initially gain traction in Trinidad where traditional readings of sexuality and intimacies in Trinidad were focused on either a racial divide (Black/White or Black/Indian) or a gender or sexuality divide (man/woman, heterosexual/homosexual). Yet these categories of sexualities (heterosexual, homosexual, lesbian, gay) and racial categories are in many ways dependent on each other and cannot be looked at as separate from each other. As Morris (1995: 585) writes,

Gender (and sexuality) may not be the primary object(s) of identification……. We need a conceptual vocabulary that permits discussion of engenderings that are multiply refracted in and through other categories of identity that are not reducible to gender…. We still need ethnographies that explore the constitution of racialized and ethnicized genders and/or genderized races and ethnicities.

However, within the Caribbean context, critiques of gender relations and normativity (Barrow, 2000) began to emerge which paid attention to the intersections between race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. In some ways, the connections can be traced
to the roots of Black feminism in works by, for example Patricia Hill Collins (2000), Kimberlé Crenshaw (2001) and Audre Lorde, which sought to dismantle Eurocentric understandings of Blackness and build newer ways of theorising the intersectional classed, raced and gendered experiences of Black women. In the Caribbean, race has traditionally been addressed as a basis for social inequalities during the slavery and indentureship eras and then subsequently through concepts such as diaspora, creolisation and hybridity. Of late, there has been a remarkable expansion of studies on sexuality in the Caribbean with divergent areas of focus such as biopolitics (Kempadoo, 1998) and links to family. Interestingly, there are very few studies on contemporary narratives of sexuality and even less so on Indian sexualities, eroticism and sexual desires. That the questions of race are so closely linked to sex in Trinidad is an “open secret” (Ashley, 25), discursively constituted but also constrained in its silence. During the data collection process for this research, the young women were significantly reserved in their discussion on the intersection between race and sex in Trinidad but eventually narrated how sexualities, including sexual stereotypes, that are based on a person’s race are prevalent. Also the dominant tendency to talk about heterosexual unions ignores non-heterosexual Indian sexual identities and Brinda Mehta (2004: 220) comments on this when she says, “it must be pointed out that, for the most part, these sexual reclaimings are situated [by Indo-Caribbean women writers] within a heterosexual model of affirmation.” She calls for new possibilities of understanding sexual knowledge and pleasures and charges Indian Caribbean scholars to take on the task of “claiming and sustaining decolonized sexual subjectivities through the rupturing of classically defined male and female sexuality.” (Mehta, 2004: 226). If heteronormative understandings of sexuality are in part the result of a colonial legacy, Mehta’s quotation demonstrates that understanding all of the ways in which exceptions to this normativity are voiced, accepted and contested helps the decolonizing process overall.
This dichotomy of silences and speaking out on matters of sexuality is a contentious one particularly with regards to the Indian Trinidadian population as there are no studies or reports on the sexual identities and cultures of this group. One intervention in trying to explore this came from Caribbean feminist literature which examines the ideological processes of racism and sexism in much detail, but at the level of the everyday and personal, Indian women’s sexual experiences are not largely explored. Joy Mahabir and Pirbhai (2012) critique the conceptualisation of feminism as an activist project which sits at odds with the lived experiences of Indian Trinidadian women for this very reason. Dougla poetics can open a space for conversations to explore this because what emerges from the talk with the young women is that sexual boundaries are racial boundaries and that gender ideologies underpin this and sexual norms. There are emerging works that attempt to address these openly. For example, some calypsos and artworks by Glenn Roopchand7 and Shalini Sreereeram speak about racial differences in sex which in hegemonic culture are rendered unspeakable. Through the contingent performativity of gender and race, one can see further the complexities of trans-racial sexual desire and how racial borders police sexuality. Racialised sexuality in Trinidad, based on my findings, can be characterised in two ways. One through a type of silence and governmentality (through the notions of respectability) and secondly by the discursive positioning of the stereotyped hypersexual Black (male and female) Other.

7 _Dougla Serenade_ by Glenn Roopchand is one example of a piece that looks at racial interaction.
Racialised sexuality

“Indian women we stuck up… But we don’t whore down the place”

This was a quote from Reshma (19) which was the only explicit one in which racism inferred. The ‘whoring’ she is referring to is the stereotype of public displays of sexuality performed by African Caribbean women and the “stuck up” is the acknowledgment of one of the stereotypes that define Indian Trinidadian women. Sexuality in this statement not only becomes racialised but it is a marker of otherness, a notion which has figured prominently in the colonial race-colour-class hierarchy of Trinidad. Historically, the sexualities of East Indian and Black women were stereotyped in divisive ways as I explain further below in the section on creolisation. The discourse of morality was at once used to define East Indian women and to mark them as resistant to creolisation which in the post-colonial era was tied to modernisation (Mohammed, 1998). At the turn of the noughties, it is important to explore if Indian women continue to be endowed with these discourses which restrains and silences their sexuality as well as how racial norms are present in the heterosexual matrix. What emerges from the talk is how the notions of respectability and piety do sit in opposition to licentious and immoral behaviour as embodied by African Trinidadian women so that any sexual expression that is not deemed as operating within a particular boundary is marked as ‘Creole’ or ‘Black’. Indianness then becomes aligned with certain codes of conduct or how, as Aisha Khan (2010: 71) explains it, “proper comportment (respectability, manners, ‘living good’ with people) and the equation of being civilised with being ‘cultured’ are implied, and seen as the province of the middle (or upper) class.” Respectability was one of the earliest discourses to combine and condense race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality and class. Articulated as a means of social progression from oppression faced
in the colonial encounter, respectability also came to form the cornerstone of normative Indian femininity. Ideas of racial endogamy were expressed in fears about creolisation, overt sexuality, disorder and degeneracy. These were the terms which characterised the evaluations by which the working-class or ‘grassroots’ (Khan, 2004) were coded. Practising love as a form of social mobility and erotic desire was and it could be argued remains racially coded in varying ways. This is apparent in the creolisation/mixing discourses which is theorised as an “abiding and perhaps preeminent cultural hallmark of the relationship between Indo and Afro in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.” (Khan, 2004:326) and where Indian Trinidadians concerns about mixing for them “is as much about not mixing as it is about mixing.” (ibid). The production of sexuality therefore was and remains very much a raced product as well as gendered. Though much has been written about how respectability is a mechanism through which the concept of class emerged (Skeggs, 2004), I want to foreground how it is a marker of race and sexuality and how these iterations of these categories become central to the notion of Indianness.

The creolisation of the Indian woman

This is a title taken from one of Patricia Mohammed’s (1998: 142) well-cited and influential essay in which the “creolisation process is interlocked with modernisation as new values are formed and shared between and among the various groups”. Almost 15 years later, I argue that while the conflation of creolisation and modernisation is not an idea that resonates with the respondents in this research but may remain a salient point for others,
it is also important to pay attention to the changing and different configurations of women’s sexuality.

In order to explore this more fully, let me attempt to read the term creolisation. This was one of the first popular words to be used in reference to Indian women and as a theory to explore the changing roles of Indian women (Mohammed, 1998). This is by no means a bounded definition and in the Trinidadian context is far from being race-neutral despite efforts to indicate otherwise. Viranjini Munasinghe (2006:550) argues, creolisation “is a schizophrenic theory, that is one in which theory and ideology are conflated.” This must then be understood not as a homogenising process, but rather 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’ is creolised 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. Yet, there remains divergent views on this as some of the women read creolisation as a code for assimilated into Blackness and some who take it to be synonymous with mixed-ness. For example Maariyah (24) explains,

“We are all creolise. But it’s a term that some people take to mean African. I don’t fully agree. Look at our language. You have Trini creole right, I have plenty
African friends. We are mixed. We don’t live like…you know how in America you have ghettos. They don’t mix with any other people. It’s not like that here.” What Maariyah is saying that through selective processes one can enact a creolised identity and there is not just one point of entry into what is considered creolised.

So while she has this point of view, it was counteracted by Najma (22) and Raadiyah (24) who say that,

Najma “I think it’s a problem term because we don’t identify ourselves naturally or automatically. I mean it’s not at the forefront of my mind, I am you know…”

Raadiyah (24) “The term creole isn’t used in the real meaning of the word. Like taking something from another place and making it indigenous, it’s not used like that anymore. ……It used to be for food right? It really isn’t used. I guess it largely means Black people though right? Really…..when this term was used it simply came to mean Black. And this could be the difference in meaning. You look terms like nigger or coolie or honkey or oreo. For example an East Indian person would be horrified at the term coolie or Black man would feel the sting of the word. We don’t use the term coolie here, it’s illegal! In the same way that people don’t say negro anymore but if they did you would be more than shocked.

Raadiyah’s view then is not entirely dissimilar to Munasinghe’s (2001) argument that Indian descent people in the Caribbean have been considered by academic and popular discourse as outsiders to creolisation but she also, like Patricia Mohammed (1998), calls for a richer meaning of the term.

There is however one concern which was not at first expressed in the interviews but in my view is important to consider. That is how do Indian women figure in this process of creolisation? The women above speak about creolisation in general terms and evoking a male figure but what of the Indian woman? If language and food are identified as points of entry then what about in the area of sexuality or sexual intimacy? This was an area which warranted exploration as in one of its most core meanings, Kamau Brathwaite (1971) suggests that creolisation is interlocked with race, sex and sexuality when he says “it was
in the most intimate area of sexual relationships where the most significant (and lasting) inter-cultural creolisation took place.” Initially, the popular interpretations of creolisation put forward by the young women did not call attention to the role of heterosexuality through racialised grids in their constructions. Indeed, I argue that this is a critical area to explore as the regulation of Indian Trinidadian femininities as separate from African Trinidadian came to be a discourse that formed part of the dominant narratives on Indians in the Caribbean (Hosein, 2012). Notions such as cultural retention, purity, respectability, honour, family, goodness were deployed on Indian women’s bodies in opposition to African Caribbean people as sexually promiscuous, lazy, undesirable, irresponsible and inferior (Dabydeen & Samaroo, 1993). Regardless of the varied definitions of creolisations, there is no way of looking at this and Indianness without working through the positioning of Indian women’s sexuality. What emerged in this research is that Indian female sexuality is defined, whether implicitly or explicitly, by and against African Caribbean sexuality and patriarchal ideologies.

For example, in conservative and ethnocentric discourse on Indianness in Trinidad, one area where the concerns of racial ambiguity and Indian women’s sexuality came out strongly was in the debates of creolisation and the figure of the dougla. The fears of miscegenation were expressed in the disavowal of the dougla through a discursive silencing of this mixed-race figure as a “disallowed identity” (Puri, 1997: 127) and through public condemnations on this as a category along with creolisation and douglarisation (Maharaj, 1993). Rhoda Reddock theorises that one of the reasons of the Indian disavowal of the dougla is because of the sex-ratio imbalance during the indentureship era and Hindu notions of caste endogamy. While caste is not a concept which came out in my findings, what the young women did reveal was how sexual stereotypes based
on a person’s race remains pervasive and this is not only evident in heterosexuality as we see in the section further below.

Women are seen to be crucial symbolic markers of Indianness and are often located with the discourse of purity and piety. Shalini Puri (1997: 126) makes the distinction between Indian men’s and women’s sexuality when she says “If the creolization of the Indian man is identified in terms of increased status and ownership of private property (associated with sexual potency in Lord Kitchener’s calypso), the creolization of the Indian woman is identified in terms of a change in her sexuality.” Sexuality then it could be said becomes the basis for gender inequality in this sense as men gains greater capital from creolisation in contrast to women. Puri also relates this to notions of control where any stereotypically undesirable characteristics such as public displays of sexuality are rendered creolised and therefore un-Indian.

If these are the problems of creolisation, can dougla poetics help to overcome them? In the first instance I looked at earlier how creolisation is understood by some of the young women and what is its function in the talk of the young women. I will now relate this to its implicit gender codings in which if an Indian woman’s sexuality does not fall into a heterosexually, respectable moral framework, she was labelled as creolised in a pejorative sense.
Respectability, Heteronormativity and the Female Body

Heterosexual activity plays a large part in establishing one's gender and sexuality. It is presumed and policed through notions of respectability and produced in marital relationships as we saw earlier and as Hema (21) indicates below which spaces one ‘limes’ in. Though exceptions to this are examples of women placing an onus on financial independence and career achievement in lieu of marriage, for example by Seema (19) who says, “I want to travel and do my masters first. I am not thinking about boys or marriage.” Sattee (21) also says, “I am applying for an internship with the UN. I don’t really care for having a boyfriend right now. I see these girls do everythin, look after their man and they have nothing.” By and large, career goals were seen as a progressive step and to marry early was seen as a step backwards. For example, Rani (21) says, “It’s a different generation. We have an Indian prime minister. I think a woman should be independent first then think about marriage. We don’t need a man to pay our bills. I feel sorry for girls who think this.” So while the idea of early marriage was seen as falling into a gendered, patriarchal norm, the idea of sexual activity was seen rather differently. Respectability was the hinge through which both gendered and racialised distinctions were illustrated. This notion of respectability also characterises the dominant heteronormative model of intimacy. Any deviation from that signals an alternative positioning from society, as Rani and Lisa’s account will go on to detail.

The bodies of young Indian women act as sites on which the discourses of social and cultural reproduction are negotiated. In this context marriage, specifically racial endogamy becomes greatly encouraged in terms of ‘same-race’ unions, even if the religions are different. What the dougla poetics of the talk reveals is how sexual
desire is raced. The discourse of desire is not only contiguous with gendered orders in which ‘other’ forms of desire are critiqued, but is also racially determined. Implicit in both are strong notions of Indianness and Trinidadian-ness. These ideas of ethnic and national identities entail certain proscriptions and prescriptions for sexual-racial crossings. What ‘good Indians’ should or should not do sexually and with whom, much like what “Trinis to da bone” should or should not do sexually and with whom (Hosein, 2012; Kanhai, 1999; Mohammed, 1988; 2002). The gendered dimension to this resides in the double standard for men and women which Samantha (24) comments on when she says

“I have noticed an increase in Indian men having relationships with Black women. This wasn’t so much accepted a while ago but seems to be acceptable now. Well very slowly! But for an Indian women to get with a Black fella is a taboo. For sure.”

Samantha is talking about the gendered double standard here as for a woman to engage in a similar intimate dynamic carries more sanctions in comparison to her male counterpart. Kelly (20) also reiterates that the least desirable pairing, much like her heterosexual counterparts, is Indian/African when she says

“I don’t even find these Indian girls attractive! They too reserved for me. But I can’t be with a Creole woman. With their sexual moods. Serious.”

In the seemingly innocuous talk about, essentially, who fancies whom, racial hierarchies are established and modified. As a form of racial boundary maintenance, the analysis based on my research findings demonstrates that while inter-religious partnerships because of the shared ancestry are more culturally acceptable than inter-racial partnerships, it could be further suggested that sex is not just about a sensual experience
between two bodies but about two social subjects endowed with particular images, stereotypes and collective memories. For example Amy (21) explains that,

“You’ll find that a lot of inter-religious marriage take place more than inter-racial. And if it is inter-racial, they most likely the same religion. Or it would never happen. For example a Black Muslim and an Indian Muslim or an Indian Christian with a Black Christian. You have Hindu-Muslim marriages happen also. But to see a religious Hindu with a religious Black person....I don’t think it would happen.”

It is possible then, according to Amy, for trans-religious marriage to exist, but within a bounded racial category. Amongst those who are ‘religious’ and who espouse notions of morality and purity based on their extended religious ontologies, even while trans-religious matches are acceptable, trans-racial ones are not. Racial endogamy is more important than religion amongst the sample of the young women. Trans-racial unions are more contested than trans-religious ones. The sexual aspect of this was side-lined but Raadiyah (21) offered one point of view when she says, “I think it comes down to power. You hear these stories that Black men are real men and Indian men are lost. I think that’s why some Indian women secretly like this but would NEVER talk about it.” Raadiyah is suggesting here that while Black men are objects of pleasure in this context, this is a sexual encounter that is not respected and hidden as it speaks to the larger dominant discourse of fears of miscegenation and loss of power into a dominant Creole community.

Before asserting that race and sexuality are mutually constitutive as boundary-policing categories, it is important first to discuss the distinction between religious/cultural difference and racial difference — the two types of difference explored so far in this thesis. This distinction is most clear in the social fact that religious groups are for the most part not perceived as bounded units, or at least they are not perceived as bounded to
the same extent. This point of comparison emerged from the data. Analysing their talk suggests that the Hindu, Muslim and Christian communities of Trinidad can be regarded as reference groups for status negotiations which are informed by honour, reputation and respectability (Khan, 2004). At the most basic level, this is directed towards reproducing various religious communities through prescribed forms of marriage, much like the indentured labourers reconstituted Indian villages and practices (Hangloo, 2012). However, of fundamental importance is the fact that there are many instances where these forms are refuted and rejected, religious boundaries are crossed as personal criteria for each individual varies. This can take place fully within the boundaries that encircle the domain of respectability even if it is provocative amongst one’s most immediate family. Regarding trans-racial marriage, on the other hand, respectability did encircle these forms of matches. At both the marriage and dating levels of intimacy, this negotiation of Indian respectability in contrast to the liberal, sexualised Creole gains significant meaning.

Many of the respondents distanced themselves from the idea of being a “creolised woman” because of the associations with the sexual mores of Black women. For example, in the following narrative though, Lisa (25) contrasted the restrained sexuality of Indian Trinidadian women with the perceived promiscuity of Black women,

“These things are hidden. One time you will have someone talk about their sex life openly but among friends. Indian people tend to be very very quiet about this. Even if the whole village know their business, they make it a point to keep it quiet. Indian men don’t have this problem. I kno ’cause my last boyfriend was a Black fella. I used to hear real disgustin things his friends used to say. Like ‘You can tell if a woman been with a Black man by the way she walk.” The men talk shit and then you have some, not all, Black women who just put it about. His friends had this perception of me I think. At first they think I this sweet Indian girl or something. Then we were together and thought I was like a bad girl or something. It was hard.
In this passage, while Lisa did not mention anything about the role religious orthodoxy played in this, she highlighted how Indian women are racialised as a “sweet Indian girl” on one hand, a stereotype which dates back as far as the colonial times, and how Black women are racialised as hypersexual ‘bad girls’. The moment she engaged in an act which went against the race gendered good girl/bad girl dichotomy, she became othered in a negative sense. We see this in the example of Drupatee Ragoonai’s performance at the chutney-soca monarch where her behaviour was seen as morally degenerate and creolised. Lisa’s narrative also suggests that even if one steps out of patriarchal control, the sanctions remain powerful in shaping both the sexual and emotional lives of young women. The resistance from her boyfriend’s friends and one can assume the neighbours in her village caused emotional pains and though she desired new gendered norms and practices, there would always be an encounter with the largely raced gendered discourse of sexuality and morality.

If the heteronormative model in Trinidad allows for trans-religious relationships but discourages trans-racial ones, this is an indication of how the racial referent becomes foregrounded in spite of a heightened and proud national consciousness of mixing. Amy’s statement, which the other young women agreed with, shows how shared ethnicity plays a significant role in the deployment of Indian femininity. This is in marked contrast to the picture of the callaloo nation which tells us that the Trinidadian multicultural society is manifest around practices and issues, including rituals, labour, intermarriage, and class mobility (Khan, 2004). It is publicly acknowledged that “all we is one” and largely people co-exist rather peacefully. Yet it could be said that the mechanisms in place which resulted in racial endogamy, that is the colonial endeavour which maintained the colour-race-class

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8  This is discussed in much greater detail in Chapter 7.
hierarchy and whereby marrying into the White culture was largely seen as “marrying up” into a superior upper-class and marrying into the Black culture was seen as “marrying down” into a lower-class, operates in latent ways. Paul C. Taylor’s (2013: 85) argument on racial endogamy and socially acceptable mating practices in the USA is useful here to understand this in the present day context. He advances:

To the extent that preference and conscious choice are involved in selecting marriage partners and mates, our apparent horror of interracial relationships points toward deeply ingrained, subtly established, and thoroughly racialized conventions about the aesthetic and the erotic, the beautiful and the desirable, and the relationship between these and the social bases of self-esteem. Sociologists talk about all this in terms of racialized capital, by which they mean that belonging to one race or another makes one more or less desirable, in general, as a potential partner or mate. Any relationship capital is racialized in part because we live in a world that has been defined by a pervasive system of racialized symbolic value.

If understandings of the point of a marriage and romantic relationship derive from the heteronormative concept of the essential importance of sexual reproduction, the preoccupation with the race of one’s mate is logical. Religion is conceived here as fulfilling an affective and social function and understood as such by its adherents. Race, on the other hand, is conceived of as an inherently biological concept, and the phenotypes of one’s other-racial mate would be ‘mixed’ with one’s own and passed onto future generations. Therefore the selection of a marriageable mate is, within this heteronormative framework, entirely contingent upon an idea of the importance of the maintenance of the essential boundaries: namely those that are ingrained in the body itself: race.

This is not to say, however, that every individual who chooses to eschew trans-racial marriage is doing so consciously because of a desire to avoid ‘mixing’ their ‘biological inheritance’ with an Other. While an etic analysis would preface these understandings of race as a manifestation of ideas about the way in which biological inheritance is
ingrained upon the body according to (socially derived) categories, an emic analysis, which is prioritised in the epistemology of ‘talk’, focuses instead (or at least additionally) upon how these individual girls conceive of the importance of avoiding inter-racial marriage. Based on the young women’s words, the most important reason for avoiding trans-racial relationships is about ‘respectability’ and keeping one’s parents and family happy. There are consequences attached to deviating from the gendered ideology, which take precedence over overt racial concepts for these young women, as the following excerpt from a focus group interview demonstrates,

Victoria (23): “You’ll tend to find that your family would be more open to a Christian person bringing home a Hindu person or a Muslim person or even a Muslim person bringing home a Christian person than you bring a black person.”

Samantha (24): “It is a matter of choice… preference. There are a few Indian boys who may marry an African girl but plenty Indian girls still…”

Victoria (23): “I have been observing though more a greater occurrence of male Indian — female African relationships. Because it wasn’t something that was…… It was because they would not go with their relationship publicly if they did go into that. But yes you would see more female Indian-male African relationships publicly. Now I’ve been observing it is changing.”

Samantha (24): “But just because you see it publicly, it don’t mean that families have accepted this. It could be that their parents have kicked them out or that they chose to live independently from their parents. And I know Indian families would not accept it. They would break off all their ties. They concern about their reputation and what people say.”

This focus on what one’s family is “open to” and the consequences of bringing home a mate that would displease their family is the internal process of reasoning for avoiding trans-racial coupling (apart from liming). This idea of pleasing one’s family (or at least avoiding the act of displeasing them) is mediated through concepts of ‘respectability’. The selection of a differently raced mate presents an ‘undesirable’ situation, and it was
perceived by a number of respondents to operate outside the realm of respectable Indianness.

On occasion, some of these young women chose to pursue an intimate relationship with someone of a different race. Importantly, this was done under the full understanding that this was “unacceptable”. As Samantha (24) suggested, these young women had a deep understanding of what might provoke one’s parents to the extent that they were “kicked out”. While partaking in one of these relationships, they might not be thinking in terms of dating someone who is “a different race,” but they may still imagine their mate to be ‘unrespectable’. Embarking on a trans-racial relationship entails the understanding of oneself that one is acting in a non-respectable manner, outside of the heteronormative model. Through this internalised notion of respectability (and converse disrespectability) works to sustain social borders in the same way as concepts of race do.

These notions of respectability were very significant throughout the Caribbean during the late colonial era, when a middle class was emerging in strong numbers. Brereton (2002: 215) elaborates on this in the context of 19th century Trinidad,

In many ways the true gulf of the society was between those who were respectable and those who were not, rather than between whites and non-whites. Whites were by definition respectable........With non-whites, on the other hand, and notably with Blacks and East Indians, the onus was on them to prove their respectability. It was assumed that they were not respectable, unless they showed that they were by their education, attainments, occupation and style of life. This is essentially what marked off the coloured and black middle class from the Creole masses; not wealth, not lightness of skin, but ‘respectability’ proved by a certain life-style and especially by command of European culture and ‘manners’.

In the colonial era when racial categories were perhaps left unquestioned, the only ways in which individuals could navigate through different social categories was through
the adoption of particular behaviours, classified as 'good manners'. This was ostensibly a way out of the overbearing racial categorisations. However, the importance of manners in this context could only emerge through the intervention of certain groups to attempt to 'raise up' other groups through a form of behavioural modification. Therefore, while not referencing it explicitly — and in fact denying its importance — the proponents of 'good manners' were in fact upholding the previous hierarchy, albeit modifying it so that 'acting white' could stand in for actually 'being white'.

If respectability was read as 'acting white' during the colonial era, it was a substantial part of the value system that was inculcated in young people through the numerous Canadian Missionary Schools, which effectively disseminated this 'European' value systems. These schools, or at least their modern iterations, continue to exist, and this important category of respectability is still highly valued at these schools. These values continue to play out on the social landscape today.

Hema (21) gives an example of this when she talks about how particular social spaces are sanctioned in different ways, particularly for women:

“The girls down south are different. My brother has a lot of female friends right. And everytime he used to ask them to come to a bar, not to drink but to play pool, they never come. They would just not come. I went only once and I was the only girl there! Fuh real. You would never see a girl in a bar down South. I don’t know why that is. I really don’t. The one time I went with my brother it was like a scandal! And it was the girls who spread stupid rumours about me you know.”

This excerpt demonstrates Hema’s perception that young women who live in the South find themselves subject to a particular scrutiny. In a Foucauldian sense, these girls are subject to such a high degree of surveillance through constantly being measured against ‘the acceptable’ and ‘respectable’ that they have learned to internalise these conceptions, policing their own behaviour and fully believing in the categorisations of respectable and unrespectable, just as most people firmly believe in the substantial
aspects of the categories of race. In this situation the fear of scandal, the fear of being exposed to scrutiny, the fear of the unrespectable (that is, sexually inappropriate behaviour) effectively maintains the boundaries that purportedly set people up into different essentialised racial categories.

Gabrielle Hosein (2004: 3) explores this in her study of Indo-Trinidadian girls where she posits “symbolic womanhood” as an important concern for Indian Trinidadian girls, which acts as a way of maintaining respectability for them, thus:

Self-regulation, performance, and tactics of masking and manipulating femininity are part of girls’ attempts to deal with competing pulls in society. Young women’s dress and behaviour cannot be simply seen as aspects of assimilation or cultural loss because girls carry themselves in ways that enable them to access belonging across a range of sites.

In this example, acting feminine in the appropriate way works both as a means to under-sexualize oneself — to distinguish oneself from the ‘unrespectable’ girls; at the same time, it works to gender these girls’ bodies on an even deeper level. Through this focus on ‘femininity’ gender is emphasised, even as sexuality is de-emphasized. A good girl is very much a girl, associates with girls in all of the appropriate places and performs all of the appropriate gender-specific tasks. While she is so emphatically a girl, she must also be an appropriate (read: ‘less’) sexualised figure, in comparison to the unrespectable woman. The concerns of the young women emerge when they tell stories about the consequences of past unrespectable behaviour. This is well exemplified by Rani’s (21) account of her expulsion from school due to an incident inflamed by her peers:

“You see the thing I was 16 when I was with my ex-boyfriend. And he got me drunk. It wasn’t his fault cause I was drinking it. I have to take some blame for it. He took me to a public restroom and had his friend film us. I wasn’t naked and it was like for 15 seconds. He sent it out and then broke up with me. I don’t know
why he did that but he didn't get any shit for it. I'm a girl and I got expelled from my school because of it. Even though I told.....We had a fight, but a fight doesn’t justify what he did. Because of that video I got expelled from school. I had to pay a whole lot of money to continue to do CAPE9 A levels which was terrible. And he got nothing. Nobody told him anything. And up til this day when people still watchin they say ‘oh yea that’s the girl that’s the girl from the...video” it wasn’t even my fault. But I don’t have to go around explaining myself to like random people. My parents knew, his parents knew what happened. My friends, whoever believed me, stick around. I mean that my true friends. So because of that, me particularly, I have to pay attention to who I have as my friends and how I behave in public. That was the worst time of my life. I was 16 but it taught me a lesson. “It’s not an option for me. I have to know who I talking to, who my friends. But my reputation....I have no hope for that again. I know I have a good character. I know that for myself. I am a good person my parents know that. But....you see how women....

I think in that instance girls were shady. They said they weren't gonna say anything but they were the one who spread the video around. I believe in the girl code and I think girls should look out for each other but they don’t.”

What could be assumed from this extract is how local patriarchal norms were embodied by Rani’s own self-policing (even as it was abandoned in a moment of shame) and in her female contemporaries’ judgment of her afterwards. While the boy in question was not punished significantly, it is necessary for the young women to uphold and to police the values of respectability. If indeed women act in an ‘unfeminine’ or ‘unrespectable’ way, more is at stake for the larger community than one girl’s promiscuity. It is also an example of gender inequality in which Rani is socially sanctioned for what is perceived as a public and shameful display of sexuality (of which she is punished by her school institution) and her boyfriend has impunity.

Despite these constant attentions to the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours in heteronormative social situations for these young women in Trinidad, some women know that respectability is not something that they can aspire to. Some

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9 The Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations equivalent to the British Advanced Levels (A-Levels).
Indian women by virtue of their class, relationship status, peer affiliation or quite simply their interests are already categorised as non-respectable. So while these institutionalised notions of conformity are upheld to a large extent by the young women, there are also some who attempt to transgress these notions through small acts of agency. Cindy (24) gives an example of this:

“Girls do end up getting the worst part of it. Because if a man is with a Black girl, no one looks but the other way round, she will get cuss for it. And not from the men eh, the gossip will come from the girls. So we do end up representing the religion sort of and the culture. I think that’s why most Indo Trini girls, whether Christian, Muslim or Hindu are careful. I mean you never see them smoke, if they drink it’s not open, they don’t cuss, you’ll find a lot of them reserved, but also very very careful where they lime or hang out. At UWI a lot of the girls, their dads carry them to campus and pick them up. They only allowed to go to uni and that’s it. So when they get here, the hijabs10 come off, they drink at the bar on campus and all sorta thing happen.”

Cindy’s account signalled how the gaze of family and community members acts as a powerful form of social control within this cultural space and any transgression is noted almost immediately, marked and judged accordingly across the Indian communities. The gendered dimension of this comes into focus here as Cindy signals that inter-racial relationships are gendered and carry a double standard in that a female Indian and Black male is discouraged and socially sanctioned. The sexual activity of Indian men with Black women can go almost unheeded as the illusion of authenticity or ‘culture bearers’ (Munasinghe, 2006) is borne by Indian women’s bodies. The gender inequity in intimate relations and restrictions placed on women is bitterly resented by Lisa (25) in her narrative of her relationship and by Cindy (24) above. Mixing with Blackness then is consequently read as an act of immorality and transgression which carries sanctions as Christal (20) explains:

10 A head covering worn by some Muslim women
“If you Indian, you marry Black, you are shunned. That’s it. And if you an Indian boy marrying a black girl, same thing. I don’t think the reaction will be as severe. It’s like Jamie saying, she right. The boy’s family will try and recognise that she’s there but will have nothing to do with her. If you’re a girl, forget it. You’re not recognised. You’re not treated right. It is disgusting. They wouldn’t even look you in the eye! Yea it’s all over. I agree with Jamie. It all goes back to the politics of race in this country.”

Race boundaries also then become sexual boundaries which all combine to inform notions of sexual desirability. Raced performatives become embedded in sexual imaginings. In these spaces of desire, women are policed, regulated and restricted not in the same ways as men as Christal reveals.

These examples of transgressions cannot be understood as exceptions to a heteronormative matrix. Instead, the identification by these young women of other women (and occasionally themselves) as ‘transgressors’ demonstrate that these categories are fundamentally ingrained and reproduced many times over. The policing of boundaries itself then emerges as the most important aspect of sexuality. It is not so deeply important that a young woman not act in an unrespectable manner; of far more importance is that she at least knows what unrespectable behaviour consists of. If she knowingly chooses to break that barrier, the barrier is still understood to exist.

This policing that enforces this particular notion of womanhood produces a sort of symbolic violence against women. Rani experienced disciplinary action from her peers for her perceived transgression because they were deemed to be outside the boundaries of respectable Indianness. Her particular crime was that of performing her sexuality in public. She therefore occupies the position of the ‘other’ as she acts in opposition to a culturally dominant construction of respectable femininity. If performances
of sexuality do not fit into the latter or the heterosexual matrix, there are repercussions as Rani explained above such as shaming and ostracisation. The fear of transgressing the respectable, therefore, presents an incredibly powerful mode of normativising Indianness.

In summary, Cindy’s opening line about trans-racial relationships was hugely telling. All of the data demonstrates that racial categorisations operate in such a way in Trinidad that the least desirable pairing is Indian/African and the more socially acceptable as well as desired pairings are Indian/Indian or Indian/White. More importantly, the data demonstrated that these proscriptions were not theorised and understood in terms (for the most part) as rules against ‘trans-racial’ coupling, but instead as rules against (or heavily stressed recommendations against) ‘unrespectable’ behaviour. It can be said that respectability in Trinidad has historical roots in a colonially constructed concept of racial hierarchy, where white missionaries had to instil lower class children of colour with good behaviour. Respectability may have undergone some changes but it is still propagated in a racially segregated way, and this is clear not only in Indian and African descent communities but also in terms of the doula body whereby the material body of an Indian and African signifies a transgression from respectable Indianness. In this sense ‘good manners,’ ‘respectability’ and other seemingly racially neutral labels can be understood as deeply racialised, as well as deeply gendered as female bodies are demonstrably the main site of the policing of these racial boundaries. Therefore, this particular racial barrier (meaning proscriptions against Indo-Afro relationships) is considerably ingrained in the heterosexual matrix. Interestingly, however, it is not necessarily overcome in non-heteronormative relationships. If heterosexuality is maintained through respectability and through the exclusion of trans-racial relationships (including all expectations, acts,
pleasures or desires,) then it might be expected that homosexuality transgresses these boundaries. However, the following section demonstrates that these racial boundaries are indeed reproduced within homosexuality. Heteronormativity may authorise ‘correct’ forms of raced sexuality, but in the same way homosexuality in Trinidad also appears to be organised on similar lines.

Racialised sexuality in non-heterosexual contexts

Until now, this chapter has focused on desire within heterosexual unions but what of non-heterosexual relationships? Do race and sex intersect in a similar way within queer spaces? To answer this question, it must be first recognised that there is a limited, although growing, body of work examining the intersection and interaction between race and homosexuality in Trinidad, but much more limited for Indian queer women. The majority of the focus on Indian Caribbean women has been on history and the conditions of indentureship under which heterosexual East Indian women had to negotiate colonialism, patriarchy and culture (Kanhai, 1999; Mohammed, 2002). These have examined female heterosexual desire and agency in relation to music, dance and performance. With but a few exceptions such as Shani Mootoo’s novel Cereus Blooms at Night and Jasbir Puar’s 2001 study, the existing theoretical frameworks such as creolisation, hybridity and even dougla poetics, does not offer much traction in analysing non-heterosexual relations in this region for LGBT Indian Caribbeans. While only one respondent, Kelly (21) identified as lesbian, I identify a need to adopt a critical
perspective on which takes into account race, gender and ethnicity in non-heterosexual identities.

In recent years, a number of studies critiquing non-normative sexualities in the Caribbean have emerged (Smith, 2011; Sheller, 2012; Fumagalli & al, 2014). Though much of the scholarship is centred on African Caribbean people, there have been a small number of studies on Indian women’s cultural practices such as matikor and chutney music participation (Kanhai, 1999; Puri, 2004; Mehta, 2004) as a way of subverting gendered roles. In addition to cultural practices, Jacqui Alexander (2005) has looked at the regulatory practices of heterosexualisation not just in social practice but at the level of nation. She argues that the latter is affirmed in state discourses and laws such as the Sexual Offences Act and Immigration Law, which bans gay people who are described as a class “prohibited” from entering the country, and also criminalises same-sex sexual relations between consenting adults. Sexual difference is thus codified into Caribbean society as distinct from gender. In general, female sexual desire does not figure prominently in the bulk of studies on Caribbean sexualities. The silences around this may not necessarily be linked to this being a taboo subject, but to do with the rendering of sex and all other “complex negotiations about matters of heart and body” (Gosine, 2005: 62) invisible, at least where women are concerned. Although it should be noted that some women do resist this process of rendering sexuality in their own way. By some of the women talking about raced sexualities and who they are and not attracted to, the dougla poetics of this illustrates that sexuality is imagined and enacted in many ways that are not understood through public codes and practices. One other way of dealing with this was through a critique of coming out. For example, Kelly (20) explains that while
sexuality in Trinidad is heavily policed and laden with social importance, she does not subscribe to the dominant perspective of declaring one's sexuality.

“People don’t go around shoutin’ hey I am straight so why should gay people go aroun shoutin’ hey I am gay. In Trinidad, it different though we are one of de more tolerant countries in the Caribbean for gay people. Even if we did, we won’ get gun talk like in Jamaica. Ah don’t tell my business to people and yuh find that lesbians in Trinidad, the Indian ones, are still quiet about it. Yuh can’t be openly gay in Trinidad. That not coz we scared, it jus’ how it is. We doe shout it in the same way they do in America.”

Kelly here is expressing annoyance at the expectation that she would express her non-heteronormative behaviours in public when she says, “Ah don’t need to make style I is a gay woman or a straight woman.” In this sentence, Kelly is talking about how homosexuality is not declared in a perceived mainstream way where coming out is a huge deal, at least in her eyes. The challenge to the assumption that gay is a global category defined by coming out is one that is taken up by Kelly who does not subscribe to the Americanised definition of homosexuality. Yet, Kelly along with some of the other young women were cognisant that by not participating in declaration which underlie feminism and homosexuality, they are rendered as silent and passive.

Cherisse (23) says, “Just because we don’t wine openly or talk openly about sex, it doesn’t mean we are uneducated about it. Or ignorant. We not bush people! We do challenge the men.”

As Niranjana (2006) says this is an unfortunate stereotype that stems from colonial times. Cherisse is saying that women enact agency in their own ways which may not be read as such. Silence here is constructed in contrast to the norms of declaration which carries ambivalent meanings. Silence promotes safety and agency, allowing Kelly to navigate the spaces of sexual definition for herself. While privileging voice and creating spaces for the possibility of this is a crucial undertaking, does this mean silence means
complicity with the heterosexual matrix or heteronationalism (Alexander, 2005)?

If visibility and voice is an exigency of Trinidadian culture, does one no longer have a stake in the nation if silence is rendered as being of higher importance? Or in the case of Indian Trinidadian women, does this render them as submissive as Cherisse hints at and what Kelly challenges. Esther also expresses a similar frustration in being mis-read as a victim, “You know I was hesitant to let my daughter play mas¹¹. Some of my friends laugh at me and told me like, ok, stop with this Indian mentality ok. We have a real problem with crime here and sexual violence. I am a training to be a psychologist so I see this. But I didn’t like that comment because I’m not married to an Indian man. But my background is. So just because I said no to my little girl that means I am backwards?”

To give a broader perspective into this, Esther is talking about the sexualisation of carnival in which women wear bikinis and participate in what is seen as a national event. That she refused to let her daughter participate signalled a dis-identification from being Trinidadian, in the eyes of her friends. This positioning is highly problematic as it does not capture the complexities and nuances of multiple identity positions. In simple terms to not talk about sex or not play mas does not mean one is not Trinidadian or more Indian. That these binarisms invariably fall back on race as Esther explains and as Kelly explains is a limiting perspective. Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* (1978: 27) argues against the repressive hypothesis and the binary between silence and speech when he says:

> Silence itself — the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers — is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies. There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not

¹¹ To participate in Carnival and this is explained in further detail in Chapter 6.
saying such things, how those who can and cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case.

In this sense, a dougla poetics lens can work to resist focusing solely on the speaking subject while simultaneously allowing the possibility of the silenced subject to emerge. This is particularly relevant given that much of the work on Indian Caribbean women remains centred on indentureship, who epitomised a subaltern population. An examination of the silent subject is also relevant because, in the Trinidadian context, binaries and concepts have continuously been shifting, flowing, breaking and resisting dominant models in various ways. This has brought about the construction of queerness in opposition to heteronormativity much like silence exists in opposition to speaking. There are moments of queerness that are warped alongside the weft of everyday heterosexual life much like there are moments of silence that are warped alongside agency.

If for Kelly silence has dignity, then for Rhea (21) and Shanta (20), dis-identification with homosexuality functions in a similar way. In the identity questionnaire, Rhea (21) listed ‘I am not lesbian’ and Shanta (20) and Reshma (19) listed “I am not bisexual” as their second top priority. When questioned about the reasoning behind this, there was an awkward silence. They did however emphasise that they were not homophobic but simultaneously there was an unwillingness to discuss this further. Rhea, Shanta and Reshma’s disidentification with homosexuality and homophobia is another useful way of looking at the character of gendered processes in Trinidad. By adopting this position, one does not endanger the heteronormative regime and their heterosexuality is structured through the dis-identification with homosexuality. It is here that Muñoz’s model of disidentification is perhaps most productive. According to Muñoz (1999: 11–12),
assimilationism works to identify with the dominant society whereas disidentification is the “third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it.” In the same way as dougla poetics works, there is a recognition of a shifting terrain and in this manner, the contingent performativity of the young women’s identifications and disidentifications point to how sexual processes are imagined. For example Kelly (21) at one point saw her sexual orientation as contradictory to her religious identification,

“Sometimes I feel like I’m not a good enough Indian, coz I’m gay. I am spiritual and I pray to God. I love being Hindu but I don’t know what my religion says about being gay. Maybe I’m a bad person I don’t know. It’s wrong, maybe. I don’t know. But I am a good person. My actions are never bad. I always good to people, talk good. I had a man once. My sister tell me ‘You should keep a boyfriend’. They think I’m straight.

Kelly’s passage here illustrates how she is struggling to find a balance between being lesbian and retaining an ‘authentic’ Indian identity. However, she also relates to sexuality as not static and more about how she feels, acts, relates to and desires others rather than just a sexual act. The question of sexuality is then is a religious one for her but also there is a wider question of what it means to be and belong.

Gayatri Gopinath’s Impossible Desires (2005: 162) addressed this need of belonging, particularly her chapter on the chutney controversy where she discusses the chutney space as troubling,

colonial constructions of respectable female sexuality and proper womanhood enshrined within the home, initially consolidated during the period of Indian indentureship in Trinidad, [and the ways they] continue to resonate in the public culture of the postcolonial present.
Gopinath provides a useful reference point in regards to female queer desire in her study on silencing and the possibilities of chutney. Her critique, in addition to Butler’s framing of the heteronormative model, works well within the parameters of dougla poetics, where talk offers possibilities as a space of queerness and/or alternative forms of sexual pleasure and knowledge. It is only through listening to talk, and all of the nuances, pauses, silences and speech that it entails, that we can come to understand the ways in which these colonial ideas of sexuality are contested on a regular basis. Also in keeping with the tenets of the black feminist framework where specificity of experience is important, dougla poetics is foregrounded as working in a similar way to queer theory in this sense as the former “contests and deconstructs those dominant political and theoretical discourses that frame Caribbean women’s alliances as always inevitably fractured along ethnic divides, and their interests and enfranchisements.” (Donnell, 2007: 177). Both queer theory and dougla poetics work towards a development of a holistic framework that allows for difference and for the discussion of difference. This comes out in the desire talk from Kelly when she indicates that the least desirable pairing, much like her heterosexual counterparts, is Indian/African. Sexuality and desire could be read as one of the structures which allows for a racial hierarchy to function. Desire is also orientated towards social norms and anchored in the social world so that this comes to represent “embedding of social structures in bodies” (Bourdieu, 1998: 40).

While it has been well documented that Indian Caribbean ethno centrists have often drawn upon notions of purity and authenticity to control and regulate the bodies and sexualities of Indian Caribbean women, there is a general assumption that Indian femininity implies heterosexuality. One of the very few works that addresses this absence of queerness in Indian Caribbean scholarship is by Jasbir Puar (2009) who, in her article ‘Chutney to Queer
and Back: Trinidad 1995–1998’, recounts her experiences of navigating Indian, gay and
lesbian spaces in the South and Port-of-Spain and the shifts in performed value systems
when traversing these different spaces. During the process of interviewing organisers
of LGBTQ events, her fieldwork came to reveal a racialisation of homonormativity which
in her subsequent work on homonationalism, came to be defined as,

homonormativity is both disciplined by the nation and its heteronormative
underpinnings and also effectively surveils and disciplines those sexually
perverse bodies that fall outside its purview. Thus the nation not only allows for
queer bodies, but also actually disciplines and normalizes them; in other words,
the nation is not only heteronormative but homonormative.” (Puar, 2007:50)

This definition is extended to her understanding of the national image where she claims
“(indeed, the overall image of the Caribbean) still understood itself as inherently African,
any right-based claims made vis-a-vis the state on behalf of homosexuals understood
those homosexual subjects also to be African.” (Puar, 2009:5). This is a statement which
Kelly re-affirms in the following extract but also about placing queer sexuality outside
of Indianness by describing this as “creolised” (as in Black),

“Some lesbians in Trinidad are defined by the fact that they is a lesbian. They think
that they will never fit in a crowd or a lime. You’ll also find the majority of these
places, like when you go the Avenue, are mainly dominated by Black lesbians who
have already labelled us as ignorant. It funny you asking me bout creolisation
’coz you see mixing in everyday life but in these places where I go, I see it as
creolised,……”

Kelly’s experience of navigating these spaces and the racial referent is hinted at in Puar’s
work where she highlights how Caribbean queerness was aligned with Blackness and that
the Indian woman, on issues of sexuality, was deemed ““backwards”, “more oppressed”,
“homophobic”, and deeply entangled in the demands of rigid kinship structures.” (Puar,
2009: 3). And yet it also seemed the case that those Indians who participated in the Port-of-
Spain networks were required to identify as Trinidadian over and above Indo-Trinidadian, in part because the Indian communities was perceived as relatively hostile. This adoption of a national identity through asserting homosexuality shows one of the many complicated ways in which different aspects of identity intersect with one another in unpredictable ways. We also see that the black woman is sexually undesirable and stigmatised in her talk. The stereotypes of Black women as hypersexual are problematic and we see just how racial stereotypes are a negative paradox. In Kelly’s eyes, by virtue of being gay and for an Indian woman to be attracted to a Black woman implies a betrayal to being a ‘real Indian’. For some of the other respondents, a similar feeling was expressed if an Indian woman was attracted to a Black man. To find a legitimate social standing then in LGBT communities then is a difficult endeavour for Kelly who finds that sexual experiences of non-heterosexual women lean heavily towards Black women and black eroticism. If heterosexual Indian eroticism then is defined and guided by raced norms of gender and sexuality, then non-heterosexual Indian eroticism is in a similar way guided by these values. Which broadly indicate that the least desirable pairing is Indian and Black and that Indian sexuality is only valid between same-race unions or Indian and White.

These two discourses of Blackness being the dominant norm in queer spaces and Indianness being the ‘other’ are mutually reinforcing. The statement above also suggested a particular anxiety around Blackness, Indianness and sexuality. And this is not just evident in identities but also in spaces where for example, as Kelly indicates, queer spaces reinforce racialised sexualities and stereotypes. The tropes through which Black lesbians ‘recognised’ Indian lesbians as “‘backwards”, “more oppressed”, “homophobic” and heterosexual as Jasbir Puar indicates are also similar to colonialist constructions of Indian femininity. Kelly’s account also demonstrates a part of queer
life that is rarely registered — as neither falling within the parameters of respectable
Indianness or Trinidadian-ness. Therefore by identifying as a lesbian, by attempting
to re-identify as Trinidadian, but ultimately existing as an Indian ‘other,’ the different
parts of her background which are meant to form the appropriate matrix of a cultural
identity are thrown into disarray, by virtue of her being an Indo Trinidadian lesbian. Link
to the quote

While it is predictable that the claiming of queer space is lauded as the disruption
of heterosexual space, rarely is that disruption interrogated also as a disruption
of racialized, gendered, and classed spaces’ (Puar, 2002: 936).

If queer spaces are marked as Trinidadian to the exclusion of Indians, then it could be
noted that “Despite the complexity of the notion, the term gay space or queer space
implies coherence and homogeneity that do not exist ... The appearance of homogeneity
conceals exclusionary practices predicated on other axes of difference, or even on sexual
practices themselves, as well as the labor that produces these spaces” (Rushbrook, 2002:
203). The exclusion of Indian women from discourses of queerness and Trinidadianness
has also come to produce a social landscape upon which a colonial patriarchy co-exists
with a heteronormative patriarchy which brings to the fore pre-existing racialised
processes. As Puar (2002: 936). insists, “the claiming of space — any space, even the
claiming of queer space — [is] a process informed by histories of colonization, these
histories operating in tandem with the disruptive and potentially transgressive specifics
at hand.” Therefore, to presume a progression within queer spaces or a queer re-claiming
of ‘straight’ space is challenged here by the recognition that queers can also play a role
in participating in the deployment of heteronormativity. It is only by examining
these intricate identities through notions of poetics and performativity that one can
discern that hetero and homo normativities are not necessarily polar opposites.
On the queer scene, racial intelligibility is inextricably linked with sexual desirability (Campbell, 2014). Furthermore, the heteronormativity of the Trinidadian state not only sanctions certain sexual norms, but also reproduces racial norms. This came out in Kelly’s data where she talked briefly about her anxiety about the ways in which “Creole and White gay women are like the gatekeepers to the gay community.” Blackness and/or Whiteness for Kelly were the central organising features under which queer Indian women could claim visibility. The positioning of Black and Indian queer women in this particular extract is potentially exacerbating tensions between the two groups but it also points to the dominance of the logic of Whiteness as a legitimate expression of queerness. Kelly also spoke about her experience in New York, where she went to two clubs which catered to the niche market of the Indian Caribbean queer community and the South Asian queer community. Though the location was different, Kelly commented on how queer Caribbean groups competed against each other and even in a different space, the queer Indian Caribbean community strived to mark itself as distinct from the queer Afro Caribbean community. In Kelly’s words “They bring their drama all over the world, not just Trinidad!”

While Kelly perceives a tension between her national, ethnic and sexuality categories, this attention to how the individual navigates between these categories is an example of how dougla poetics can help us to understand what this complicated interface means for the people involved. This is a departure from a much larger body of work that approaches the relationships between queerness, bodies and identity on a stage of national politics. This is not to denigrate that national level of analysis. For example, Jacqui Alexander (2005: 49) argues that states have an investment in heterosexualization and those categories such as citizen, patriot, and immigrant carry ideological heterosexualism when she says,
The violent erasure of insurgent sexualities in the period of “flag independence” can be linked more directly to the state’s activity in re-establishing the nation as heterosexual, in ideological and material terms, imagined and practiced through patriarchy and masculinity.

While Alexander (1994: 5) focuses on the nation, the transgression of national heteronormativity plays out at the level of the individual and she also notes that the nation “disallows the queer body”, so it is worth interrogating how nations legitimise certain queer identities over others. What Kelly’s description of queer spaces in Trinidad indicated as well as Amy’s description of the bars in the South was that any terms of citizenship, heterosexual and homosexual, were gendered, racialised and classed in distinct ways. What could be taken from Kelly’s talk is that much queerness, in the same vein as heterosexuality, works in service to maintain an element of “racial purity” as Butler described in the opening quote of this chapter.

Both the national level of analysis and the individual, everyday-focused framework of douga poetics work to expose this complicated situation where purity, reproduction and queerness intersect with one another. In this discussion of the boundaries that the queer communities of Indian Trinidadians maintain, the disruption of heteronormativity only goes so far. Perhaps that is to be expected, as all social groups will set their own orthodoxies and heterodoxies. It is perhaps surprising, however, that the racial boundaries which have been historically and continue to be today so deeply intertwined with notions about reproduction, are manifested so clearly in a non-heterosexual discourse. This suggests a different concept of race in this community. Inter-racial pairing in the queer community is still transgressive, although it is not transgressive because of the same ostensible threat to the boundedness of racial groups. Or perhaps a better way to summarise this difference is that the boundedness of these different groups (referring
to Indian and African Trinidadians) is seen as vulnerable in the queer community as well as in the hetero world. Perhaps this is not accompanied by a discourse of the need to reproduce with an authentic or pure member of the same ethnicity. Thus, even divorced from heteronormative notions about the primacy of sexual reproduction for the purposes of social categories, racial distinction proves to be extremely meaningful.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, the dougla poetics revealed how racialised sexualities, along with stereotypes, acts a salient marker of otherness and as core aspect of in the structuring of gender inequality. I also insert Kelly’s account as an example of how this is not only evident in heterosexual relations but also in non-heterosexual spaces. What Patricia Mohammed (1998: 130) initially described as the creolisation of the Indian woman, where “to consort with people of African descent” would subject Indian women to the stereotypes deployed against Black women, is a notion that has on one hand changed but on the other has not. As we see throughout some of the women’s talk, they were cognisant of the pervasive hypersexualisation of Black men and women as well as some Indian female stereotypes. We also see that how racialised sexuality is the basis for gender inequality as experiences that fall outside of the heterosexually demanding, contained and linear ethnic and national discourses can provoke heightened reactions. Furthermore it also illuminated the possibilities of further similar narratives while simultaneously highlighting how Indian Trinidadian women’s sexuality is both visible and obscured. Female sexuality is celebrated in popular culture through carnival and chutney soca, yet secretly constituted under the tropes of respectability and/or shame.
In both sections of this chapter, Lisa, Esther, Rani and Kelly experience exclusion at certain points in their lives and invariably end up occupying positions outside of Indianness with the latter seen as inherently heterosexual. Yet a double oppression is also apparent when Indian queer subjects attempt to claim their place in the nation. Kelly’s narrative is a reminder that ‘queering’ does not necessarily mean transgression of dominant ideologies but at times is reliant on them. The ways in which these ideologies are propagated and reproduced through various social situations (including drinking, dating/liming, and other basic social and sexual interactions between these girls and their peers) need addressing as there are still patriarchal structures in place and need to be continually and critically explored through different lenses. It is at this juncture that I want to reiterate dougla poetics as accomplishing this task by engaging with these performative productions of race and gender, not as a universalising process but as part of a specific Trinidadian experience. That processes of sexualisation and racialisation mutually constitute one another can be addressed through a dougla poetics framework which addresses this specific Trinidadian experience. I do this because gender and sexualisation have been largely excluded from the canonical theorisation of creolisation and hybridity and yet these theories implicitly rely on feminine bodies in their articulation of racial difference and heterosexuality such as mestizaje’s mulata or the dougla woman in Puri’s dougla poetics.

One of the main discourses that manifests this structure is the constant discussion of how Indian female sexual behaviour is associated with being unrespectable. However, it is important to note that by calling these structures ‘patriarchal,’ that is not to say that they are propagated primarily by men. In fact, this thesis demonstrates that much of this social structure is fully controlled, governed and shaped by seemingly transparent institutions,
(re)produced as much if not more by these girls themselves than by the men in their lives.

In drawing to a close, if relationships and sexuality are posited in this chapter as one of the contexts through which racialised difference works for example in partner preferences and desire, then it could be argued that in addition to this, colour works as a metonym of race to produce a similar type of difference. But this is not to claim that race means entirely the same thing for entirely the same reasons across all groups. While queer and heterosexual people may demonstrate similar beliefs regarding their preferences for Indian-Indian, Indian-White versus Indian-Black couples, it may not be accompanied with the same logics and explanations. In fact, the racial politics in heterosexual and homosexual couples (or relationships) in Trinidad and the diasporic community may appear to be quite different, in terms of explanations offered for its existence. However, the similarities are more striking than the differences. What are these?

As the callaloo nation continues to effect its dogma of a post-racial milieu through concepts of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism, expressions of pre-existing notions about racial divides become more and more separated from explicit mention of race. However these beliefs still proliferate, as deeply entrenched as ever. Even when they arise in situations that are cut off from the historically created fear of racially mixed progeny, the hierarchies and divides still characterise the queer communities of Trinidad. Through examining how these Indian women discuss and perform their race, it is evident that the categorisation of Indian, though shifting in its rationale and its performance attributes, is still a salient social marker today as I will go on to explore in the next chapter on how colourism is a part of Trinidadian beauty culture. Despite the fact that some scholarly discussions of skin colour and race move independently, the two are closely linked as I will explore in the next chapter.
Chapter 5

THE COLOURISM OF BEAUTY AND ‘HIGH COLOUR’

Introduction

“In the Caribbean there is still that struggle for colour, maybe because colour here gives you some sort of status. When I started teaching pre-school about 3 years ago, I went for an interview and there was an Indian woman. It wasn’t an interview basically, I just got the job. It was later on, I heard one of the teachers saying “Well she’s a pretty Indian girl.” So you know if you go somewhere, people quicker probably recognise you based on your colour because I mean you may look a particular way, whatever the case it. But it has some sort of social status.” (Lisa, 25)

Theorising on the performance and work of beauty in the Caribbean region has gained increasing attention. Ideas about race have in the past and continue today to constitute an important aspect of what is considered ‘beautiful’ (Barnes, 1995; Edmondson, 2009; Tate, 2013). Rather than approaching the concept of beauty as an apolitical quality that some people have and others do not, it is important to approach the concept of beauty through what it accomplishes in society. Anecdotes such as the one narrated above demonstrate that skin colour is not only an integral aspect of beauty culture, but it also comes to signify a particular type of social capital in Trinidad. A black-white binary may appear to be the most obvious consequence of racial ideas of beauty in a post-colonial country. However, it is not necessarily the case that the phenotypes associated with the former colonial power are always considered the most desired. Trinidad demonstrates that the politics of beauty, while heavily racialised, are far more complicated than such a binary might suggest.

One of the main sites for exploring Trinidadian ideas of the interplay of beauty, race and gender is the beauty pageant. I turn to beauty pageants to explore what they do
in terms of constructing raced and gendered ideals. There is a rich body of literature on representation in beauty pageants both nationally and internationally (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003; Cohen et al, 1996; King-O’Riain, 2007). While some feminist arguments hold that beauty pageants centre on the objectification and commodification of women’s bodies, this line of thinking does not take into account the complexity of differential power relations across different cultural settings. For instance pageants for Indian women globally may be an arena where they are afforded visibility and power which may not be present in other areas of their lives. Janet Banet-Weiser (1999: 25), in response to the argument that pageants are caught between objectification and empowerment, attests to this when she says the beauty pageant has also become a “kind of feminist space where female identity is constructed by negotiating the contradictions of being socially constituted as ‘just’ a body while simultaneously producing oneself as an active thinking subject, indeed, a decidedly ‘liberal’ subject”.

This chapter focuses on how skin colour works in ideas of beauty amongst a sample of an Indian population in Trinidad. In order to do this, four interrelated contexts need to be explored, which have determined by chapter sub-sections. Firstly, the colonial history which initiated the race-colour-class hierarchy is unpacked. Secondly, the contemporary discourse on Indian Trinidadians’ engagement with colour hierarchies within Trinidad and in India is analysed. Thirdly, this chapter examines the emerging category of ‘Spanish’ beauty as a possibly post-racial concept, and lastly the chapter foregrounds local and national beauty pageants as “lively sites for the production and contestation of cultural meanings” (King-O’Riain, 2007:75) which are also “deeply linked to claims to cultural authenticity, race, gender and identity.” (King-O’Riain, 2007: 75). As a “gendered, racialized, and contested symbolic resource” (Craig, 2006: 160) then,
beauty practices and imperatives are far from superfluous and have a strong and formative impact on the lives of the young women. The following discussion demonstrates that notions of beauty create and uphold some of the most important divisions in their society.

The question of beauty

Lisa’s anecdote above demonstrates that beauty for this group of young Indian women is not imagined around a black-white binary. Ideas of beauty cannot be reduced to a spectrum of whiteness to blackness, which certain older approaches to colonial power relations have proposed (Segal, 1993). In Trinidad, amongst these young women, there is a possibility for them to be seen as ‘pretty Indian girls’ who are not discussed in terms of black and white. Being identified as a ‘pretty Indian girl’ signifies that an individual can be perceived as an ideal of their particular race, as opposed to being perceived as on a spectrum where the traits of certain racial groups are considered preferable to others.

When discussing beauty, the focus on a black-white binary approached colour as something that emerged out of one’s mix of two poles: lighter skin was desired because it demonstrated a higher degree of whiteness. Naomi Wolf (1991: 12) writes that “‘beauty’ is a currency system like the gold standard…in assigning value to women in a vertical hierarchy according to a culturally imposed physical standard, it is an expression of power relations,”. This emphasis on a vertical hierarchy has obvious colonial implications, which may be reflected in ideas about a black-white binary in Caribbean beauty ideals.
This may or may not obtain today regarding groups that self-identify through expressions of blackness, whiteness, or some ‘mix’ of the two. However, the population of Indian descent — who explicitly do not refer to any point of ‘mixing’ with lighter or darker skinned populations as a group — discuss skin colour in a very different context. In this group, light skin is still highly valued. However it is not discussed in terms of how far along one resides on a spectrum of race. Instead, it is talked about purely in terms of colour. While a dark-skinned Black girl may be identified as being ‘more black,’ in this sample population discussions of skin colour are ostensibly limited to the skin colour itself, without the added step of adducing different percentages of racial mixing. Therefore, instead of racism, this process of judging and categorising according to colour as the full referent itself is referred to as ‘colourism’ (Walker, 1982). This valuing of light skin is a widely recognised but largely undiscussed phenomenon in every Indian community whether in Trinidad or elsewhere. In this chapter, I aim to explore the complex ways in which beauty is defined by these young women. I explore why specific physical signifiers such as skin colour and hair have in the past and still continue to symbolise the boundaries along which they define Indianness. I discuss their conceptions of colour and hair as they relate to the broader beauty culture.

Claire Colebrook (2006: 132) wrote “The question [of beauty] for feminist politics is not so much moral — is beauty good or bad for women? — but pragmatic: how is beauty defined, deployed, defended, subordinated, marketed or manipulated, and how do these tactics intersect with gender and value?” Most importantly for my research, I want to extend this question to further ask how beauty is defined and deployed in relation to notions of race. Based on some of the young women’s narratives, claims to racial authenticity were made through shade of skin and hair length and texture. Rather
than looking at some of these beauty politics as attempts to imitate Whiteness (which notions of a black-white binary presuppose), I explore how some of these practices and beauty ideals mark an internally-defined Indian racial identity. A generic Euro American standard idea of beauty was almost non-existent. Instead beauty was discussed in terms of how 'Indian' one looked (with constant reference to Bollywood actresses, for example). Unexpectedly, beauty was also discussed in terms of an ideal of looking 'Spanish'\textsuperscript{12}.

Importantly, 'Spanish' was not discussed as a racial category but a set of characteristics that could exist in any population. Therefore, I argue that the valorisation of all things ‘Spanish’ works as an attempt by these Indian women at positioning themselves not on Black/White binary (which I argue is largely now irrelevant), but in a quadripartite system that divides people as Black/Mixed/Indian/White.

This hinge of agency and subjectivity will be further unpacked towards the end of the chapter in a closer analysis of the way in which beauty ideals are constructed and reflected in beauty pageants in Trinidad. Through analysing my respondents’ talk about these three contexts of beauty culture, the persistence of colourism became apparent. However, before I go on to explore these contexts it is worthwhile to turn to consider the colonial context in which the construction of skin colour hierarchies played a hugely significant role and it could be said the legacy of which plays out even today in contemporary global North dominated culture.

\textsuperscript{12} The meaning and significance of ‘Spanish’ is complex but in this context, I take it to mean a “phenotype that can blur the boundaries of (and among) such socio-politically distinct ethnic categories as ‘African’, ‘Chinese’, and ‘East Indian.’ (Khan, 2010: 68)
The axis of race and colour

The 19th century had bequeathed to the region a three-tiered hierarchy that fractured along merged lines of class and race. Whites for the most part occupied the dominant position, economically and politically, there was a brown (mixed European and African) middle stratum, and at the bottom was the black African-descended majority. (Chrichlow, 1998: 66).

The days of colonial rule in Trinidad promulgated a social and moral order based on rankings of attributes such as skin colour, hair texture and facial features (Alleyne, 2002: 11). As a way of organising society, Frantz Fanon’s (1967) concept of the epidermalization of race as being synonymous with skin colour as designating an idea of race, is utilised. It draws on the intertwining of “historico-racial schema”) in which the “white man” has constructed a “narrative of the inferiority of blackness” (Fanon, 1967: 111) and “racial epidermal schema” in which the Black body is recomposed by the world, in Fanon’s case along racist lines, and the manifest presentation of race. He talks about the “real dialectic” between “my body” and “the world” and in its simplest sense, race is attended to by Fanon as socially constructed based upon salient phenotypical features to categorise all humans. Skin colour may generally be understood as the most salient of these variables. As Mervyn.C.Alleyne (2002:8) writes,

In the case of the Caribbean, the two poles of the colour gradation correspond to two racial categories that are still unambiguously recognized (black and white). But increasingly, as more mixing takes place between races and between colours, shade, rather than precise colour, has become (or is becoming) the dominant factor in the social organization.

Skin colour, as part of a continuum of shades which is the product of racial mixing, has a long-standing history in Trinidad, as part of a racial accounting schema (Khan, 2009) which plays out to this day through social relations and organisation. Aisha Khan (2009:
106) explains how these colour designations developed as symbols of more significant social designation.

...authentic “whites” in Trinidad were British, Spanish, and French; suspect “whites” (that is, those tainted by proximity, both sexual and social, to nonwhites) were labelled “Trinidad white” or “French Creole.” Continuing this logic of class signification, authentic “blacks” clearly belonged to an African heritage but, by definition, also to a grassroots heritage (poor and working class). Because color categories are social symbols rather than literal descriptions, those persons of African heritage who were able to claim membership among the middle class and elite were not “black” but “brown”, regardless of whether they were genetically mixed with European ancestry.

As Khan’s description above demonstrates, Indian Trinidadians did not figure largely in the historical analyses of the race-colour hierarchy in Trinidad, but there was an elaboration on the ‘African’, the ‘European’, the ‘mixed’ and the ‘brown’ which interrogated bounded race categories, particularly in her analysis of “whites”. While Europeans may have previously been regarded as having ownership of Whiteness, in the Caribbean context this is further extended to Syrians/Lebanese, Chinese and light(er) mixed people. In the post-independence period, Indians were included in this hierarchy as a “fourth tier” (Brereton, 1989:89). However, it could be said that although Indians were excluded from the foundation of Trinidadian nationalism and were therefore not part of the racial equation13 (unlike those of Afro, Euro and Creole categories), they have subsequently developed as a group within a society that has these understandings. Therefore today people of Indian descent, as well as douglas, are by no means removed from the meanings and effects of racial and colour hierarchies in Trinidad.

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13 One notable exception being the Caribbean historian and politician Walter Rodney’s (1969) analysis of the Black Power movement in which he suggests that the way forward is to forge a Black and Indian alliance to resist the White cultural and political onslaught.
As Trinidad today has become more hooked into a global system of economy and culture, people who do not fit into the neat racial binary set out above are more visible. This pertains both to the Indians, douglas and other ethnic groups who exist in Trinidad today, and also to the body types and images to which these Trinidadian women are exposed through international media. Therefore skin colour is not the immediate signifier of race and ethnicity that it perhaps was at one point. Douglas and people who are ‘Spanish’ present an important exception to the historically established categories that have been discussed in this section. This chapter will go on to look at what skin colour means today. While it is important to examine the historical contingencies of these understandings of race, these issues are discussed and understood very differently today, at least within this particular sub-group of the population. Rather than being discussed in terms of historical or colonial legacies, the concept of colour has been naturalised and normalised as a point of meaningful distinctions between people.

**The colour complex**

Much of the rhetoric in Trinidad around the phenomenon of skin colour and race is framed in the overarching notion of colourism. That is, people are aware of the process of discrimination that privileges light-skinned people of colour over their darker-skinned counterparts (Hunter, 2005). While the desire may not be to effectively be racially White, the influence of these cultural norms on/of beauty are effective in other ways (Hunter, 2005). The stratification by skin colour, or colourism, has a long-standing legacy...
in the Caribbean. In Trinidad the colonial race-colour-class hierarchy played a significant role in the making of these attitudes in terms of colourism:

“Colorism” [in the sociology of race literature is usually defined as] the discriminatory treatment of individuals falling within the same ‘racial’ group on the basis of skin color. It operates both intraracially and interracially. Intraracial colorism occurs when members of a racial group make distinctions based on skin color between members of their own race. Interracial colorism occurs when members of one racial group make distinctions based on skin color between members of another racial group (Herring, 2005: 3).

In Trinidad racialisation operates on two different levels. First, on the level of racial category (Black, Indian, White, Chinese and so on) where regardless of skin tone and appearance one faces specific experiences because of one’s ethnic background. Secondly, there is the notion of colourism whereby skin tone plays a role, for example, in how an Indian experiences discrimination or privilege based on having darker or lighter skin.

The anecdote that opened this chapter demonstrates a naturalised understanding of light skin’s equation with beauty. In Lisa’s story of gaining access to employment because (in part) of her skin tone, being a ‘pretty Indian girl’ is a term that refers to light skin without stating that explicitly. There are far more obvious and explicit examples of the equation between beauty and light skin, following this ‘intra-racialisation’ paradigm. Rhea (21) told me “…..I think in Trinidad, most people view beauty according to your skin colour. Yeah the fairer the more beautiful you are.” Anisa (25) expanded on this with a story:

“I have a friend who is a make-up artist. And she said she was reconsidering doing brides in Trinidad period. Because everybody wants to be three shades lighter than they actually are. And she had some horrible experiences with people wanting her to make them look fairer so that they would look that fair on their wedding day. And that was their idea that they were not comfortable with their skin tone.”
In this anecdote, being 'three shades lighter' may be discussed simply in terms of beauty, just as any bride of any background may say she wants to be ‘beautiful’ on that day. However it is the makeup-artist’s analysis, paraphrased by Anisa, which underlies the ways in which beauty is understood to reflect some inner quality that is highly desired, one which is not about personal definitions but about comparisons with others. These brides do not ask to be made up as beautifully as possible, but instead request to be made ‘three shades lighter’. In this story, beauty and light colour stand for the same thing.

At first glance, the issues to emerge from the extract seem to resonate with much of the discourse in African Caribbean communities where skin colour was not the only dimension along which women and men were stratified but other racially charged features such as hair texture, body shape and even dress came to the fore (Edmondson, 2009; Hunter, 2002; Sobo, 1993). While other physical attributes such as hair texture, eye colour and so on were mentioned in terms of beauty and desirability, skin colour remained the principal marker of difference through which these ideals of female desirability are achieved. For instance, the ubiquity of skin lightening creams and high sales of these are indicative of the attitudes of women and the fairness cream market is a highly profitable industry, a fact which is not lost on the young women. Rani offers a perspective on this in what she identifies as a ‘colour complex’ in Trinidad.

“It (The colour complex) is there because you know we have those Naturally Fair\textsuperscript{14} creams which people buy. They may not come out and say ‘You know I don’t like being dark’ or ‘I’m not fair enough’ but the point is these things are selling. And they sell because if you advertise you make money. One of my cousins she’s dark and she started using these things. I mean I think it’s working! But bleaching creams and stuff, a lot of people bleach their skin. You can’t really say that 90% of the population is sensitive to colour but you can tell from little things like that, people are buying different facial products, clean your skin not just because you

\textsuperscript{14} A brand of skin-lightening brand manufactured in India and distributed globally.
want it clean and healthy but because you want to raise that complexion. To me, little things like that, my house included… I mean I’m fair but I try to avoid the sun you know!”

In this example, Rani describes the implicit colourism that is taking place although it is not explicitly framed as this according to the larger population. The use of these creams as ‘raising’ the complexion provides women with a status that can perhaps lead to other types of advances (such as Lisa’s anecdote in the beginning of this chapter illustrates) because being fair is a form of social capital (Hunter, 2002).

While this sort of discourse is not to indicate any desire to be White in a racial sense, there is an important difference which can be understood through Judith Butler’s notion of performativity. Apart from ‘passing,’ one cannot use make-up to meander through racial categorisations. Being ‘high colour’ is not specific to the Indian community as anyone can have high colour but a light-skinned girl who is racially ‘black’ is still considered to be black. With this intra-racial colourism, lighter skin — or even the suggestion of lighter skin through make-up — indeed enacts that superior classification. Unlike a binary situation where skin colour stands for racial difference, a situation like that of the Trinidadian Indian does not entail lighter skin demonstrating an entirely different category, but a better version of what all Indians are. By putting on make-up to be three shades lighter, these girls are not ‘passing’ or pretending to be what they are not. Instead, for the purposes of their wedding day, the girl has become three shades lighter. She will be able to show the pictures to her grandchildren who will see her as a beautiful light-skinned girl. Just as performativity provides a way out of the trap of hybridity, performativity also provides a way out of the trap of a black-white binary.
Rebecca King-O’Riaain (2006) and Shirley Anne Tate (2010) both examine this distinction between wanting lighter skin (‘intra-colourism’) and wanting to be racially White (‘inter-colourism’) and similarly conclude that the assumption that wanting lighter skin is to look like one is from a different race is misleading. This is especially evident in studies of South Asian women, where race is not part of the discourse at all (although caste does indeed hold some similarities to the concept of race) (Schoenhals, 2003) but light skin is extremely desirable, evidenced in the multi-billion dollar skin-lightening industry in South Asia (Hoskins, 2014). This belief in the superiority of ‘high colour’ is not an implicitly and unproblematically accepted phenomenon. Many Indian Trinidadian women with whom I spoke admitted to subscribing to this ideal, on some level, while also fighting against it. For instance one of the Indian beauty pageants, the Miss Mastana Bahar pageant, was rebranded and renamed as the Miss Naturally Fair Mastana Bahar Pageant, named for its sponsor: ‘Naturally Fair’ is a brand of skin products from India. This was explained by Rhea, a 21 year old student, who described her experiences of participating in this pageant. Rhea articulated her discomfort at the insensitivity of the title towards the participants of a darker skin tone as well as the experience:

“Serious. I couldn’t believe that. How can you name a show that? What message are you trying to say? I was not happy. I know Black people here have the same same problem. … The stage make-up applied to the girls’ face is often ‘whiter’ than their actual skin tone. It make them stupid, even if they were light-skinned to begin with. But I think that lighter skin gives me an advantage to be honest.”

If on one hand, as Rhea is saying, people do not agree with the colour complex, then at the same time they are buying into it as evident in the high consumption of skin lightening creams. This ambivalence is highly fraught, as individuals can identify some aspects of the power structure that governs their beauty ideals, but cannot move outside of that structure’s reach.
It must be acknowledged that the importance attached to skin colour is not exclusive to India and Indians. In February 2007, the Ministry of Health in Jamaica launched an aggressive five month island-wide campaign dubbed “Don’t Kill the Skin” aimed at addressing the ever-growing skin-bleaching issue in Jamaica. In Jamaica, the bleaching of one’s skin disrupts constructions of blackness as the body is an initial signifier of one’s racial belonging (Fluehr-Lobban, 2006). Furthermore, beauty in Jamaica has historically been determined by one’s proximity to whiteness and, as such, “brownings” are perceived as more desirable than their darker-skinned counterparts (Mohammed, 2000).

The privileged positions of “brownings” within Jamaica’s beauty structure are evidenced in their over-representation in annual Miss Jamaica World, Miss Jamaica Universe beauty pageants and in local advertisements. The bleacher’s quest for a “browning identity” not only refers to a desire to have a lighter complexion but also to have access to the social capital associated with it (Brown-Glaude 2007: 50). Thus, the issue of skin colour, though not exclusive to Indians, is still an issue for girls and young women in various facets of their lives. The beauty programming directed towards women involves a market replete with skin lightening products which remain in considerable demand and simultaneously perpetuate the notion that “lighter is better”, a directive which can affect life chances in varying ways.

While across generations, people have attempted to dismantle the ‘fair is best’ myth, there remains an underlying preference for fair skin, at least in the eyes of some of the young women I spoke to. Hema (25), for example uses the creole term ‘high colour’ which is sometimes used to denote a fair skinned person, and cited this as her most desirable quality in both men and women:
“I think it’s the colour. I like a high-coloured person. You know that white context of people with European features…you know the white, nuh. I have to be honest I think I have a colour complex. I really prefer guys who are light-skinned.

Hema is giving a brief but everyday example of fair skin preference but in a conversation about how this plays out a national level, Esther puts forward her view by drawing on a well-known personality in Trinidad. In 1998, Wendy Fitzwilliam who was viewed as a darker skinned Trinidadian, was selected as a representative for the Miss Universe pageant and went on to win the contest. At the time, it garnered a lot of attention because it represented the strides made by women who do not conform to Caucasian standards of beauty to compete in a global pageant. Esther (25) talks about how she looked to Wendy as an icon who did not look her at skin colour as an impediment. This is also interesting that she looks to an African descent woman for this given the underlying Black and Indian tension in Trinidad.

“Wendy Fitzwilliam is definitely one of the women I most admire. I like that she’s motivated and that being a Black women she accomplished something like that. She’s good at the academics also because she’s a lawyer. She’s all rounded and seems able to do so much things. One of the reasons I liked her is because she is really dark and overcame that. People think that lighter skinned is more beautiful and dark skinned isn’t.”

This discussion of Wendy Fitzwilliam presents Blackness as something that is categorically different than Whiteness, where the only way that one can be something ‘in between’ is through mixing (as discussed in the preceding chapter with the analysis of hybridity). For this thesis, this discussion of Wendy Fitzwilliam stands almost as an exception. The Indian young women with whom I spoke did not perceive that they were in the same situation as Wendy Fitzwilliam, although she was independently a role model for overcoming this aspect of Trinidadian culture. For them, while light skin was something they aspired to, they perceived themselves to be in a system that was
more of a colour gradient, ranging not between the binaries of black and white, but
the spectrum of darker colour and ‘high colour’. This point of distinction presents
an important aspect of the way in which Indian Trinidadians perceive themselves
to be different from their African descent counterparts.

These young Indian women perceive that their discourse of the importance of light skin
is different than the binary that characterises the politics of African skin. Both care about
light skin, but it is important to note that these young women are not imagining light
skin as a symbol of ‘whiteness,’ but rather of a true Indianness. In this sense, there is more
to being an ideal example of ‘racially Indian’ than having light skin. Christal (20) told me
that “For me, Indian is about having beautiful hair. Like, long, straight and black. Like
the Bollywood girls. That is beautiful.” Hair occupies a distinct space in embodying beauty
and in the staging of the Indian self as Rosenthal (2005:1) describes:

Emerging from the flesh and thus both of, and outside the body- at once corporeal
and a mere lifeless extension- hair occupies an extraordinary position, mediating
between the natural and the cultural. It prompts one to scrutinize and question
those boundaries defining self and other, subject and object, life and death.
It is perhaps on account of this liminality that hair has so often been thought
of as containing the essence of individuality and personhood; a lock of hair can
serve as a synecdoche for the body whence it came, possessing in the eye, or rather
fingers, of the beholder stronger representational power than, for example,
a painted portrait. It is for this reason, not surprising, that the growing, grooming,
cutting, shaving or losing of hair- on the body and head- were often associated
with transformative life experiences, with rites and rituals, and with the marking
of cultural difference.

Rosenthal suggests that while skin colour is something that is essentially set (of course
there are limitations to this, but compared with hair that is an easy assertion to
defend) hair can be cared for, cut, styled, etc. in order to make it into what is desired.
Therefore it may appear to be a part of the body that is least able to be racially valued,
in the sense that it among the easiest parts of the body to change. However, talking with
my respondents demonstrated that hair is certainly as laden with racialised ideas of
beauty as Christal reveals above in her valuation of long, straight and Black hair which
Lisa (25) agreed with but went on to give an explanation as to why hair is laden with these
meanings,

“My cousin is from Valsayn. He just got married. He is what people would call
a Red Negro. His father was half black half white and his mother was a dougla.
But he came out looking quite black with the curly hair and very dark skin.
He married a light skinned East Indian girl who is purely East Indian. Whatever
that means! But…..her family disowned her. It became ’We’re not gonna talk to
you because knowing the colour of the family you’re gonna create these pickney
or horrible children. He fell out with her family, his wife stopped talking to her
family. But people were so afraid of what his child is going to look like and as soon
as the child born, they looking to see if the ear darkening, if the hair rolling up at
the nape of the neck or kinky and suddenly everyone knows that there is or was
a mix somewhere along the line.” So that you’re not guaranteed what the child
is going to look like.”

This was a hugely telling extract which illustrated how because of the processes
of racialisation in the Trinidadian context, skin colour is not the sole determinant
or even reliable indicator of one’s race but hair is read as a contentious and visible marker.
To carry curly hair signifies as Lisa says a transgression, if not immediate then somewhere
in the persons’ ancestry, and straight hair is a marker of authenticity. Hair “rolling up
at the nape of the neck” and kinky hair is a texture that is associated with Blackness
what Lisa was invariably hinting at in the example of her cousin’s relationship was the
fear of miscegenation, specifically the fear of mixing with Blackness. Which in turn
became symbolic of ugliness and repulsiveness and an example of how race is inscribed
on the hair. Though it is an incorrect simplification to state that straight hair is the
cultural property of Indians and curly hair for Africans, it continues to be an implicit line
of thought in view of the racial history of the Trinidadian population.
Many of my respondents refer to the ‘Bollywood’ look, consisting of conventionally straight, long and dark hair and fair skin. Some briefly stated that this is their preferred look. While light skin is indeed part of the ‘Bollywood look,’ hair colour and texture also works to categorise women into racial groups. Jennifer used an example from her experience of teacher training at a local school where she conducted an exercise with her students. She exhibited photos of two models from India, Aishwarya Rai and Sushmita Sen who had won Miss World and Miss Universe respectively, and conducted a poll where she asked which out of the two the students found more beautiful. The latter is considered a darker skinned model with long black hair and dark brown eyes while the former is considered a fair skinned model with blue eyes and dark brown hair and has gone on to become a global icon representing India on various international platforms and brands such as Omega and L’Oreal. Across the board, all the students selected Aishwarya Rai as the most beautiful model out of the two and this surprised Jennifer who went on to say:

“I real shock you know. Because I personally think Sushmita is way more attractive and intelligent. You ever heard her speak in an interview? And she does things out of the norm you know? Like, she is a single woman and she adopted two baby girls. Which other Indian celebrity can you tell me has done this? I tried to argue the personality side of this with the students but they weren’t interested. They didn’t care!”

As I just discussed, colourism can pertain, therefore, to more than simply skin colour. This also emerges when the young women discussed Indian hair as it compares to non-Indian hair as we saw in Lisa’s extract above. How hair marks cultural difference in this context is specific as a defining marker against the African ‘other’. It is racially and socially coded as Amy illustrates when she says:

“I know what Lisa is saying. Indian people like curly hair only if they know or it is ‘real’. I can’t explain but you know when it’s real Indian hair. It’s obvious when someone has nappy hair. You know that person is Creole. But sometimes it can be
mix… Everybody has some type of mixture. This is why they say you have to be careful about calling someone a racial term.”

The nappy hair can be read as a marker of Africanness and ‘real’ here marks Indianness. This is an example how fears around miscegenation and the social stigma of douglarisation becomes evident and to not fall into an Indian beauty norm expresses an otherness. That hair becomes such a marker in a way marks a boundary of the beautiful Indian woman’s body and is rooted in racialising notions about Indians and Others.

Race here emerges as a multi-faceted set of understandings that work with some groups to set them up along a self/other binary, and in other groups to establish a single group within which there is graded variation. These different ideas of race have all existed and developed in Trinidad’s colonial and post-colonial history. As Trinidad is exposed through various media outlets to other ideas of beauty, the Trinidadian discourses of beauty is changing for both the Indian and Black communities. The following section will examine how ideals about beauty today in the island are working to reformulate ideas of race yet again.

**Spanish & Dougla — the new hybridities?**

Dark skin has historically been a source of stigma for both Indian and African Trinidadian women and the extent to which the issue of skin colour is deeply entrenched runs somewhat parallel to the beauty cultures of India where the ancestral homeland is itself immensely influenced by Western ideals of beauty and preferences for fair skin. Yet
as a way of challenging the binary of fair and dark, the ‘Spanish’ prototype of beauty, which incorporates not simply ‘Western’ ideals but leans towards the South American ideal, was posited as an alternative (Khan, 2010). Esther (25) describes this as follows:

“What is appealing to people is variable. You’d see some of the older people say they don’t actually like blondes, they look yellowy or anaemic or ill! What they aspire to is the mixie look (someone who’s dark but not too dark), a defined waist but with muscles. The gym culture from South America has hit Trinidad very very hard. So a guy would be more likely to say ‘My wife works out at so and so gym, or my wife has run in a marathon, not that my wife has the biggest boobs or she has a tiny figure.”

The beauty practices Esther narrates lean more towards body fit in lieu of a thin body but alongside this, she hints at the Spanish look as aspirational, a type that anyone can achieve through work. Is this an attempt to move away from the racialised body which is so prevalent in Trinidadian discourse? In Susan Bordo’s (1993: 16) influential work on the body, she notes that ‘our bodies are necessarily cultural forms; whatever roles anatomy and biology play, they always interact with culture’. It could be said then that the articulation of Spanish as a beauty ideal could be seen as an attempt to negotiate the waters between their Indianness and their Trinidadian-ness producing a new type of hybrid, racial ideal as a particular aesthetic and/or colour category.

If in the gendered frames of everyday life the rules of femininity are defined clearly, such as the wearing of jeans, hair length and comportment then the racialised frames of everyday life are simultaneously defined through phenotype but also resisted in some ways. The Spanish look is seen as a form of improving the Indian feminine body which reaffirms the idea that despite the post-racial rhetoric, the racialised body is a fixed entity. However, the legitimacy of this notion must be called into question. I consider here how Spanish lends symbolic neutrality when deployed by the Indian Trinidadian young
women. By their strong identification with Spanish as an ideal beauty prototype, it could be read as a way of including their presence in the national callaloo portrait as racially un-Indian and nationally Trinidadian. If Indian signifies a fixed racial group, then Spanish signifies a fluid inter-racial, inter-ethnic set of characteristics. Aisha Khan (2010) has written in great detail on the use of the term as an “ethnic modifier”. But does Spanish as a more open category work to negate the consequences of colourism? Is it possible to make such a clean break between a racial group and an ‘ethnic signifier’? To address these questions, first the concept of what ‘Spanish’ is in this Trinidadian context must be unpacked.

To define what ‘Spanish’ means in Trinidad is a complex task. Its meaning fluctuates according to variables such as phenotype, for example skin colour, hair, location. For instance, Venezuelan migrants or the Carib community who have Spanish ancestry and are based in areas such as Arima, Santa Cruz and parts of the South are all called Spanish. Hernandez-Ramdwar (1997: 75) writes that, “‘Spanish’ identity in Trinidad…. relates less to culture and ethnicity than to particular phenotypical characteristics, a ‘look’ distinguishing one from ‘pure’ African, Indian, European, Chinese, or identities such as ‘dougla’, ‘mulatto’, etc.”. However, there is also the designation of Spanish as a particular group. Sylvia Moodie-Kublalsingh (2012: WWW) writes that “… today in 2012, there are Trinidadians who are still described as ‘Spanish’ mainly because of their appearance and their surnames; because of some family member’s knowledge of Spanish, or because they reside in traditional ‘Spanish’ villages where parang has been popular.” This ambivalence of the term is not limited to academic writing. Among the young women, there was a similar variation in the deployment of this designation. When it came to the question of beauty and appearance, there seemed to be two processes
operating. It was first deployed as a beauty prototype, desirable and attractive. Secondly, it appeared to be a more neutral way to signify traits that this group considered to belong to the Indian population of Trinidad, rather than the African descent population. This could be read as an attempt to be part of the callaloo portrait while not reifying race in the essentialist sense. However, ultimately, Spanish works to shore up the same effect as any other colour categories such as Red and Creole as having racial connotations.

If dougla was cited as a specific racial albeit undesirable category (Indian-African) by the young women, then Spanish acted as both a symbolic category and a phenotypical one which incorporates the most valuable or attractive aspects of each race without falling into an ethnocentric trap. Aisha Khan (2010: 62) refers to this as an ‘ethnic modifier’ by which she means “a category of ethnicity that modifies other ethnic categories, indicating a positive condition which improves another ethnic referent into something more highly valued, at least by certain sectors of the society.” The idealisation of Spanish is how we can see their Trinidadian-ness. This definition is one which one of the young women, Hema (21) taps into in her discussion of what constitutes a beautiful look in her mind,

“Ok well I think red and Spanish are the same thing. But if you asking me what the difference, then with reds you have the curly hair and some African features but fair skin. With Spanish…it has the straight hair like the Indians and fair skin. I don’t know how to explain it but you just know when you look at them! It’s hot.”

Hema’s knowledge of ‘red’ and ‘Spanish’ points to her creolisation, her Trinidadian-ness. In describing Spanish as “hot” and attractive, she demonstrates her desire for this categorisation. ‘Spanish’ becomes appropriated in this context as drawing on specific, positive elements (fair skin and straight hair) while ‘red’ is appropriated as a mixed version
of Blackness with the hair and features negatively imaged. Interestingly while the young women did not classify Spanish as White, the emphasis on fairness as one of the defining attributes was certainly forwarded. It could be said that in the effort “[to efface] antagonisms rather than represent them” (Khan, 2010:70), ‘Spanish’ functions in part to affirm a racial hierarchy where ‘softened’ or ambiguous ‘African’ or ‘black’ convey and confer a higher status that modifies stronger more clear-cut expressions of ‘African’ or ‘black’ attributes.” (Khan, 2010:185).

However, much of the young women’s narratives contradicted this idea of Spanish as an “ethnic modifier” or political neutraliser posited by Aisha Khan because ultimately, we can see how colonial and contemporary racialised norms continue to inform desirability. Aisha Khan’s positioning of Spanish as a political intervention in the disrupting of a racial hierarchy in this sense is not in concordance with the young women in this research as the emphasis indeed remains on the phenotype. Samantha (24) illustrates this point through her articulation of ‘red’

“One of my friends she’s red, I’m Indian and there’s a Negro girl in the car. And we were all talking about race. I was saying that everybody in the Caribbean black, ok. We are all Black people. And she was like I don’t believe that, I don’t believe that. I hate when people say that you know, if you’re not White you’re Black and I’m like ‘Does it matter?’ We are all Black, we are not White. I mean we use the words Indian, or dougla or African, but what you think is white or Spanish, is black in the Caribbean. I realised from her though that she had a real issue with being red because red puts you kind of like puts you above the whole Afro, I mean it’s part of being Afro, but you climb the social ladder being red. And she’s really high complexion. You can tell she took pride in knowing that she was red. Sometimes a brown skinned girl will get called red and they take pride in that also. But she defeated the whole purpose of what I think is red!”

15 “Having a light brown, reddish to almost white skin complexion, usu, a mixture of African and European descent. Like other skin colour terms, maybe negative depending on usage…” (Winer, 2008: 751)
Samantha’s statement could be read as a palatable and mediating category between Indian, African, White, Red and Spanish which negates all the perceived negative features of each of these racial groups and draws upon the positive aspects in its construction. Samantha herself is using Black in the cultural and political sense and problematizes colour categories. Yet it remains anchored in this idea of high colour equals higher status and it seems no colour category can escape this, even Red. In one way Red makes Blackness clear but in another way it reinforces the privileging of lightness as a sign of beauty, a logic which has colonial roots but which can be seen and heard at the level of everyday as Samantha (25) goes on to explain.

“You hear this expression, If yuh ent red yuh dead.

Keerti: “No. What does it mean?”

Samantha (25): “I used to hear this a lot from people around me growing up. It’s to do with what you’re asking us. It means the more high colour you are, the better. You’ll find many people grow up with this stupid mentality.”

It could be further argued that hybridity theory does not account for this complex dynamics of skin colour, the meanings assigned to shades, and colourism. If hybridity has been criticised for glossing over asymmetry and unequal power relations (Brah & Coombes, 2005), then in a similar vein this along with creolisation reaches a theoretical impasse in its lack of attention to these colour dynamics.

The notion that Spanish lends symbolic neutrality in this sense is problematic as we come to see that a racialised dimension to this is quite present. The resilience of the hierarchies of skin colour operate in discreet ways and one of the ways through which this manifests is how an essential component of female beauty remains centred on fairness. So while much has been written about the fluidity of racial categories, the social and economic
advantages that are conferred on the basis of skin colour, regardless of whichever ethnic
category one professes to belong to, remains a negotiation. The process of conferring
phenotypes on categories, whether defined as browning, creolisation, douglarisation, Red
or Spanish, is not solely an individual one but overlaps with other aspects of everyday
life. The perceived advantages that come, from skin colour and ‘Spanish’ in this instance
are examples of this as sites where fairness embodied in Spanish is co-opted within
the national callaloo portrait but simultaneously points to the continuing power of the
colonial legacy. As one of the lighter-skinned young woman states, “It does give you
some sort of social status….in Trinidad. This is why we try to preserve our skin colour.”
(Cherisse, 21).

The perceived advantages that come with being fair-skinned are acknowledged
by the young women, for example Ashley (25) who says “It’s not that my mum wanted
me to be white or I’d want my children to be it’s that………you want them to have access
to the ‘benefits’ or….privileges of Whiteness. And I think people don’t understand this.”
Ashley’s passage reveals here that she does not necessarily want to be racially White, nor is
she equating White with racially Caucasian people. Rather the conceptualisation of racial
inequalities, so often directed towards the Black-Indian divide, focuses on white privilege
and the material effects of Whiteness. This introduces the question of what constitutes
Whiteness in a nation where virtually everyone is considered mixed, douglarised, Spanish
or Indian and Black to some degree?

Aisha Khan (2009: 106) writes “….authentic “whites” in Trinidad were British, Spanish,
and French; suspect “whites” (that is, those tainted by proximity, both sexual and social,
to non-whites) were labelled “Trinidad white” or “French Creole.” As an organising
principle then, Whiteness in the Caribbean is “a repetition with a difference” (Benitez-Rojo, 1996: 3) and not only linked to skin colour but as “a social and ideological phenomenon — reproduced itself and configures the ‘place’ of other racial/ethnic groups in ‘centering’ itself.” Unlike in countries with a majority population that defines itself as white, in Trinidad there are virtually no nationals (tourists, of course, are the exception) who identify as such. Therefore, for the purpose of this dissertation, the definition of whiteness will only arise out of the talk of the young women respondents. In this context, I would posit that Whiteness is a symbol for Indian Trinidadians with varying connotations, one of which is the discursive production of beauty.

This becomes clear in the talk of the young women for example Kelly identifies as being a fair skinned Indian, Shoma describes herself as of high colour, Amy conceived of herself as Spanish looking and so on. The shades of ‘fair’ skin or ‘high colour’ that the young women described ranged from the white skin colour associated with American and European Caucasians to the tanned skin colour, locally termed Spanish, associated with Latin Americans and olive skin colour associated with Indians in the subcontinent. Blackness as an imbricated social construction takes on a continuing dimension as being othered in one sense as seen in the colonial discourse portraying African descent Trinidadians as inferior and the infusion of Africanness into modes of social and cultural life as a contamination. Therefore, these different terms that surround skin colour, although explicitly non-racialised, in some ways work to uphold racial categories as strongly as more explicitly racial references.

The beauty prototypes of Spanish, Dougla or even the global Indian look, while discursively produced as alternatives to the Euro-American beauty standard, may
attempt to displace ideas of race to be a part of the callaloo portrait but the social
construction of these ideals are invested in racialisation. The approximation to and,
attainability of, fairer skin work to reinforce race. This system of valuation as perpetuated
in the colonial order operates discreetly but it is recognised in the talk of the young
women as entrenched in the Trinidadian social psyche and not strictly limited
to the Indian or African ethnic communities. While race was not spoken about in
explicit terms, the women spoke in great detail about colour as both a synonym of race
and a construction. Based on the young women's talk, I posit that colour consciousness
still persists, albeit in a highly different form than earlier explicitly racial discourse.
However, given the close link to race, is this linked to racism? Lisa's quote which opens
this chapter offered an example of racial discrimination in the workforce where it became
apparent that the interviewer was using colour to stand in for race. Yet still, even this
discrimination presents a far more complicated phenomenon than the 'racism' that people
might presume to exist that functions along a racial binary based on Black and white.

While these different ideas about beauty came up in general discussions, there is one
particular phenomenon which can be approached as an epitome about these ideas
about the relationship between race and beauty. One of the prime social settings
where skin colour, hair type and beauty are poured over and analysed by these young
women is the beauty pageant, which I will analyse in the following section. Despite
the increased proportion of darker skinned women named as winners, queens or
representatives of the nation at international pageants, the valorisation of light(er) skin
is still predominant. National and local beauty pageants in Trinidad are prime examples
of how “social structures and everyday experiences are racially organized, based upon that
meaning.” (Omi & Winant, 1995: 56). This is reflected in the cross-section of contestants
and the sort of beauty that they aspire to. Importantly, this concept of ‘racial organisation’ that is reflected in Trinidian beauty pageants continues to demonstrate an exception to a binary concept of race. Through foregrounding the performativity of race and gender in this setting, this focus on beauty pageants will show how race is understood within the terms of this Indian sub-group of the (debatably) callaloo nation.

The beauty pageant circuit in Trinidad

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

It could be said that in addition to being zones of contestation and thus agency, the national beauty pageants in Trinidad are sites where the ideal citizen is elaborated to portray new and modern values. The diverse racial and ethnic range of annual pageant winners presents a sleek and cosmopolitan image of diversity as the face of the nation. In the Caribbean region, beauty pageants are national spectacles and there are an increasing number of television productions themed around fashion and beauty which have emerged in recent years which attest to the high interest in these such as ‘Caribbean’s Next Top Model’ and ‘Synergy TV Supermodel’. It is fairly obvious then that any discussion on femininity and beauty as racialised categories in the Caribbean should look to pageants as part of its analysis.

It could be argued that part of the emplacement of Indian beauty pageants is to negotiate difference with the blended callaloo nation in contradistinction to the “tossed salad”
(Khan, 2001) where the different ingredients are visible. While there are a number of local pageants that focus on explicitly Indian characteristics (judged according to ‘traditional’ dress, for example, in the case of the Miss Naturally Fair Astana Bihar pageant, which was the first and oldest Indian pageant established in Trinidad and in which there is no modern wear segment (Ragbag, 2012:5) pageants and their reality-show equivalents are increasingly played out on a national, and even international, stage.

As these pageants are increasingly open to the whole national body, individuals from different ethnic groups (or different racial groups) compete against one another.

As nations of ‘Spanish’ beauty have come to dominate common discourses of beauty, a similar phenomenon has emerged regarding the winners of these beauty pageants. Shanta (20) describes this situation:

“This is why I think Colombian women, Venezuelan women and South American women now in general tend to dominate beauty pageants, or Spanish here in Trinidad. Because they are kind of hybrids, they tend to have curly hair and they very rarely have blonde hair or poker straight hair. I mean not naturally straight, they use those straighteners you know. They have these features that are very appealing and you know that there is a mixing going on there. There is that sexual appeal and visual appeal. And I think that works here in Trinidad but works on a more racial level. But I think when you look further, the fear that this will be the future face, just as in United States there is that fear that Hispanics will be the dominant ethnic group ‘cause of the population size and there is a big panic about that. Because if someone else gets into power, then they will seek revenge, that is the panic.”

Beauty pageants here work not only to reproduce gendered ideals but an ethnicised and racialised womanhood which in turn asserts their own emplacement. Without making judgments about racial groups with more or less beauty, ‘Spanish’ characteristics have taken a foreground on the national stage as ‘racially neutral’ phenotypes, that happen
perhaps to exist more predominantly in certain races, amongst groups with certain skin colours.

The Miss Trinidad and Tobago pageant is a symbolic contributor to a nationally constructed idea of beauty, theoretically representing a democratic notion of beauty. But what the hybrid ‘Spanish’ figure represents on this platform is not necessarily a de-raced or de-ethnicised identity. Salma (19) elaborated on these implications in her views on the 2011 Miss Trinidad winner Gabrielle Walcott:

“She’s pretty but how many girls look like that in Trinidad? Gabrielle Walcott is what we’d call Trinidadian Caucasian or Syrian Lebanese.

Nafeesa (18) She is being polite! They don’t say Trinidad Caucasians! We would actually call her a White Trini!

Salma: Ok ok! White Trini. You know sometimes here these girls come from these powerful families where you have it all given to you. She does not represent the face of this nation. I don’t think. Why can’t a dougla win this thing boy?! You don’t see much Indians. I don’t know, I guess it’s still not encouraged. It real shame.”

Najma, (22) Trini men prefer women who look Spanish but the women here don’t seem to really care to make themselves look like that. They on their own beat really.”

Nafeesa (18): Some do. Visually how she (Gabrielle) looks, I would say mixed race.

Salma: Nah, she look white. My point is she is a minority. A powerful minority. No one looks like her in Trinidad so how can she represent us at that level?

Anisa (25)” But….I mean Trinidad is mixed so much! Simply maybe because they get the best of all of the races it’s highly attractive. So they get really nice hair, nice skin, pretty eyes, nice body shape and everything. So it seems like cross breeding has really developed into….I mean even what we call dougla. That is something that is attractive to Trinidadians because…you know how in every culture there is something you don’t like. For example, maybe in African culture you wouldn’t like your hair and in Indian culture maybe you wouldn’t like your nose, I don’t know! But it seems that when the races are mixed the product is nice, beautiful hair and good features. A different type of look that what we are accustomed to and that’s what’s attractive to us. So that’s why red people and Spanish people that is why it appeals to us! Because it’s different to what we’re accustomed to being only of
one origin. So what Salma is saying…maybe that’s why this is what is being done at the pageants.

As national beauty pageants are publicised as representing a national and democratic type of beauty, achievable by all, these girls have identified ways in which these specific types of desired beauty are far more specific than the pageants might suggest. How beauty is personified by the pageants then does not equate with the lived reality of Trinidad according to this discussion and we also see a perspective on mixed-race beauty emerges, where on one level this is seen as quintessentially Trinidadian. This was evident in the lauding of Anya Ayoung-Chee who was a contestant in the 2008 Miss Universe pageant and won the first prize on a well-known programme ‘Project Runway’ in 2011. On the other hand, the evocation of the mixed-race figure speaks to the question of power. Earlier literature on douglas and douglarisation (Stoddard & Cornwell, 1999) made reference to the perceived threat of this kind of mixed-race identity but in Shanta’s and Salma’s viewpoints they identify ‘White Trini’ as reinforcing a raced beauty ideal and identity hierarchy. How Chinese mixes fit in here was not mentioned in the extracts but it is hinted by Shanta and Salma that Chinese mixes would be part of White Trini along with Syrian/Lebanese people.

Colourism is hinted at in these extracts and while the historical reasons for this in the United States and India may be different, Hunter’s (2002) argument for considering skin colour as a form of “social capital” for black women works in similar ways for Trinidadians according to the young women. Fairer skin does confer advantages and that it is widely valued remains of concern. That it also has material effects is also of concern as Cindy (age) explained to me the extent to which colourism permeated matters of intimacies and personal relations:
“I never thought about it until you ask me. I am dark. I don’t know much about my family or which part of India they came. I found out recently they were from South and reading books on indentureship at school, I know most of the Indians here come from North, right?

Keerti: Yes.

Cindy: Well.....I never have an Indian boy. I don’t live in an Indian area, I know some from school and we lime but I never have a......relationship. One boy tell me one time “I don’t date dark girls but yuh real cute.” I tell him....well....where to go! I don’t think I will marry an Indian boy. I don’t fit their idea of Indian. What you all are saying is right. We have a real obsession with colour in the Caribbean. My best friend is Chinese and oh gosh....you know how many times I hear people call her yellow or ching chong in the Savannah? They real ignorant people in this country. I never have any problems with Black fellas. I’m married to one! I find more acceptance with these guys. I know they have same problem too....with skin bleaching and all.....but my own experience......I just attract more African boys. I don’t think it’s a race thing.....it’s my colour.

Keerti: But was that a conscious decision for you? I mean did you decide for yourself that this is my skin colour so I can’t be with an Indian say or was it something your family influenced?

Cindy: No, no my family were not happy at all! But they knew the problems and they know what Indians are like. And also they became more relaxed the older they got. They always tell me look at the boy’s heart not his colour. We fell in love but I think if I was.....liked....by Indians, or not this colour I am (!), my family would have never let me marry my husband! They say this but deep down they would prefer an Indian. They knew, what you call high colour boys, would not find me attractive so they accepted it in the end. It just was like that.

Desirability then works in tandem with colour as a process operating on a profoundly personal and social level and which allows and disallows certain bodies to assume certain identities. Beauty then is the outcome of practices which are socially constructed and put into effect by the individual who experiences this as intimate and social. If this does take place within the bounds of Indianness as Cindy explains, then a disavowal of sorts is enacted. The other young women hint at the significance of skin colour in the context of desirability and potential partnerships but Cindy’s account demonstrated the extent to which skin colour, as informing beauty, has salience in everyday life.
Conclusion

In this chapter I set out four contexts of beauty culture; the colonial history, contemporary colour hierarchies, the colour categories of ‘Spanish’ and dougla, and beauty pageants. What can be discerned is that the colour-class-race model which was deployed in the colonial context has passed down to the contemporary era, despite the deployment and embracing of newer, hybridised aesthetic categories such as Spanish and Dougla. While the binary of Black/White is deemed as irrelevant, race is performatively inscribed on both skin and hair through the colour spectrum of high colour/low colour, that is dark and light(er). Contemporary beauty culture in Trinidad creates and upholds raced dimensions as evidenced in the discussion of skin lightening creams and curly hair as an example of Blackness. The dougla poetics revealed a contradictory process where at once beauty is determined by one’s proximity to Whiteness in terms of aesthetic and habitus which is resisted in part by the young women but who also buy into it. One of the ways in which resistance takes place is in the use of Spanish, an evocative modality theorised by Aisha Khan (2010) who uses the fluid hybridity designated “Spanish” as a way of exploring colourism in Trinidad. Yet still, it remains that it is about fitting in to the racialised beauty order where, as the famous Caribbean proverb says which was later sung by Calypsonian Lord Kitchener “If you’re white you’re all right, if you’re brown stick around, if you’re black, step back.” Skin colour, as a legacy of both the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent’s pasts, has shaped and continues to shape Indian Trinidadians’ cultural perceptions of beauty, identity and difference.

The displays of boundary making evident in the talk on how an authentic Indian look or a Spanish look, both with an emphasis on a fairer skin colour, illustrate that issues
of colourism and racialisation have become intricately interwoven. The constructions of Indian beauty were at many points based on essentialist boundaries which excluded darker skinned women. However, importantly, this was not associated with a black-white binary, which perhaps better characterised the African descent population’s preoccupation with lighter skin. There were other times where the rejection of darker skinned Indian women was in terms of their closeness to Blackness. Some also spoke about how they had been positioned by colourism or what the young women called “the colour complex” in terms of social capital and opportunities. Indian constructions of beauty illustrated both a rejection of Euro-American ideas of beauty but on the other hand an implicit co-opting of these in their valorisation of Spanish as an ideal (as closer to Whiteness) and disidentification with Dougla (as closer to Blackness). The underlying influence of Whiteness, not as a racial category but as a privileged subject position operates in implicit ways. It does so both through the deployment of Spanish as the ideal Trinidadian prototype and through the influence of Bollywood culture which itself is heavily organised along regulatory and hierarchized regimes of beauty where fairness is the beauty norm. In some of their constructed images of Indian womanhood, there was a specific racialised script which promoted a particular type of Indianness and this emerged in the discussion on the Indian Trinidadian beauty pageants with the emphasis on straight hair, slim body shape, and fairer skin.

As Moreno Figueroa (2013:156) writes, “beauty is difficult. It is a resource and a feeling, an unavoidable lure that does different kinds of work: it stabilises and enables hierarchies.” This chapter covered many of the different ways in which beauty is inculcated with notions of race. It began with an initial historical overview of racial categories, demonstrating that the notion of light skin proliferates among different Trinidadian groups, with
different rationalising ideologies. This is further unpacked in a discussion of common understandings of the different associations of phenotypes and aspects of beauty that have proliferated through much of the colonial and post-colonial era. The third section introduced the modern emergence of a new category of phenotype: the purportedly un-racial ‘Spanish’ beauty. This was revealed to have far more racial underpinnings than it may appear to have on face value. Therefore, I argue that the valorisation of all things ‘Spanish’ works as an attempt by these Indian women at positioning themselves not on Black/White binary (which I argue is largely now irrelevant), but in a quadripartite system that divides people as Black/Mixed/Indian/White.

The doula poetics in this chapter revealed the ways in which beauty is understood and performatively produced by the young women as raced. The control and comportment of the body is one of the many ways in which idealised images of race, ethnicity, gender, and nation are created. These idealisations are played out in beauty pageants but also at the level of everyday lived experience. The ways in which this bodily control through colourism works to maintain processes of racialisation, as a corollary of colonialism, builds an image of beauty and morality that has material effects on women. The colonial influence not only extends to beauty practices and ideals but also to notions of comportment and dress which I will examine next in carnival and playing mas.
Chapter 6
THE BODY CONTOURS OF CARNIVAL

Introduction

When I told one of my respondents that I had attended a carnival celebration, she told me “So yuh had a real Trini experience!” This annual festival of food, music, dance and culture has come to represent the Eastern Caribbean in both theory and cultural practice. Indeed, the centrality of Trinidad and Tobago’s annual Carnival, which began over two hundred years ago, cannot be exaggerated. This is a major cultural force in Trinidad which is indelibly linked to the country’s national Creole identity (Cowley, 1996; Hill, 1972).

As Keith Nurse (1999: 685) illustrates: “The Trinidad carnival and its overseas offspring is a popular globalized celebration of hybridity and cultural identity, a contested space and practice, a ritual of resistance which facilitates the centring of the periphery.” Among the many aspects of Trinidadian culture that are expressed, reflected and constituted in carnival celebrations, the treatment of the bodies of Trinidadian women is a fundamental part of this carnival phenomenon of “centring the periphery”(Nurse,1999: 685).

The woman’s body has always been a central force in carnival’s development and has an increasing influence on the parameters of Carnival. The mainstreaming of women’s heterosexuality within Carnival culture has created significant debates with regard to the question of how to value women’s choices of participation. As women’s participation is celebrated, this has resulted in the increased spending by women and for women as the Caribbean woman’s body has become the central focus of carnival celebrations.
This has brought about a debate in which women are alternatively celebrated as they participate, and critiqued for bringing about the commodification of carnival. Ashley (25) told me that:

“You know, Peter Minshall said ‘The business of playing mas is being other than yourself.’ This is Carnival. It used to be like this. Now we still do it, but if you have plenty money, then you can be this other person. But, if you can’t pay big money then you can’t participate in the way that you see in the magazines. You find this free’ up? And…….You see what happen at carnival right? You hear about hornin’16, carnival babies, you see the ads for condoms increase. Banks give out carnival loans! There are problems with our economy, hospitals don’t have enough. But people will still take out big loans for this even if they ass is broke. It’s….changed.

In this chapter, I seek to explore this debate about women’s contribution to carnival by looking at mas playing through Butler’s (1993) concept of performativity. By drawing on these, I highlight the doubled way in which agency (articulated as sexual liberation and ‘free- up’17 by some of the young women) is enabled and disabled in relation to mas performance at Carnival.

The participation of women in this Carnival setting reveals the centrality of gender to discussions of national culture (Edmondson, 2003; Pinto, 2009; Puar, 2001). The heightened visibility of publicly performed hypersexual heterosexuality in this sphere is a reflection of the diversity of the national body with Black, Indian and European descent people taking part alongside many others. Yet they have all been positioned differently in terms of heterosexuality. This is not unproblematic among the different racial groups that make up the body politic of Trinidad. With a resolute focus on the body in the act of playing mas18, Indian descent women have been mapped

16 Horning means adultery, a sexual relationship outside of an official one.  
17 Freeing up or ‘free-up’ means acting in an unrestrained, relaxed, lively manner (Winer, 2008:363)  
18 Playing mas is explored in greater depth in a later section but generally it means to wear a costume during Carnival and to either perform a masquerade or one of the many mas bands which vary according to a mini, small, medium or large size.
out, in terms of both possibilities and problematics, as negotiating their sexual-ethnic identities in relation to the nation and the Indian Trinidadian community by performing in a traditionally identified ‘Black’, ‘Creole’ or hybrid arena (Munasinghe, 2001; Puri, 1997, 2004). However, given their increasing economic power and entry into the labour market, the understanding of women’s role previously relegated to the private, domestic sphere has undergone some shifts as have classed value systems.

A brief description of Trinidad Carnival

Carnival in Trinidad emerged out of slavery as a form of rebellion against oppressive European colonialism. Daniel Miller (1994: 130), in his description of Carnival, writes that this “seems to change its implications almost each decade, facing about to address different aspects of Trinidadian society such as emancipation, race, class and gender”. During carnival, these different aspects of individual identity were performed and contested traditionally and today.

In its first epoch, Carnival was established by the French aristocracy and then transitioned to the pre-emancipation phase where masquerade costumes worn by former slaves embodied socio-political characters meant to mock or critique the slave-holders (Green & Scher, 2007). Post-emancipation was an epoch where men accompanied their female companions and outnumbered women in the costumed bands. Between 1884 to 1941, Carnival began to evolve into a national festival and from 1945 to the present, there have
been increased linkages to ideas of nationalism, politicisation, commercialisation and even globalisation (Nurse, 1999).

While it was a “site of contestation and resistance to hegemonic formation” (Traube, 1996: 133), ironically it produced and mirrored the tensions, relations and conditions of the nation. In Bakhtin’s (1984: 10) conception of carnival, the term was applied to the popular celebratory events of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in sharp contrast to the official forms of culture. For Bakhtin,

......carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of all time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal.

Yet while it could be said that from Bakhtin’s viewpoint, which is largely based on the European carnivalesque, related to Trinidad Carnival in some ways, it would perhaps be equally useful to examine the theoretical frameworks which have developed in response to the context of Trinidad carnival. For example Richard D.E Burton (1997: 157) argues that carnival is not a temporary moment of social opposition and reversal but an exaggeration of everyday life in the Caribbean. “During Carnival time, various strands of ‘normal’ Trinidadian social and cultural life [.....] knit together to form a nexus of particular intensity.”

Many of these aspects of carnival remain today. The modern format of Carnival season in Trinidad starts on Boxing Day and ends on Ash Wednesday, the day before Lent. The mas band (an organisation that provides masqueraders with what is promoted as ‘the ultimate carnival experience’ which includes costumes, goody bags, food and alcohol
for the duration of Carnival) such as Tribe, Poison, Yuma19, Harts and so on usually launch their costumes through elaborate stage presentations as early as July after which they create and construct the costumes. Given the immensity of the Carnival enterprise, mas-making is often outsourced to China for manufacturing.

The economics of Carnival are complex. The increased consumerism of carnival can be further understood as part of the modern instances of Trinidadian capitalism and consumption which constitutes a modern, liberal subjectivity. Simply put, carnival has come to stand for the fact that money is often translated into national belonging: in order to ‘play mas’, which constitutes being a visible part of the nation and a demonstration of Trinidadian-ness, one has to “pay big dollars for this.” (Lisa, 25). It could be said that this brings into sharp relief the gendered, raced and classed dimensions of society in a hybridised site. Therefore it is important to look at the interplay of the contradictory contours of Carnival. For instance while certain aspects of Carnival enact a reversal of power, there is also a reification of existing relations of power. The mas bands are a case in point as they are subject to international commodification with masqueraders20 of different ethnic and class compositions among this larger site of Carnival celebrated under the register of freedom. The mas in this context, becomes an important mode of address as a way of illustrating particular societal tensions such as codes of conduct and ‘bacchanal21’ mentality which I will go on to explore.

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19 YUMA stands for Young, Upwardly, Mobile Adults.
20 A masquerader is a person who plays either the traditional characters on the street during Carnival or the pretty mas (Refer to section 6.4)
21 A key term in Trinidad which means confusion, uproar and disorder but can also be a good or bad term. It can be used to describe a noisy and joyous occasion as well as extremely disreputable and scandalous conduct. (Green & Scher, 2007: 227).
However despite its grand expenses, carnival is ultimately a necessary part of participating in the nation as an individual. “Carnival is a release for 2 days. It is an expression of who you are as a person and carnival is an extension of that” (Vaasha, 23). This talk of carnival existing as both a setting where identity is emphasized and as a setting where that identity is challenged, the notions of reified identity that have been approached throughout this thesis so far are again brought to the fore. Carnival is the epitome of the tensions that a discourse of hybridity suggests. Just as in earlier chapters, an exploration of the performative aspects of raced and gendered identities provides a way out from the trap of reified categories.

The array of events and competitions that run alongside Carnival commence not too long after the Christmas season. Numerous fêtes\(^22\) (parties with admission fees) are usually organised to mark the Carnival season and the price of these range from the high end all inclusive parties (upwards of 400TTD) to the smaller scale ones. The next series of musical events, namely the Panorama (the steel band competition), the Calypso Monarch\(^23\), and the Chutney Soca Monarch\(^24\) start their preliminary rounds in January. The King and Queen of Carnival begin their qualifying rounds shortly after and the King and Queen of each mas band compete against each other for the coveted title. The semi-final rounds take place a few weeks before the official Carnival (Dudley, 2004: 11). While there are many celebrations that take place across the country, the main activities take place in the capital Port of Spain over a five day period starting on Carnival Saturday.

\(^{22}\) An all-inclusive fete is a party predominant during the period of Carnival for which one has to pay at least a 400TTD cover charge. Apart from live entertainment, patrons have at their disposal an unlimited supply of food and drinks. An all-inclusive costumed band also has unlimited supplies of food and drinks.

\(^{23}\) An annual music competition dating to the 1950s where a performer is judged to have the best calypso (music genre) of that year.

\(^{24}\) Inaugurated in 1996 to consolidate Indian presence in national culture and Carnival, this is an annual music competition where a performer is judged to for the best chutney soca (Indian inflected music genre) of that year. The winner is awarded 1 million TTD.
which is where the ‘kiddies’ parade’ takes place for the costumed bands for children; Dimanche Gras\textsuperscript{25} where the King and Queen of Carnival is decided after a lengthy show; J’Ouvert\textsuperscript{26}(literally meaning opening day) begins right after Dimanche Gras in the early hours of Carnival Monday morning; the parade of the adult mas bands appear on the streets on Monday and Tuesday where the bands are categorised by size and judged at various points in the downtown area for the Band of the Year title.

According to the 2012 National Carnival Bands Association guidelines, there are a multitude of bands that masquerade ranging from a mini band (11–50 members), small (51–250 members), medium (251–600 members) and large (601+). This represents a change from the 2007 classification when the breakdown was as follows: extra-large band — over 3000 players, large band — over 1000 players; medium band between 500 — 1000 players and a small band less than 500 players. Apart from each band having their own King and Queen and masqueraders, they have a sound system with a DJ set up on trucks that play mainly soca music for the ‘road march’, that is the judging points where the masqueraders perform. The costumes at this point not only enhance the dance but add to the visual effect of the performance. In this context, the costume design is regarded as being of utmost importance. Given that carnival is a major revenue stream, substantial investments are made not only in the costumes, but on aspects of customer service such as provision of food and beverages, mobile bathrooms and open bars that move along with the band on the streets of the capital. The alternatives to carnival during

\textsuperscript{25} Dimanche Gras taken from French meaning Fat Sunday before Ash Wednesday. This is marked by the above music competitions.

\textsuperscript{26} The opening day of Carnival (around 2am) where revellers covered with mud, dark oil or grease fill the streets. Mason (1998: 9) describes “J’ouvert’ (from the French ‘day opens’) is a chaotic, anarchic dirty mas’ of rough, home-made costumes and drunkenness which begins spontaneously in the early minutes of Carnival Monday, hours before the sequined masqueraders claim the streets as their own. J’ouvert is about abandon, physicality and fear, a deliberately hellish counterpoint to pretty mas’ heavenly themes.”
the season are not advertised in great detail but some of the young women cited various ways in which they do not participate such as spending the weekend in Tobago, Florida or one of the neighbouring Caribbean islands, some went to their families or beach houses down South, and some watch the proceedings on television. With soca music constituting such a crucial role during carnival season, masquerading and the mas costumes come to play perhaps an even greater role. The transformation of the human body through masquing is known in Trinidadian vernacular as ‘playing mas’ and women spend months beforehand getting in shape to become, as one of the young women put it, “body beautiful” (Lisa, 25). It is not just the bodily transformation but also its performance of sexualisation and vernacular critique of respectability which it enables that is significant.

Mila Riggio (2004: 93) lists three primary components of Trinidad carnival: calypso and soca, pan (the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago) and masquerading. In Trinidad, masquerading has always been central to the festivities. The affective masque for Bakhtin (1984: 39–40) is connected with joy and “it contains the playful element of life; it is based upon a peculiar interrelation of reality and image, characteristic of the most ancient rituals and spectacles.” This suggests that there is no true reality to social relations, but all interactions are a masked occasion in some way. People are always conscious of the role they are playing, and in explicitly masked situations this is only more apparent. However, it is important to note that the emphasis on approaching carnival as a place of resistance must be understood as existing at present in different contemporary conditions. There are many issues which are being subverted in carnival. As Puri reflects (2004: 107), “…the critical emphasis on resistance and transgression, of which Carnival has been the privileged critical site,” is problematic as it reduces “the resistant and/or oppositional possibilities of a whole host of cultural practices.” It is also important to note
that ways in which women and men experience carnival are different, as well as the ways in which Indian, African, White and Mixed-Race people experience Carnival. Bakhtin’s analysis of the mask and Butler’s notion of performativity help to demonstrate that there is not one carnival that supports or challenges the reality of Indian Trinidadian women’s identities. Instead, the masks put on and played with in carnival are a paradoxical, challenging/challenged, but ultimately real and fundamental aspect of who these women (and other participants) are. Approaching how women have partaken in carnival throughout Trinidadian history will reveal more about this paradox.

A brief history of women and Carnival

Women’s role in carnival has changed greatly in recent years, even compared to dates as recent as 40 years ago, which is around the time of the first body of critical literature dedicated to this unique and formative phenomenon (Nurse, 1999; Guilbault, 2007). The aesthetic of carnival was markedly different in the 1970s where there was not only a greater emphasis on traditional mas characters which reflected the resistance to French, British and American colonial powers on the island, but the number of men outnumbered women in the mas bands. Analysed as a form of resistance against the social, economic and political elite, the impact of gender on carnival as a cultural form in pre-independence and contemporary Trinidad has slowly gained traction in scholarship in recent generations (Edmondson, 2003; Noel, 2010; Puri, 1999).
One of the major changes of modern carnival culture has been the gender dynamics of carnival. In recent generations, African descent women have begun to make up the majority of the masqueraders and become iconic in the representations of carnival. Referring to the 1970s, Samantha Noel (2010: 73) explained, “Carnival was now more than ever associated with women” and this was attributed to their increasing economic power. Patricia Mohammed (2003) took the idea of gender dynamics further by looking at how gender functioned in this symbolic site. She explores how women were portrayed in the calypso27 of the early twentieth century and how they negotiated their gender relations in a blueprint where men glorify their physical prowess and skill. She explains that while Victorian values played a key role in the prohibition of women’s active participation in Carnival in the 1900s, there was a steady rise of working-class African descent women (locally called jamettes) who chose to resist this and express their sexuality through their contributions to calypso and carnival.

While Mohammed talks about women masqueraders in terms of musical involvement, Natasha Barnes (2000) voices her concerns about this in terms of spectacle and stereotype:

By re-enacting and embodying patriarchal stereotypes that depict women as sexually available, women consent to, rather than critique, their own subjugation....[can] a resistive praxis emanate from the spectacle of women masqueraders gyrating in full view of television cameras? Is ‘visibility’ enough of a liberatory strategy to convert the subversive act into an emancipatory politics?

These analyses all examine the double bind of increased sexual freedom and increased sexual subjectification that have arisen for Afro Trinidadian women in recent years.

While this is a necessary interpretation when looking at present day Carnival, it falls

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27 A type of song originating in Trinidad. Most traditional calypso lyrics comments on topics of current political or social interest, relate stories of people’s behaviour, engage in competitive insults or celebrate Carnival (Winer, 2008: 157)
short of looking at the role of Indian descent women in this process. That being said, the Indian woman's misgivings are warranted given that one of the dominant arcs of the scholarship on Carnival is that of resistance and/or transgression. Puri (2004: 108) characterises resistance as “a natural or essential property; it may be exerted by a medium; it can be a state of being or a property of a material” and transgression as “a performative act of boundary crossing….directed against the status quo, law or established norm.”

I reiterate Puri’s point that while she speaks of carnival as non-oppositional, she acknowledges the contradictions in this. Studying these cultural expressions through the concept of performativity allows for the foregrounding of these contradictions as the subjects of study: in everyday and ritualistic performances, contradictory elements are brought together, challenged, supported and reproduced in sometimes familiar and sometimes unfamiliar ways.

The history of the carnival may show how women turn against the hegemonic order but in its current guise, how does Carnival speak to the positionalities of women? Specifically, how does it speak to Indian descent women, who represent a different set of cultural expressions than African descent women in Trinidad? One of the very few works done on the presence of Indians in carnival was by Peter Manuel (2000: 160) who explains:

Over the last 15 years the Indian community has become more urbanised, more mainstream, more westernised, and that trend is beginning to have a noticeable effect on carnival. Urbanisation of the Indian community means, quite simply, that more Indians are taking part in carnival, or at least being exposed to it. The older and more conservative members of Indian society will still disapprove, but the younger Indians are more prepared to become involved.
While this may read as a generic summary of the attitudes of the Indian descent community to Carnival, it does not address the complexities of the impact of gender in playing mas as it is not only experienced differently by African descent and Indian descent people but by Indian women and men. The gendered effects are frequently read as clashing with the rules of propriety and dress inflected with ideas of respectability, as Samantha’s anecdote (24) illustrated:

“I played last year and I would say around 3,000–4,000 people played. Many under 20s play because of the history of mas bands and it becomes a rite of passage when a young woman passes her CXC 28 exams, she is allowed by her parents to play mas. So I was only allowed one time. My brother don’t have this problem. He plays all the time! It was fun but my parents didn’t stop me because of religious reasons. It was more ‘cause of what goes on with the drinking and wining and that. So….. as a parent I could see their reasons.”

As playing mas is emerging as a rite of passage for Indian descent women and men in Trinidad, Indian Trinidadian women are able to engage in a deeply national stage of public culture in a way that is only opening up to them now. The following section examines how playing mas takes on meaning for these young women today.

**Playing Mas**

Carnival is a paradoxical concept. On the one hand it is celebrated as a national event that stages subversive social spaces and ‘othered’ identities and on the other hand these ‘othered’ identities are not sustainable outside of Carnival yet its presence serves as a stabilising force in Trinidadian society (Isaac-Flavien, 2013). Butler’s (1990) concept

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28 The Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) provides examinations and certification at the secondary and post-secondary levels. It is equivalent to the UK Ordinary Level (O-Levels) and Advanced Level (A-levels).
of performativity suggests that individuals can demonstrate agency in their ability to alter the available discourses of gender, whilst these alterations are always embedded within power structures. Playing mas exemplifies this tension between agency and structure. Through repeated and sustained gendered acts, the illusion of a unified self is produced. Both power and resistance work to constitute the subject. Indeed, Butler’s theory suggests that there is no subject without subjectivation, which enables an understanding of how subjects are produced through powerful discourses and how they can change this constitution. Thus, Butler’s theorising allows us to examine the contradictions in the contemporary mas practices as a form of femininity by understanding them as based upon the repetitions and subversions of gender norms.

Butler’s work helps to inform the disparate strands of thought on the sexualisation of carnival through the gendered, raced and sexualised practices of playing mas. The roles of gender, race and class are represented, upheld and challenged in the carnival festivities. Most importantly, carnival brings to the fore the fact that there are many different assertions about the appropriate breakdown of the categories of race, ethnicity, gender and class. Carnival demonstrates that there are multiple discourses of agentic female sexuality and not just the ‘free up’ discourse. These intersect with class, ethnicity and race producing particular limitations as to who can take these up.

Ethno-centrists have regarded Carnival as a strictly Creole or African event. A more recent example of their viewpoint is when the carnival celebrations in 2012 coincided with the Hindu religious festival of Maha Shivratri, the president of the National Council of Indian Culture (NCIC) was reported to have said in a local newspaper that he implored people to keep away from active indulgence in carnival which can only degrade human
values (Subero, 2012), and this was in particular reference to women. From a gendered lens, the higher moral ground becomes underscored with notions of pollution and impurity, respectability and vulgarity. Shalini Puri (2004: 202) refers to this as a discourse about ‘carnivalesque degradation’. She argues that carnival discourse represents the festival as something which epitomizes Bakhtin’s (1968: 20) “double movement” which both “bring(s) down to earth,” and “turn(s) (its) subjects to flesh.” This carnivalesque degradation manifests in spheres of social interaction such as theatre and performance, all under the umbrella of carnival. In these performances’ focus on the grotesqueness of bodily flesh, Puri argues that, the grotesque represents the body of the “people” which resists attempts by officials to be controlled and centralised.

Yet the common issue of what body best represents ‘the people’ surfaces again in the discussion of bodies in carnival. The anxiety over the overlap of Indian women’s sexuality with black women’s sexuality interrupts the model of celebrated hybridity posited by the nation-state (Puri, 2004). The controversial reception to Drupatee’s chutney-soca song, ‘Lick down me nani’ as well as the disciplined tone by the National Council of India Culture condemning women who do play mas are typical examples of how female involvement in Carnival usually draws the loudest condemnation from conservative Indian groups. The possibilities enabled by this agentic female sexuality becomes reduced to the homogenised portrayal of Indian descent people in the local media (Ryan, 2011) which in itself represent different, most times competing, interests and “exists as the discursive fiefdom of the two major ethnic groups, African and East Indian...” (Brunton, 2012:1). Therefore Carnival representation in the media suggests a homogenised, normative African Trinidadian ideal of beauty. Although mas was debatably a transgressive practice at other points in history (and to some extent still is)
in its celebration of different female embodiments, through the mainstreaming of imagery of the Carnival queen, media representations reproduce normative beauty standards with a focus on slim, light(er) skinned, beautiful bodies with long, black or highlighted tresses dressed in the bikini and beads costume. This is certainly the imagery which dominated the Sun, Sea and Sand Carnival souvenir magazine which I purchased among other tourist brochures. The subversion is then tempered by who can participate in these practices and what groups tend to have the body-types that are presented as ideal, creating or at least supporting a variety of social hierarchies. In addition to the ‘body-types’ and their accompanying variations, how one dresses for carnival is an equally, if not more important, part of the performance.

The dress dilemma

In the post-war period and during the oil boom of the 1970s, the aesthetics of the carnival underwent a divisive change. The dominant discourse on this is centred on the old’ mas aesthetic and the pretty mas aesthetic. ‘Ole’ mas’ refers to a ragged costume aesthetic prevalent during the early hours of J’Ouvay in addition to the depictions of the traditional Carnival characters such as jab-jab, Fancy Indians, Midnight Robber and Dame Lorraine just to name a few (Riggio, 2004). The working-class people,

29 J’Ouvay is the official opening of Carnival at daybreak on Monday preceding Ash Wednesday. The literal translation from French is ‘day open.’ (Winer, 2008: 473)
30 A traditional carnival character playing a whip-carrying devil who cries and demands money with the words, “Pay the Devil, Jab Jab.”
31 A mas depicting Native Americans and goes beyond costume and dance styles to include lifestyle, religious beliefs and social structures for example of the Cherokee, Cree and Plain tribes. (Riggio, 2004)
32 Traditional masquerader who gives elaborate and terrifying speeches through ‘robber talk’ in which he boasts of his destructive power aimed at getting the audience to give up their cash.
33 A carnival figure of a man dressed as a woman with exaggerated buttocks and oversized breasts (Scher & Green, 2007)
particularly the women who participated in this, were referred to as jamettes and this masquerade was developed to satirically comment on social and political situations in addition to using folklore characters and jumbies (spirits). This mas involves covering the body in mud, dark oil or grease paint. The ‘pretty mas’ presented a remarkably different aesthetic. It was historically associated with European culture and the upper class and the costumes drew on Greek mythology or aspects of European history. The commercialisation of Carnival was more prominent in this type of mas where merchants sponsored the ‘best costume’ prize and encouraged mas bands to advertise their wares. Having band members pay into the costume production also encouraged a Eurocentric approach to the design and these began to gain more visibility. (Alleyne-Dettmers, 1995; Powrie, 1956).

In contemporary carnival, the pretty mas is also referred to as the ‘bikini, feather and beads’ mas. It is a major bone of contention in the debates about Carnival. This is encapsulated in Miguel Browne’s (2001) poem, “Longtime was pretty copper, satin, silk and tin/Nowadays is bikini and bathing trunks dey playin in.” The preference for pretty mas over traditional mas, which was acutely observed and lamented on by some of the young women, for example by Hema (21) who says “People have different points of view on this. But it is sexy! The old time costumes was for that time period. Some people do miss it. But the temperature gets so hot here. It’s not practical to wear these long gowns with corsets on a road march in this blazing sun! So I prefer the pretty mas for this.” There were more elaborations on this further below but Green (2007: 216) also remarks on the changing nature of carnival,

The masquerades, songs, music, and performative forms as well as the social organization of Carnival production during the colonial era mark a time
of unambiguous resistance a period when the assertion of a pure national identity was untainted by crass commercialism, vaguely “hybrid” cultures, or media manipulations. The Carnival of the present, on the other hand, is largely looked upon with a sense of loss and regret.

Far from being just cloth, feather and beads, mere objects, the sexual and cultural politics of the mas costume and how the body becomes the signifier for sexuality through it was a concern for the young women. The dress and the body come together to make the woman embody the meanings of carnival, the meanings of mas.

The dress and the body as mas

Conventions of dress transform flesh into something recognizable and meaningful to a culture and are also the means by which bodies are made ‘decent’, appropriate and acceptable within specific contexts. Dress does not simply merely serve to protect our modesty and does not simply reflect a natural body or, for that matter, a given identity; it embellishes the body, the materials commonly used adding a whole array of meanings to the body that would otherwise not be there........Bodies which do not conform, bodies which flout the conventions of their culture and go without the appropriate clothes are subversive of the most basic social codes and rise exclusion, scorn or ridicule. (Entwistle, 2001: 33)

Inspired by the above assertion that naked bodies require clothes to show adherence to social codes, I argue that mas clothing does exactly what Entwistle proposes. Bodies are sexualised in the appropriate way, or de-sexualised in the appropriate way, through both their taking on of traditional carnival clothes (in the case of African Trinidadian women) and through refraining from carnival clothing (in the case of the Indian Trinidadian woman). The Caribbean cultural sphere of Carnival has frequently served as the site of questions about resistance or accommodation. In addition to this women and women’s bodies, as a site of difference and similarity, have come to dominate
much of the scholarship on Carnival. However in terms of the pretty mas, the women’s relationship to this, apart from the obvious stance of economic and sexual independence, has not been explored in detail.

The anthropologist Daniel Miller (2010: 16) attempts to address this by engaging a depth ontology. “The assumption is that being — what we truly are — is located deep inside ourselves and is in direct opposition to the surface”. Miller unpacks the idea that clothing presumes a relationship between the interior and the exterior and uses Trinidad as an example to show that “people use clothes to find out who they are at that particular moment of time.” Miller claims that in Carnival, clothes and costumes are elaborately worked upon but discarded immediately after the event. In some ways, this signalling of temporality is echoed in some of the young women’s talk where they conceptualise the mas outfits and their attendant meanings on freedom, expression and so on within the Carnival event. Riana (22) says, “You know I think women wear these bikinis and thing because it’s a time where anything goes. Pretty much. It is a time of liberation and you’ll find some people judging it for xyz reason. But most people will tell you that what happens at carnival, and what you wear, the clothes. You wouldn’t wear this, like on a daily basis. That’s why I think we spend a fortune on carnival. Coz for that time you can wear whatever the hell you want and do whatever. Once this is done, you’re not gon’ show up to campus with these costumes are you?!” The mas costume then plays a considerable part in constituting a particular experience and selfhood. So while a lot of the women hinted at the homogenising effects of globalisation on the aesthetics of the mas costume, for example when Shivani (24) says, “You know Trinidad is unique. We are the best place for Carnival. I been to Miami, Caribana, Crop Over and other ones. They were fun. But the vibe here is different. But the costumes look the same at most
of these ones. Lisa is right. Rio is different. Their costumes are much more sexier. And they barely wear anything! It’s much much more skin. But apart from Rio, you’ll find globally carnival costumes look the same. I don’t know why that is. Maybe they all manufactured in the same place.” Lisa (25) below talks about Rio as a point of differentiation and we can find differences in the women’s relationship to this type of clothing. This in turn also illustrates the diversity in Indian women’s thoughts and experiences. The bikini is also not part of Indian beauty pageants so it does function as a form of taboo wear (Ragbir, 2012), despite the bikini, beads and feather mas being the most ubiquitous form of clothing during Carnival. This does not mean that the experience of wearing the mas is reduced to a single expressive form. Indeed, we see the different ways in which clothing, in the world of Carnival, plays a key role in determining one’s classed position but also one’s sense of nationhood as for example Lisa (25) who makes the distinction with the Rio de Janeiro Carnival, which takes place in Brazil, further on in the discussion.

Within the general contours of carnival, the mas costume has a particular identity most notably as a signifier of a classed position and as marker for a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. Even though globalisation is often cited as having a long-standing influence on the nature of Carnival, how is the latter locally understood and consumed? Given the racial diversity of the nation, how specifically do Indian descent people consume carnival? Rhoda Reddock (1998: 424–425) posited that Indian ethno-centrists, in their rejection of Carnival as a creole festival, held this view:

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 [an] example of the decadence and low moral standards of creole society and the African population in particular and have called for some 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 their culture.

If the ethnocentric Indian Trinidadian view is that the ‘wine and jam’ carnival is culturally destructive and morally suspect for women, then the young women whom I spoke to had a variety of views on mas playing. None of them spoke about their Indianness in relation to mas playing but there were traces of race talk in their categorisations of certain mas bands. For example, Harts was termed “the white man’s band” and Jouvay was categorised as the “African party.”

Nafeesa (18) criticises the past and present political state as marking out racial groups competing for cultural citizenship as highly problematic:

“In Indians and Africans went through the same thing. We are all one people. But we always fighting over an African party or an Indian party but what we don’t realise is that it’s the White man who set up the bacchanal that we see today. Politicians, man. The corruption you see with politicians don’t help us.”

Certain carnival activities were also categorised in a similar fashion with some fêtes being attended more by Indians than the Carnival Monday, for example. Perhaps the key underlying issue here is the reinforcement of capitalist patriarchal structures through the consumption of Carnival. In other words, to truly participate in the nation, one has to perform the bikini, beads and feathers mas which signal a middle-class position of being modern and agentic. However, it could be said that the sexualisation of mas brings a particular type of objectification and in terms of the music scene, Indians become ‘othered’ through their own musical expressions (Niranjana, 2006). For instance, chutney soca allows an image of Indian identity to be consumed in opposition to an African identity, but it is also an important element of Indian identity as Trinidadians.
The young women who participated in my research understood the divergent views on the mas costume. Indeed, much of the scholarship on Carnival often foregrounds the costumes as powerful social communicators and the performance of the character who knows the situation that they are performing. While the focus on character was highly present in the traditional mas, this is not to say that the bikini, beads and feather mas should not be theorised for meaning though this appears to be a long-standing pet peeve of Trinidadian citizens (Copeland, 2014). As Entwistle (2001: 35) says, “dress, as both a social and personal experience, is a discursive and practical phenomenon.” Given its contentious position among the young women in this research, it is worth exploring in further detail how the mas costume is experienced by those who have played mas. This is so as, according to Entwistle (2000) dress is a situated bodily practice which is embedded within the social world and crucial to the micro social order. So, I attempt to do this in one of my lines of questioning where I asked the young women who had played mas about their perceptions of carnival and they went on to describe their feelings of liberation, playfulness and joy, albeit temporarily, but some women had other opinions on the capitalist nature that the costume has taken on.

This brought up another question of how mas is embedded with the Trinidadian social world for these young women. Of course there is no one single answer. There was certainly division on the meanings of mas with some contending that it has sold out to consumerism and some positing that it is empowering. For example Maariyah (24), “Look it might not be feminist in the way that we learn this at school. But women work now, we earn our own money. So why can’t we for a few days party up.” Najma (22) also adds, “It’s just fun. I don’t know why some people take this too serious. I mean girls take it seriously on a different level! With the workouts and culture around it. But I play
“We started using bikinis and beads because it was easier to work with. There was also a demand from women for skimpier costumes. As fashion changes, so does the tastes. But it was the women who would make the costumes skimpier. The first time that Harts had produced the bikini, beads and feather costumes, this sold out. There were two reasons for this. Comfort. It was more comfortable to wear the bikini costumes instead of the heavy, full flowing gowns which in the scorching heat is very uncomfortable to wear. And second – the global movement to look good, be fit.”

One of the main reasons cited for reluctance in playing mas is the costumes but interestingly, this is constructed in comparative terms. So while Annelise, from a commercial point of view, is talking about women’s agency and the globalisation of fashion and beauty for some of the young women, the outfits were wedded to notions of immorality and decadence.

Riana (22): “I never played mas but I went to a couple of fêtes. I wouldn’t play because I don’t like the costumes.”

Cherisse (21): “Last year’s Carnival, the Indian presence was very very evident. 2010. I would say only in recent years it has become visible.

Me: Would you play?

Cherisse (21): Nah. It’s not my thing. It’s just not my thing. The outfits….. (sigh)
Bodies remain the site on which differences are constructed and sexuality becomes signified through dress in this context. Clothing is used as the vocabulary through which notions of morality and sexuality are conveyed. The mas costume is invested with varying elements that pertain to these notions of morality and sexuality. This costume which historically carried a different meaning and could be read as a form of cultural capital for some women is also disavowed as a signal of middle-class respectability. If mas enunciates identity this carries a premium. Mas costumes speak social and cultural capital as new identities are performatively brought into being through the costume itself. The fact that one has to pay a considerable sum of money highlights the issue of access to capital as determinants of who can wear what, and who can be what. This point is made more clearly below by both Sattee and Vaasha who also point out that the costumes’ vulgarity is problematic for respectable women:

Sattee (21) “Yea I’d never play mas. You know it have people’s band where you can just wear whatever. I would probably play in people’s band because I am not rich and cannot afford 4000TTD. It real expensive now and the thing about it is, it’s basically underwear you’re playing in. I would not go all out into this thing. It’s too vulgar. Because you could just go in normal clothes and still enjoy yourself just as much with clothes on.

Vaasha (21) “I know a lot of Indian people who would say they would never play because of the costumes but for African people it’s not a problem. Indian people like to party too but it’s just that their parties are a bit different”

The point about the costumes’ vulgarity can be likened to the attitudes towards the swimsuit segment issue in Indian Trinidadian beauty pageants where as Ragbir (2012: 14) says, the pageant producers and participants are invested in “protecting this

34 D’People’s Band entitled "Mas for All" came about as a concept with the purpose of accommodating the ordinary man who cannot afford the exorbitant cost of carnival mas bands. This also gives the small bandleader an opportunity to join the people’s band by bringing their mas section of this unique experience. The young and the young at heart also have a chance to showcase their creativity and talent by designing and making their own costumes to parade on the streets of Trinidad and Tobago. (National Carnival Commission of Trinidad & Tobago, 2011).
staged space from swimsuits, westernized Bollywood and Afro-Creole culture the way that they do; it is the only site they can appear pure as Sita\textsuperscript{35}, as devoted as Draupadi, as untouchable as Rapunzel and as much the star of their own fairytale as Cinderella, an ordinary girl who became queen — sexually desired, idealized, yet unique innocent, chaste, pious, untouchable — and in the end rewarded for their efforts.” In Ragbir’s study, the critique of India for its use of swimwear as a way of inserting global ideas of beauty into the national arena and the concerns about putting women’s bodies on display in a sexualised way echoes many of the ideas expressed in the young women’s talk vis-à-vis both African and Indian women’s bodies in carnival.

Vaasha’s extract was the only one which made a distinction between perceived Indian and African norms and it could be theorised that this pertained to a colonial view of African ‘untamed sexuality’ (the discourse of hypersexuality that marked African descent women) and Indian ‘restrained womanhood’ (Pinto, 2009). This is one view of the sexual politics of carnival. In investigating the sexual politics of carnival, it is important to examine the extent to which these politics overlap with the sexual politics of the non-carnival world. The ways in which sexuality as articulated in Carnival differs or adheres to the more everyday tropes of racialised womanhood will be explored in the following section.

\textsuperscript{35} Sita, in Hindu tradition is the wife of Lord Rama, and is esteemed as the exemplar for all Hindu women in discharging her wifely and womanly duties, for example, virtue, respectability and devotion (Ragbir, 2012: 14)
The sexual politics of carnival

The deployment of the body in a sexually suggestive manner as part of Carnival culture has been theorised as “a safety valve for these women to vent frustrations over social inequities” (Miller, 1991). I contend that two processes are occurring here. Mas takes on a dimension through which we see the reinforcement of patriarchal structures, but I also take the view that mas playing should also be explored as a series of moments of agency that respond to varying social tensions and inequities. Unmistakeably, the homogenisation of the mas bands in terms of their costumes does not afford the women a varied choice or afford varied alternatives in terms of the portrayal of characters and new identities they want to convey. According to Clare Lewis and Steve Pile (1996), for the women, the body became the costume. The body vocabulary offered through wining and gyrating may symbolise economic and sexual freedom for women. On the other hand, the ways in which women masqueraders are conceived by some of the women in this research as not behaving properly indicates a racial hierarchy. In this sense, the woman who refuses to participate and pronounces a moral judgement about those who do, is also enacting her classed racial position. In this way, it is important to analyse the refusal to perform mas as much as it is important to examine those who do play it, in order to look at how carnival entails the performance of one’s race. Both inside and outside of Carnival, race is performed through these actions and discourses alongside tropes of patriarchal respectability and citizenship.

Following on from Butler’s (1990) performativity, the bodies of the masqueraders are enacted through these performances. They are ‘worked out’ from the physical body into a cultural form and ‘worked back in’ to the physical body. The physical practices
of mas are reiterative and citational practices which evoke and reproduce the images of femininity. The body becomes the materialisation of cultural norms but also materialises the masqueraders’ interpretation of them. This was commented on by Kelly (20) who talked about “winin’ up on three men” as an undesirable way of performing mas, compared to Lisa (25) who said that “you can tell from the way someone winin’ where they from.” The borders of sexuality are drawn along classed lines in Lisa’s statement in which she revealed the differences between wining for personal pleasure indicating a middle-class respectability, and wining for sexual arousal which went against these norms.

Kelly’s (20) account explicitly addresses this self-examination of respectability in carnival:

“I think carnival’s just an excuse to get all naked and do all this revelry which is just not my domain. Because I guess it’s this carnal instinct to run amok and just be primitive for 2 or 3 days. Everybody have this primitive instinct but I guess it just how it come out. Now there’s a lot more Indian people going to the celebrations and partaking. They getting a lot more bold over time. Because normally very Indian people in the sense of ‘traditional’, they believe that Indians as a race, not Hindus specifically, are supposed to have a code of conduct. But nowadays people are rejecting this code of conduct. But even for normal stuff sometimes the way they behave….I feel ashamed when I see an Indian girl drunk, falling down, wining 3–4 men at one time. And it not like they’re friends, it’s a random man coming up behind and touching her up. I don’t really support that.”

Kelly’s encounter with Carnival reveals how bodies are the markers of societal behaviour, moral codes and racial conduct, epitomising a Foucauldian (1977) disciplined body in which “docile bodies” are mobilised in intimate ways. The social control of sexuality, an indicator of power, is marked in Kelly’s passage where the maintaining and establishing of docility takes place via a mode of observation of the bodies in question. In her positioning of respectable Indianness in contrast to Trinidadian untamed sexuality, we see that sexuality is policed and maintained via codes of conduct. Kavita (19) commented on a similar theme with regards to the physical body:
“You know dem people who post their pics up on Facebook? When you like your pornographic looking business and these amazingly huge-bottom girls and whatnot, we can see it! It shows your tustiness level man. Ease up.”

What is perhaps intended and coded as images of sexual desirability are not necessarily registered in a positive manner which leaves one to question to what extent is there room for multiple or alternative forms of sexuality. Desire and disgust maps out the contours of sexuality in carnival where notions of morality and immorality are invoked. If on one hand, Najma (22) and Maariyah (24) talks about the possibilities of empowerment in carnival then this is accompanied by protests about what is perceived as aggressive sexuality performed not only in the public world but also in the social media world. Foucault’s concept of docile bodies is regarded by feminist writers as limiting agency by reducing social agents to docile bodies (McLaren, 2012) and indeed this line of critique can be extended to women in mas as these statements signalled how the body reflects society and vice versa in the quest for sexualised visibility. However the body, in this sense, also becomes open to resignification through the way the women perform mas. It could also be said that the masqueraders are not merely passive actors in terms of hetero-patriarchal power or docile bodies, but actively performing multiple feminities.

Though Puri (2004) cautioned against privileging Carnival as a site from which to explore practices of resistance and domination, I concur with her notion of opening this space up to new cultural politics. The theory of a hybridity of cultural difference gives rise to a new concept of the performativity and negotiation of race and gender identity in carnival. This occurs both through wearing certain dress that falls within the remit of respectability (such as based on my experience at UWI wearing jeans and tops and not revealing

36 Colloquial way of describing someone who is overtly vulgar and sexual in a negative sense.
clothes), playing mainstream music that both upholds and questions the social structures in place. It also takes place in the talk that surrounds these cultural representations. This demonstrates that the female body, Indian and African, can also be conceived of as a negotiation (Mohammed, 2002; Pinto, 2009; Puri, 2004). Furthermore, as the young women have revealed, through playing with the commonly held understandings about desire and disgust, the masquerader’s body is a site for the articulation of power on both the levels of the individual and the social. Multiple meanings of culture and value are mapped onto the mas body. Ethno centrists articulate a symbolic threat to Indian values, nationalists articulate a reflection of the social structure, and the young women articulate a paradoxical, fused space. The body therefore becomes an integral site of the cultural understandings of playing mas.

The body and playing mas

As I mentioned in the introduction, Carnival is a space where capitalist, patriarchal and nationalist powers play a role in mediating the performance of mas. Carnival is a space where stereotypes of a sexualised and racialised body are contested and where processes of resistance and domination, the seen and unseen are merged. Following Bhabha’s (1993) discussion of sites of negotiation of meaning and representation, I will now look at how the young women in my sample negotiate with dominant powers in this space through the act of playing mas and how this performatively produces new Indian Trinidadian feminine identities.
For masqueraders there is an expectation to look fit, glamorous and beautiful as an industry professional informed me as well as some of the young women. The ‘body beautiful’ look has to be attained through exercise, cosmetics and diets. The pursuit of the fit body is associated with experiences of freedom, fulfilment, and feeling good. Through a Foucauldian lens, these masqueraders would be considered disciplined women who are not granted choice but follow regulations. Taking Butler’s performativity concept as a useful tool here, I move past this Foucauldian assertion and argue that they are not passive recipients of a disciplined body but actively agentic through their performance and bringing into being of particular identities. While in general terms the female masquerader’s body at Carnival is sexualised and commodified, at the same time there are other forms of femininities being deployed, for example in fêtes, at Jouyay, at music events and so on. To a large extent the homogenised imagery of Carnival in tourist brochures, local press and other media outlets does not draw on this. It places a larger focus on the woman who plays mas, establishing her as the representative of Trinidadian racial and cultural hybridity. She also is a highly sexualised figure and is part of a long history of metaphors from the jamette as we saw earlier which also corresponds to Westernised stereotypes of Caribbean sensuality.

Carnival has a complicated relationship to race, gender and respectability, but these variables have almost always been approached through their significance for African Trinidadians (Barnes, 2006). The sexuality of Black women’s bodies is often how the nation is read and imagined diasporically. The representations of Indian descent Caribbean women do not figure to any great extent in the exported versions of Carnival and within the nation, there are limiting discourses of Indian sexuality. In this construction of otherness, it could be argued that Carnival is one of the ways
through which sexuality produced tensions between African and Indian descent people. Brinda Mehta (2004: 70) extends this point when she talks about the difficulties in forming solidarity alliances though Indians and Africans shared a common history of economic and political disenfranchisement. Colonial engineering played a huge role in this and if the colonial policing of Black women’s bodies marked hypervisibility, then for Indian women’s bodies it emphasised invisibility (Ragbir, 2012; Wahab, 2008). Bourgeois values were embodied in this notion of respectability. Such values are defined by Shalini Puri (2003: 23) as “oriented towards bourgeois valuations of the centripetal, toward standard English, home, family, hierarchy, decorum, stability, honesty, economy, delayed returns, and transcendence.” The Indian woman was imagined as a character that fit into this set of bourgeois values through its invisibility, although it was never incorporated into the bourgeois class itself.

At a superficial level, carnival practices can be seen as a welcome response to the silenced, repressed Indian sexuality but far from being a glamorous and globalised mechanism, it operates and sustains patriarchal power structures. The symbiotic relationship carnival has to popular Trinidadian culture cannot be overstated and therefore the mainstreaming of sexuality and female physical appearance as embodied in mas was of concern to most of the young women I spoke to. For example, Amy (21) says:

“People don’t think about this deeply. It’s a fashion thing. Some people don’t accept that these old-time costumes is not what people want. The world has changed, events have changes, even calypso and music has changed.”

Amy is expressing a desire for what she considers to be the status quo to allow for changes in mas and carnival. By allowing for these changes, these modernisations, Amy is essentially requesting that notions of respectability are re-examined and adapted.
to incorporate the sorts of practices in which many girls partake. Similarly, Vaasha (23) also discussed how women who participate take more control of their representation than they did in earlier generations:

“Trinidadian masqueraders have become more demanding and expect more. Women’s designs have evolved and women will speak when it comes to what they want to wear!”

The two quotes above demonstrate that these young women stand at a highly charged crossroads between what they and others perceive to be ‘traditional values’ which are characterised by respectability, and ‘modern’ expectations which involve more active selections about self-representation, and can incorporate sexuality more explicitly. These two young women are exploring a way in which the expectations for the statically constructed category of ‘Indian Trinidadian woman’ can be changed.

However, not all of the girls who wish to participate in carnival are embracing these changes:

Lisa (25) “Ok yes, the fashion is changing but why is Trinidad trying to be Rio? That is a different thing completely. The culture of Brazil is to show off their body like so. Women have no hang up about that, but Trinis….. were never like that, so why are we trying to copy them? Bikini mas is not too sexy in my opinion. Bikinis are for the beach and that’s it. Rio is a totally different carnival. We have a different history here in Trinidad and you only have to compare the musics to know this. You know we have soca they have samba. The history is different and yes we need to move forward but I don’t think we should forget the origins of our carnival.

Lisa objected to the sexualisation of the Trinidadian carnival. She objected to it in a way that mirrors a discourse of purity and authenticity as well as a fear of hybridity. The sexualisation of carnival is described here as entering into the country through a foreign channel, while Trinidadian sexuality is not part of its own carnival celebrations.
Lisa is navigating the space where dougla sexuality is established, negotiating for a different outcome than the girls whose requests are described above. Despite their differences, all three of these young women are approaching carnival as a representation of the social body, and attempting to negotiate with the pre-existing expectations that surround it.

In my view, if carnival is seen as representing the social body, then this is also a gendered body with differences in the normative expectations of female and male bodies as reflected in the mas costume. The social construction of the carnival body is based on the nation’s ideology of hybridity and modernity and the social pressure to discipline the body is reflected in the gym regimes that the young women talk about in their goal to get the ‘body beautiful’. This along with the pressure to participate, signal a stake in inclusion in the nation. The regulation of the Indian female body then takes on many guises as modernity is measured by which mas band one plays in and simultaneously respectable Indianness is measured by silenced sexuality. Through the governmentality of these sociocultural discourses, it could be said that some of the young women are “bearers of their own surveillance” in the production of “docile bodies” (Foucault, 1979). This is shown for example below:

Shivani (24) “Indian girls are obsessed with legs. I am! If you have thin legs seem more attractive, thick legs are preferred by women. What they call good legs or thick legs. The kind of particular shape you find with South Indian women where you have thin, delicate legs, very bird-like. It’s kind of like a racial self-hatred. I go to the gym to get the fit look…you know like the Brazilian women. So I feel more confident when I wear my costume. I don’t like to look fat.”

Hema (21) “Oh gosh, she’s right. I mean…I know women, we have all types of sizes and bodies. But you HAVE to look good for mas.”
The concept of the body panopticon operates in this sense as surveilling in order to fulfil the cultural imperative set forth by the business actors of carnival. However, this is not to say this panopticon does not preclude the potential to resist this form of disciplining. These young women are very much aware of the ways in which they are being interpolated with the racial politics of their bodies.

Carnival as a national brand becomes an image that develops as much through the local contradictions of society as it is a part of an implicit debate about how people, particularly women, should be. This is an image with which some Indian people will identify while some will not or some only on certain occasions such as fêtes, the music monarchs and so on. It could also be said that the identity of being Trinidadian, which the young women placed a resolute emphasis on in the initial questionnaire, includes the presence of the African descent person as ‘othered’ in some ways which on one level they define themselves against and dis-identify with, but at another level they incorporate as part of their Trinidadian-ness. The dimension of ethnicity ascribed to Carnival is that some of the young women, in their attempt to resolve this contradiction of alterity, consume some forms of the carnival whether it is the act of playing mas, listening to the music, or fêting, which provides an identification with the ‘othered’. In a similar way, it could be said that chutney-soca operates in the same way with African descent people identifying with the ‘othered’ Indian through the transformed, hybrid music genre which is an acceptable form of Indianness but the inherent contradictions in this is something I will turn to in the next chapter.

The comments of the above young women indicate a different perspective as to their reluctance towards mas playing. While for some reason mas indicated freedom albeit
temporarily, modernity through the expression of sexuality, for the young women above it almost represented a resistance to patriarchal control. All of these women many of whom have divergent viewpoints on what carnival should be like, have expressed that they want to see changes take place through interventions in the expectations that surround mas and carnival. Therefore carnival is perceived as the site where these important gendered negotiations such ought to take place.

At this juncture, I would reiterate the framework of doula poetics as a way of conceptualising the complex and subtle forms of femininity being deployed. The young women's perspectives explain how carnival femininities are not splintered solely by racial factors as much of the earlier scholarship on Carnival points to, but also individual, class and ethnic factors, morality, respectability, body awareness. The discourse on mas playing which I have explored in this chapter is just one example of the dynamic nature of gender and race. It would be a mistake to classify Indian female masqueraders as conformist to the 'Creole' nation in the same way that it is reductionist to talk about non-participants as traditional or "excluded from the nation." (Munasinghe, 2001). The young women I spoke to, much like other women, react to and resist patriarchal discourses in varying ways so therefore the question of how mas has the potential to disrupt 'tradition' should be expanded in classed and sexual-racial terms.

The varying points of view indicate that it is not productive to fall into a false dichotomy of Indians and Africans as within these ethnic groups there are further divergent views on playing mas. Within this sample, all the young women demonstrated extensive awareness of the mas costumes despite some of their apparent boycotting of the event. They also expressed their discomfort with the revealing mas costume and therefore
exclude themselves from the site but we also see, as Entwistle (2001) says, an articulation of scorn and ridicule. For instance, Raadiyah’s view of carnival points to both sexuality and alcohol consumption as a reason for the aesthetic evolution of mas.

Raadiyah (24) “I think when sex started to sell, that’s when rum started to sell. We are a nation of rum drinkers whether it’s social or everyday drinking. We’re a nation that likes it and you know with our hypersexual moods, especially during carnival both of them go hand in hand. So this is why the costumes have changed and become sexier.”

Behaviour that is usually associated with Carnival such as drinking, wining, dancing provocatively is looked down on by Raadiyah who views this as clashing with norms of respectability and civility. The act of wining which she conceives of in negative terms is theorised by Natasha Barnes (2006: 85) as a public display which could be transgressive in a “logical extension of their new identities as modern, assertive feminist subjects” but also works to reinforce the capitalist, male gaze. Indeed, Barnes (2006) talks about wining as part of the desire for visibility but the association of wining with wild, untamed conduct is the discourse that is articulated in more detail by the young women.

Another example arose when Esther (25) spoke to me about the clash of ‘jump up’ with norms of respectability:

“I have a 4 year old daughter. She was practising at school one day and come, she say ‘Mummy, I jump up.’ I was shocked. I know she don’t know the real meaning of it ‘cause she innocent right. She literally means jumpin. But you and I know that if she were older, it’s no longer innocent. I’m not judging, but I think when it comes to your family you should know what is right and wrong and I don’t want my daughter growing up, getting wrong ideas about that without knowing the consequences. I cannot have my daughter wining in her childhood. I don’t have a problem at all if she wants to play in the junior mas because other schools go and it’s safer. Also, I find it more fun than the main mas.”

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37 Jump up means to participate in carnival masquerade, especially pretty mas. The term also describes those who crash a street band or play las lap in street clothes. A man might jump in a band in street clothes to protect his girlfriend or keep her company. (Martin, 2004: 288)
Respectability is a significant issue in that it relates to Trinidadian, middle-class sensibility irrespective of race or colour. Also, we can see in this statement that the sexualisation of carnival practices in which certain forms of perceived sexual expressions are the norm such as jumpin up, wining and dancing in the bikini mas, is a concern as is safety despite the discourse of freedom and change.

There is a large variety of sentiments regarding the increased sexualisation of carnival in recent generations. Some girls expressed happiness in the embracing of the Rio-inspired bikini and bead style of mas. Those women, such as Maariyah, Najma and Lisa discussed this newfound ability to be publicly sexual as a form of empowerment. In their opinions, this mode of representation had not been embraced enough in Indian Trinidad. On the other hand, other women discussed this increased sexualisation as a serious break from respectability, and the emergence of a class of women and girls who would be ultimately at a loss because of their lack of respectability. This demonstrated a preoccupation with ensuring that Indian girls did not act ‘Afro,’ maintaining the historical understanding that Indian girls were respectable in their invisibility while African girls were more dominant visually through their more vulgar behaviour. No side is right or wrong, and this debate here and elsewhere will continue to persist. However, women on both sides of the debate shared an emphasis on carnival and performance as a site where the boundaries of respectability were established. While some wanted to open the present boundaries, others wanted to police them more. Even those seeking more relaxed approaches to sexuality internalised a deep discipline about how to make their bodies more sexually attractive. Carnival emerges here as a site imbued with significance as both a set of limits and possibilities for the negotiation of the sexual identity of the gendered and raced Trinidadian Indian.
In sum, the young women point to the objectification that takes place in Carnival as an effect of globalisation but in the same way have argued that this remains a localised image within a larger frame of gendered and ethnicised identity. Carnival and playing mas then is and is not a universal image, at least in comparison to other worldwide carnivals, and its modernity embodied in the pretty mas, is determined by the local setting. Moreover, race is only one dimension where Carnival as myth deals with contradictions in value. Carnival, mas and even music carry temporal connotations. If Carnival retains a notion of modern subjectivity fostered by its media representation and advertising, we have seen also that it has been a presence in Trinidad for many generations. It has become a site where nostalgia and tradition is wedded to modernity, liberalism and consumerism. The body acts a signifier in this process and playing mas, as a form of agentic female sexuality, also mirrors the contradictions in society and identity.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, the dougla poetics has revealed how the young women performatively produce the raced body in the hybridised space of carnival through the practice of playing mas. Carnival in its modern day incarnation has come to stand for the fact that money is often translated into national belonging so that playing mas, within a particular band, is a signifier of a middle-class position and a modern, cosmopolitan subjectivity. So at once sexuality is discursively produced as agentic and as combatting silenced sexuality but it is also contested as a limited act in which one has to exhibit a particular ‘body beautiful’ which is viewed as unrespectable, immoral and decadent. At once
the possibilities of empowerment are revealed alongside protests about aggressive sexuality and hypersexuality.

The douga poetics shows that to take one position over the other is an oversimplification as we see a complex and more nuanced view of contemporary Indian femininities within the sexualisation of Trinidadian Carnival culture. I argue that the multiple ways of understanding these within the context of playing mas at Carnival has the potential to be taken up subversively and of blurring gendered norms. However, historical and ethnocentric traces of sex in Trinidadian culture necessitate that any subversive act is likely to reinforce the patriarchal gaze causing issues in the readability of mas performance.

In considering how these young women negotiate sexualised Carnival culture, I have attempted to move away from the binary positionings of modern masquerader vis-à-vis the traditional non-participant which in my view is not an adequate approach to gendered and raced identities. This form of analysis has frequently dominated ethnocentric rhetoric and to some extent media representation of Indian women who draw on this monolithic stereotype. There are many ways of ‘doing gender’ and doing Indianness and playing mas is only one of them. In some of the young women's talk, there were a variety of attitudes towards playing mas and Carnival with some espousing conservative views and others talking about sexuality as form of liberation albeit temporarily. In both embracing the changes that are bringing about more permissive attitude to sexuality in carnival, and also in adhering to more traditional representations of female sexuality, patriarchal norms are being challenged, but ultimately reproduced albeit in different ways.
This emphasis on the body — made by both those who wanted to uphold traditional social restrictions on bodily expressions and those that wished to adapt them — is was explored through the lens of performativity and dougla poetics. The body’s expressions may be read through the traditional gaze that has emerged out of colonial history, but each young woman’s struggle to either uphold that traditional mode or to change it is a negotiation of how best to navigate between the expectations that she has and those that are made on her, as a raced and gendered being. Performativity and dougla poetics are well suited for examining these social representations that are so important to the constitution of identity, but which eschew easy categorisation. This will be explored further in the following chapter which looks at the issue of the equally complicated, symbolically fraught and debatably hybridised form of uniquely Indian Trinidadian music: the chutney-soca.
Chapter 7

CHUTNEY CURRENTS

Introduction

Throughout the previous chapters, I have looked at dougla poetics as an extension of raced gendered performativity in trans-religious practice, sexuality and desire, beauty culture and carnival activity. Whether contested or celebrated, these processes have come to frame Trinidadian culture and the final area of my analysis where I will explore this is in that of music consumption. In seeking to explicate the social role of music across the Caribbean, scholars have frequently invoked the concepts of identity, race and ethnicity (Haynes, 2013; Hebdige, 2005). In the extant literature on the connections between music and identity, such as Peter Manuel’s engaging text Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae (2006), Carolyn Cooper’s Soundclash (2004), a study of Jamaican dancehall culture and Global Reggae (2012) among many others, the choices and behaviours surrounding music were interpreted as extremely important for the creation of identity and as identification. Indeed, music “is one of the expressive means through which a cultural group constructs its identity” (Arom & Alvarez-Pererye, 2007: 8). In this island with tense and simultaneously open boundaries between different self-identifying groups, music has come to be particularly important as a symbol of belonging. For the sample of Indian population which I am researching, chutney-soca takes on a significant role in the ways in which Indian identity is negotiated through the complex politics of race, gender and other categories. Through approaching the way in which these young women listen to and talk about this music, another aspect of the performativity of their identities will be uncovered.
The celebration of douglarisation (as focused on the contestation between Indian and African spaces) and creolisation (as focused on the African and European mixes) in the sonic space against the stigmatisation of these in the social space reveals larger processes of exclusion and inclusion. This is where the possibilities of dougla poetics work to explore the complexity of Indianness, and refute totalising narratives. This chapter will illustrate this process and these discourses in which Indian identity, specifically in terms of its race and gender implications, are performatively produced in chutney-soca. Before I turn to how douglarisation and creolisation are articulated in chutney-soca, I will make a brief reference to other musical traditions in Trinidad, all of which at some point have influenced or borrowed from each other.

In Trinidad, hybridity and creolisation are often invoked to explore the juxtaposition and mixing of musical elements and cultures. However, there is a paucity of literature on Indian Caribbean music. Exceptions to this are Peter Manuel’s (2000; 2006; 2008) writings on chutney and tan-singing, Tina Ramnarine’s (2013; 2001) writings on chutney in Trinidad and the diaspora and Tejaswini Niranjana’s (2006) Mobilizing India which features two key chapters on chutney-soca. The entangling of identity and music mean that race and gender politics continue to play out in music, with chutney-soca becoming the main site for the production and contestation of Indianness in this new phase of cultural politics.

The merging of chutney with soca sounds has not only given Indian Trinidadian young people a distinctive voice but it is also regarded as at times both in harmony with the lived realities of the callaloo nation and in discordance with this. This chapter examines various aspects of hybridity in music or as Anjali Roy describes it, sonic douglarisation (Roy,
2013), through briefly tracing the history of the ‘ol’ time chutney’ of the plantation era and its move towards a douglarised sound in the 1990s. It attempts to cover the gendered and racialised dimension to these changes to chutney and explores the ways in which the young women discursively produce Indianness, particularly ideas of morality and conduct, through reference to chutney-soca. If in the previous chapter, I posit that carnival in its way mirrors complex relations between society and state, then it could also be said that music also plays a significant role in this. Indeed, music in Trinidad has frequently featured in debates about race relations, configured in Trinidad as between Indian and African groups, and we see this quite clearly in the ‘chutney polemic’ discussed below. Claiming this new form of music as ‘Trinidadian’ has not been a smooth and accepted intervention.

**Chutney: Old and New**

It is a difficult task to define chutney as it “means different things to different people.” (Ramnarine, 2001: 15) but the experimentation with Indian musical forms began in the 1970s. Historically, the Indian communities celebrated various festivals with musical accompaniments. The Hindu springtime festival of Phagwa, for example, is accompanied by chowtal singing an competitions and pichkaaree (Ramnarine, 2001). In the Muslim neighbourhood of Port-of-Spain, the taziya floats constructed for Hosay are paraded

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38 Chowtal is a type of classical Indian song often improvised to a set form typically sung during Phagwa. A mixture of the religious and secular, the chowtal singing competitions display the skills of men and women singers who perform both devotional songs and local compositions (Winer, 2009: 210)

39 An Indian Trinidadian musical form named after the long tubes used to spray coloured water during the Spring festival of Phagwah. The songs also act as a form of social commentary.

40 A Shi’ite Muslim festival more commonly known as Moharram (Korom, 2011)
to the sounds of tassa\textsuperscript{41} which is also performed at Hindu weddings. Indian music played a crucial role in their construction of a Trinidad Indian identity and one genre that came to be emblematic of this was chutney.

The old form of chutney was created by the Indian communities who had migrated to Trinidad as indentured labourers. An important product of Indian folk culture, it is a music genre that “comprised a variety of genres, such as wedding songs, birth songs (sohar), devotional Hindu bhajans\textsuperscript{42}, narrative birha, seasonal songs (chowtal, hori, chaiti), Urdu/Muslim qawwali and qasida, and idiosyncratic versions of Hindustani classical and light-classical genres which form the core of neo-traditional ‘tan-singing’ or ‘local classical music’” (Manuel, 1998: 22). The word chutney, named after a spicy condiment, came about because it is described as a “hot music in its use of double entendres and more importantly, in the music’s fast and repetitive rhythms, which are played on tassa and dholak\textsuperscript{43} drums and the dhantal”\textsuperscript{44} (Ramnarine, 2000:527). One of its main objectives is to incite both women and men to dance and it is generally regarded as an Indian Caribbean musical genre which represents the Indian populations of Trinidad, Guyana and Surinam. It was performed by Indian women in sex-segregated functions as part of a Hindu wedding ceremony and was traditionally a female only space. While it came to include men as performers at a later stage when chutney was gradually developing, it was for the most part considered an exclusively Indian space and an alternative to Carnival. Moreover, while calypso was used for social commentaries in Carnival, chutney was mobilised as a ‘matikor space’ (Kanhai, 1999: xiv) where women commented

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{41} A small kettle-shaped drum from India with a clay body covered with a tight skin and struck by fine-tipped mallets; accompanied by a large double-ended bass drum (Dudley, 2004: 108)
\item \textsuperscript{42} A type of Hindu hymn or holy song usually with words in Hindi (Winer, 2009: 75)
\item \textsuperscript{43} A large double ended Indian folk drum held in the lap of a sitting musician (Dudley,2004: 106)
\item \textsuperscript{44} A straight metal rod played with a metal beater to give percussive accompaniment to chutney music (ibid)
\end{itemize}
amongst themselves on sexuality and gender norms. “Chutney is a very positive
development for it points to the growing emancipation of Indian women in this country,
and is linked partly to their advancement through education and the inroads they have
made in the workplace.” (Kanhai, 1999: 196). Chutney was also interpreted as agentic
as it marked the Indian woman’s assuming control of her life and rejecting a secondary
position in a patriarchal order (Guilbault, 2007: 195).

While the roots of chutney are located in the private folk songs performed mainly
by women, chutney began to take on panoply of influences from the mid-70s
onwards. It was no longer solely based on rituals and special occasions and also began
publicly commenting on topical, social and political issues. The first entry of chutney
into the mainstream was in the 1970s through the performances of Sundar Popo
(Guilbault, 2007). He was one of the first chutney singers to pioneer this public display
and an example of this public comment on Indianness was his account of Indian
migration to the island.

The Fatel Rozack came from India
with me nanee and me nana…
in the boat they came,
singing and playing their tabla.
Remember 1845, the 13th of May,
225 immigrants who landed on that day.

(Ramnarine, 2000: 528)

These commonly held understandings of the history of East Indians made up a set
of references that all of the Indian descent people who listened to this music could relate to
and enjoy. However, over the years that transformed into references to more modern shared
histories, referencing life in Trinidad itself rather than the commonly held Indian roots.
One other major change in chutney’s transformation was that of language. The prevalent usage of Bhojpuri and Hindi in old chutney songs gradually declined as spoken Hindi declined in Trinidad and chutney as a result became more creolised to incorporate Trinidadian English and Creole words. The florescence of this musical form and its gradual change towards chutney-soca was seen as a process of creolisation which rejected Indian culture, norms and values. While the younger crop of local chutney-soca singers did not speak Hindi or Bhojpuri, they were familiar with the lyrics to Bollywood songs and certain religious songs, called bhajans, which indicated a change in the articulation of Indianness. This was reiterated by the respondents who regarded the old chutney as expressing a distinctive local Indianness for a particular time and the emerging hybridised form which maintained some of the Indian elements such as dholak, dhantal and harmonium but also fused a distinct Caribbean identity into one form — and this was called chutney-soca.

**The development: Chutney-soca**

A rhythm from the islands/A rhythm from my soul
A rhythm filled with fire/To warm up your soul
The spirit of a people who came from India
With African vibrations call it chutney-soca

Rikki Jai song (Niranjana, 2006: 191)

The increasing movement of Indian Trinidadians away from rural plantation areas to the urban areas paralleled a similar movement in chutney where old Indianness was giving way to a new musical form that ‘borrowed’ aspects of the type of music known to be ‘African’. Mirroring the increased amount of social mixing between the populations
(not in terms of racial mixing but rather the increased visibility of ‘joint’ spaces), this music combined elements that up till then were previously associated with the two disparate Trinidadian populations (Manuel, 2000).

Chutney-soca came into vogue in the mid-90s in which time Trinidad and Tobago saw the first Indian Prime Minister, Basdeo Panday, sworn into office. This political breakthrough paralleled a musical development in the form of chutney-soca which expressed a “concerted revival and assertion of Indian identity” and “a new spirit of creolization and syncretism.” (Manuel, 2000: 168). In 1995, the first Chutney-Soca Monarch was launched and this was seen as an important point in the attempts of Indians to be part of a Trinidadian culture largely dominated by carnival, calypso and steel pan (Manuel, 1998). Prior to the Chutney-Soca Monarch, the Mastana Bahar pageant was the only Indian space where Indian art forms were given a platform in which to compete and celebrate aspects of Indian racial and ethnic identity. So when chutney-soca became institutionalised, along with Indian Arrival Day, this was seen as an attempt to strengthen a distinct Indian identity which would be part of the fabric of the nation rather than outside of it. (Manuel, 2006)

Chutney-soca, as performed at the monarch, is itself a site of contestation. Shivani (24) details an account of her last experience of attending this event,

“I used to listen to chutney when I go to a club. I been to the monarch. I been to about 2 chutney events. I been to events where they sound chutney but it wasn’t a chutney show. Cooking nights, where they would sing as well. Yea and you see there’s an identification with this thing on a very…..well on an entertainment level. It’s something that’s theirs. The chutney-soca monarch was interesting. First of all I wasn’t in the crowd right. We were in the VIP, but I was able to look out into the crowd. It’s very interesting actually. Well you see the way that I listen to music now has changed because I’m writing about this in a paper! But before this I would
have completely said this is nonsense. As a musician I would have said this is crap. But only when I started doing the research that I started listening to the music differently. I think now soca has emerged as something....Initially there was a point where there was no merging of chutney and soca. I would say that the merging of them would have come very visibly in the last 2 or 3 years. The musical representation at Carnival, for me, was most visible in 2010. But the monarch....no, not my thing. If I was in the crowd, I know I wouldn’t like it.”

Shivani’s comment demonstrates the ways in which what it means to be Indo-Trinidadian is regularly questioned and adapted. Shivani, though she likes the music, expresses a discomfort with this sort of music being performed in a space that she associates with explicit Indianness. This is only one example of the attempts to navigate the different pulls on identity that these women face.

As mentioned in the introduction, there has been a fair amount of work done on music and identity, and specifically there is a small but critical body of work on chutney-soca. For instance, Tejaswini Niranjana (2006) advocates the disavowal of authenticity in her analysis of chutney-soca and places a lens on the inter-racial and sexual politics in Trinidad. Niranjana (2006) also examines this phenomenon, but eschews the concept of hybridity in her work on chutney-soca. As has been discussed throughout this thesis, the concept of hybridity, while theoretically describing a ‘mix’, in fact works to reify the different ‘entities’ that are seen as coming together to produce that mixed phenomenon. This freezes in both time and space the notions of what Indian and African music were prior to this point of hybridisation. Music is an excellent venue for the illustration of the problems of the hybridity model, as it fundamentally presents the listener with the fact that this new form of music is truly its own representation, and it exists as its own category, understood and appreciated by its fans on its own merits rather than as vestiges of its genealogical legacy. “Appreciation of chutney-soca, it would seem, includes the fact
that it is not calypso or soca or even folk-style chutney. It reminds you of all these forms even as it disavows them” (Niranjana, 2006: 103). This demonstrates the over-simplification of any notion of hybridity. Therefore I join with Niranjana in avoiding the term hybridity, while searching for another appropriate concept for the developments that bring together elements previously understood to be ‘African’ or ‘Indian’.

Shalini Puri’s (2004) work reconsiders Indian Caribbean women’s sexuality, and uses the example of performer Drupatee Ragoonai to explore how boundaries of Indian Caribbean sexuality are drawn in relation to Afro Caribbean hypersexuality. Just as homosexuality has been discussed in mainstream discourse as ‘contamination’ coming from the West, immoral and impure (2004: 250), this perceived hypersexualization that emerged alongside of the emergence of chutney-soca became assigned to Indian descent women who had entered “a stereotypically imagined ‘African’ or Creole domain of vice and sexuality” (Puri, 2004: 196). This places Indian women on a polar opposite location on a spectrum of sexuality, in which they were previously a sexually ‘pure’ group, which neatly erases much of the sexual history of female labour in indentureship (Mohammed, 2002). Chutney-soca in this sense becomes significant as a contested space where intricacies of race, ethnicity, heterosexual desire and nation are enunciated. As an Indian or doula identity is created and contested through the sounds it is associated with (that is sonic douglarisation) doula poetics arises again as a well-suited theorisation for approaching these highly nuanced and deeply complicated musical politics of Indian women’s subjectivities. I refer to this as the soundscape of Trinidad.
Chutney and the broader soundscape of Trinidad

The music in Trinidad includes a diverse range of genres from the commercially popular soca to calypso, and what can be termed ‘hybrid’ sounds such as chutney and rapso (Birth, 2008). As I briefly noted in the earlier chapter on Carnival, soca is generally regarded as the soundtrack to Carnival season and calypso offers social commentary. There was a time when calypso prevailed as the dominant national music (Guilbault, 2007). It was traditionally used as a vehicle for satire or social commentary and while it has lost popularity with the younger population, it is still used to critique the elite. A recent example is that of the calypso ‘Uncle Jack Part 2’ by Karene Ashe, the winner of Calypso Monarch 2011, in which she chronicles the international bribery scandal around former Vice President of FIFA, Jack Warner, also a high-ranking politician who founded his own political party the Independent Liberal Party (ILP). Calypso is also largely associated with pan because “Both were connected to Afro-Trinidadians from the most deprived socio-economic areas; both were also, targets of, and responses to, the colonial regime.” (Guilbault, 2007:59). Steelpan is an intense source of pride for Trinidadians and was declared the national instrument in 1992 (Dudley, 2004: 53).

Alternatively, soca is generally the most well-known musical genre to emerge from Trinidad and dominates carnival season. At the international level, the most popular soca performer is Machel Montano who has also won Soca Monarch for two years running and is a firm crowd favourite. For the Soca Monarch competition, this is split into two categories namely Power Soca, which incorporates frenetic beats, typically short lyrics whose theme revolves around ‘jamming and wining’\(^{45}\) and hard partying such as Machel

\(^{45}\) Rotational hip movements are usually referred to as “winding” (pronounced winin’) (Winer, 2009: 471)
Montano’s *Advantage*, Iwer George *Fete after Fete* among many others. The second category is Groovy Soca which features mid-tempo soca rhythms and a greater focus on melody and lyrical content in contrast to the ‘jump and wave’ theme of power soca (Guilbault, 2007). Some examples of groovy soca are Shurwayne Winchester’s *Carnival Please Stay* and the highly popular 2011 Groovy Soca Monarch winner, Kes the Band Wotless.

Chutney-soca is a genre that fuses soca rhythms with traditional Indian instruments and bilingual lyrics. It has emerged as a popular music genre and gained institutional recognition when the Chutney-Soca Monarch was established in 1995. It has come to feature on the top four prestigious events on the Carnival calendar. In 2012, the Junior Chutney-Soca Monarch was inaugurated with the objective of creating sustainability and longevity in the music industry for youth. A more recent development announced by the National Chutney Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago was of the World Chutney-Soca Monarch where artists from around the world will compete. Interestingly, one of the requirements is that no rum songs will be allowed in a performance which as I will go on to explain is often the theme of the bulk of chutney-soca songs. Indian Trinidadians’ relationship to cane drinks, specifically rum, feature heavily in songs such as Adesh Samaroo’s *Rum till I die* to Ravi B’s *Ah Drinka*, Rikki Jai’s *White Oak* and *Water* among a variety of others. In terms of gender representation, there has been a steady upsurge of female performers in the Trinidadian musical scene. In spite of the ways that women are ‘othered’ in soca, which was a traditionally male-centred space, and chutney-soca, there is a relatively high number of female soca artistes such as Destra Garcia, Nadia Bastion and Fay-Ann Lyons who compete for the Soca Monarch. The presence of females

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46 White Oak is one of the leading rum brands in Trinidad.
is steadily gaining ground in chutney-soca with performers such as Sassy Ramoutar and Artie Butkoon who compete for the best chutney singer position and the 1 million Trinidadian Dollar cash prize at the Chutney-Soca Monarch.

After the ‘bacchanal’ of soca, calypso and chutney, the presence of Venezuelans and the Latin American element comes forth particularly during the Christmas season in the form of parang. This is “traditionally performed by troupes of amateurs (parranda in Spanish) who, like their counterparts in Puerto Rico and elsewhere, go house to house, partying, singing and playing guitar — and mandolin-type instruments.” (Manuel, 2000: 217). In recent times, there has been a blending of this Latin-based music in various off-shoots such as soca parang and even chutney parang, which signals the continuous musical experimentation in Trinidad. A very rapidly growing genre that has carved out a niche in Trinidad is rapso which “initially found little public support, as it corresponded to neither of the art forms from which it drew inspiration: poetry and calypso” (Guilbault, 2007: 171). In spite of having no competition of its own, it has had a noticeable presence since the 1990s and is defined as “a musical offshoot of calypso using a chanting style that emphasizes Trinidadian rhythmic speech patterns over a calypso rhythmic accompaniment” (Guilbault, 2007). One of the most prominent performers of this genre is 3 Canal who often produce political songs for the J’Ouvert selections at Carnival and have opened the door for spoken-word performers and experimental musicians. Gospel music also has a strong following though this is mainly confined to the Christian and Church communities of Trinidad and Tobago. There are other examples of vibrant musical productions which are critically recognised but yet these do not get the same level of state sponsorship in comparison to chutney soca and soca such as pantar (a fusion of steelpan and sitar) and pichkaaree (folk music that is influenced by calypso and uses picong
alongside old Indian melodies). The lack of support for these alternative musical genres are commented on by Shoma (25) who says,

“I play classical. It has a small audience. The melody is sweeter but it doesn’t get as much media attention as chutney-soca. So that is our mainstream I guess. Indian culture was never given the kind of sponsorship that calypso and pan was given. This was never seen as being indigenous to Trinidad. The argument is that calypso and steelpan was produced here. The steelpan is a national instrument. The Indians are arguing but why? Because we also belong to this land. It’s not our fault that our history didn’t allow something new because we already had a history and heritage. We are in no way Indians from India, we are Trinidadians so therefore our music and our culture should be seen as part of the national landscape, right. So there’s that. But maybe if the education system, if they place priority and give importance to arts…and recognising these things…. There’s gonna be an eventual shift in the thinking of race.”

While certain music genres then are promoted and marketed more heavily in comparison to others, by and large the music industry in the Caribbean is a fast growing sector globally and while the commercial value of calypso and soca has been recognised in different countries, looking closely at chutney as a musical genre, it remains largely rooted within the Indian communities of Trinidad and Guyana. It has found smaller niche markets in countries such as Canada, the US, and Europe through the diaspora. Though characterised as ‘party music’ by the majority of young women in this research, its socio-cultural and musical accomplishments, both nationally and internationally remain somewhat ambiguous. That being said, there clearly is a demand for this as evident in the number of Indian radio stations in Trinidad such as Masala Radio and Sangeet FM who feature this genre on their playlists as well as other radio stations such as Jaagriti radio and Aakrash Vani, which play Hindu religious music. While some of the young women proposed that chutney-soca provides an interesting window in the culture of modern-day Indian Trinidadians which fuses the customs of the old country with liberal attitudes, equally there were a section of women who felt the current chutney-soca
clashes considerably with the old chutney. For example, Hema (21) says “This foolishness they call chutney is not the real thing. There used to be a lot of nice meanings to the song. You know about children’s birth or weddings. Or how to live your life. Now it’s just about how to get drunk. I guess that’s what sells. Like you see in hip hop.”

Although chutney-soca has a niche international audience with New York City and Toronto routinely promoting chutney events and hiring performers from Trinidad, it has not established a strong presence in the world music market. At a national level, while there are fairly regular chutney fêtes organised around the country and the university campus, these are conceived of as publicly portraying chutney-soca as the music of the community according to some of the young women. For example Seema (19) says, “I never been. My mum won’t be happy! But when you read in the papers, it does end up representing all Indians. But not all Indians only do chutney. For some there is a deeper connection.” If certain Indian groups in Trinidad consider chutney-soca as a valuable and useful link to notions of Indianness and their ethnic identity, other groups use it as a means to disavow the religious and gendered aspects of Indian ethnicity. From this point of view, chutney no longer becomes significant in the sense of connecting the need to feel ‘Indian’ in a traditional sense, as this is fulfilled through other means such as religious occasions or prayer attendance. As Cindy (24) says, “One of my family members used to real listen to the religious chutney. I think because in his day that was the only thing available. He go to temple and stuff and these spiritual weekends but he doesn’t listen to the old chutney now no. Just the new stuff that come on the radio.” Amongst these women, chutney-soca is enjoyed as something unique to the Trinidadian community of people of Indian descent, rather than representing a pan-Indian ethnic quality.
The consumption of chutney-soca at a global level has meant that it has transformed into a broader platform for collective expression, but it is a platform that was ambiguously embraced by the young women as we see above in Seema’s discomfort with chutney-soca representing the Indian community, Hema’s comment on the evolution of chutney and how this has sold out to capitalism in some ways and Cindy’s comment on how one listens to this music for different reasons. Chutney-soca’s audience, both nationally and internationally, remains essentially Indian Caribbean. This said, the responses in this research to this musical genre are so highly differentiated from the celebratory discourses of chutney by musicians that it becomes inherently difficult to speak in terms of a coherent sensibility in connection with chutney-soca. At the level of the local, what becomes clear is that it provides a sort of musical underpinning for a new Indian Trinidadian culture, whilst also revealing the conflicting meanings anchored in what are interpreted as archaic conceptions of gender and ethnicity. As Maariyah (24) says

“It’s still very much national and when they perform outside they get more of a West Indian audience. I don’t think it will ever be really international. Because the thematic content of it is too representative of an Indo Trinidadian sensibility. Which is….they talk about rum, they talk about horning and all that which is not really so much a part of the international or Western thing you know.”

Maariyah’s comment illustrates the commonly held perception that chutney-soca is a social and geographical phenomenon relevant to Trinidad and Tobago. The enjoyment of this music and the communication/performance of that enjoyment is crucial to being Indian Trinidadian, rather than being Trinidadian or Indian.

While Maariyah narrated the problems of expanding chutney-soca across the musical spectrum, Lisa (25) who is taking a music course identifies the potential of this
“My aunty would sing local chutney and Indian film music. It was something I wanted to do. I feel like it needs to go all over the world more. It is too much centred here. Chutney needs to be taken to another level. One of my cousins will be singing chutney on a Bollywood soundtrack soon so it is growing.”

Lisa takes pride in this cultural representation, but she argues that it could be appreciated by a wider, international audience. Maariyah’s and Lisa’s comments demonstrate that this music may be appreciated and enjoyed on two different levels, in terms of relating this music to the specific time and place of Trinidad and Tobago.

The relatively new entry of chutney-soca into the public sphere could account for its limited localisation, having only emerged as a sub-genre in the 1990s. This makes it quite a new phenomenon. Curiously, there is a parallel chutney vogue in other parts of the old Indian diaspora for example, Fiji and Mauritius (Servan-Schreiber, 2011) and a reiterated dialectic that could be traced in the global chutney discourses was that of authenticity and inauthenticity, representation and misrepresentation, much like can be found in studies on Bhangra in Britain (Singh & Tatla, 2006). Chutney and Bhangra are heralded as modern, hybridised successful sonic experiments through their combination of South Asian languages and English and old folk beats and newer sounds. But similarly both are contested for representing Indians in at times homogenous ways, for example in Bhangra the emphasis on drinking Bacardi and whisky is analogous to the rum songs of chutney-soca. The articulation of these musical forms is then partly driven by the debates about the divergent views on representation and what it means to be Indian. Before I consider how these are lived out in practice, I will turn to look at the role of women in chutney-soca.
Women in chutney-soca

Initially the preserve of women, male chutney singers came to appropriate many of the songs formerly linked to the women’s repertoire in the 1970s, as chutney first emerged onto a public and commercial stage (Ramnarine, 2001). In the late 1980s however, there was a growing presence of female chutney performers making the crossover from the private to the public domain. Accompanied by this, was ‘chutney dancing’ which is a combination of “graceful Indian-style hand gestures with sensuous pelvic “wining”,” (Manuel, 2000:337). When Indian women began dancing to chutney in public, much wrath was incurred primarily from ethno-centrists who saw this as endangering orthodox Hinduism (Niranjana, 2006:117). While the chutney dancing critique does not hold as much sway presently, it has taken on a new guise as conflated with performances of wining. As we saw in the Chapter 6, some of the young women expressed reluctance in playing mas because of the association of wining at carnival. Interestingly, both chutney and carnival jump-up dancing emerged as forms of liberation for women and expressions of sensuality and yet drew similar protests from purists and conservative elements of the Trinidadian population.

Indeed, race and gender are deeply implicated in chutney-soca, particularly through ideas about the sexuality of the Indian female body. The body of the Indian woman performing chutney-soca intimates a connection between music and sexuality. Niranjana (2006: 119) argues this when she says that:

chutney-soca does not express or provide a statement of an existing sexuality….. Instead, it represents the point of convergence of a multiplicity of discourses around sexuality, serving in turn as a node from which such proliferate. Further, the sexuality question cannot be separated from question of racial difference.
Sexuality is mapped onto the different bodies of different groups of women in Trinidad. As in many multicultural environments, women from one group may be depicted in one way, defined in opposition to the way in which women from another group are imagined. In Trinidad, this is evinced in an African whore/Indian virgin dichotomy (Munasinghe, 2006). It is in the small details of everyday life that that dichotomy is imagined, performed and embodied. It is through examining the situations that arise in everyday discourse that that dichotomy takes on meaning for these women. Therefore, the analysis of songs which the participants hear in an informal context are primary sites of the production of cultural understandings of female gendered and raced subjectivity.

This becomes very clear in the controversy surrounding Drupatee Ramgoonai’s 1988 chutney-soca “Lick Down Me Nani”. In the song, Ramgoonai employs two double entendres. ‘Lick’, a stock pun in typical calypso, contrasts with ‘Nani’, which is Trinidadian slang for vagina as well as the Hindi term for grandmother, that “revered and idealised symbol of Indian womanhood” (Puri, 2004: 197). While the ensuing outrage was more explicitly linked to this sexualised parody of a matriarchal authority figure, scholars such a Kenneth Parmasad (1995) argue that “Lick Down Me Nani” is an example of the increasing pressure for Indians to renounce or degrade Indian culture in order to enter the Afro-Creole dominated public space. The violence implicit in “Lick Down Me Nani”, in which the singer references the unnamed male in the song “driving too hard” into Nani till she “fracture she spine”, is emblematic of symbolic aggression towards Indian culture as represented by Nani, and also representative of the perceived natural violence of African men, who were described in this song as rapists. Thus, the violence here occurs along racial lines.
However, one can argue that the song is actually representative of much more complex processes of performativity at work as the song emerges out of the “fissures and inequalities of the Indian community” (Puri, 2004: 201). It is through listening to and enjoying these songs, with all of the challenges to identity that they present, that certain tenets of female Indian identity are questioned. Its explicit sexual overtones challenge the culturally dominant de-sexualised ideal of Nani, the quintessential Indian authority figure. Thus, the majority of outrage from conservative Indian cultural nationalists like Ken Parmasad (Manuel, 2000: 332) lies in the relocation of the Nani figure from the “classical” to the “grotesque” (Puri, 2004: 201). The grotesque here is the Afro-Creole context of calypso and its typically outrageous embodiment of sexuality and excess.

Drupatee, far more than her male chutney-soca counterparts, was the subject of harsh criticism from Indian religious groups in Trinidad. This is typical of how female involvement in Carnival usually draws the loudest condemnation from such conservative Indian groups. As Puri (2001: 196) observes, “policing the behaviour of women is a means of policing the construction of the Mother Culture”. However, as Puri points out, this policing of Indian women’s sexuality neglects the fact that the roots of “carnivalesque degradation” are not strictly Afro-Creole:

“… the charge that Drupatee had embraced the ‘gods of sex, wine and easy money’ construct Indian culture as the morally superior and sexually restrained antithesis of an Afro-Creole culture of excess. This construction, however, ignores the existence of carnivalesque traditions within Indian culture… [the Spring festival] Holi provides a space within Hindu culture in which intoxication, drunkenness and public expressions of sensuality are much less rigidly policed…” (Puri, 2004: 202)
As such, we can see that the ribald sentiments in “Lick Down Me Nani” in fact hark back to traditional Indian festivals of excess as well as having more contemporary roots in chutney-soca, the musical form that incorporates calypso, Hindi-English, Trinidadian Creole and Indian instruments like the dholak and tassa. In fact, it is the outraged Indian conservatives who are neglecting this part of their heritage in expressing the sentiment that “Lick Down Me Nani” is insulting and degrading to Indian culture. “Lick Down Me Nani” is the result of historical Indian traditions fusing with a doula poetic and sensibility (Reddock, 1999).

If chutney-soca is celebrated as a douglarised sound, this is predicated on the elision of biological douglarisation in the social space. The douglarised sound of chutney-soca is imagined in the national callaloo ideology as a product of hybridity. However, despite this positive emphasis on the multicultural state, hybridity works to reify and maintain as ‘pure’ the historical sources of modern combinatory musical expressions. This lends itself to discourses of contamination and pollution, which have dominated concepts of creolisation and douglarisation, emerging at various points in the perspectives on chutney-soca. There is a long-standing history of sonic douglarisation in Trinidad and according to Kim Johnson (2008), the syncretic process began as early as the 1920s which resulted in Killer’s 1947 calypso “Every time ah passin gal, you grindin’ masala”. These syncretic musical endeavours undertaken against a backdrop of ethnic purity (Munasinghe, 2006), occurred amidst the racialised discourses of hybridity perceived as contaminating and far from a positive valuation. However, I would posit that the syncretic process that Johnson (2008) illustrates is more to do with the threat of miscegenation, specifically douglarisation and that which might be discerned is this syncretic music is singing about the sexual desire of a Black man for the Indian woman.
Shalini Puri (2004: 220) argues that even today douglarisation is accompanied by this idea of contamination but “that the very anxiety surrounding the figure of the douga is a measure of its radical possibilities”. Further, she conceives of douga poetics as a Rather than hybridity, Puri presents douga poetics and Roy (2013) presents sonic douglarisation as one explanation in which chutney-soca is privileged as a complex bridging of the racial divide, rather than the substantive mixing of the two groups. Of course the crossing of ethnic boundaries across the soundscape in the carnivalesque space could also be seen as concealing deeper anxieties about racial mixing and changing gender norms.

One of the gender norms that chutney-soca plays with is that of the gender of who is performing this type of music. The male expropriation of what was historically a female mode of expression, as Rosanne Kanhai (1999) describes in her matikor space of the old chutney, was contentious. One of my respondents expressed this in her comments.

“Chutney in itself had a traditional root. It was mainly sung by women, particularly at religious festivals. And then it became very social when…, have you heard of Sunder Popo? When he began singing it, he took these female songs and started singing it publicly… [only] if I hear it and I have no choice then I’ll listen to it.” (Ashley, 25)

From its humble beginnings as a folk song form, it has grown to become a significant presence in the cultural and sonic landscape of Trinidad and Tobago, and the changes it has weathered as a result have not been fully accepted. While it is true to say that the move from matikor space to public stage garnered a range of opinions, the latter was an area controlled by men. While this more playful and informal type of Indian music is now heard more on a national stage and in many ways that represents a liberalisation of social norms, the fact that this traditionally female mode of expression has been appropriated by men means that women’s expression remains heavily policed.
The extensive repetition of debates on Indian women’s public performance in many ways echoed the ones we saw in the earlier chapter where the British and French elites were confronted with the jamettes at Carnival (Rohlehr, 2004:225) The censorship and control of working class performance, particularly that of women, and the strongly upheld notions of morality and respectability can be traced in both the jamette and chutney-soca examples. Initially criticised for leading to the creolisation of Indian women in a pejorative sense, the same charges were not levelled against men in the same way. As Gabrielle Hosein (2012: 8) says, this is perhaps because of the “gender-differential experience of creolisation”. That is, Indian women cannot access public space in the same way as Indian men because the latter gains more cultural and social capital from both an Indian and creolised reputation whereas Indian women lose social capital and status from a creolised reputation. Hosein (2012) argues that this is partly because of the conflation of creolisation with a historically racialised discourse of African Caribbean femininities as leaning towards sexual vulgarity, immorality and miscegenation (Hosein, 2012: 12). Because of this conflation, creolisation and douglarisation are conceptualised, in an ideological sense, as stridently assimilating into Blackness. In the following section, I will explore this conflation and relate this to the debates on the performance and consumption of chutney-soca by the young women.

**The chutney polemic: creolisation and douglarisation**

Chutney was and remains an area of contestation within the Indian community in Trinidad. Some of the tenets of creolisation in its ideological sense manifested quite
clearly in the debates on chutney and Peter Manuel (1998:31) described this relationship between creolisation and chutney as “the chutney polemic”. Here the controversy serves to concretise and expose otherwise more subtle and abstract issues of contention, reflecting the complexities and contradictions involved in the current process of cultural reorientation — a process at once involving creolisation, Westernisation, celebration of Indianness, and female and proletarian liberation. (Manuel, 1998: 31–32)

Chutney here acts as a cultural representation that cannot be neatly categorised as a problem-free hybrid product, but one whose meaning is constantly negotiated and contested, as the young women’s Indian identities are brought into being through performativity. These constant negotiations take place not only through discussing whether one likes chutney-soca or not, but also through discussions of who should be listening to it, and what therefore are the responsibilities of its performers. Ashley (25) said:

“Indians in Trinidad have to be culturally defensive. I’ll use the example of the reception to Lotala right. Which basically translated as the elder brother’s gone out and his wife and his younger brother are at home. So he’s looking at the bhowji (sister in law) and then there’s just this sort of flirtatious behaviour between them. Now that’s perfectly acceptable and it’s very much a feature of Bihari folk songs. Because their relationship is so sacred it can afford to be flirtatious. You know there’s this bhajan where Krishna is flirting with his mother Yashoda. And he is saying ‘Oh you are so beautiful’ and there is this underlying flirtation in that song. The same happens in the songs with the bhowji. It’s passed off as a joke right. In Trinidad however that doesn’t happen. The society was in complete uproar in the Indian community about it. And I think it has to do with the fact that we have a mixture of races here. You have the dominant Afro Creole culture right. And you have to sort of declare yourself, declare your culture and in a way apologise for it. Because, although you were increasing in numbers, you were still a minority in the sensibility and in the way you thought about yourself. So that when you have something like chutney-soca now, that focuses on, well in recent times rum, you now have to apologise and say “Well this is not our culture, this does not represent Indian culture.” But if the larger public doesn’t see the other musical productions that’s going on inside the community coz you have the classical, you have the devotional, you have the old chutney. It’s not consumed by a larger public. It’s still relegated to the Indian population. Chutney-soca however is the more visible of Indian music if you want to call it that, Indo-Trinidadian
music. And the issue with it is really that if this is the thing that is going
to represent us musically, then it has to represent us well. And audible to the ears
of the Afro Trinidadian population more importantly.”

Two points emerge strongly in this passage. The binary here between Afro Creole culture
as dominant and mainstream in terms of music and Indians as competing for a place
in the sonic landscape. Secondly, the need to keep Indian morality within the community
so that a moment of flirtation with a sister in law, a relationship which is deemed sacred, is
sanctioned. Whether harmless or meant in a humorous way, any deviation from the moral
framework is rendered inauthentically Indian. The concern of cultural appropriation
and reception is critical in this statement and echoes the creolisation discourse which is
similarly regarded as assimilationist and accommodating. So the assimilation into rum
culture which is ubiquitous becomes embodied in chutney-soca but also accommodated
into the larger national sphere. There is also a hint of ethnic friction where she says
that chutney-soca has to “represent us well” in order to gain some sort of authenticity
or larger recognition. If it is consumed at a mainstream level, then it is important to strive
for cultural authenticity for fear of being misheard or misunderstood. As a dougrarised
cultural form, chutney-soca then reflects alliances and contestations that are breaking the
traditional social moulds in the contradictory callaloo nation.

That is not to say that chutney-soca presents a tension free picture of Trinidad. It is well
known that ethnic frictions are played out largely in politics within ideological
frameworks but we have also seen this played out within the moral frameworks of calypso
and chutney-soca. For instance, below Hema (21) talks about the vulgarity of men,
in contrast to women, as highly present in chutney-soca:
“It’s great that it [chutney] is accepted at the national level. But some of the obscenity that goes with it is embarrassing! Ok I know the Sanatan Maha Sabha had these reservations about the chutney dancers and the women performing and I don’t agree with that at all. They say in Hinduism women sustain the culture and the home. That is changing now I think. But in the chutney scene, it’s the men who are obscene not the women! Have you heard what they sing about?”

The claims to morality and decency so often deployed towards women here are applied to men. Hema interrogates what she perceived as the licentious behaviour of her male counterparts rather than female. Nafeesa (18) reiterates this point too when she says

“I haven’t been to a chutney fete ever. I wouldn’t go.

Keerti: “Why not?”

Nafeesa (18): “Too much Indians! I think…..Every Sunday there would be this little Indian chutney something in Central⁴⁷. It always had a lot of Indians which also led to a lot of fights. Men! So a lot of people…..well those who were not chutney lovers would distance themselves, you know ‘well let’s stay away from that kind of behaviour.’ And then you know it’s kind of like a religious thing which has now changed to carnival and bikini and beads. So it’s like going against what your religion defines as moral and immoral.”

Keerti: “So you prefer the old chutney then?”

Nafeesa (18): “Yes. Because even when they started to sing this, it was songs about a mother’s love and all these things were classified as chutney. There was some sort of valuable something coming out of chutney at some point in time. And even when they still continued singing it is what we would call classical music, with the matikor, you want to hear the dholak beating. Nowadays if you get Ravi B and they’re supposed to be about chutney, you get chutney about who drink the best rum. These boys jus….don’t really know what they doin!”

Raadiyah (23) “Actually I’ve never been to a chutney fete. But I don’t mind going. I don’t really have much friends to go with because you cannot just go by yourself or with the wrong people. You have to know who you going with. The thing what Nazina is saying is right. And also what these guys sing about is damn rude to women. I s’pose like hip hop now. Similar thing with the hornin’ and wife beatin and foolishness like that.”

⁴⁷ An area in Trinidad. Most likely in reference to Chaguanas which is a town located in Central Trinidad.
The sexualisation of chutney-soca and dancing which has dominated most analyses resonated with the young women to the point where the issue was not with women’s winning but men’s comportment. This brings up the question of masculine identities in Trinidad, an in-depth discussion of which would entail its own project. As Foucault demonstrates, all bodies are equally subject to discipline, even those that ostensibly hold power in a given society. While the bulk of this thesis deals with feminine identity, it is important to understand that a correlating version of many of these pressures about preserving pure and respectable Indianness while integrating into national culture pertain to men as well. Both men and women feel pressure to act as representations of Indianness in varying ways. In this sense, chutney is felt and cited as an important venue for the public representation of being Indian.

**Reppin’ Indians: Chutney and representation**

“It does represent Indians but not as much as soca. Because I think if you think of a national song or national rhythm, then you’ll probably think soca. You’ll think Machel Montano rather than Ravi B. It’s getting there, the chutney is getting on the same plane as soca. Again, because it has been meshed. It’s been integrated so it’s a new voice. I’m probably the only Indian, or the 2 Indians in my organisation, a place which has well over 15 persons, and my counterpart says carnival time or when the song come out that Ravi B saying that Rikki Jai give him some puncheon. All these things. Like she’ll talk about it before I even hear of it. Also when Rikki Jai won the monarch, I was like ‘Him again!’ And my boss was like ‘I wanted him to win!’ And it’s like out there. You may not appreciate it in the sense that it’s something that you listen to everyday but the fact that people know of it, and they appreciate it and they support it to some extent. So they are accepting it. And it is a voice. (Shoma, 25)

As it becomes clear, the burgeoning of chutney-soca on the sonic landscape of Trinidad has been accompanied by a large interest in the politics of race, ethnicity, gender
in modern Indian-Trinidadian identity. It also became one of the few repertoires of Indian culture which were initially excluded from the cultural mainstream but have now gained a higher positioning as evident in the growing number of music competitions in chutney-soca. While music in this sense represents a dynamic, cultural space, undoubtedly this hybrid music genre comes to act as a reflection or as an articulation of the contemporary lives of Indian Trinidadians. This brings up the question of the extent to which chutney-soca represents a unified ethnic community in any meaningful way.

Based on what some of the young women indicate, the chutney-soca performances are not perceived as being part of a transformational social change or a socially conscious music genre, but chutney-soca does fulfil an affective need for Indian Trinidadians to create a space that blends their ethnic and national identities. For example Cherisse (21) says,

“You only have to listen to the lyrics to know that this is party music! Or when you at a lime and this is playing, the beat is good. But times have changed. The way my friends’ parents talk and listen to this music is different. For some people it is a community thing. When you hear it abroad, it’s more of a Trini thing and it brings Trinis together that way. But I don’t think it has done anything in the way that some songs for example make you think or reflect. This is just party music man! You actually feel bad for the women in these songs! It’d be good if there were some nice nice chutney that’s sweet or melodious. Or talks about love or issues in this country in a real way.

Victoria (23): “She’s right. We have some real problems in this country with crime. Education. Domestic violence. I’m not saying all songs should be about this but some of these performers could talk about some of this at least. Or do something socially. Like you see in some rapso. Rum songs get boring after a while! I suppose for Indians, yea this music gives them a way of being…visible.”

This need, along with the desire for visibility, drives the aesthetics of chutney-soca in varying ways so that one can no longer talk of any ‘pure’ or original form of Indianness. However this does lead to what the late Stuart Hall calls (1992) the burden of representation whereby chutney-soca is forced into the spotlight as representative
of the callaloo Indian. However, the lack of positive imagery in the content of the songs is not highly regarded by women, as Ashley (25) discusses:

“You’ll have the rum, the wining, the degradation of women and stuff coming out in chutney which to me goes against that whole notion of chutney being a spiritual something and a uniting something...when you really think of where chutney has come from and what it is today, then you'll understand you know why we're supporting something like this when it goes against what we know or what it’s supposed to be teaching. I don’t listen to it.”

Ashley and many of the other young women narrated how the content of contemporary chutney-soca works in terms of attaining patriarchal heterosexual appeal and validation at the expense of the women who are objectified. For example, gender relations are performed in this genre through constant references to rum, which is both a status symbol and also an importantly masculine material; emphasising rum’s primacy in the life of men brings about a secondary position for women to their man drinking. Ravi B exemplifies this when he sings “Yuh cyar change meh no way , Gyul yuh know ah was ah drinka, Yuh always know ah was ah drinka.....Gyul rum is all i want, Yuh know rum is meh lover.” Men’s right to choose rum illustrates how men are still perceived (by themselves and often, but not always, by women) as the gender whose needs need to be catered to first and foremost.

The chutney polemic (Manuel, 2000) provides a useful point of entry in this context. In this framework, the objective to assert a ‘real’ Indian identity in contemporary Trinidad is fraught with a number of problems, evidenced particularly well through the medium of chutney-soca. This is evident in the creolisation discourse where chutney-soca was seen as a contamination of sorts by the Creole culture. Paradoxically, in its new purportedly hybridised guise, it gained greater prominence through its fusion with soca beats although
it has predominantly served to maintain Indian culture (Manuel, 2000). This discussion of chutney-soca’s new adaptations demonstrates that the move of chutney to the public sphere, while heralded as a productive action that asserts ‘the Indian’ in the Caribbean, has simultaneously asserted an almost rigid and absolute mode of Indian identity which is regarded by the young women as an inadequate and inappropriate representation that does little to showcase the new realities and concerns around gender and ethnicity in the nation. What comes to the fore is that the respondents are speaking from a multi- accented centre of identity that does not fall into the trap of ethnic simplification or “the politics of inclusion and “the politics of exclusion” (Bissessar, 2004: 208) as frequently seen in political discourse and which plays out in musical expressions such as chutney-soca. These processes of identity making and identifications are particularly important for the respondents whose experiences are not restricted to the confines of an imagined fixed Indian community. As Simon Frith (1996: 109) highlights: “…..identity is mobile, a process not a thing, a becoming not a being….our experience of music-making and music-listening is best understood as an experience of this self in process.”

While politically, chutney-soca may have played an important role in the insertion of Indians in the Trinidadian public sphere, the young women reiterated on numerous occasions that the production and performances of contemporary chutney is not a largely positive representation due to its emphasis on drinking. If the controversies in the 90s were centred around creolisation as a corrupting influence on ‘the Indian’, then today the controversies seem to be centred around the unimaginative lyrical content geared almost exclusively towards alcohol and the consequences of drinking. This is one example of a group discussion on the topic:
Victoria (23) “My favourite kind of music is soca but I listen to everything else. While growing up Indian music was my favourite, but when I grew up and married, my husband’s side listened to chutney a lot so I started to like it. Not the religious chutney because I don’t understand what they are singing about but I like the other chutney. I don’t really like the rum songs but I like the songs that sing about everyday life. But drinking is part of the culture of Trinidad. Trinidadians like to drink! So they will sing about it, right? To me, well I drink alcohol but not as often as some people. But sometimes chutney is little bit too vulgar. It sounds like the people singing these songs are alcoholics. I mean, they singing about drinking rum all the time!”

Notions of morality find expression once again through the critique of the lyrical content of chutney-soca centred on winning, alcoholism, touching and degradation. This is accompanied by a discourse of ‘pure’ and traditional old Indian behaviour, emerging into a more degrading and degraded form of behaviour that proliferates today:

Samantha (24): “Coz chutney represents Indians right. Or the Indian background that’s why. Long ago it was different but now it go over to the other side. To me, it’s like degrading to women, I mean have you heard Ravi B When I drink Rum. And this dowry shit that Rikki talk about.”

Cherisse (21): “Hmm….Yea long ago it was real chutney but now it’s changing.”

As chutney changes and its subject matter changes to encompass ‘modern’ behaviour, this means that the critique of modern chutney stands in for a critique of modern culture. The aspect of modern culture that is most criticised is the way in which it is no longer ‘pure’. Purity here refers to authenticity, something that is perceived to be eroded and which has been wearing away in recent years.

Discussions of authenticity in chutney-soca demonstrate that there is a constant tension between how ‘Indian’ and how ‘Trinidadian’ this music should be. Excessive reliance on one pole or the other is criticised. On one extreme of distaste, the women spoke about their distaste for simple ‘copies’ of Bollywood sounds:
Esther (25): “Well I may go just for the experience. But…there are aspects that I don’t like the touching and the wining. It is mixed but the majority of people going are Indian…I guess that’s what people want. But these artists…..all they do is re-sing Bollywood songs. We know it come right out of a film show. We know it a copy but it spoil the whole thing!”

Simply ‘copying’ Bollywood music is described as lazy and inauthentic, relying too much on the simple fact that it is Indian, and not enough on the Trinidadian experience.

On the other hand, chutney-soca music that is too emphatic of the ‘Trinidadian experience’ is also criticised.

Kavita (19): “When chutney is about rum, it about everybody. Rum is the way that chutney-soca infiltrates the society to be accepted by everybody. Unfortunately but nobody will listen to a religious chutney.”

The hybridity model of Trinidadian music falls short here, in that it presents the amalgamated product as a harmonious combination of the two ‘parent cultures’. These comments however demonstrate that no harmonious balance that is commonly accepted exists, in terms of music or society in general. Finding the right balance in chutney-soca between ‘too Indian’ and ‘too Trinidadian’ can be read as a performative approach to finding that happy medium in personal identity as well.

The ways in which chutney-soca is imagined under the tropes of hybridity, which Peter Manuel (2000: 341) comments on when he says “Centrifugal ethnic revivals and centripetal syncretic hybridity thus emerge as the twin bases of Trinidadian culture” in his analysis of chutney-soca, ethnic and national identity, resonated with much of the young women’s talk. The interviews revealed similarly how chutney-soca paradoxically works to highlight and celebrate the Indian presence at a national level but also works to reify particular ideas of Indianness and somehow become linked to totalising ideas
of the Indian descent community, whilst ignoring the diversity of the Indian population in Trinidad. This is a concern expressed by Rani (21) when she says,

“Look, I like soca but seriously, how much soca can you listen to? There’s only that much you can take. Then all the songs….I know girls get pleasure from listening to the lyrics in the song that excites them. But they’re so rude! And chutney-soca the same. I HATE it! It’s centralised around rum, horning or somebody cheating on you and how you gonna cheat back on them. I mean that’s stuff that happen in yuh house and you think about not to go and broadcast on the airwaves. I feel so ashamed when I see Indian people singing it. That stuff goes out worldwide and god knows what people thinking about us! The songs, lyrics they way they dress, there’s no substance to it or meaning. You have to have a mental block when listening to it or I’d get a headache.

These critiques of chutney-soca express internal disagreements about the qualities that these women want to be associated with Indo-Trinidadian women. If we refer to Stuart Hall’s (1992b: 305) comments where he talks about how the West perceives the periphery as “‘closed’ places — ethnically pure, culturally traditional, undisturbed until yesterday by the ruptures of modernity — we also get a glimpse of how the Orientalist gaze works at ‘home’. Reified ideas of what Indian music should or should not be derive from reified ideas about what Indian-ness itself should be. Any claim made in the name of an activity not being ‘Indian’ or also being ‘too Indian’ is a claim that upholds a rigid and bounded notion of what being of Indian descent entails.

Conclusion

As a symbol of Indianness, chutney-soca sets up boundaries about what Indianness entails. Accordingly the performance of this music takes place along gendered and racialised lines in different settings. Therefore it cannot be reduced to simplistic
analysis of how, why and where Indian Trinidadians want to depict themselves in music. A dougla poetics framework works in this sense to address both the musical and social complexities in order to understand the overall meanings of the music culture where racialised and gendered identity are negotiated, constructed and stylised. For example we see how chutney-soca is positioned and consumed as at once as a raced Indian product and a hybridised cultural export. It is part of the social fabric of the nation and fulfils an affective need to create an Indian Trinidadian space but this is gendered in particular ways as the young women locates this genre as sexist and immoral by way of its resounding focus on rum, winin' and drinking. The dougla poetics underpins raced gender in chutney-soca on these grounds as we see the discursive production of this music as male-dominated, inauthentic in its imitation of Bollywood sounds but as one which gives voice and expression of Indian-Trinidadians both nationally and internationally. At once the performativity of this reveals the contestation and celebration of this musical genre in this manner.

Chutney-soca has been examined on analytical grounds for its relation to continuity and change based on the nationalist callaloo agenda. Chutney-soca makes a statement on the local ground in a different way perhaps to diasporic centres such as Canada and the US. Given the history of racial and gender politics in Trinidad, performatively producing identities as they are expressed in the sonic and visual cultural scapes becomes a critical task for chutney-soca performers in a culture where visibility is important. Yet we also see a call, in Shoma’s (25) statement on classical music and pantar for example, to a diversification of cultural expressions to participate in the wider cultural and sonic landscape. So to speak of Indian musics is more appropriate.
Throughout the young women’s talk, the idea that chutney-soca invariably ends up representing Indians in Trinidad is simultaneously contested and reified. That the songs reflect a continued investment in the idea of a particular type of Indianness centred around traditional gender norms is a limitation identified by the young women. The ideologies and politics within chutney-soca are rejected not only because they reflect only one aspect of Indianness but because they are seen as misleading or inauthentic representations of Indian Trinidadian life.

Nevertheless, cultural actors previously regarded Indian investment in soca with some ambivalence as this has long been characterised as an expression of African descent culture in the Caribbean. Soca is often perceived as a musical genre to which African Caribbeans have a primary claim and chutney-soca performers have had to confront the claim that soca cannot be appropriated despite its claims to hybridity (Guilbault, 2007). But chutney-soca has had considerable success amidst the contentions that the lyrics and songs inscribe essentialist ideas about Indian authenticity and its ambiguous positioning as valorising certain experiences, namely those that refer to the traditionally male centric activities of drinking and womanising, over others.

The complexities and nuances of raced, ethnicised and gendered identities is an on-going process and internal differences can create tensions around what it means to be an Indian Trinidadian woman, which is reflected in the narratives on chutney-soca and the politics of this scene. Implementing fixed boundaries around who belongs and who can perform (as seen in the Drupatee controversy) can lead to a simplification and re-inscribing of racialised difference onto Indian identities. Nevertheless, it is clear that the young women are cognisant of sonic spaces that allow for these issues to be negotiated with all
the nuances that come to the fore when looking at identities such as gender dynamics, morality, respectability, representation, tradition and modernity.

The lenses of performativity and poetics show that these musical genres represent alternative forms of Indianness that are neither largely consistent with the ancestral culture nor indeed with the local Creole population. Through enjoying or voicing one’s displeasure with chutney-soca these women are bringing into being representations of who they want to be, and they are enforcing the alliances that they want to characterise them. There is no pure soca or chutney or chutney-soca sound outside of this middle ground of the performed and poetic space of everyday life.
The dougla poetics of Indianness

This thesis has shown the ways in which Indian women’s ways of seeing, talking and doing performatively reinscribe raced and gendered discourses. Through the performat ive practice, we see the constitution of the raced Indian subject and a poetics begin to emerge. I call this a dougla poetics in which fixity and fluidity is located. I draw on hybridity and creolisation as theoretical anchors from which to explore raced gender identities and develop Shalini Puri’s idea of dougla poetics as way of localising and contextualising my analysis. I argue that dougla poetics seeks to go beyond hybridity and creolisation theorising, which are the two meta narratives, to specifically explore an aspect of mixing and mixed cultures in the Caribbean.

The dougla poetics of the young women is marked by critique, celebration, avowal and disidentification and the continuing significance of race and while it shows how this impacts peoples lives on identifications, it brings into sharp focus a narrative which once erased but now evokes a contemporary imagining of Indianness, and that is the identification with dougla as a form of identification.
Building up doula poetics

In the introduction chapter, I explained how I have extended Shalini Puri’s concept of doula poetics, and while race and gender are the key concepts which underlie my analysis, I will now illustrate how the doula poetics of the talk interrogates hybridity and creolisation across all the chapters.

In Chapter 3, the young women initially give us a number of examples of trans-religious practice such as Sipari Mai worship and fasting for other religious festivals not necessarily of their own as well as other forms of Hinduism such as goddess worship. While fluidity is made visible through their religious leanings, fixity becomes apparent in the boundaries drawn on matters of marriage. Much like doula, this is a significant telling of who can mix with whom, what mixing does and does not so that a Hindu Indian woman could marry a non-Hindu man as long as he was not Black, or that a Muslim Indian woman could marry a non-Muslim but not a Black Muslim. Trans-religious then does not extend to trans-race. If the doula body has been cited as a marginal race category, then even in marginality we find racialisation so that queer identities, for example, do not escape categorisation. For example in Chapter 4, we see how through the governmentality of the performative discourse, Indian female sexuality becomes a site of respectability, silence and marked in contrast to the African other. Though there is a recognition of difference, the disturbance of the boundaries of Indianness in this context has social, emotional and at times material consequences. To mix in the sexual sense then is a problematic notion and one which is extended to non-heteronormative settings. We see how sexual desire is raced and permeates every social group, so that even for marginalised communities, this racialisation extends here. The raced ideas present in sexual desire
continue in the context of aesthetics and beauty culture in Trinidad as is explored in Chapter 5. The dougla poetics here reveals a disturbance of the Black/White binary but a continuing process of colourism was predicated on ideas of race. So that while fluid colour categories such as Spanish and Dougla were deployed as hybridised and reflecting a more modern, cosmopolitan Trinidadian-ness, there remained a preference for light(er), “high colour” skinned individuals, even within the mixed categories. The contradictory contours of beauty culture placed a focus on the body but in the following Chapter 6, bodily practices are also foregrounded, specifically in the act of playing mas at Carnival. The multiple discourses of agentic female sexuality which were articulated as “free-up” also enacted the constraints in the identification of mas as decadent, hypersexual, immoral and indecent. Raced bodies become the site on which differences are constructed with dress informing notions of morality, respectability, desire and disgust. The consumption of chutney-soca music, as explored in Chapter 7, is based on similar ideas of desire of the authentic old-chutney and disgust of the rum content of the newer hybrid sounds of chutney-soca.

I have also shown how the Indian woman’s identity was at times constructed around a racialised Other. However, I do not intend this research as an attempt to recuperate Indianness from questions about perceived political and cultural superiority or privilege or omission. Nor am I attempting to show Blackness as an absolute referent against which Indian ‘otherness’ is constructed. While this othering does happen at various instances, Indianness for the young women is a process of relation. For this reason, I do not end with a definitive conclusion which summarises how these young Indian women ‘do’ race and gender as this is a site of constant renewal and change, fixity and fluidity, and disruption. This is not a research study of ‘us versus them’ or ‘we culture and they culture’. I am
not concerned with singular, monolithic portraits of Indian womanhood. What I do foreground is a critical examination of the ‘we’. How is Indianness constructed as Indian and what practices are tied with its repetition? How is it that certain ideas about religious practice, sexuality, desire, beauty, carnival and music come to be overlaid with racialised ideas?

To return to the original research question ‘how do young women of Indian descent navigate Indianness and Trinidadian-ness?’, what emerged was that the young women’s understandings of Indianness and Trinidadian-ness, at the individual, local and national levels, can be simultaneously fluid and fixed. While Indianness is certainly not a homogeneous concept, *The dougla poetics of Indianness: Negotiating Race and Gender* has explored the ways in which ‘Indianness’ takes on meaning for a sample of Indian Trinidadian young women aged 18–25. Empirically, I approached this project through a dougla poetics of national/individual identifications in combination with raced gender performativity. This entailed looking at trans-religious practice, sexuality and desirability, beauty culture, carnival activity and music consumption. Not as a one-dimensional experience. In fact, different bounded ideas of ‘Indian’ manifested in discreet ways across the five areas listed above. Nafeesa’s (18 ) reflection is one way of answering this question when she says “Everyone has some degree of douglaness. People are in denial about this sometimes but everyone in Trinidad has been douglarised to a certain degree.”

The revelation of Indianness as fluid and fixed may seem at odds with national characterisations of race in Trinidad which foregrounds multiculturalism, racial harmony, and a cosmopolitan ‘race-lessness’ (Khan, 2004) where “all we is one”. While these depictions of race are valid, these are seemingly incomplete. At first glance these
examples might all read as versions of a ‘fluid identity’ (Butler, 1999). However, we also see that fixity is present in some of the ideas articulated across Chapters 3–7. It was therefore more appropriate to position dougla poetics as a theoretical starting point through which to explore these intersections of race and gender not just in terms of fluidity. What this has done as a theoretical tool is highlight the fluid mosaic of Trinidadian society, which constantly transforms but has not brought about a reduction of the racial and ethnic divide. Modern discourses of the callaloo nation at times modify the status quo of binarism, and at times do not. Dougla poetics opens up a space for a relational exchange rather than just racial exclusivity. In its rejection of mutually exclusive positionalities, this runs complementary to raced gender performativity as we see throughout the thesis how the young women are shaped by the reiteration of discourses and practices of raced gender.

Indeed, race and gender in the Caribbean has been a rich and ever evolving area of interest for scholars working across various disciplines (Barrow, 1998; Haynes, 2013; Kempadoo, 2004; Lewis, 2003; Radano & Bohlman, 2000; Scher, 2010). These, among many others, are diverse and exciting approaches, and have opened up various strands of inquiry. Furthermore, while there have been some inroads made into the study of Indian women in Trinidad, there are lesser works on Indian descent people in other areas of the Caribbean region namely Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Jamaica as well as Guyana and Surinam. Though people from these countries imagine and experience Indianness in their own, unique ways, there are connecting threads perhaps not only facilitated by the wounds of slavery and indenture but also in contemporary forms of migration, labour, economy and more recently digital culture. In this manner, a secondary question arises: in what ways are national understandings of creolisation, hybridity and diaspora explored through the prisms of race and gender? This question largely relates to
the first, and while I reject the application of diaspora as a defining trope for the Indian young women in this research, it is one that is taken up by writers such as Joy Mahabir & Mariam Pirbhai (2012) and Brinda Mehta (2004) as a lens through which to explore creolisation and identity. It is here that I position dougla poetics as an instrumental way of critiquing existing theorisation on diaspora, creolisation and hybridity as well as develop thinking on raced gender performativity. I use dougla poetics as a way to approach questions of identity and identification as becoming rather than discrete, fixed, bounded and universal categories.

Furthermore, rather than drawing on the race relations paradigm that has dominated US and UK studies that visualise a society as stratified ‘races’ engaging in a competition over various resources, I contend that dougla poetics does not follow a strict model of social stratification. Such stratifications have been described by, for example, Lloyd Brathwaite (1953) in which other ethnic groups such as East Indians and Chinese sought to distance themselves for Blacks as much as possible in their efforts to maintain ethnic purity. While Brathwaite’s (1953) sociological study was pioneering and presents an insightful model in explaining the complexities of the island-nation’s social structure, it was largely focused on the Creole component and was seen as omitting the East Indian, Chinese and Syrian components. This demarcation is not as strict in the present-day context but it could be said that there remain on-going processes of gendered racialisation in which race and gender is constructed and made meaningful in the context of unequal power relations. Indeed, this is what dougla poetics seeks to chart.

Yet while Puri turns to political manifestos and literary texts to understand the politics of mixing for Indian Caribbeans, she does not begin from the standpoint of Indian
women’s raced readings of gender. By using talk, this research brings a new insight into dougla poetics in that it shows how race, gender, ethnicity and politics still count and how this is lived and negotiated interactionally.

Building from the conclusions of the previous chapters, we see that raced gender is a salient factor in the way social relationships and identities are operationalised. Some of the research findings were unexpected but as I contended in Chapter 2, by using a narrative approach and using talk as a basis for data, this can be an insightful way of understanding identity as well as broader social dynamics. Giddens writes:

A person’s identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor-important though this is — in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going. The individual’s biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ‘story’ about the self. As Charles Taylor puts it, ‘In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going.’ (1991:54)

This research study, from the dilemmas of my researcher identity and the research interactions to the revelations in the talk, has provided succinct examples of how identity is never static, but always in flux.

**Reflections**

As I write this concluding chapter, an investigation was launched into the presence of placards bearing racist slogans during a demonstration organised by the Joint Trade Union Movement in May 2014. This was seen as one of the rare instances where
the term ‘racist’ reared its head in an explicit manner and received widespread attention in print and social media. Its timing just before Indian Arrival Day on 30th May led to an uproar from the public and politicians who condemned the organisers of the march for not removing the individuals carrying these placards. However, it was also seen as an orchestrated move by the opposition to distract from the performance of the current Government and for them to gain support for the election next year (Kissoon, 2014: WWW). This struck a chord with many as it was yet another indication, though questioned and challenged by some, of how political parties draw on racial discourses for specific gains. This also supported one of my findings in which the young women spoke about how racial attitudes emerges from interest-based parties during election time but that at the level of everyday, people are generally silent on this matter. When it does emerge, it is uncomfortable.

The current Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar (2010: 109) stated in her swearing-in speech, “No more labels. No more prefixes of Afro and Indo nor North and South nor East West corridors. The election is over. It was a means towards an end.” This could be taken to mean that race is used as a means to a political end and once that is fulfilled, this should no longer be addressed. The first elected Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr Eric Williams (1962: 281), proclaimed in one of his speeches a cosmopolitan approach to replace the value systems of the colonial era in his foundation of a ‘race-less’ society but a closer reading of this illustrates how hybridity in certain ways is not dissimilar to colonialist ‘divide and rule’ discourses.

There can be no Mother India for those whose ancestors came from India….There can be no Mother Africa for those of African origin, and the Trinidad and Tobago society is living a lie and heading for trouble if it seeks to create the impression or to allow others to act under the delusion that Trinidad and Tobago is an African
society. There can be no Mother England and no dual loyalties; no person can be
allowed to get the best of both worlds, and to enjoy the privileges of citizenship
in Trinidad and Tobago whilst expecting to retain United Kingdom citizenship.
There can be no Mother China, even if one could agree as to which China is the
mother; and there can be no Mother Syria or Mother Lebanon. A nation, like an
individual, can have only one mother. The only Mother we recognize is Trinidad
and Tobago, and Mother cannot discriminate between her children.

Despite Trinidad being imagined as hybrid then, this quote holds a conservative view
of a national subject who has a singular, staunch allegiance to the nation even though
at the same time it acknowledges the potential for multiple identities and identifications.
This duality is a succinct reading of Trinidadian culture in which discourse of hybridity
are celebrated but where division also threatens the nation-state. Much like the metaphor
of the callaloo (Khan, 2004), or the rainbow nation of South Africa, or America’s melting
pot, and the more recent discourse of cosmopolitan multiculturalism, these are ways
of negotiating difference by promoting a positive national image. What is interesting
in Eric Williams’ statement though is that he is mainly talking about cultural hybridity,
not racial. This move of de-emphasising race and emphasising culture is one that is on-
going in political invocations of the nation. While the national anthem states “Here every
creed and race, Find an equal place”, there are many criticisms of that position to be found
‘on the ground’ in Trinidad. Khan writes:

Everyone can find an equal place. But…There is then a duality in Trinidadian
national consciousness: a celebratory acknowledgement of its multiple
cultural influences and the mixed quality of its history and population, as well
as the ostensibly self-evident ethno political division into Afro and Indo. This local
characterization of Trinidad as having experienced its entire history as a ‘callaloo’
society (literally, a multiple-ingredient stew, also the national dish) represents
Trinidad, the callaloo nation, as profoundly cosmopolitan and democratic through
a coexisting diversity that results in racial harmony and other marks of modernity.
(Khan, 2004: 184)
In these two representations, unity may be a common thread expressed in the national motto, “all we is one”. Indeed, as I highlighted in the introduction, mixing is seen as quintessentially Trinidadian and a source of pride for the nation with its ethnic, racial and religious heterogeneity. The official policy of multiculturalism which was implemented in 2010 “to give greater voice to the diverse cultural expressions of our common desires for individual and national identity and to promote a realignment of policies including resource allocation, to allow for a more equitable recognition and fulfilment of the needs of the diverse proponents of our culture” (Persad-Bissessar, 2010: 1), was also seen as part of the national ideology of the callaloo nation. But does this idea of equitable recognition or diversity, racial or otherwise, run parallel to what the young women see and speak?

The short answer would be no. Esther (25) states, “It is a struggle at times to put this in practice. I am Trinidadian and I feel I have to qualify this more when I am abroad. But here at home, you do see it is as one as you think. There isn’t racism or violence like other countries for example but there is a….latent racial tension you could say.” Discussions of diversity then run alongside difference and tension as we see throughout the thesis. Some areas which were cited as holding much appeal and promoted in terms of a non-racial or ‘post-race’ community are for example youth movements and protests against unemployment and crime, environmental societies, cultural locations such as the T&T Film Festival, and literature festivals. While these venues of the production of national identity were cited in positive terms, the unease and discomfort initially expressed in the questionnaire slowly came to the foreground. These are nuances that cosmopolitanism, hybridity and creolisation theorising does not necessarily take into account.
This rendering of the complexity of raced difference in Trinidad is further analysed at the level of politics by Kirk Meighoo (2008: 124). He writes:

politically, the Indian interest is really three interests (Hindu, Muslim, and Presbyterian), that the Africans are four (Afro-Saxon, Garveyite, Butlerite, and Tobagonian) and that others are also important (French Creoles, and those that do not fit because of mixture). Even if Hindus and Afro-Saxons have been the main elements in opposition, over time, these many sub-groups have combined in many unusual ways, which make Trinidad and Tobago’s politics far more complex than being based on African-Indian rivalry.

One must question, then, to what extent state ideologies which fall into binarisms are an accurate representation of lived reality. Those who have economic interests manipulate various social groups and elements within those groups to maintain power. Race, as covertly embedded in social processes, becomes a device to ensure power which in turns yields consequences which are not racist, in the sense of leading to extreme outcomes such as volatile segregation, supremacy or xenophobia, but racialised. Moreover, the argument by Meighoo points to the fact that ethnic groups are not homogenous nor static and that much has happened to alter the demographic landscape of Trinidad and Tobago, as we continue to see in the increase of the mixed-race population. Regarding the Indian interest, while they are no longer regarded as the exotic element in the callaloo nation we do see from the material presented in this thesis that identity, at the level of individual and national, remains raced and gendered and also that these processes are embedded within social and cultural practices. In this manner, I have argued that even the most liberal, cosmopolitan ‘post-race’ (Ali, 2003) or ‘cosmopolitan race-less’ ideology implicates a deeply naturalised concept of racial difference. This concept is heavily embodied in social practice; the ways in which this sample group’s seeing, doing and talking performatively rein scribe racialised and gendered discourses indicate this. By drawing on hybridised tropes such as Spanish or Dougla, race might be avoided
as a direct topic thereby navigating past the contours of race. Yet, this research has shown that these attempts are problematic precisely because they rest on essentialised (albeit essentialised on a hidden level) differences. Even in the callaloo nation, race and gender then remain visible markers, not just of cultural practices, but of the body which remains indelibly linked to the colonial past.

What does this mean, then, for Caribbean studies? Or, for Critical Race Theory and Ethnic Studies? It might be useful at this juncture to reiterate what the research is not. I do not mean to convey Indian-African Trinidadian relations in the same way that Frantz Fanon, for example, deals with the Black-White case in his invaluable text *Black Skins, Black Masks*. Despite the extant literature on the division between these two groups, they were in a sense fighting the same struggles against an oppressive colonial regime. However, Avtar Brah’s (2005:3) argument about the “colonial sandwich” in which the body is already inscribed within the gendered social relations and Shalini Puri’s (2004: 172) note below, provide a useful starting point for approaching critical race theory and Caribbean Studies together.

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.

It is undeniable that the histories of inclusion and exclusion have marked both groups. As Josephine Lutchman (2012: 1) says, “Whilst Afro-Trinidadians are culturally more visible than Indo-Trinidadians, there seems to be discriminatory practices and discourses aimed at Afro-Trinidadians which keep them at the bottom of the social hierarchy.” This is a useful further direction of study to explore how processes of racialisation,
as in the process by which race becomes meaningful in a particular context, structure these discriminatory practices for both groups. The race and gender inequalities for both groups are equally important; it is imperative to critically examine them in the interest of social equity. It is important to keep the conversation moving and future work should address the poetics and politics of these relations by avoiding binaries and dualisms whether to do with race, self or society, psychology or social and man or woman.

Shirley Tate’s theorisation of race performativity also works to great effect in addressing these gaps in research. Performativity works “through socially and culturally recognized forms of sameness and difference.” Returning to the construct of race, refusing to talk about it (an accusation which can easily be made of the dominant political body of Trinidad) does not reduce the effects of racial discrimination. This was a deeply felt conviction by many of my respondents. There was a reluctance to talk about racialised difference which is why I developed my methodology in such a way as to explore this in their talk without naming it as such and this is my contribution to method. The initial opinion was that it would go against the callaloo rhetoric of the nation and bring divisive racial discourses to the surface which the women were trying to move away from. Moreover, to talk about the ‘race problem’ is to in a way disavow the modern, liberal and cosmopolitan subject position. However, by removing race from the national equation (exceptions during election time) or by reluctantly talking about racialised difference, which was the initial position taken by some of the women, this does not remove the problem of racial tensions and/or discrimination. By displaying race consciousness and emphasising mixedness (whether dougla, Spanish, creole or hybrid), this does not imply a post-race era. Rather than ignoring or removing these important distinctions from conversations, dougla poetics works as a conceptual way of exploring the relations
between the affective and the ontological concepts of racial categories. This emerges as a more fruitful way of connecting with people and understanding the spectrum of thought on the everyday lives of Trinidadians.

While hybridity and creolisation have frequently been invoked as ways of inviting positive attitudes to raced differences and representations of nation, these raise their own questions. Mixing, as Khan (2004: 13) explains in the Trinidadian context, “is both unspoken bogey and voiced barometer of modernity and progress in a milieu where race and religion — cultural constructions in Trinidad’s stratified society and key idioms of identity construction — are two dimensions of experience most receptive (some would say vulnerable) to dilutions, impurities, and fraudulence.” What can be gleaned from this is that in Trinidad mixing is heralded as a facet of social life but also potentially disruptive to the ‘separate but equal’ doctrine. There has been much theorising done on the significance of mixing using race, class and gender as categories of analysis especially within the realms of cultural, national and political identities. Scholars have looked at how mixing and separation are articulated in calypsos (Reddock, 1999), literature (Baldeosingh, 1997), and religious practice (Khan, 2004) among others.

Mixing is not only theorised in academic works, but also by many Trinidadian in their ‘folk’ explanations of their own descent: “A mere glance at one’s family members attested to the Caribbean reality of hybridity. Racial, cultural, and all other types of mixtures and multiplicities were and continue to be the pulse of the Caribbean,” (Munasinghe, 1997:78). Creolisation and hybridity theorising does not attend to unequal power dynamics and largely ignore gender despite ironically relying on the female body in its evocation. As Sen (2006: 186) writes, “If the East Indian population in general has
been largely ignored in Caribbean discourse, the East Indian woman has been even more marginalized.” As such, I attempt to contribute to a post-colonial feminist project of inserting young women’s voices into wider discourses of race, gender and nation as I say further down below in the section on research contributions.

**Future research directions**

It could be said that Shalini Puri’s dougla poetics framework offers a different vision of race and ethnicity which is more amenable to change, whether contested or celebrated. While there may be an affective value in remembering the past which has tremendous symbolic resonance, the everyday and present way in which one performs their culture is also very important to look at. With this in mind, I return to the discussions with which I opened this thesis, I would posit that Indianness, and therefore raced gender are not only external or present in the realm of politics and ethnocentrism in Trinidad, but internal in the ways that people see and talk, in their interactions, in their relationships, in their practices and their senses of self, both as individuals and as part of society. This is taken for granted in work on identity.

While I mentioned in the first section that it is important to examine the constantly shifting discursive formation of Indianness both in Trinidad and other parts of the Caribbean region, it is also important to look at Indianness not in isolation but in relation to other ethnic groups. To further an understanding of Indian and African descent people in Trinidad, the political and economic historical circumstances
of displacement, slavery, indentureship, decolonisation, globalisation and neo-colonialism needs to be considered. A quick glance at the colonial history of Trinidad has shown the shaping of uneven political and economic relations between the ethnic communities within the nation as well as between the Caribbean region and the global North. The role of colonialism and politics in fostering a racial and gendered hierarchical society is undeniable and continues today despite the end of formal colonialism. These unequal relations still prevail and operate under different guises. These new dynamics and neo-colonial forces need to be explored more. For example oil as a natural resource places Trinidad in a prized position but there are North American and foreign-owned companies who have business operations based in the country and whose vast profits do not largely go back into the local economy (Figuera, 2014). The travel industry is another sector with a very limited number of Caribbean companies operating in the region and American based airlines having a monopoly on intra-Caribbean travel. Therefore while transnational forces shape economic relations, this also affects gendering and racialisation processes in local racial terrains and subsequent social inequalities end up constructing racism as a process of competing for privileged access to global capitalism. Much like was the case in the post-independence era in Trinidad.

This would be a great area for future exploration to examine how Indian Caribbeans who have acquired mobility and moved to the metropolitan North in areas such as Toronto and New York are positioned in comparison to those who chose not to migrate. The idea here is not to establish a homogenisation of experiences of Indian Caribbeans in relation to global capitalism, but to look at the trajectories and experience of the diasporic Indian Caribbeans in the metropolitan North alongside their counterparts at ‘home’.
While Caribbean feminists have carried out ground-breaking studies and made considerable inroads for women, I put forward that further research should look at expanding the conceptual base for Gender Studies in the Caribbean to include testimonies of Indian Caribbean men and LGBT people. The dominant model in the Anglophone Caribbean is hegemonic heterosexual masculinity as described in Rhoda Reddock’s (2004) *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities*. Indian Caribbean masculinities were markedly absent from this anthology. Perhaps one of the very few studies carried out on Indian Caribbean men and similar processes of discrimination was by Rhoda Reddock who draws a similar comparison with the addition of Hindu-inflected notions of gender. However, considering that Reddock’s work focuses on Hindu men, there has not been any comprehensive works on the lived experiences of non-Hindu Indian masculinities. As my thesis highlighted, Indian women and men are not solely Hindu and there are divergent points of view amongst the Indian Muslim and Christian communities. Dougla men are scarcely visible in these studies. How do dougla men participate in and resist dominant masculinities? Indeed, the particular historicity and contemporaneity of dougla poetics frames Trinidad and Tobago in unique and challenging ways to constantly update and vitalise Caribbean, Indian and African, subjectivities through its specific raced gender concerns that also include men and young people.

With a similar critical viewpoint, I turn to queer studies. There is a small but growing body of literature on Caribbean queerness (Glave, 2008; Lewis, 2003; Padilla, 2008) but I caution against reading the nuances of Caribbean LGBT realities according to Western modes of thought. Given the criminality of homosexuality in the state of Trinidad and Tobago and other Caribbean countries, in addition to the race and gender dynamics of Trinidad, it is a risky endeavour to read or enact Caribbean
queerness through a global North hegemonic lens. To call the Caribbean homophobic then, as is often stated in global press and social media, is a dangerous generalisation in the same way that if one were to say that all Indians are sexist or that all South Africans are racist. Yet, these stereotypes and images persist. I call on douglā poetics again as one way, as part of Caribbean theory, to look at Caribbean queerness, as expressed in both Trinidadian history and present-day reality. Exploring Caribbean queerness through the vectors of race and gender, as connected and not as stand-alone concepts, would be highly important. Although it was beyond the scope of this study, a further question arose: how does the context of Indian gay men differ from that of their Black counterparts? Do the limits imposed on inter-racial relationships as indicated by a lot of the young women in Chapters 3 and 4 extend to Indian Caribbean queer masculinities? Do these extend to queer femininities?

Finally, one other compelling question from this research I have not been able to address is the how young African descent and douglā women, through poetics, navigate race and nation, Blackness, douglā-ness and Trinidadian-ness in their identities and identifications? We see how the larger Indian community have been resistant to the notion of douglarisation and how the young Indian women largely are open to douglā poetics, but how have young Black women responded to this theorisation would be of considerable interest and reveal a highly significant and productive research project. There is much work that remains to be done on these further research questions.
**Research contributions**

Drawing from black feminist thought (Hill-Collins, 1990), this research contributes to the field of gender studies in its tracing of open-ended subjectivities, experiences, representations and multiple voices of contemporary young Indian Trinidadian women. I posit that dougla poetics presents an appropriate way of bringing forward Indian women's voices. In my view, this is a beautifully expressed way of exploring 21st century Indianness and while Puri (2004: 220) talks about the triple discourse of dougla, the last one being the dougla body demonised by Indo-Caribbeans, perhaps dougla poetics now has come into a fourth discourse in which the racial terrain is changing, challenging and continuing. In trying to find a model that looks at how race is gendered and gender is raced, dougla poetics as performative works quite well as much like the etymology of the term dougla is still developing, so is race and gender. Dougla poetics can then be used as not so much defining Indianness, but opening it up to new conjectures, new speculations and analyses.

Based on the five areas explored in this thesis, I suggest that dougla poetics contributes to gender studies by providing a space for this historically delegitimised group. In doing so, it presents a conceptual tool through which talk about the complex lived experiences of Indian descent women in the Caribbean can best be understood. Emerging from Trinidad and Tobago and rooted in this unique locality, this contributes to the post-colonial feminist project of de-Eurocentralising normative readings of the region. The intersectional focus has very much been a marked characteristic of Caribbean feminist thought where race, ethnicity, gender, nation and class have been theorised in trying to explain gendered exploitation and furthering its principle to improving
the lives of Caribbean women (Leo-Rhynie, 2003). This provides an alternative conception to scholarship on women in the Caribbean that for decades had portrayed women (Black and Indian) in this region as either hypersexualised, decadent bodies or as passive beings shackled by structures of male authority. The expansion of gender discourses which looks beyond registers of submission and patriarchy can be linked to sociology which asks for a broader understanding of the dynamics of identities and society in appropriate ways, as well as giving respondents validity in their viewpoints of their social conditions. By following Shalini Puri (2004) and Judith Butler (1990), I have refused to represent Indian, Black and Dougla groups as dualistic or polarising categories.

In using dougla poetics as a theoretical framework for this research, which in its original inception was aimed at Caribbean cultural studies and navigates between political and literary analysis, my expansion of the concept of dougla poetics reveals its flexible and interdisciplinary potential by crossing traditional boundaries. In combining this with race performativity theorising, I offered a way of further engaging with Puri’s (2004) project of vitalising contemporary Caribbean theory. Hence, I propose that dougla poetics not only as a lens into a particular social issue but as a methodological choice in itself makes a clear contribution to critical race and ethnicity studies. Using a theory that developed in the location of study adds another layer of examination of the intersectionality of gender and race, and reveals even more emphatically that it is no longer instructive to explore race as polarised, binaristic or homogenous. I also extend this to Diaspora and Post-Colonial Studies, particularly given the refusal to use the hyphenated identity label for Indo-Trinidadian as a way of linking culture and space together: that is, cultures are fundamentally seen as anchored in territorial ideas. Thus, cultures are spatially bounded and rooted in communities (Modood, 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. It is assumed, therefore, that Indian Trinidadians have a direct cultural link to India by virtue of Indian descent. However, this was a position which was denied by the young women who acknowledged their ancestry but for whom home, understood both as a fixed geographical point and as a site which produces a sense of belonging, was Trinidad. To draw on diaspora as a defining trope for contemporary young women then is problematic but also useful to interrogate newer questions of migration, such as regional migrations from other Caribbean states to Trinidad and to metropolitan cities such as Toronto, New York and London through a diasporic lens.

Poetics and performativity are well suited to the spatiality and temporality of identities and identifications at macro and micro scales. This is because in addition to showing how people inhabit multiple identities, there are particular situations and moments in which certain aspects of their identity and identifications are made more dominant than others in one's articulation. Race and gender are such aspects as for example one of the young woman appropriates an Indian identity for herself in the talk on the history of indentureship and colonial oppression, but she disavows from the chutney-soca scene for being 'too much Indian'. There are subtle and multiple ways of being Indian which allude to historical and temporal contexts, for example with reference to the initial elevation and imagining of India as the spiritual home of Indianness, and to contemporary and current tensions of individual and national identifications.
As such this research offers a contribution to Caribbean studies. In my title, I mention Indianness and I talk about how Indianness changes over time and space and one example I offer is how certain Hindu religious practices in Trinidad differ from that of the ancestral homeland of India. This is appropriated by some of the young women who at once reject the link with India and assert an Indian identity in a local context. Kali Mai worship for instance is engaged with as an Indian Trinidadian experience as is chutney-soca music consumption and the beauty pageantry of Mastana Bahar. While, again, I highlight poetics as geared towards the temporal and spatial variation of raced gender identities, this is not done in isolation and it is not an attempt to engage with bounded categories. Indianness is relational and constructed alongside a range of other vectors and perhaps one embodiment of this is the dougla, in terms of body and culture. Therefore by co-opting this, my research also makes a contribution to Critical Mixed Race Studies to explore how racial boundaries are porous and one of the ways through which social stratification takes place is through colourism as the dougla poetics in the talk revealed.

Thinking back to the title of the thesis, the idea of dougla in the talk was at times challenging for the young women respondents. At first, many dis-identified by virtue of collapsing the term with Black. As I was exploring Indianness, I determined that these terms became defined both visually and symbolically. One contribution to emerge was how the young women eventually illustrated some of the tensions that circulate around these acts of producing Indianness, during liming sessions and informal conversations, they largely responded positively to the term dougla at the level of culture and nation as one way of talking about their identities and identifications.
In terms of everyday life, many of the young women in this research have a deep awareness of the processes of gendered racialisation and inclusion and exclusion, both at a social and national level, impinging on their lives. Even when they assert the positive aspects of the callaloo nation through discussing the concepts of mixing, Spanish, hybridity, or douglas, they simultaneously hold critical views about this process and eventually question the racial undertones in this process. Moreover, they engage in douglapoeotics, performing mixity (dougla) at the same time performatively producing Indian subjectivities. In fact, the successive chapters of my thesis have travelled the terrain of Indiananness through culturally exploring discursive repertoires on race and gender in trans-religious practice (Chapter 3), sexuality and desire (Chapter 4), beauty culture (Chapter 5), carnival activity (Chapter 6) and music consumption (Chapter 7). My respondents in these chapters are not arguing that racial difference is non-existent or elided in Trinidad (which was the initial position). For the young women at least, racial difference still persists in discreet ways which are gendered. They are reminded of this at various points. Whether it is in questions of which mas band you play with, who you choose to engage in an intimate and sexual relationship with, who you choose to marry, where you ‘lime’, which fête you go to, what beauty practices you engage in or what music you listen to, these questions all belie identity politics that in another lens might be classified as ‘racial,’ but help to complicate the issue greatly. What the douglapoetics tells us is what is happening at this moment, and that is, the impression that one can be whatever one wants in fluid way, as we see in hybridity and creolisation theorising, is not accurate as we see in the talk the continuity of race and racialisation.

If everything is mixed, creolised or hybridised, there should not be racialisation in theory as more mixture has taken place. So what does mixing do or not do at
the 21st century moment? I stated in the introduction chapter about dougla taken up as a cultural identity so it is not just about mixing of bodies but about culture. Yet the fact remains that the racialisation of the body is an underlying principle as we see how dougla poetics operates across the domains. So as Chapter 3 shows, Indians may have hybridised religious practices but marry within ‘we culture’ so that an Indian Muslim would not marry a Black Muslim. Chapter 4 hints that trans-racial relationships, both in heterosexual and homosexual contexts, are boundary in similar ways and Chapter 5 extends this idea in the exploration of beauty perceptions where Blackness is discursively produced as not beautiful. Chapter 6 hints at the dichotomy of African whore and Indian dichotomy in which playing mas and the attendant bodily practices such as wining, drinking, and dancing publicly in a bikini costume, does not necessarily bridge the racial divide in a straightforward manner. Chapter 7 similarly notes how chutney-soca is in discordance with lived social realities and while it gives an expression to Indian Trinidadians, it is a performative discourse which is signposted as creolised in a degrading manner.

These are but a few examples of how dougla poetics has rendered these issues of race and racialisation as more complex and varied the meanings. There is not a singular meaning, of Indianness in modern Trinidad. Dougla poetics also shows how race and gender intersect in the continuous negotiation of identity. It is made abundantly clear by the young women that race and gender matter. While the majority did not consider themselves as interested in the racial hierarchy or racism, there was a simultaneous acceptance of its relevance to Trinidadian society. So given the symbolic hybridity embodied in dougla, the question must be asked: can dougla poetics be a way of moving beyond race?
Next steps. Post-race dougla?

One original research contribution to arise from this thesis is the drawing on dougla as a step forward in social interactions in Trinidad. The young women identified with dougla at the level of culture and nation in their assertions that they are all are douglarised to a certain degree. Does this mean a step forward for the elimination of racial difference? Is dougla a step towards a post-race era?

The concept of ‘post-racial’ has, particularly since the election of Barack Obama as president of the United States, been evoked in North American scholarship considerably. However, recently writers have questioned if indeed this moment has arrived given the current dynamics of racism in the United States (Hollinger, 2011). In a similar vein, the question of a cosmopolitan ‘post-race’ or ‘raceless-ness’ sensibility raises many difficult questions. I have indicated that dougla poetics offers alternative gendered readings of raced difference at the level of everyday which challenge fixed, essentialised or stereotypical readings which remain in representation. But another question must be posed: to what extent does this fully consider the reality of race? Can confronting race through dougla poetics challenge racial discrimination in Trinidad and Tobago?

Anoop Nayak (2006: 416) indicates that post-race discourse adopts “an anti-foundational perspective which claims that race is a fiction, only ever given substance to through the illusion of performance, action and utterance, where repetition makes it appear as-if-real.” This suggestion offers radical possibilities in that theorists can “put post-race theory into post-race practice.” (ibid: 424) through an understanding that “race is something that we ‘do’ rather than who we are, it is a performance that can only
ever give illusion to the reality it purports.” (ibid: 427). However this position can be critiqued in that it does not fully factor in everyday experiences of race and/or racial discrimination. A number of intellectuals have called for the end of racial categorisation in favour of more nuanced and complex categories such as Stuart Hall’s (1992: 257) new ethnicities, Homi Bhabha’s (1990: 210) third space and a reconstitution of populations as ‘mixed’ or ‘post-race’ (Ali, 2003) and in the Caribbean region, creolisation, hybridity and douglarisation have been evoked in a similar way as a means to call attention to outdated ideas of racial purity. Caribbean hybridities have also emerged in this region, not simply in its linguistic and racial evocations but also in cultural applications in the forms of syncretic musical styles of chutney soca and calypso (Chapter 7) as well as religious in the forms of Orisha, Sipari Mai worship (Chapter 3). The culmination of this hybridity has been theorised as manifesting visually in the carnival rituals of Trinidad. But as I have explored throughout this research, this is far from a straightforward process. Hybridity and creolisation are frequently deployed to highlight fluidity, racial and otherwise, and places a large focus on rhizomatic exchanges between African and European cultures (Glissant, 1990). This presents a danger in that there is a reification of race taking place. The asymmetry of the terms Indianness, Blackness and even Whiteness (in the global sense) which signals normativity and subordination, assimilation and accommodation at different junctures are not taken into significant consideration. I turn back to Josephine Lutchman’s (2012) point mentioned earlier when she questions who is in fact enacting discriminatory processes and Shalini Puri’s (2014) point about lateral and vertical hostility.

In this sense, perhaps douglal poetics works as a sociological tool because it draws attention to the process of racialisation relevant to particular contexts and the precise circumstances in which it occurs. In other words, who does what and how?
It is an alternative to the binary of racist/anti-racist. Yet the extent to which this concept has the potential to challenge racial ideas and discrimination from the symbolic to a material endeavour is one that remains to be seen. This talk and its subsequent analysis has shown that while certain readings of race such as Indianness and Blackness are a social form of racial classification, this has varied over time but in some ways these categories remain strong. Despite my resistance to the term hybridity as one that is rooted in scientific-biological racist thought, it is possible to consider the race identifications as hybrid. But I still lean more towards dougla poetics as a more textured approach to reading race. That being said, we see an endurance of race in the talk of the young women. While the ways in which raced gender impacts Trinidadian society today differs from its effects during slavery and indentureship, it nonetheless endures. Stuart Hall (1997: 7) remarked “the biological definition [of race], having been shown out through the front door, tends to sidle around the veranda and crawl in the window.” This is an image which can be likened to the dougla poetics of the talk which showed how, indeed, race has continued to permeate in discreet and subtle ways to determine how these women think of those who are different to them. Race and gender therefore reside in many subtle locations, for example in usage of stereotypes. Butler’s (1999) concept of “fluidity of identities” runs counter to what the young women describe in a society often invoked as fluid, hybrid and callaloo but in which you cannot simply refuse raced gender.

Raced gender is not completely fluid because of entrenched ideas about stereotyping. Simultaneously raced gender is not completely fixed because of differential agency. This is however performative in its repetition and citation of norms as we saw throughout the chapters in the negotiation of borders in trans-religious practices, desires and relationships, beauty culture, carnival practices and music consumption.
This negotiation plays out on the bodies of Indian women. Therefore, the simple answer to the question of whether we are living in a post-race era, is no. As a discourse and as a signifier (Hall, 1997) race evokes different notions and meanings and while these meanings may develop and transform over time, in some ways we see that the young women are propelled at various instances to fixed attitudes, in addition to (or perhaps despite) viewing themselves through a dougla lens with an interest in anti-racial and cultural issues. The dougla poetics of Indianness demonstrate that the notion of a cosmopolitan racelessness is skewed and represents an ideal rather than a reality. According to the young women the discourse of racial discrimination, though not explicitly phrased in those terms, was assigned to an episode in history that is officially over. However, there was a process of identification with the liberal, modern Trinidadian subject which disidentified from racialised structures alongside a further developed view that racial tensions were latently present. Raceless-ness therefore presents a failure to address the persistence of the impacts of race in its disavowal of the effects of this at various levels, not just political.

The possibility of moving beyond race into ‘cosmopolitan racelessness’ is certainly attractive however it is my belief that this moment has not arrived yet. For all the initial explicit talk from the young women that they identify as Trinidadian first and placed primacy on personality traits such as “I am unique, friendly, logical, shy and so on”, in the disidentification part of the questionnaire, 17 out of the 29 respondents made statements such as ‘I am not Black’, ‘I am not African’, ‘I am not interested in race’, ‘I am not a coolie’, ‘I am not fair’, and ‘I am not Creole’. What this suggests is that these young women are still implicated in racialised processes at an intricate level so much so that to renounce race as a critical concept or category of analysis is not a productive intervention.
Rather, I argue that dougla poetics works to attend to race as well as gender as permeable categories, fruitfully understood as performative “constituted by the very “expressions” which are said to be its results” (Butler, 1990: 25). Five ‘expressions’ which I argued throughout this thesis came to illustrate how fixity and fluidity, difference and sameness are constructed and then incorporated into discourses of race and gender. These came across in trans-religious practice, sexuality and desirability, beauty culture, carnival activities and music consumption and the material has shown some of the different opinions within these areas.
End note

There are many questions one can pose regarding Trinidadian dougla poetics and/or hybridity. There are also questions regarding Indian descent people across the Caribbean as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The talk of the young women was fascinating, and were this study implemented across a larger cross-section of the population, this would yield further insights. Of striking note was the revelation of the central question: if all the women identified as Indian, then why did they also play with the notion of dougla? Despite initial dis-identification with the term as pertaining to the dougla mixed-race body, they also identified strongly with it at the level of culture and nation. It is perhaps one way as Puri (2004) says to make visible the Indian elements in the national and social imaginaries which creole historically excluded and to some extent ‘Spanish’, as an aesthetic category, also excludes. Dougla, as a poetic and performative concept, becomes a specific way of inserting the Indian signature into the Creole nation. If the women were conscious of the connotations associated with Dougla (at times read as a synonym of Black), then what encouraged them to take up the concept? How do they, and we, navigate this contradiction, among others? In the context of this research, this contradiction seems to point towards a move from racialised connotations but also to a practice of identification that marks one as a Trinidadian subject, as part of the nation.

The Trinidadian national identity may be one of an official state doctrine 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, but is also one of change and renewal. There may be divergent views on dougla poetics from other young women not interviewed in this research but there is a broad agreement within the sample group that it symbolically represents a step forward from demarcated, essentialised race relations. Forwarding the understanding of dougla poetics as a multi-relational process also allows a move away from crude, one-way models and to the idea that dougla is not a crude synonym of creolisation or douglarisation. It is not a form of racism, but a means of interrogating how race is sustained and resisted.

Understanding the dougla poetics of Indianness therefore should be understood foremost in relational terms rather than as a site. This is an imperative step towards rectifying the sociological and politic blind spots about Indian descent people in the Caribbean. Furthermore, this should be viewed as a process which is itself continuously in flux and on-going instead of a resolution to the politics of race in Trinidad. As my thesis has invited us to consider, there is not a monolithic portrait of raced gender. Multiple perspectives reflect multiple relations of power. With this in mind, mixing, callaloo and dougla are as fluid as they are fixed to essentialisation. And this poetics is the spectrum across which presences, whether raced, gendered or ethnicised, are allowed and disallowed — celebrated and denied.
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IDENTITY questionnaire

Please tell us who/what you are by filling in the blanks with statements about yourself.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>+/-</th>
<th>SCORE</th>
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<td>j. I am...</td>
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</table>
Now tell us who/what you are not:

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<th>+/-</th>
<th>SCORE</th>
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Now go back to the ‘I am …’ statements and put a tick ✓ against the 5 statements which best describe who you are as a person.

Now put these 5 statements in order of importance with the most important, getting a score of 1 and the least important getting a score of 5.

Do you see these aspects of yourself as good qualities that add to who you are or bad qualities that detract from who you are? If they are good qualities put a + sign, and if they are bad qualities put a – sign in the given column.

Then do the same for the ‘I am not…’ statements: tick the 5 which you think best describe you, put these 5, in order of importance from 1–5, and put + and – signs to show the good and bad qualities.