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"A Creative Process": Indo-Caribbean American Identity as Diasporic Consciousness

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This article examines contemporary cultural production by New York-based, self-identified Indo-Caribbean artists in order to understand how Indo-Caribbean identity is formulated in the double diaspora, removed from the contexts of both India and the Caribbean. Specifically, I analyze Miranda Deebrah's oral performance piece *Sounds from Home* and Lissa Deonarain's short documentary film *Double Diaspora: A Portrait of Indo-Caribbeans in New York* using Aisha Khan's framework of "diasporic consciousness." I argue that in these pieces, Indo-Caribbean identity is constructed not around ethnicity, culture, or Indian traditions, but as a process that recognizes the interlinking of multiple traumatic displacements and migrations in the history of descendants of South Asian indentured laborers. Deebrah and Deonarain narrate journeys toward understanding and embracing identity that follow a trajectory from alienation and psychic disavowal caused by the dislocation of migration to the United States, where Indo-Caribbeanness is largely invisible in racial discourses, to self-imposed exile and distancing from the community. This prompts a return to histories of indentured migration and ultimately a reconfiguration of Indo-Caribbean identity around notions of intergenerational trauma and multiple displacements. I argue that this conceptualization of Indo-Caribbean identity as a diasporic consciousness allows a generation of Indo-Caribbean artists and activists to flexibly navigate racial discourses in the US, because it refuses to reproduce reified categories of race and ethnicity often demanded by a nationalist politics of recognition.

Keywords: Indo-Caribbean, Guyana, double diaspora, diasporic consciousness, migration, identity

Este artículo examina la producción cultural contemporánea de artistas indocaribeños basados en Nueva York con el fin de entender cómo la identidad indocaribeña se formula en la doble diáspora, alejada de los contextos tanto de la India como del Caribe. Específicamente, analizo la pieza de performance oral de Miranda Deebrah, "Sounds from Home," y el cortometraje documental de Lissa Deonarain, *Double Diaspora: A Portrait of Indo-Caribbeans in New York*, usando el marco de Aisha Khan de "conciencia diaspórica". Sostengo que en estas piezas, la identidad indocaribeña no se construye en torno a la etnia, la cultura o las tradiciones indias, sino como un proceso que reconoce la interrelación de múltiples desplazamientos traumáticos

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y migraciones en la historia de los descendientes de los trabajadores no abonados del sur asiático. Deebrah y Deonarain narran viajes hacia la comprensión y la aceptación de la identidad que siguen una trayectoria desde la alienación y la negación psíquica causada por la dislocación de la migración a los Estados Unidos, donde el indocaribeñismo es en gran medida invisible en los discursos raciales, al exilio autoimpuesto y al distanciamiento de la comunidad, lo que provoca un regreso a las historias de la migración de mano de obra no abonada y, en última instancia, una reconfiguración de la identidad indocaribeña en torno a las nociones de trauma intergeneracional y múltiples desplazamientos. Sostengo que esta conceptualización de la identidad indocaribeña como una conciencia diaspórica permite a una generación de artistas y activistas indocaribeños navegar con flexibilidad los discursos raciales en los Estados Unidos al negarse a reproducir categorías reificadas de raza y etnia a menudo exigidas por una política nacionalista de reconocimiento.

Palabras clave: Indo-Caribe, Guyana, diáspora doble, conciencia diaspórica, migración, identidad

Introduction

In their landmark contribution to the field of Indo-Caribbean studies, the 2016 anthology *Indo-Caribbean Feminist Thought: Genealogies, Theories, Enactments,* editors Gabrielle Jamela Hosein and Lisa Outar "claim 'Indianness' as multiple, ambiguous, ambivalent, and cross-pollinated" (4). Highly attuned to "the ways . . . anti-black and anti-Indian discourses circulate in explosive ways" in the historical, political, and social context of the Caribbean, Hosein and Outar make clear that the terrain of Indo-Caribbean feminist thought that they define is not a "separate but equal feminism" nor divorced from the larger context of Afro-Caribbean and Caribbean feminisms (4). Shalini Puri's rich ethnographic analysis of race relations in Trinidad in *The Caribbean Postcolonial* (2014) provides sufficient context of historical and ongoing "lateral hostility between blacks and Indians" (172) to underline that Hosein and Outar's caution is warranted: carving a space for Indo-Caribbean identity and national belonging can veer into separatist politics and risks cooption by an "Indian cultural nationalist and political agenda" (Hosein and Outar 2016, 4). Thus, the editors and contributors to *Indo-Caribbean Feminist Thought* theorize Indo-Caribbean identity as multiple, in flux, and always-already creolized, particularly in the charged arena of gender politics.

Negotiating Indo-Caribbean identity in the vexed political climate of the Caribbean, where racial tensions simmer in the wake of destructive legacies of slavery, indenture, and colonialism, is tricky enough. But what does an Indian Caribbean identity mean to those living outside the Caribbean, who are removed not only from India, but also from contemporary Caribbean societies and nation-states? I want to suggest that new ways of conceptualizing and constructing an Indo-Caribbean identity emerge and are demanded by the movement of Indo-Caribbean peoples to North America. This Indo-Caribbean diasporic consciousness, as I term it, takes expression in visual and performing arts that stage a communal understanding of identity as process.

In a 2016 article for *Brown Girl Magazine*, New York-based performer and storyteller Miranda Deebrah writes: "Removed from the homeland of our ancestors who were brought to the Caribbean

as indentured servants . . . [and] now, primarily settled in New York, Indo-Caribbeans are again removed from yet another homeland." Deebrah elegantly elucidates the condition at the heart of Indo-Caribbean identity in diaspora; a twice removal, once from India (or more accurately, South Asia)[1] to the Caribbean as indentured laborers under British colonialism, and secondly from the Caribbean to the United States and many other locations in the global north in migration flows of late capitalism. "Diaspora" itself becomes a troubled category for Caribbean peoples of South Asian descent living outside the Caribbean. Is "diaspora" the original movement of South Asians to the Caribbean (as well as to Africa and the Pacific Islands) through the imperial system of contractual labor known as indenture? Or the dispersal of Caribbean peoples primarily to North America and Western Europe in the twentieth century, especially postindependence? Hence, the concept "double diaspora" comes to characterize the Indian Caribbean outside of the Caribbean. Indo-Caribbeans in the United States navigate a double displacement from home or "origin," from both the Caribbean and South Asia. Furthermore, while nation-states of the modern Caribbean are characterized by creolization and the "problematic of black-Indian party politics" (Puri 2004, 172), the demographic and racial landscape of the United States offers an entirely different set of discourses and challenges to navigate for those of Indo-Caribbean descent.

Indeed, the Indo-Caribbean diaspora remains largely invisible in contemporary racial discourses of the United States. As Dwaine Plaza notes in his demographic work on Indo- and Afro-Caribbean populations in Canada, Indo-Caribbean migrants to North America find themselves in the difficult position of having "an ambiguous sense of identity where they are neither fully Caribbean nor South Asian," a statement that may equally apply to the US context (2004, 243). However, there is a dearth of research on Indo-Caribbean ethnic and gender populations in the United States. As Pyong Gap Min notes in his quantitative study of the cultural attachments of Indian Caribbeans in New York City, "although far fewer Indo-Caribbean immigrants are settled in Canada than in the US, more research has been conducted on those in Canada" (2013, 1603). A growing body of research has attempted to rectify this gap over approximately the past three decades, particularly through the critical lenses of race and ethnic studies, Indo-Caribbean feminisms, history/historiography of indenture, and literary studies. Particularly notable are contributions like Brinda Mehta's *Diasporic (Dis)Locations: Indo-Caribbean Women Writers Negotiate the Kala Pani* (2004) and Gaiutra Bahadur's *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey*

[1] Although scholarship in this area often refers to the "Indian Caribbean" diaspora and the term "Indo-Caribbean" itself contains a referent to "India," I here want to make an argument for locating the origins of Caribbean and other descendants of indenture to "South Asia" rather than India. During the period of indentured migration from the subcontinent to the Caribbean (1838–1917), "India" as an independent nation-state did not yet exist. The majority of indentured laborers derived from the Uttar Pradesh and Bihar regions of northern India, although significant other numbers were also recruited from parts of South India (R. Mohabir 2019). Therefore, the language, religious, and cultural customs of indentured migrants to the Caribbean, insofar as one can locate any fixed "origin," derive from these regional dialects and cultures such as the Bhojpuri language, not "India" (an as-yet imaginary entity) as a whole. Retroactively imposing "India" on South Asian migrants to the Caribbean enacts a distortion on their historical and cultural trajectory and ahistorically writes them into the nationalistic narrative of a homogenous "Indian" culture that is a relatively recent construction. I find it especially urgent in the current geopolitical climate that sees the resurgence of Hindu nationalism and ethnic and religious fundamentalism in India to insist on properly historicizing the nation-state, contextualizing the recency of "India' as a national imaginary, and centering the always-already creolized and multifaceted nature of the South Asian indentured labor diaspora. Thus, throughout this article I show preference for the term "South Asia" over "India" when describing the origins of Indo-Caribbean peoples.

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of Indenture (2014), the latter an archival and personal investigation into the stories of indentured Indian women from the perspective of a first-generation Guyanese immigrant to the United States that broke ground for scholarly and popular audiences alike. The feminist interventions of these works illuminate not just the initial migration of South Asians to the Caribbean, but also the double diaspora, particularly "twice migrants" to the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. A smaller amount of research on the topic exists in the fields of social science, sociology, demography, and related areas (see, for example, Tanikella 2009; Pillai 2019; Despot 2016; Jackson 2016). Still, as Min observes, there is a significant gap in the study of "twice migrant" populations in the US.

The Indo-Caribbean diaspora complicates both dominant representations of the Caribbean as primarily African and normative constructions of South Asianness in the West. Jasbir Puar succinctly describes the Afrocentrism of gender and sexuality scholarship on the Caribbean as the "Africanization of state-created identities" (2009, 5–6). Despite the racial heterogeneity of Caribbean countries like Trinidad and Tobago, the Caribbean is homogenized as black. On the other hand, according to Das Gupta, Gupta, and Teaiwa (2007), the Indo-Caribbean diaspora constitutes a "marginalized [South Asian] diaspora, long disavowed because of [its] association with coolie pasts, [and] displaces South Asia as the point of reference" (128). As a "disavowed diaspora" from South Asia, Indo-Caribbean peoples challenge what Tejaswini Niranjana (2006) calls the "normative diasporic" Indian: an immigrant to the "First World," usually highly educated and middle-class, with strong ties to the homeland (181); or what Indo-Fijian historian Brij Lal has termed the "dollar diaspora" to emphasize these immigrants' elevated economic status (qtd. in Anjum 2006, 102). The Indo-Caribbean subject's relationship to Western modernity is instead routed through the "detour" of indenture in the British colonial Caribbean, which introduces anxieties about caste, racial mixing, and an ambivalent relationship to South Asia. Complicating the Afrocentrism of Caribbean identity on one hand and South Asian identity on the other, Indo-Caribbean first- and second-generation immigrants to the US negotiate their marginal position through cultural productions like film, literature, and performance.

The politics of an Indo-Caribbean identity necessarily looks different within the current demographic climate and racial vocabularies of the United States compared to the Caribbean. Transplanting a "fixed" or essential Indo-Caribbean identity from the Caribbean context, defined by historical racial antagonisms between the politically constructed groups of "Africans" and "Indians" would make little sense in a contemporary America that is not structured by these logics. In her article "Material and Immaterial Bodies: Diaspora Studies and the Problem of Culture, Identity, and Race" (2015), Aisha Khan problematizes "identity," its necessary corollary, the "culture concept," and the ways that these terms serve in intellectual work to unintentionally fix "ethno-racially defined groups, notably 'African' and 'Indian' or 'Asian'" (30). Such a slippage between "diaspora," "culture," and "identity" tends to reproduce the African/Indian racial binary and therefore the oppositional racial politics of the Caribbean. "Diaspora," which is unified by a shared "culture," becomes an "identity" that essentially stands in for ethnoracial labels like "Indian" and "black." As Khan puts it, the "indispensable use of the culture concept . . . keeps intact the boundaries that divide diasporas into distinct ethnoracial units" (30). Vijay Prashad (2001) in his work on global and historical Afro-Asian

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connections, critiques the "fetish of culture" that he argues multiculturalism traffics in, where essentialized "culture" effectively replaces biological determinism to explain differences among races and ethnicities, binding us in pointless and circular problematics and keeping African and Asian diasporic histories in separate spheres. In other words, returning to the dilemma of Indo-Caribbean feminists like Outar and Hosein, constructing Indo-Caribbean identity as culturally and ethnically distinct from African and other diasporic groups of the Caribbean risks solidifying divisions between the two groups and obscuring the more complex overlaps and interactions. Yet, claiming space for Indo-Caribbean subjectivity and creative, cultural, and literary production remains an important task for activists and scholars.

I argue that doubly-diasporic, Indo-Caribbean artists and creators break with and unpack essential notions of an "Indo-Caribbean" ethnic identity, instead reassembling "Indo-Caribbeanness" as a diasporic consciousness, which Khan defines as "a particular consciousness about the experience of migration" and a "diasporic sensibility" (2007, 145). The Indo-Caribbean diasporic consciousness that I identify is political and generational, characterized less by race and ethnicity than recursive engagement with the intergenerational traumas of indenture and migration. In this way, this generation of the Indian Caribbean avoids the "reification" of the identity concept and instead conceives of identity as an open-ended process capable of navigating the US multicultural landscape, including complex and often competing discourses of the South Asian model minority and pervasive antiblackness.

I examine Miranda Deebrah's oral performance piece "Sounds from Home" (2017) and Lissa Deonarain's short documentary film *Double Diaspora: A Portrait of Indo-Caribbeans in New York* (2018) as examples of performing and cinematic arts that venture to envision Indo-Caribbean identity as a political and historical consciousness. Deonarain's documentary and Deebrah's performance piece both follow a narrative structure that cyclically processes intergenerational trauma to arrive at a collective doubly-diasporic consciousness. Beginning with migration to the United States and into a racial geography that renders Indo-Caribbeanness unintelligible, the subjects of Deebrah's and Deonarain's stories find their sense of identity fragmented and experience alienation, sometimes self-imposed, from South Asian and Caribbean "culture." This dissatisfaction with the "culture concept" triggers a revisiting of the historical legacies of migration and indenture, followed by the assembly of a new identity that redefines Indo-Caribbeanness less as an ethnic label than a process of migration and remaking in diaspora. This formation of identity for Caribbean-Americans of South Asian descent is generationally distinct from the ways that previous waves of immigrants or Caribbean residents may have defined themselves.

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Narrativizing Identity Formation: Miranda Deebrah's "Sounds from Home" and Lissa Deonarain's *Double Diaspora*

Deebrah's hybrid-genre performance "Sounds from Home" combines monologue, spoken word poetry, oral storytelling tradition, and visual elements (clothing, lighting, and images projected on a screen) to narrate her migration story and journey towards accepting and embracing her identity. The piece begins with her migration from Guyana to the United States as a seven-year-old child, a traumatic experience requiring psychic denial of her identity, and sense of self. The piece continues by narrating the fraught process of assimilation into American cultural norms and expectations for behavior. Ultimately, Deebrah finds resolve in returning to her ancestral history of indentured labor and unapologetically reclaiming her Guyanese identity. Lissa Deonarain's film *Double Diaspora* depicts the densely Indo-Guyanese community in Richmond Hill, Queens, New York City. The film features interviews with several community members about grassroots Indo-Caribbean organizations specific to that place, as well as each of their individual migration stories and relationships to Indo-Caribbean identity.

Deebrah and Deonarain are interlocutors—part of an emerging doubly-diasporic generation of self-identified Indo-Caribbeans involved in artistic and social advocacy within the community in New York. Deebrah is interviewed in *Double Diaspora*, and clips of her performance are spliced into the narrative. However, the forms of documentary film and theatrical performance offer different possibilities for analysis. Deebrah's one-woman show powerfully voices an individual, deeply personal story to a live audience. Deonarain weaves together multiple voices, stitching a "portrait" of a community. Although both center a feminist lens, their cultural production represents a hegemonic Indo-Caribbean narrative limited to the perspectives of predominantly Hindu, Indo-Guyanese immigrants to New York, the most visible manifestation of the community. Nonetheless, I see "Sounds from Home" and *Double Diaspora* as part of an emerging wave of cultural production from a generation of socially aware and active Indo-Caribbeans in the US who are deeply concerned with defining their heritage and place in the world. Together, their work forms a body of contemporary material that reconceptualizes Indo-Caribbean identity beyond the bounds of race, ethnicity, or culture as diasporic consciousness.

Migration as Dislocation and Fragmentation of Identity

The journey to diasporic consciousness begins with migration, and both pieces understand migration as a traumatic event that ruptures a sense of identity. Deebrah's story begins with her migration from Guyana to New York as a child, when attending the third grade in a new country was "a terrifying thing" (0:25).[2] The other children "sound like Americans, with their 'Oh my god!' and 'Totally!'" she intones, performing a slightly exaggerated, girlish American accent (1:06). Fluidly

[2] Quotations from Deebrah's "Sounds From Home" are from the video recording of her 2017 performance at "Yoni Ki Raat," a showcase of South Asian diasporic performance and art (https://mirandarachel.com/yoni-ki-raat/). The timestamps refer to this video.

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moving between American English and Guyanese English creole, she continues: "And me? Meh sound like dis, fresh off de boat," her bemused expression eliciting an eruption of laughter from the audience (1:24). Throughout the performance, language becomes a contested site of trauma, alienation, and a working-through of personhood. Guyanese English creole describes the vernacular linguistic expression of descendants of African slaves and Indian indentured laborers, along with indigenous, Chinese, and other ethnic groups in Guyana. As Rajiv Mohabir (2019) describes in his formulation of "chutney poetics": "The interaction between the language of power [British English] and the language of the [indentured] laborers spawned the development of a Pidgin that grew into Trinidadian English Creole" (2), a parallel process to what occurred in Guyana. Guyanese creole is therefore a hybridization of colonial English and inheritances from Hindi, Bhojpuri, and other African and Indian regional languages, with its own distinct grammar, idiom, and vocabulary. But creole is more than just a language to Deebrah; it is a performance of self, and her relationship to Guyanese creole indexes her loss of identity.

Brinda Mehta (2006) describes Indo-Caribbeans' "negation of Indian identity" as a "psychic disavowal" that "intensifies the trauma of displacement" leading to inherited, intergenerational problems such as psychological distress, alcoholism, and domestic abuse (30). This "psychic disavowal" could describe Deebrah's alienation from her identity. She says: "My whole way of being and existing was wrong in the eyes of these United States. . . , so I hide my creolese like a secret to be ashamed of" (6:50). Deebrah suppresses her native creole, and therefore her entire sense of self, to submit to the psychologically violent American politics of assimilation. A hint of irony in the plural use of "*these* United States" indicts a liberal multicultural discourse where cultural plurality is harmoniously unified within the nation-state. The hidden cost of multiculturalism in this country, Deebrah implies, is the silencing and erasure of certain voices. That Deebrah draws on the rich linguistic resources of creole to enact this critique underlines her self-perceived distance from acceptable "Americanness," but also foreshadows her reclamation of Guyanese identity towards the end of the performance.

Deebrah visualizes the fragmentation and loss of her identity through her costume onstage. She begins the performance with four scarves tied around her wrists—white, black, yellow, and green, representing the colors of the Guyanese flag, and a red scarf around her neck. As the performance progresses, she unties the scarves one by one and drops them to the ground, signaling the fracturing of her sense of self engendered by the jarring relocation from Guyana to New York. The act of untying each scarf from her body and dropping it marks a critical point of progression in the narrative and the undoing of identity. She drops the first scarf after carefully observing and learning to mimic the precise "intonations" and pronunciations of vowels of her American friend and realizes, this is how I am supposed to speak and sound, if I'm going to live here" (3:58). She also drops a scarf when she learns that her name is now "Mir-AND-da," with a drawn-out American "a," instead of the Guyanese creole pronunciation. But it is not merely the pronunciation of her name that changes, but the name itself; and therefore who she is. Before untying the final scarf from around her neck, Deebrah says: "It's just like acting. But I can feel myself in danger of losing a vital part of who I am" (8:00). Though Deebrah masterfully performs both conventional Americanness and vibrant Guyanese English creole, she stresses that identity is not reducible to performance, and having to psychically disavow her Guyanese

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heritage has profound and traumatic consequences for her understanding of self. Deebrah finds her Guyanese identity to be untenable in an American cultural landscape that is hostile to difference and has no place for her.

While "Sounds from Home" begins with Deebrah leaving her home in Guyana, *Double Diaspora* actually begins with settlement: introducing the communities, institutions, and lives that Indo-Guyanese have built in the Richmond Hill neighborhood in the southern part of Queens. The documentary introduces two grassroots organizations created specifically to serve the Indo-Caribbean community—the Indo-Caribbean Alliance (ICA) and the feminist gender justice organization Jahajee Sisters—through informational interviews with members of both. Only after this introductory material framing the Indo-Caribbean community as a collective entity, does Deonarain pivot to the personal narratives of her individual interviewees. A simple transition consisting of a few moments of black screen signals a shift in the tone and narrative of the film. While the first section featured public spaces like the streets of Richmond Hill, photos of vigils held for Indo-Caribbean women killed by their intimate partners, and the office spaces of the ICA, the next segment of the documentary features interior spaces that showcase the individual interviewees' personalities. In Deonarain's interview with Sarah Alli, an Indo-Guyanese filmmaker and photographer, Alli is seated in her bedroom in front of an impressive computer setup appropriate for film editing. A guitar hangs on the wall behind her, and some clothes are visible peeking through the slightly open door of a wardrobe. In Deebrah's interview, she is framed by shelves of worn books, board games, and crinkled flyers pinned to bulletin boards in what looks like the interior of a café or bookstore. These lived-in, personal spaces provide the backdrop for this section of the film that dives into personal journeys of identity, much like Deebrah's monologue tells her individual story.

Just a Deebrah experienced a sense of loss and disconnection in "Sounds from Home," many of Deonarain's Indo-Caribbean interlocutors find the transition from Guyana to America to be a challenging dislocation that ruptures the sense of self and demands new configurations of identity. "The Indo-Caribbean community began moving to New York—or leaving Guyana, mostly—after independence there in the 1960s" (0:47), says Richard David, community figure and cofounder of the Indo-Caribbean Alliance.[3] David's focus on the push forces of migration—people "leave Guyana" rather than "come to America"—emphasizes that these movements uproot and displace Indo-Guyanese people. A generation of Indo-Guyanese in New York in fact call America their place of birth. While Deebrah was born in Guyana and spent the early years of her childhood there before migrating to New York, technically classifying her as a first-generation immigrant, even those of Indo-Guyanese descent who are born in America feel the ripple effects of migration and displacement. Alli is American-born, but describes the challenges of negotiating conflicting pressures of "American" and "Guyanese" cultures. In comparison to her more "traditional" cousins who practice Hinduism, play Indian instruments, and perform Indian dance, Alli plays the guitar, drums, and bass; or what her family would call "white shit" (7:00). She behaves more like a typical "American" kid, choosing to move away from her parents' home for college despite cultural expectations that children live at home

[3] Timestamp from Deonarain 2018.

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until marriage. Like Deebrah, Alli grapples with the tensions of relocating to America, where her cultural identity becomes fragmented and in flux.

Other interviewees also express confusion and conflict around their place within the American racial and multiethnic topography. Susan Mahadeo, a cofounder of ICA, says she frequently feels "misunderstood" and humorously recalls being asked if Guyana is in Africa, and having to "show [people] a map" (12:03, 12:25). Shabana Bachu, a volunteer with Jahajee Sisters, says that "for the most part growing up" she identified as "just Guyanese" and would explicitly refuse the label "Indian." Alli recounts that during her first year of college, she assumed the identity of being black because that was the category through which most of her peers made sense of her. As Alli puts it: "White America likes to lump white and nonwhite into these two separate categories, and that's not how the world is" (15:07). American discourses of race, which often rely on a black/white binary, or the "normative diasporic" South Asian immigrant from India, leave little room for a hybridized labor diaspora identity like "Indo-Caribbean." Neither truly South Asian nor black, displacement into the US breaks a coherent sense of identity for Indo-Caribbeans who do not authentically fit into the available categories. Like puzzle pieces violently shunted into spaces where they do not fit, these interlocutors feel the broken and jagged edges. The dissonance between American taxonomies of race, the experience of the Indo-Guyanese community, and the inadequacy of cultural models of identity lead Deebrah, Alli, and Bachu to negate or disavow certain parts of their identity: the familiar cadences of Guyanese creole, Indian "culture," or the frustrating exercise of identifying and explaining the small South American country of their origin.

Though Alli's "psychic disavowal" of culture appears to reject Indo-Guyanese identity while Deebrah desperately longs for connection to it, I suggest that despite the differences in their migration stories and status, they actually share a generational dissatisfaction with the reified "culture concept," whether American, Guyanese, or Indian. Indeed, the fact that Alli ultimately claims a Guyanese and Indo-Caribbean identity, despite rejecting traditional Indian music and dance in favor of the guitar displayed in her room, demonstrates that her "identity" does not revolve around specific cultural forms or traditional Indian inheritances. Likewise, Bachu rejects the label "Indian," and it is not through a return to Indian "roots" that these Indo-Caribbeans find their place. Both Deebrah and the community represented in Deonarain's documentary find hegemonic American and Indian culture, respectively, an insufficient paradigm for the formation of a doubly-diasporic identity. This fracturing of identity and sense of alienation, I argue, is the first step in the process that constitutes diasporic consciousness for Indo-Caribbeans. According to Khan, diasporic communities vary widely in their historical contexts, but "what remains a key constant is a community's emphasis on its awareness of its outsider-foreign origins, [and] the struggle in local contexts to overcome the stigma with which outsider-foreign origins contend" (2007, 147). Racially illegible to America, these second-generation Indo-Guyanese acutely feel the stigma of being outsiders in the form of displacement, alienation from the self, and a shattered sense of identity. When it becomes clear that American racial logics and bounded concepts of culture cannot accommodate Caribbean peoples of South Asian descent, they forge new forms of identification that make sense in the context of a double diaspora.

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As reflected in the narrative structure and individual stories of Deebrah's performance piece and Deonarain's film, the traumatic dislocation of migration and its destabilization of self often leads to a period of self-imposed exile from the community of origin. While Deebrah attempts to scrub any traces of her "Guyaneseness" from her external performance of self, Alli, Bachu, and Mahadeo physically distance themselves from family and the Indo-Caribbean community for periods of time. Alli's interest in rock music and other American cultural forms resulted in her "pulling more and more away from Caribbean culture," and her decision to move away from home for college creates a physical distance from her community and culture (7:25). Referring to the Indo-Caribbean community in Richmond Hill, which she describes as "a very specific environment to grow up in," Mahadeo narrates: "For a while I kind of went away from it, the whole community" (12:04). "Leaving," "going away," or some type of voluntary exile from the Indo-Caribbean community appears to be an essential part of the process of rearriving at a diasporic consciousness. After the fragmentation of identity entailed by displacement from the Caribbean, second-generation Indo-Guyanese interviewed in *Double Diaspora* distance themselves from the community as part of the process of negotiating or renegotiating their sense of identity in the unfamiliar terrain of the United States. Voluntary separation and exile from the community within the US adds another layer to the "multiple exiles that are a part of the Indian experience in the Caribbean and North America" (Mehta 2006, 20). The narrative progression of *Double Diaspora* and "Sounds from Home," from the disorienting and disruptive loss of identity to voluntary exile, complicates linear narratives of immigrant assimilation into American culture. This process suggests an alternative construction of identity, not as a gradual integration of "Indian," Guyanese," and "American" cultures, but a de- and re-constructive process of coming to diasporic consciousness.

Returning to Traumatic Histories to Reassemble Identity

It is only through and after the experience of separation from community that Deebrah, the subjects of Deonarain's film, and the film itself are able to reassemble an Indo-Caribbean identity based on process and consciousness. This occurs by revisiting the history of indentured labor migrations from South Asia to the Caribbean and legacies of postcolonial trauma. The narrative threads of Deebrah's performance and Deonarain's documentary proceed nonlinearly, reaching backwards from their migration and assimilation stories into the Indo-Caribbean past. Alli says that moving to Boston for college and achieving some distance from her family and community actually helped her better "appreciate the sacrifices that [her] parents made" in migrating to the US (8:17). But the desire for connection to previous generations extends even further to the initial migration of South Asians under colonial indenture to Guyana and other parts of the Caribbean. Bachu says: "About three years ago I started to delve more deeper into what being Indo-Caribbean meant and how Indians ended up in the Caribbean in the first place . . . [and] doing a lot of research" (13:30). Through this historicized understanding that migration from Guyana to the US is in some ways a reiteration of her ancestors' displacement from South Asia, she says: "I started to develop a better sense of who I was" (13:52). Here, we see the emergence of "a particular consciousness about the experience of migration" that Khan describes (2007, 145).

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In the powerful conclusion to her performance, Deebrah draws a direct line from the trauma of her ancestors' transplantation from India to the Caribbean and the loss of their mother tongues to her own uprooting from Guyana, repression of her Guyanese creole, and ultimately the repression of her Guyanese identity. With photographs of ancestral indentured laborers appearing on the screen behind her, she explains that the psychic dispossession of her identity proceeds in "the same way [her] ancestors were ripped from their homes and forced into servitude on the unknown shores of the Caribbean. . . , raped of their customs and native tongue. *And so wha' now, same ting go happen to me*?" (8:10). Deebrah explicitly ties the psychological violence of separation from her Guyanese homeland and the silencing of her voice to her ancestors' prior dislocation and oppression under colonialism and indenture. The recognition of this double displacement and the intergenerational repetition of psychological trauma, is key to defining Indo-Caribbeanness in diaspora. As Khan outlines: "Culture and identity also find their place in diaspora through the experience of trauma, whether as rupture and dislocation in the past or the present-day experience of social inequality and its resistance" (2015, 39). Thus, an Indo-Caribbean identity in diaspora is less about "culture" than an awareness of multiple "ruptures" and "dislocations": from indenture to contemporary migration to the US, generation to generation, past and present. A static notion of identity is replaced with a process of growing historical and political awareness, leading to a diasporic consciousness.

"Where I Am Now": Diasporic Consciousness as a Recursive Process

The process of arriving at diasporic consciousness, however, does not follow a linear progression, nor do any of the narratives told by Deebrah or Deonarain's interlocutors. Rather, it operates through a recursive temporality that constantly loops back to colonialism and indenture in order to make sense of "the present-day experience of social inequality" (Khan 2015, 39). Identity construction in the double diaspora is an ongoing process, not a closed journey with a finite end. Concluding the story of her struggle with identity and self-imposed exile from the community, Mahadeo ultimately returns to Richmond Hill to cofound the Indo-Caribbean Alliance. "That's where I feel like *I am now*," she says, "wanting to present our identity in a way where we control the narrative" (12:42). Mahadeo's location of herself in the present, "where I am *now*," suggests that her journey is not over, but perpetually in progress, perhaps with future stages to undergo. Mahadeo describes "identity" as "a creative process," echoing Aisha Khan's recommendation to "let go of diaspora as an end goal of analysis and instead treat it as a condition of possibility, as a means to an end that is open and contingent rather than predictive" (2015, 43). Indeed, Bachu says of the end result of her self-directed research into indenture: "I would say I'm *back where I began*, I call myself Guyanese still . . . but I think that process was necessary" (14:01). Her temporal language underlines the recursivity and open-endedness of identity as process. In their nonlinear engagements with contemporary processes of identity-making in the US cultural and racial landscape, as refracted through historical conditions of migration and indenture, this generation of Indo-Guyanese activists and creatives provides a model of diasporic consciousness as an open platform of "possibility" rather than a static entity. Second-generation Indo-Guyanese eventually arrive at an Indo-Caribbean consciousness by losing their identity, exiling themselves form the community, and then returning to histories of indenture,

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establishing an intergenerational, recursive genealogy of traumatic displacement that becomes constitutive to the notion of being "Indo-Caribbean."

The Third Journey: Arriving at Diasporic Consciousness

Deebrah's and Deonarain's narratives, though they do not progress to a definite conclusion, end with their subjects feeling freed and empowered by the new sense of identity they have constructed around process and "a particular consciousness about the experience of migration" (Khan 2007, 145). In *Double Diaspora,* Alli wraps up her personal story about identity saying: "Once you reclaim your identity, it's pretty liberating" (14:45). She says that a younger person might not think that their identity is important, "But it's super relevant. You're relevant. You're part of the world" (17:00). Alli's journey toward diasporic consciousness culminates in an awareness of her position within a broader community and a sense of responsibility to participate in that world. Deebrah also refuses to be consigned to her ancestors' fate, saying: "I nah guh let dem take it from me" (8:43). "Dem" here refers dually to the colonial power structures that tore her ancestors from their customs and language and to liberal discourses of American multiculturalism that force denial of Deebrah's Guyanese identity. Beyond trauma, she also locates strength, resilience, and creative opportunity in these painful histories, as her indentured forebearers "created" a "new language" to "call their own"—the very same creole she has imaginatively plumbed as an expressive resource throughout the performance (8:55). Guyanese creole, or the sounds "that exist in [her] core," becomes a sonic archive of an ambivalent history of exploitation, pain, and violence, but also survival, resistance, and cultural innovation (9:05). At the conclusion of the performance, Deebrah triumphantly gathers the colored scarves from the floor and raises them above her head, literally picking up the pieces of her fragmented identity and reassembling them into something new.

Deebrah's story and Deonarain's respondents' narratives of the process of realizing their identities become yet a third layer of journeys in the Indo-Caribbean diasporic consciousness, recapitulations of the traumatic and transformative journeys from South Asia to the Caribbean and the Caribbean to the US. In "Rites and Rights of Passage: Seeking a Diasporic Consciousness," Khan (2007) explores stories of betrayal as structuring narratives of the Indo-Caribbean diasporic identity. I suggest that the generation of Indo-Caribbean performers and storytellers highlighted here offers another narrative of the Indo-Caribbean diaspora, one of multiple traumatic displacements and the journey of processing the most recent migration (to America) through the history of the other (migration of indenture.) These intellectual, psychological, and affective journeys toward diasporic consciousness might also be considered under the rubric of a "poetics of the *kala pani*," as insightfully articulated by feminist scholar Brinda Mehta (2006). The *kala pani*, Hindi for "dark waters," refers to the liminal spaces of the transoceanic crossing from the South Asian subcontinent to the Caribbean. The *kala pani* represents both a traumatic displacement and an arena of possibilities for reinvention and mobility around caste, gender, and marital status for Indian migrants. Mehta writes: "As a fragmented genealogy, the *kala pani* engenders a process of 'coming into being' amid spatial dislocations" (2006, 25). The second-generation, self-identified Indo-Caribbeans discussed here "come into" consciousness through a psychological processing of multiple displacements.

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I argue that this consciousness is made possible only by the conditions of double diaspora and the racial landscape of the US—that is, this particular Indo-Caribbean consciousness crystalizes *in diaspora*, in response to conditions outside of the Caribbean. Even though all of the interviewees in *Double Diaspora* identify their country of heritage as Guyana, the identity that they ultimately arrive at is an "Indo-Caribbean" one, not a Guyanese one. I argue that this is because an Indo-Caribbean consciousness is not an identity linked to any one country, geography, ethnicity, or race but a process necessitated by conditions of diaspora in the United States. The process itself of reassembling a shattered identity through voluntary exile and an historical and politicized understanding of Indian indenture and migration is what defines Indo-Caribbean diasporic consciousness in America, rather than any particular cultural practices such as "behavior, recipes, customs, programs, rules, or traditions" (Khan 2015, 30). An Indo-Caribbean consciousness, routed through an historical understanding of indenture, colonialism, migration, and intergenerational trauma, is flexible and nonessentializing enough to negotiate the specificities of the ethnic and racial landscape of the United States. As opposed to an ethnic label, it provides a greater "condition of possibility" for navigating pervasive antiblackness in the US and pan-South Asian spaces because it does not play into separatist racial politics as much as an adherence to the "culture concept" and models of Indian cultural inheritance.

Furthermore, I argue that an Indo-Caribbean diasporic consciousness pushes back against the nation-state. As stated earlier, a pan-Indo-Caribbean identity as constructed by this cohort of diasporic artist-activists in the US transcends individual Caribbean nations, even though I concede that the discussion here is limited to the Indo-Guyanese perspective, with further research needed on Indo-Caribbean American migrants from other Caribbean countries. But as Khan explains in the context of Trinidad: "Nationalist ideology embraces such representative Trinidadian cultural icons as calypso, steelband, and carnival—contributions all largely associated with Afro-Trinidadian presence. Striving to enjoy equal support and thus representative status, Indo-Trinidadians also deploy certain selected traditions for such recognition" (2007, 144). However, the Indo-Caribbean subjects discussed here do not define themselves primarily through any specific cultural practices. From Alli's rock music to Deebrah's "unconventional" storytelling (as described in her own words), all can be accommodated under this flexible formation of identity as process. An Indo-Caribbean generational consciousness employs a politics of recognition based on processes of migration and external and internal exile rather than "culture" and "tradition," therefore rejecting the demands of the nation-state to make themselves culturally legible as a group through a bounded set of "traditions" and cultural practices. Likewise, American politics of multiculturalism demand that immigrant subjects assign themselves to discrete "cultural" categories, such as white, black, or Indian, which Alli, Bachu, and Deebrah refuse. In this way, their conception of Indo-Caribbean identity as a transnational process of migrations across continents challenges the cultural logics and boundaries of both the American and Caribbean nation-state. Though Guyana is clearly important to the identity of the second-generation Indo-Caribbean artists and activists I engage with here, their formation of diasporic consciousness resists affiliation with any single Caribbean nation-state and a general nationalist identity politics, whether in the Caribbean or the United States.

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Conclusion: Considerations on Method and Media

By way of conclusion, I offer a few thoughts on methodology and the possibilities of creative media such as the performing and cinematic arts. In other words, what do these forms of cultural production afford Indo-Caribbeans in the US, and how do they help us understand identity formation? I was struck by Pyong Gap Min's 2013 quantitative and sociological study of "The Attachments of New York City Caribbean Indian Immigrants to Indian Culture, Indian Immigrants and India." With this important contribution to the study of "twice migrant" populations (what I term in this article the "double diaspora") from the disciplinary methodology of the social sciences, Min nevertheless acknowledges that "postmodernist scholars who emphasise the social constructionist views of culture and ethnic identity . . . would find many problems with this quantitatively analysed paper" because of the limited identity categories offered to respondents (2013, 1614). Respondents in Min's survey were offered the choices "Guyanese (Trinidadian) or Caribbean, Guyanese (Trinidadian) American, Guyanese (Trinidadian) Indian, Indian or Indian American, Muslim or Caribbean Muslim." Min's research and that with comparable methodologies attempt to systematically survey and understand broad trends across large populations.

US census surveys fail to capture Indo-Caribbeans demographically, as the "South Asian" category does not distinguish between "twice migrants" from the Caribbean with South Asian origin and South Asians from the subcontinent, and there are few other options with which an Indo-Caribbean person would reasonably identify (Min 2013). However, I want to consider how visual and performing arts may complicate and extend the categories presented here and the possibilities for conceptualizing identity beyond ethnic labels. In a conversation with Deebrah, she noted that "our community [the Indo-Caribbean community] doesn't place a lot emphasis on liberal arts." But from her perspective as a storyteller, "We [Indo-Caribbeans have] suffered enough, our ancestors suffered enough for us to have a better life" and the ability to explore artistic and creative production. In an interview given to *Of Note Magazine*, Indo-Caribbean visual artist Andil Gosine says that descendants of indenture often do not feel they have the privilege of exploring art, because under indenture, "You have to prove yourself in labor, and we are still trying to prove our humanity in a basic way" (qtd. in N. Mohabir 2014). Thus, artistic production, including visual, cinematic, and performing arts offers a way for Indo-Caribbeans to explore their humanness and new formulations of identity that cannot be captured in a survey or census form. They illuminate the complexity and humanity of the diaspora and the multilayered relationships of Indo-Caribbeans to their multiple homelands, the historical conditions of indenture, and their multiple migrations.

As I have shown here, "Sounds from Home'" and *Double Diaspora* construct identity as a process rather than a fixed category, a journey from dispossession and alienation to diasporic consciousness. Migration from Guyana to the US, whether experienced directly or secondhand as the child of immigrants, is lived as both a traumatic dislocation, inevitably recalling the transatlantic passage from India and the traumas of indenture, but also as a source of resilience and opportunity. Through exploring histories of indenture, these second-generation Indo-Guyanese reconfigure a sense of self and community, ultimately arriving at a broader "Indo-Caribbean" diasporic consciousness as

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process. The creative, innovative, and progressive formations of identity happening in Indo-Guyanese communities in New York deserve further scholarly attention in hemispheric studies of the Americas not only for the way that this generation reconceptualizes identity as a transnational, transgenerational process of multiple migrations, but the implications more broadly for how Indo-Caribbeans might impact discourses of race and ethnicity in the US, the Caribbean, and beyond.

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