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Imagining India(ns): Cultural Performances and Diaspora Politics in Jamaica

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Imagining India(ns): Cultural Performances and Diaspora Politics in Jamaica

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

August, 2003

Dedication

To my parents - Madhuram Ranganathan Shankar and Kuthur Vaidyanathan Shankar, M.D., F.R.C.S.,

sisters - Geetha, Hema, Vibha, and Uma,

mentors and friends - James Brow, Tom Vennum, Jr.,

Chapter 3 sistren, and my other, Kathleen

Acknowledgements

My profound thanks to my Jamaican friends, hosts and guides, the Jagasssar, Singh, and Baijoe families, and members of the National Council for Indian Culture in Jamaica, for their assistance with this project. All thanks to my parents, sisters, and Kathleen for their sustained support, criticism, loyalty, patience, and love.

A number of individuals, in and out of the Department of Anthropology at UT, have been crucial to my well-being, progress, and sanity. Front and center is James Brow, a constant and unflagging mentor in the finest sense – critical, kind, concise, effortlessly brilliant, and above all confident in my abilities, no matter my own doubts. He's kept me off the dole, in the classroom, and on coffee for the duration of my time at UT. I am especially grateful to Bob and B.J Fernea, and James and Judy Brow for their numerous acts of support, friendship, and kindness.

Other individuals' works, friendship and intellectual

generosity have modeled for me the ways that scholarship, academic achievement, and personal integrity mutually inform each other. They include Tom Vennum, Jake Homiak, Ken Bilby, Bob McCarl, Frank Proschan, Frank Korom, Polly Strong, Kamala Visweswaran, Katie Stewart, Bob and B.J. Fernea, Ted Gordon, Isar Godreau, Joel Sherzer, Michael Hanchard, Deborah Kapchan, Ward Keeler, Richard Flores, Charlie Hale, and Mel Tapper. The passing of days does not lessen the pain of Begona Aretxaga's absence any less — her departure left a large hole in the world, and time wounds, but doesn't heal. Miss you, Bego!

I am awed by the unwavering friendship and labors of the heart and mind performed by my 'gradual' student cohort. Chapter 3'ers Alice Chu, Apen Ruiz Chris Labuski, Jessica "Quesita" Montalvo, and Liz Lilliott, and fellow travelers John Bodinger, Melissa Biggs Coupal, Carol Cannon, Ben Chappell, Elana Zilberg, Vania Cardoso, and Scott Head walked this vale of tears with me. Frances Terry has been solace and confidant for me and hordes of Folklore/Cultural Studies students. Staff in the Department — Sergio Acosta, Pam Becker, Jenni Jones, Susan Lane, Steph Osbakken, Sarah Marmion, Andi Shively – have been great supporters, friends, and co-workers.

In Jamaica, many thanks to welcoming hosts and wonderful

resources at the Afro-Caribbean Institute of Jamaica (Bernard Jankee, Director), and Rupert Lewis, Maureen Warner-Lewis, Verene Shepherd, Michele Johnson, Barry Chevannes, and the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute for Social and Economic Studies at the University of the West Indies. Annie Paul, Jacqui Burnett, Kim Robinson, Krista Thompson, Steve Ouditt, and Wayne Modest sustained my energies with their friendship and warmth and helped me make sense of a complicated nation-space. Thanks to Laura and Dhiru Tanna and Tony Clarke for sharing their wealth of knowledge, and especially Mrs. Alva Dawkins and the late Mr. Hennis Dawkins, for their lovely home.

Grants and other support from UT's Department of Anthropology, Center for Asian Studies, Institute of Latin American Studies, and the College of Liberal Arts, and the Social Sciences Research Council, NY, helped fund graduate work and research.

Imagining India(ns): Cultural Performances and Diaspora Politics in Jamaica

Publication No.____________

Guha Shankar, PhD
The University of Texas at Austin, 2003

Supervisor: James Brow

This dissertation is a study of the emergence of racial, national and transnational identities in "East Indian' diasporic communities in Jamaica. The goal of the work is to delineate the mutually constitutive relationships between expressive cultural forms – festivals, music, speech-play – and the social worlds in which such expressions are created, evaluated, and interpreted. As a means of achieving this goal, analysis is brought to bear on ethnographic and historical materials in order to investigate: 1) the centrality of expressive forms for the construction of cultural,

racial, and class identities; 2) the tension between artistic creativity and the authority of tradition; 3) the gendering and racialization of individual bodies in performative cultural spaces; and 4) the impact of colonial, national and transnational agendas (ideologies) on local community practice and .consciousness.

As a study of representative practices, “Imagining Indians” encompasses questions of cultural transformation, invention, and hybridity, but also implicates the domain of political practice and raises questions concerning community, nationality, subalternity. The dissertation demonstrates the effectiveness of analyzing referential and non-referential ways of producing meaning in conjunction with questions of the importance of place, race, gender, class, and power in and through performance.

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Chapter One - Introduction: Sites, Perspectives, and Issues

Prologue

August 1997, Kemps Hill, Vere district, Clarendon parish, Jamaica: It has been only a little over a day since I arrived in the small village in southern Jamaica to meet my future collaborators, but the weather is wreaking havoc with my 'research agenda'. In my heat-addled state, I can actually see the ground cracking, the vegetation and virtually everything around me drying up and turning to dust as the drought enters its third month—an unusual occurrence, perhaps, but certainly not a phenomenon unknown to the predominantly 'East Indian' residents of the area, or so I've been told by everyone I've met so far. The heat under the Singh's garage roof is just as oppressive as in the direct light of the sun that is laying waste to this predominantly agricultural area in southern Jamaica. However,

neither Johnny, one of the several Singh siblings, nor his cousin Dennis, both in their late 20's, seem to be affected to any degree by the weather. Chatting amiably, they continue drinking Red Stripes, all the while working on decorations for the Hussay, the cardboard-and-paper creation they are making for the annual festival of the same name that has brought me to Vere. In about a week's time, over the course of an evening and the following day, the structure will be wheeled down the main road that runs right by the Singh's house, to the adjacent village of Race Course, with the accompaniment of percussion music, and under the gaze of a huge festive crowd.

At this stage of the construction process, however, the Hussay is in two sections—the bulbous top part, which is made of semi-transparent, green plastic, and the square, gaudily colored base to which the top will be joined. Nearby, the papier-mâché figure of a bird, still displaying its brown-paper base is lying on a table-top cluttered with scraps of tinsel, plastic, and other ostensibly useful items (or is it junk)? In the chaotic space, it's a little hard to tell exactly what is or is not essential, dispensable, or simply rubbish. However, this state of affairs, as I now retrospectively remember from my previous visits to the Caribbean, is not unusual — things here are always in a state of becoming.

I am working hard to maintain my interest in the proceedings, to faithfully record every scrap of conversation, to document the least little variation in the pattern of work — culture, after all, is taking place right in front of me. This is proving difficult, however, what with the temperature at a near-boil, a very loud cassette-player playing the same tape of Hindi 'filmi' music over and over, and Johnny and Dennis going on around me about the crowds who will show up for the Hussay (in the thousands, apparently). They seem particularly focused on the potentially available women who are going to turn up for Hussay (also apparently in the thousands). Attempting to postpone the inevitable questions about my interest in Caribbean women or those in the States or in India, I try to steer the conversation into more productive realms such as the symbolic significance of the structure and the festival's 'meaning'. I am not anticipating a full-blown exegesis, but neither am I prepared for Dennis's nonchalant response. “Well, y'know,” he says, pausing momentarily from applying some paste to a piece of paper, “it used to have a lot of meanin', but we don't really deal with that now. We just keep it up as…as a traditional kind of t'ing, y'know. Just tradition.” He smiles, shrugs his shoulders and keeps working.

*****

This dissertation is a study of the emergence of racial, national and transnational identities in diasporic communities of South Asians in Jamaica — East Indians, in the parlance of Anglophone Caribbean societies. My goal is to delineate the mutually constitutive relationships between expressive cultural forms – festivals, music, speech-play – and the social worlds in which such expressions are created, evaluated, and interpreted. As a means of achieving this goal, I draw upon ethnographic and historical material to investigate: 1) the centrality of expressive forms for the construction of cultural, racial, and class identities; 2) the tension between artistic creativity and the authority of tradition; 3) the gendering and racialization of individual bodies in performative cultural spaces; and 4) the impact of colonial, national and transnational agendas (ideologies) on local community practice and consciousness.

This project leads me into a detailed ethnographic and historical analysis of the ways in which men and women in mostly small, out-of-the-way places in Jamaica (a small place in itself) imagine, identify, and construct themselves and others as particular kinds of persons. Through their actions and their words they position themselves, and are positioned, as members of an ethnic/racial community, as gendered beings, as residents of a

particular place, and as citizens/subjects of a nation, an entity often described in their narratives as neglectful of or indifferent to their claims of membership in it. In all these arenas, 'culture' itself is fundamentally at issue – what constitutes culture? what is Indian culture and how is it different from other cultures? who has the right to evaluate the content and worth of culture and its producers? what are the ramifications of asserting and producing Indian cultural identity in Jamaica?

At the outset, I want to draw attention to the fact that there are at least two versions or models of Indian culture extant in Jamaica: this multiplicity engenders significant consequences for processes of identity formation (and for my analysis of the same). The first of these models is grounded in popular, village-based practices that appear remarkably open to external influences and participation by a range of individuals and groups; the second involves conservative and ethnically exclusive, official productions of "Indian Culture" sponsored by national, urban-based elite. A significant enactment of the first version is the multi-ethnic, pan-Jamaican Hussay festival, annually held in rural Vere district. This celebration derives from the mourning rituals of muharram, which are common throughout the world of Shia Islam. Such transformed local traditions stand in some contrast to the presentations of

nationally recognized organizations, based in Kingston. Their performances emphasize Hindu, Sanskritic, and North Indian traditions, and proponents and even some dissenters claim these as being ‘really Indian’, in comparison to local cultural expressions.

The two sites, one located in the rural, agricultural environment of Vere in the adjacent parish of Clarendon, the other situated in the sprawl and bustle of the national capital, Kingston, in the southern part of the island, are studies in contrasts and convergences. Broadly speaking, there is a high level of correlation between historical provenance of individuals (national affiliation, ethnicity) and occupation and places of residence. Accordingly, one can broadly distinguish between people of Indian descent who are mostly recent émigrés from the subcontinent (‘expats’ or ‘Indians’, as they are often called), on the one hand, and ‘Indo-Jamaicans’, the fifth and sixth generation descendants of nineteenth-century indentured laborers, on the other. While the latest statistics note that the East Indian population numbers 1.3 percent or 33,000 of a population total of 2.6 million, there are no parish by parish breakdowns and neither are there any distinctions made between India-born and Jamaica-born Indians (2002 CIA World Factbook). In any event, the expats, prominent in banking, medicine, and

business, are to be found in major urban areas such as Kingston (and Montego Bay in the western part of the island), while members of the second group are located in both urban and rural areas, especially Vere district (once a parish in its own right), which lies ninety miles south-west of the capital. Vere includes the small villages (neighborhoods, in reality) of Race Course and Kemps Hill and is sometimes referred to as "Indian Town,' given that people of Indian descent have maintained a continuous presence in the area since the first days of indentured labor in 1845. Indo-Jamaicans in the district today work in a variety of small enterprises (variety-goods shops, subsistence agriculture and marketing of their produce), or in the nationalized sugar-processing plant (the old Moneymusk Estate), or as casual laborers in nearby May Pen, the parish capital located some ten miles away.

REPRESENTATIONS OF LIFE: CONCEPTUAL APPARATUS. KEYWORDS, AND THEORETICAL ORIENTATIONS

With these sociological factors in mind, I frame this dissertation as a prolonged examination of the ways in which Indo-Jamaicans read, critique, and reproduce their social worlds, their historical pasts and existential present, their ethico-political projects and sensual practices, all through the medium of material

(non-verbal) and verbal representations, images, and signs in the spaces of expressive cultural performances. The theoretical perspectives that frame my descriptions of social processes and my subsequent analysis are situated in two distinct, but frequently overlapping, domains, elaborated below. They can broadly be characterized as: a) enactment and/or performance-centered perspectives whose empirical sources of investigation are public display events— rituals, ceremonies, festivals of song and dance—the verbal domain of creative speech acts and the oral arts of memory and rhetoric; and b) scholarship that focuses on power, racial and cultural formations in diasporas, and resistance and accommodation, with particular reference to expressive culture in colonial and post-colonial societies. In deploying these perspectives, it is of more than passing interest to see how authors argue with a tradition of scholarly study and analysis even as they reproduce and creatively refract that scholarship's orienting concepts and theoretical stances.

Concepts and Keywords

Similarly, in this work, as in any work that purports to study some aspect of social life, I begin with a brief sketch of the conceptual apparatus or 'keywords' (Raymond Williams' phrase)

that framed my Jamaican fieldwork (1999-2000) and that now frames this dissertation. To a significant extent some, not all, of the keywords that I deploy in this study are the very signs and images through which Jamaicans construct their senses of self and others. While I am not a linguistically trained anthropologist, I am interested in the ideological charge, historical resonance, and metaphorical significance that such concepts have in contemporary usage in society. It is also of more than passing significance that much of the lexicon I have acquired through academic training and the understandings and meanings I attribute to them at once overlap and are at odds with my Jamaican collaborators understandings of those same terms. Among the most prominent of these are "culture," "tradition," "version," "consciousness" and several others that subspeciate and connect each other.

To begin: "Culture," Raymond Williams claims, "is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (1983:87). He goes on to note its complex association and use in Western societies: a) with both animal and agricultural husbandry in the 15th century; b) with human civilization in the 18th century – the central notion being that of "intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic development"; c) its use as a term encapsulating the

lifeways of particular peoples, groups and historical periods (following Herder), d) its modern and widespread use as a way to describe "works and practices of intellectual and artistic activity" (ibid:87-90). He also remarks on the increasing substitution of the noun form by that of the adjectival, which brings us to the present uses of the 'culture concept' in the social sciences. I am admittedly compressing, perhaps distorting, a long genealogy and an immense body of work on the topic, but to summarize the present state of affairs it is almost uniformly the case that in anthropology, folklore, and cultural studies, the noun 'culture' has by and large given way to the adjectival form or is otherwise qualified in some manner.

Thus, there is a proliferation in our vocabulary of compound terms such as 'cultural forms', 'cultural productions', 'cultural politics', 'cultural formations', and so on. Or we speak of 'mass culture', 'sub-culture', 'youth culture', and so on. These qualifications and emendations index, on the one hand, our intellectual concerns, particularly the sense that to speak of 'culture' fixes, as if in amber, volatile and rapidly changing human interactions, behaviors, and historically structured processes of self-expression. On the other hand, and central for my purposes, such terms bespeak the difference among and between the various

modes of creative self-expression extant in any given society and the groups and individuals responsible for producing and evaluating those products. Especially in a situation where the discarded commodities of the capitalist world-system end up in the alleyways or wash up on the shores of peripheral communities (inner-cities, colonias, post-colonies), the sites of popular culture enable us to see how "working-class, ethnic, and regional communities and youth generations can appropriate the 'rubbish available within a preconstituted market'—drugs, clothing, vehicles—as well as the means of communication, in order to construct statements of their own sense of position and experience in society" (Marcus and Fischer 1986:153).

In this view, culture is a 'battlefield' (Hall 1981:237), a fundamental proposition that underlies another key concept I utilize, that being "hegemony". As propounded by Antonio Gramsci and succeeding generations of scholars, including of course Stuart Hall, hegemony refers to processes of lived relations and struggle between dominant and subordinate groups in society; indeed as Raymond Williams notes, we must remember that, in practice, "hegemony can never be singular" (1977:112-113) and instead we ought to speak of the 'hegemonic' (much like the contrast between culture and cultural mentioned earlier). Williams in his usual

precise way (ibid:113-114), also underscores the salience of art and aesthetic forms for cultural analysis: "The most interesting and difficult part in any cultural analysis, in complex societies, is that which seeks to grasp the hegemonic in its active and formative but also transformational processes. Works of art, by their substantial and general character, are often especially important as sources of this complex evidence."

These positions, especially the notion of 'cultural battlefields", affirm that the contest among and between hierarchically positioned subjects in various societies is centrally, rather than peripherally, conducted through expressive cultural forms and ideologically charged debates about the role of art, aesthetics, and culture in society. Such debates invariably widen out to interrogate standards of morality, propriety, and values, in short, the very basis on which various senses of 'community' putatively rest. A recent example, in the arena of American public culture would be the celebrated flap between Rudy Giuliani and the Brooklyn Museum of Art over an exhibition entitled "Sensation".[1]

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1 In 1999, Rudy Giuliani, then mayor of New York, pulled city funding for the Brooklyn Museum of Art, because he deemed the avant-garde art show, "Sensation," to be 'sick stuff.' He took particular offense to a piece by the British-born artist of Nigerian parentage, Chris Ofili. The work in question was a painting of a Black Virgin Mary flanked by two balls of dung. The juxtaposition

As this episode demonstrates and as Hebdige and others have theorized, processes of struggle as a regular feature of popular culture are manifestly evident in the conflictual "populist discourses which centre on... categories [such as] the 'nation,' 'roots,' the 'national past,' heritage,' 'the rights of the individual'..." (Hebdige 1996:195). In various sites of popular culture—films, music, literature, museums, festivals—opposing ideological alliances and 'power blocs,' 'dominant' and 'subaltern' groups, fight a 'war of position' or a 'war of maneuver', with and without the intervention of 'intellectuals,' to touch upon but a few of Gramsci's

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of fecal matter with sacred icon was clearly read as sacrilege by Giuliani and others (in quarters sympathetic to Giuliani the Virgin was described as 'smeared' with feces), and represented as anti-Catholic, to the point that Catholics protested in front of the Museum, chanting the 'Our Father' prayer (Spence 1999). Mobilizing putatively universal moral criteria and a reading of symbolic images that were resolutely realist, Giuliani charged that aspects of the symbolic realm—'sick art'—were an affront to commonly held (commonsensical) standards of decency and to the values of specific religious communities that the government purported to uphold and to represent.

Before it was all said and done, strange coalitions had formed: autocratic mayor, city bureaucrats, sympathetic journalists, and religious communities, on the one side, and cultural critics, artists, sympathetic journalists, and the state, on the other (a federal judge restored funding for the museum in October 1999). We ought to note as well the extent to which a wide range of discrete images and discourses from different realms were deliberately linked together in fashioning the various arguments for and against art and cultural practices.

On the administration's side we have discourses of probity, expressions of moral outrage at the violation done to the sanctity of religious traditions and images, the murmured prayers of the faithful, and the rhetoric of fiscal responsibility (i.e., no public monies for 'sick art'). On the museum's side there is impassioned language regarding the inviolability of the artistic imagination, a legal discourse that invokes the moral authority of the Constitution's First Amendment, the semiotic recoding of detritus ('its just shit') as an exemplar of cultural difference ('its much more than shit!'), and a demand for the recognition of different cultural idioms through which religious feeling is expressed.

generative concepts.[2] I will elaborate on them further ahead in the text, but at base a Gramscian approach is concerned with: a) how cultural practices and discourses are imbricated with and within relations of power and b) elucidating the struggle for possession of cultural signs that structures the sites and productions of expressive culture. The promise of a Gramscian approach for my project is that a complicating and critical factor in describing and analyzing Jamaican Indian cultural struggles is that the contest is not only waged between dominant Afro-Jamaican society and the small minority of Indo-Jamaicans, but also within the latter group as well.

One aspect of this promise is that a Gramscian approach views struggles for cultural hegemony as fundamentally implicating struggles for political legitimacy, as witness the "Sensation" exhibit controversy, and the earlier Congress versus NEA flap in the 1980's. Insofar as dominant social groups attempt to consolidate their power over other groups in society, they must accomplish "not only a unison of economic and political aims, but

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[2] Taking a Gramscian approach to cultural struggle in Jamaica, such appeals to the past involve a "war of position" and a "war of maneuver". In such a contest, Afro-Jamaican society occupies a position of virtually complete economic and political dominance, and seeks to "organize permanently the 'impossibility' of internal disintegration—with controls of every kind, political, administrative, etc., reinforcement of the hegemonic positions of the dominant group, etc. (Gramsci 1971:239; Limon 1994:41).

also intellectual and moral unity" (Gramsci 1971:181; emphasis mine). Dick Hebdige states a central tenet of Gramscian approaches to popular culture. He writes:

> [In a Gramscian approach] our attention is drawn to the processes whereby particular power blocs seek to impose their moral leadership on the masses and to legitimate their authority through the construction (rather than the realization) of consensus. The Gramscian model demands that we grasp these processes not because we want to expose them or understand them in the abstract, but because we want to use them effectively to contest that authority and leadership by offering arguments and alternatives that are not only correct ('right on') but convincing and convincingly presented, arguments that capture the popular imagination, that engage directly the issues, problems, anxieties, dreams, and hopes of real (actually existing men and women: arguments, in other words, that take the popular (and hence the populace) seriously on its own terms (1996:195; emphases mine).

In such a situation, the activities of thinkers, cultural leaders, and academics are significant, because they are responsible for inculcating 'intellectual and moral unity' among the members of their respective groups by educating consent. Particularly in the case of the "progressive class," by which Gramsci means any social group that has ascended to "a position of dominance in a given society" (Hanchard 1991:93), its intellectuals "end up by subjugating the intellectuals of other social groups" (Gramsci 1971:60), and thereby bringing those groups under the sway of the dominant one. The corollary is that

intellectuals of subaltern groups are engaged, and must engage, in similar educational activities within their own [sic] groups in order to counter the hegemonic thrust of dominant ones. “Subaltern” as a concept and descriptive term now extends beyond Gramsci’s original use indicating working classes to include women, racial minorities, and those generally less empowered in a given society (Spivak 1987). Following Gramsci, I examine the extent to which Indian intellectuals (elite, as I sometimes term them) are engaged in such processes in Jamaica.

Following on from the notion of culture as a battlefield, the phrase ‘version’ (or versioning’, in some accounts), which is most prominently associated with Jamaican popular music performance is especially salient in the context of my research. As I utilize it the term highlights the articulation among and between styles of individual and collective expression and the social location of performers vis avis audiences, illuminating the contingent, unstable, and conflictual nature of identity production (Jake Homiak, personal communication; see also Leach, 1954, and Hall, 1990, for cognate theoretical perspectives). 'Vershan' (in Jamaican Creole) is most prominently associated with popular song styles and is a tradition dating back to the 1960s. In those days when 45 rpm records (singles) were mass produced, the song absent the vocal tracks was reproduced on the B-side of the disc as an instrumental-only version. Other performers, most notably the

deejay, would ‘toast’ or ‘talk over’ the instrumental tracks, spawning a number of versions or variations of a pop tune. Now, as in those early days, musical ‘posses’ in dance clubs and other venues attempt to sonically ‘murder’ competing crews using the base of the existing musical composition on which to build their own lyrical content. Supremacy in the dance hall through the medium of song style is achieved through the approbation of the audience and positively affirms the musical 'crew's' identity and its vershan, but the battle is renewed at the next sound clash, so that dissolution/resolution is a constant theme in public performance (Stolzoff 2000)

Versioning, then, as a distinctive characteristic of Jamaican popular, public life, explicitly means that while several individuals and communities may lay claim to the definitive, authoritative version of a song or a cultural form, they rarely, if ever, succeed in setting the limits of public discourse and creative self-expression on their own terms. Invariably, any rendering of a song or any truth claim gives rise to competing and contested articulations of the same. I provide explicit ethnographic examples of how 'versioning' manifests itself in discourse and music in Chapters Four and Five, but the dissertation as a whole is concerned with delineating among and between competing versions of culture (and identity politics) in Jamaica.

In the process of educating consent and consolidating hegemonic rule over subaltern factions, leading groups may often invoke a common cultural tradition and destiny or perhaps refer to "their founding ancestors…[who are claimed to be] held in common" (Brow 1996:23). Two or three important aspects of the concept of "tradition" must be mentioned here. First, any appeal to a tradition is a persuasive fiction about the past, and an "aspect of contemporary social and cultural organization, in the interest of the dominance of a specific class" (Williams 1977:116). My sense is that the concept of 'fiction' ought not be equated with "falsity/genuineness," but rather with "'imagining' and 'creation'" as Anderson points out in his extended examination of the imagined national community (Anderson 1993:7).

Next, any tradition is also a "deliberately selective and connecting process, which offers a historical ratification of a contemporary order" (Williams 1977:116). As Brow's multi-layered work in Sri Lanka so tellingly demonstrates (1996), the use of tradition is a crucial means by which national leaders seek to "incorporate" the local community into the national fold. But, while these processes of "incorporation" give us a sense of the "consensual" strand of hegemonic processes, the violence exhibited against ethnic Tamils in the country (ibid:15-16) point to the "coercive" aspects of hegemonic nationalism. Third, while imaginative appeals and authoritative versions of cultural

traditions may appear to be accepted by some subaltern sectors at some moments, hegemonic constructions of the past are susceptible to counter-interpretations and by the deployment of alternative traditions and "indigenous cultural resources" (Brow 1996:24).3

Finally, "cultural traditions," both the discursive and the extra-discursive variants, ought to be understood as "emergent," indicating that "new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships, and kinds of relationship are continually being created" (Williams 1977:123). But there remains the residue or trace (the "residual" in Williams' phrase) of previous institutions, meanings and values, which forms a significant part of the ongoing argument and reformulation of the emergent tradition. Moreover, any cultural analysis involving subaltern cultural forms must recognize that they are not immune to the interventions and influence of dominant cultural practices and discourses. According to Gramsci, the consciousness and experience of subaltern groups are "necessarily fragmented and episodic…always subject to the

[3] Referring back to the "Sensation" controversy, defenders of the artist and of the exhibition invoked the shibboleths of artistic freedom and the Constitutional rights to free speech. Some mounted a cultural counter-assault on Giuliani, et. al., via newspaper articles, arts journals, and other media, by noting that Ofili was Nigerian and the fecal matter was not an act of blasphemy since it was in actuality, elephant dung. It was claimed that in the context of African culture, elephant dung symbolized rebirth and thus Ofili's piece was an artistic expression of his own bi-cultural being (and one assumes African syncretic culture) and a representation of the ways in which worship, even religiosity, is manifested in different cultural contexts.

activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up" (Gramsci 1971:54-55).

An important and engaged critique of epistemological conceits comes from David Scott who calls into question the ideological work the discipline performs. He notes that anthropology "manifests a deep, humanist inclination toward a story about continuities and embraces the earnest task of demonstrating the integrity and the intactness of the old in the new, and of the past in the present, of these [New World] societies" (1991:262). The overriding concern of anthropological work, from Melville Herskovits to Richard Price, is to affirm the authentic presence of the figures or signs of Africa and slavery in the practices or consciousnesses of the descendants of African slaves. He argues that rather than verifying or validating cultural continuities and authentic pasts that, instead, we ask how the figural representations of the past are used in present projects. The anthropological problematic then is not that of providing scientific guarantees, but rather that of critique, which emanates from understanding in some way what the various tasks that 'tradition,' as a discursive force, accomplishes. Among the questions we would ask in this mode of critique are:

> How are the figures of Africa and Slavery employed in the fashioning of specific virtues, in the cultivation of specific dispositions, specific modes of address, specific styles — of dress, of speech, of song, the body's movements; how in

> other words, do these figures participate in those techniques by means of which the construction of appropriate bodies and selves are effected? (Scott 1991:278)

Discussions of alternative or emergent traditions and indigenous cultural resources call to the fore a concept that has come to dominate current cultural debates, that being the "hybrid." At the semantic level, the concept indicates difference from 'pure,' 'unalloyed', or 'unmixed', and contemporary uses of the term draw principally on the theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's formulations concerning verbal art and linguistic praxis (1981). Following Bakhtin, Deborah Kapchan note that because genres of speech traditionally index autonomous, socially constructed categories (ethnic, gender, and class identities), hybridity's oppositional character manifests itself in the ways that "hybrid language…defies borders, shows up uninvited in traditional contexts, and wreaks havoc on our comfortable conceptions of category and definition" (1996:6-8). "Hybrid genres of verbal and nonverbal art" (ibid), according to Kapchan, provide the opportunity to examine larger sociocultural transformations in the market, another arena of public culture.

Hybridity links up in important ways to 'creolization," another chain in my conceptual armor- the ways in which these terms connect with culture is a large and important part of my

dissertation. The concept of creolization first made its appearance in the work of linguists, who meant by the term the product of historical contact in colonial situations in the New World between two widely different languages, one of them always European. Linguists' particular emphasis on the formal, structural features of languages and the borrowing of grammatical and performative properties between linguistic domains, remains important, but is not as widespread as the use of creolization to connote cultural change and transformation. In the work of scholars like James Clifford and Ulf Hannerz, we are treated to a valorization of creolization, which is rendered synonymous with heterogeneity, novel social formations, syncretism, anti-authoritarianism, and so on. While I am attuned to the avenues for analysis opened up by these theoretical stances, I am also wary of analysis that papers over the specific socio-historical circumstances that such terms address(ed). Creolization becomes in the purview of these and other theorists only a keyword, fashionably useful to describe the transnational moment that is characterized by the proliferation and flow of cultural materials, artifacts, musics, styles, bodies, and subjectivities across political and cultural borders, frontiers, and boundaries of all sorts, so that all around us is evidence of "a world in creolisation" [sic] (Hannerz 1987).

But particularly in the case of "creolization" we ought to pay heed to Sidney Mintz's dictum to particularize and localize the global. That is, as he says, we need to pay attention to specifically historical processes of creolization and the extraordinary, physical, mental, and spiritual labors performed by Caribbean people in

> …[C]ulture-building, rather than cultural mixing or cultural blending. They were not becoming transnational, they were creating forms by which to live, even when they were being cruelly tested physically and mentally. They had to devise new forms of communication, new forms of interaction, new ways to maintain life's meaning, and to do so using the materials in their heads, hearts, and hands—as well as the materials they found around them. (Mintz 1998:119; emphasis in the original)

The rather sober point is being made, I think, that contrary to the celebration that accompanies an invocation of "transnational cultural flows" and "traveling cultures", we need to reckon with the immobility of bodies. Thus, some bodies are not allowed to float across geo-political terrain, can't do so, for reasons involving border policies, boundary policings, and other stark realities such as economic constraints and racial profiling. I deal more extensively with the problems and possibilities generated by the creolization concept in the body of the dissertation. For the moment, I want to shift attention to Mintz's evocative description of "found materials" and how it resonates with my earlier note that

popular cultural sites provide the means for subaltern groups to 'appropriate the 'rubbish available within a preconstituted market'...in order to construct statements of their own sense of position and experience in society" (p. 10). Both these positions join up with Walter Benjamin's reflections on the task that faces cultural workers toiling under the demands of the modern commodity system at the turn of the twentieth century, which is no less true in the present age. Subalterns, colonized people, racial minorities must dialectically

> [I]nterpret out of the discarded dream images of mass culture a politically empowering knowledge of the collective's own unconscious past. [It] is through such objects [the dialectical image] that the collective unconscious communicates across generations. New inventions, conceived out of the fantasy of one generation, are received within the childhood experience of another... (Susan Buck-Morss, 1993:273)

Insofar as the dissertation concerns diasporic cultural expressions, it includes an exploration both of the unconscious and conscious manifestations of "Indian-ness" in Jamaica. For anyone investigating the contours of diasporic formations, W.E.B. Dubois' evocation of the "twoness" of African descended people in America (perhaps of all subjugated people in the West) is essential

to contend with[4]. The concept of “double consciousness” I borrow from Dubois to discuss how diasporic Indians convey their sense of belonging and displacement, identity, and dis-identification, articulated in the claim of one of my collaborators to be an “East Indian-West Indian, not Indian.”

Perspectives on Cultural Performances and Aesthetic Processes

In claiming a mutually constitutive link between expressive culture and the production and reproduction of social selves and cultural others, I draw upon a well-established tradition of research and theorizing prominent since the inception of Western social sciences. While I do not intend to revisit that history, fully or partially, at this juncture I do want to establish the basic tenets of what has come to be called the performance-centered approach in anthropology, folklore, linguistics, and more recently, cultural studies. Scholarship in these fields has called attention to the dynamic, co-constructed and emergent nature of a range of behaviors and actions or, as I variously refer to them, cultural performances, practices, enactments, and display/performance

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[4] “One ever feels his twonesss—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (1989[1903]:45)

events. Following Don Brenneis, I want to emphasize, "the critical role of the communicative 'event' as a productive nexus for study and interpretation…[Events] are where we experience and shape the world, each other, and our own experiences…[In a constructivist view of social and cultural life] 'events' are where what we take to be society is jointly constituted" (1993:294).

A standard formulation of cultural performances and related terms dates back to Milton Singer's classic work on India, "When a Great Tradition Modernizes" (1972). Singer's term highlighted the communicative essence of culturally mediated behaviors and bridged the divide between actions classified under the rubric of "religion and ritual [such as] prayers, ritual readings and recitations, rites and ceremonies, festivals" and those classified as "cultural and artistic [such as] plays, concerts, and lectures" (ibid:71). Singer's further claim that his "Indian friends thought of their culture as encapsulated in these discrete performances, which they could exhibit to visitors and themselves" (ibid; emphasis mine) highlights the importance of interpretation and attribution in all such acts.

From the vantage point of linguistic anthropology and the ethnography of speaking approach to culture, Richard Bauman states the case for a sustained analysis of oral performances,

specifically, and performance events, broadly, as providing the ground on which communication between social actors takes place:

> Oral performance, like all human activity is situated, its form, meaning, and functions rooted in culturally defined scenes or events - bounded segments of the flow of behavior and experiences that constitute meaningful contexts for action, interpretation, and evaluation. [The] performance event has assumed a place beside the text as a fundamental unit of description and analysis, providing the most concretely empirical framework for the comprehension of oral literature as social action by directing attention to the actual conduct of verbal performance in social life. (1986:3; emphasis mine).

Deborah Kapchan's succinct summary brings together the salience of studying and analyzing verbal and non-verbal modes of cultural expression when she notes: "Performances are aesthetic practices — patterns of behavior, ways of speaking, manners of bodily comportment — whose repetitions situate actors in time and space, structuring individual and group identities" (Kapchan 1995:479).

Thus, in the contemporary moment, scholarship concerned with public display events and large-scale festivals, on the one hand, and ethnography of speaking and discourse-centered approaches that focus on the verbal artistry of individuals and speech communities, on the other, converges on the idea that

performances do not merely reflect action and social life, but rather constitute it. I also want to draw particular attention to Singer's Indian friends who thought their culture was 'encapsulated' in performances that could be exhibited to themselves and to others (ibid). The point is especially salient because I am concerned to examine not only the forms and modes of expressive culture in Jamaica (following Singer's laundry list above), but also the competing assertions and countervailing discourses regarding the content, history, and meanings that are attributed to the performance of culture. As Don Brenneis notes: "A focus on performers, their rhetorical intentions, and the communicative devices through which they deploy various idioms to pursue their goals must be complemented by attention to their audiences and to those local theories and understandings that inform their responses." (Brenneis 1991:365; emphasis mine).

In this vein, Robert Cantwell updates Singer's generalized observations to emphasize the significance of 'perceptible signs' (representations) in structuring social relationships. As he writes:

> …[S]ocial distances, with their accompanying insulation of one group or community from another, cause people …to conceive the other on the basis of perceptible signs that lend to that conception the character of a mimesis or fictional attribution, with all that attribution implies; in the social hinterlands between self and other, verbal, pictorial,

> dramatic, and other representations of groups and communities arise to mediate that conception, including self-representations of one group to another, often in response to the other's stereotyped expectations (Cantwell 1993:6-7; emphasis mine).

The terms ‘conception’, ‘attribution’, and ‘representation’, lead to a consideration of cultural performances as a poetics, that is, “acts of cultural interpretation focused on aesthetically salient, culturally imbedded textualities and enactments” (Limon 1995:14). Stephen Greenblatt calls for a poetics of culture from a perspective that champions “the work of art [as] the product of a negotiation between a creator or class of creators, equipped with a complex, communally, shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society” (1989:12).

All of the perspectives mentioned thus far owe their strengths, if not their actual content, to the considerable influence of Mikhail Bakhtin and others in ‘his circle’, including Volosinov (Bakhtin’s double in many accounts), whether or not this influence is immediately recognizable. I have already mentioned ‘hybridity’ as a key concept that underpins my analysis and to some extent, so too is Volosinov’s concept of the ‘multiaccentual ideological sign” (1975), but “dialogism” is especially prominent. The “dialogic principle” (Bakhtin 1981:198) emphasizes that “the self is constituted only through its relationship to the other, all

understanding is dialogic in nature, 'meaning belongs to a word in a position between its speakers', and agreement between the collaborators in the dialogic relationship is defined as 'covoicing'" (Hall 1996[1993]:298). The importance of this perspective as it bears on the concept of "consciousness" can scarcely be understated, especially since any mental, spiritual, and intellectual labor that does not have an 'other' to intervene as co-author, interlocutor, and interrogator is deemed impossible. A solipsistic conception of the self is not possible in this formulation, only social beings in active social relationships. Writing on the 'novelistic' structure and content of Dostoevsky's novels, Bakhtin writes:

> And since a consciousness is presented…not on the path of its own evolution and growth, that is not historically, but rather alongside other consciousnesses, it cannot concentrate on itself and its own idea, on the immanent logical development of that idea; instead, it is pulled into interaction with other consciousnesses… consciousness never gravitates toward itself but is always found in intense relationship with another consciousness (1984:32)

Given my emphasis on the intersection of expressive culture and intersubjective relations of power, I situate this study within the framework of scholarship that views cultural performances as "social drama[s]…rife with problem and conflict" (Turner 1981:153). This insight directs attention to asymmetrical relations of power in the performance and construction of self and

community, which may be defined in terms of the ethnic group, gendered subjects, the village, or the nation (Abu-Lughod 1986, Brow 1996, Dirks 1994, Kapchan 1996, Korom and Chelkowski 1994, van der Veer 1994, B. Williams 1990).

Another thread in my argument weaves in Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of how the French upper-class distinguishes itself from other classes by virtue of superior knowledge of the "distinctions" between genres of art, music, and other aesthetic forms (Bourdieu 1984[1979]). Bourdieu's notion that cultural knowledge, a form of "symbolic capital" (ibid.), is used to consolidate social, economic, and political power within and between class-formations echoes the main features of projects that aspire to become culturally hegemonic within Indo-Jamaican social formations.

Perspectives on Power, Resistance and Accommodation, and Racial Formations

The next set of perspectives I utilize is drawn from scholarship on power and racial and cultural formations in diasporas, especially work on expressive cultural sites in ex-colonial societies. Importantly, the emphasis on 'diaspora' as a descriptive and analytic category in social science research marks a movement away from sociologically-grounded preoccupations

with the success or failure of racially, ethnically, and culturally marked 'others' to assimilate to the norms of a given nation-state. At base, the term refers to the offspring of one geo-political territory who, often under conditions of exile, servitude and subjugation, have been displaced and are now resettled within the borders of another such entity, where they must coexist with other such groups and larger, dominant populations. The very real situations of global displacement and cultural mobility provides ammunition for critiques of anthropology's presumedly obtuse and archaic ideas about the identity between community, culture, and place.

> [The] national [and sub-national] cultures that sediment out of global cultural interactions are emphatically not self-contained, closed realities, isomorphic with delimited territorial spaces. As continually shifting syntheses of forms deriving from a variety of local and foreign sources - missionaries, migrants, intellectuals, pop stars, tourists - national cultures are inescapably open to change. In this they do little more than refract the ceaseless global flow of persons, commodities, and ideologies. (Foster 1991:251)

The various definitions of diaspora that have been attempted in the wake of such statements are problematic in many resects, as are any such attempts at typology, but not entirely without merit. I mention here only the ones that are salient for my purposes: For instance, to the above definition, William Safran

(1991) adds several qualifications about diasporas including: a sustaining myth of eventual return to the homeland, a collective memory of the their distinct identity and maintaining identifiable contact with kin in the homeland.

Vijay Mishra claims there is a radical break between the older Indian diasporas of classic capitalism that left the subcontinent for the Caribbean and other British colonies in the nineteenth century and the "mid-to late twentieth century diasporas of advanced capital to the metropolitan centres of the Empire" (1996:421). He reasserts the fact of the presumed radical break by stating, in spite of abundant evidence to the contrary, that the old diasporas were ones predicated on "exclusivism", meaning extreme parochialism and insularity, while the latter are characterized by "mobility," meaning flexibility and openness, and whose exemplars are not surprisingly, the intellectual and cultural elite of the literary and film worlds – Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi, et..al. Historical writing and ethnographic work on the topic both demonstrate that these binary characterizations — exclusivism as the essential property of the old and mobility as the hallmark of the new — are inadequate as historical analysis, since diasporas can never be captured in terms of an 'either/or' and 'before/after' formulations. More accurately it is their 'both/and'

qualities and characteristics that render totalizing conclusions of analysts irrelevant.

Other scholars advance the theory that diasporas trouble the aspirations of nations to “normative homogeneity” (Tololyan 1996:4) and to imagine themselves coterminous with one race. Moreover, “the state’s hegemony is challenged by transnational movements of capital, labor, ideas, information, cultural commodities...” (ibid.) These programmatic statements are probably necessary precursors for nuanced work in the vein of Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonnini’s on Chinese transnationalism. They make the welcome assertion that “there is nothing intrinsically liberating about diasporic cultures,” and invite an investigation of how and in what ways "diasporas, like any cultural formations, are grounded in internal hegemonies and systems of inequalities" (1997:324-25).

Paul Gilroy’s theoretical and analytical interventions are also salutary, particularly his theorization of (black) diasporic culture as a "non-traditional tradition" or "the changing same" (Gilroy 1993). He asserts a contingent and provisional connection with the historical experiences of exile racial terror, and repression while at the same time insisting on a novel and emergent cultural dynamic in diaspora cultures — unity in heterogeneity. Bowing in the

direction of both Raymond Williams and Mikhail Bakhtin, he writes: “[Diaspora] multiplicity is a chaotic, living disorganic formation. If it can be called a tradition at all, it is a tradition in ceaseless motion—a changing same that strives continually towards a state of self realisation that continually retreats beyond its grasp” (1993:122).

In Gilroy’s perspective, expressive forms are centrally important for diasporic formations, because they do the 'work' of symbolically marking the presence of difference within the nation and providing autonomous spaces wherein solidarity is established among and between racialized communities which are often brutalized economically and politically by various State apparatuses and marginalized by nationalist cultural projects (1987). Following DuBois, he argues that political activity and strategies for self-expression in the black diaspora have been historically conducted in sites and practices of vernacular culture, occluded from the dominant interpretations and interventions of whites. As he notes of “black music” it ”is a cipher [code] for the ineffable, sublime, pre-discursive and anti-discursive elements in black expressive culture” (1993:119-120). But, in noting contradictory strains and tensions within the black intellectual tradition, he dispels any notion that a unitary vision or version of

Afro-diasporic pasts and futures exists or will come into being any time soon.[5]

Other perspectives, not all of them emanating out of work on diasporic cultures, raise provocative questions on the nature of the relationship between power and resistance and cultural subjectivities and acts. Michel Foucault's formulation of power—that it is productive of subjects, that power engenders its own resistances (Foucault 1978[1976]; 1980)—and work inspired by Gramsci are crucial to this set of perspectives (Brow 1996; Comaroff 1989; Dirks 1994; B. Williams 1991).

Foucault (1980:142) argues that

> [One] should not assume a massive and primal condition of domination, a binary structure with 'dominators' on one side and 'dominated' on the other, but rather a multiform production of relations of dominations which are partially susceptible of integration into overall strategies...there are no relations of power without resistances [which] are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised; resistance to

[5] The continuing power of the idea of a code or cipher that communicates 'blackness' is mirrored in the title of Branford Marsalis's 1997 album, "Black Codes from the Underground". The album, through its invocation of the Underground Railroad, an icon in the mythic charter of African-American struggle against oppression and for freedom, alludes to ever-present themes and desires for black liberation and autonomy. James 'Blood' Ulmer's stunning guitar work on albums such as "Black Rock' (1986) is another evocation of a diasporic sensibility, which reorients the rock idiom (always coded in terms of its 'white' interlocutors) back to its roots. So too Funkadelic's acid tinged, carnivalesque meanderings through Africology, Egyptology, Hendrixville, and other 'black' nodes of history and creativity. One may read these allusive, expansive, specific and spatial texts contrapuntally against other musical texts in the African diaspora, particularly reggae.

> power does not have to come from elsewhere to be real, nor is it inexorably frustrated through being the compatriot of power. It exists all the more by being used in the same place as power; hence, like power, resistance is multiple.

The tension between subaltern and dominant formations, writes Dick Hebdige, can be seen as the "struggle for possession of the sign" (1979:19). In the case of expressive culture these struggles testify to the unequal, hierarchical relationships rooted in contests for power, which are at the heart of all cultural formations. In Foucault's wake, subalternity is not a guarantee of anything, especially since cultural expressions may just as well collude with the projects of dominant groups and uphold the prevailing meanings of master symbols, as they are likely to subvert them (see the preceding discussions on hegemony). In either case, power produces and reproduces subjects and subjectivities through a tense, mutually constitutive relationship in ways that cut the legs out from any perspective predicated on Manichaean notions of absolute and incommensurable distances between colonizer and colonized, masters and slaves, and nations and subjects.

In different contexts from Foucault's theorizing about power's productivity, Roger Abrahams (1972:30) notes the

conjoined nature of repression and expression in the sites of expressive culture:

> Individual items, genres, or even total expressive traditions have within them, when given voice, a capacity for both coercion and normation. The two are not necessarily contradictory; indeed they usually are not. An item of folklore may act both as an instrument of continuity and as a mechanism to further change. What may be in one man's [sic] rendition an argument for maintaining the way things are (because that is where he supposes his best interests lie), may be in the enactment of another man a device for progressive or repressive change (because that is where he sees his best interests).

The concern with power has had some consequences for anthropological investigations of symbolic processes and collective enactments, as witness Victor Turner's later work, which shifts from Durkheimian appraisals of the redressive, harmonizing functions of ritual performances (Durkehim 1973[1915]; Turner 1969) towards a view of such events as "social dramas" shot through with problem and conflict (Turner 1981). The present study is firmly situated within these traditions and broad formulations, insofar as I view the structuration of ethnic and racial identities through public performance as an intrinsically agonistic process, replete with competing claims to legitimacy. As Edmund Leach's classic statement (1990[1954]:278) on the topic of ritual notes:

> Myth and ritual is a language of signs in terms of which claims to rights and status are expressed, but it is a language of argument, not a chorus of harmony. If ritual is sometimes a mechanism of integration, one could as well argue that it is often a mechanism of disintegration.

The views of Abrahams and Hebdige gain particular salience in the context of colonial and post-colonial societies, where projects of self expression and community formation ("subnational" in B. Williams' term [1989]) are always undertaken with a sideways glance at dominant others, in historical and contemporary social encounters. The naturalization of colonial instrumentalities of ideological control and domination can be seen in the ways in which race, politics, and culture are thought and practiced in ex-colonial societies. As Dirks notes, “The postcolonial world is one in which we may live after colonialism but never without it” (1992:23). Jean Comaroff's study (1989) of the development of the black Zionist church in colonial South Africa details how hegemonic European Christianity was initiated by missionaries in the early part of the nineteenth century, who introduced a "mode of thought and practice which became engaged with indigenous social systems, triggering internal transformations in productive and power relations" (ibid:2). The subsequent structural changes that followed, notably the introduction of industrial workplaces and hierarchical labor markets such as the mines, were facilitated

by the teaching of "values and predispositions" (ibid:3) by the missionaries. Comaroff notes that church members today appropriate and integrate core ritual symbols from white Protestant religious rituals into their customary forms of worship, even as they attempt to reshape the symbols and structures of the dominant sign-system for their own purposes. These reinvented signs and symbols “are the product of a dialectical interaction between indigenous social forms and elements of more general currency in the culture of colonialism” (ibid:194). But they are not necessarily the leading edge of a radical reordering of hegemonic Christian theology. As Raymond Williams notes, "The true condition of hegemony is effective self-identification with the hegemonic forms: a specific and internalized 'socialization' which is expected to be positive but which if that is not possible, will rest on a (resigned) recognition of the inevitable and the necessary" (1977:118).

Ethnographic form, methodological practice

My initial vignette and similar forays into the realm of ‘thick description’ are the means by which I hope to achieve several distinct, but related ends: For one thing, as an evocation of these discursive processes of self-fashioning, it is intended to underscore

the conflictual and contradictory production of identities and emergent social processes in the 'local community' and the Jamaican post-colony at large. In foregrounding the excess of signs and the density and tactility of objects, sounds, images, and words in distinct cultural spaces, I want to draw attention to the materiality of cultural production and the inevitable tension that arises when the received wisdoms and traditions of the past have to contend with the demands and projects of the existential present.

The few studies on the topic of Indo-Jamaicans, not all of which are emanate from the academy, either take a political economy approach to agricultural communities, in the process dismissing the salience of cultural expressions in processes of creolization (Ehrlich 1970; Ehrlich 1976) or concentrate excessively on describing the continuity or deviation of contemporary expressive practices with parent traditions in India (Mansingh and Mansingh 1976; 1979). By contrast, I have attempted to emphasize the dynamic nature and role of reinvented traditions in the construction of Indian ethnicity and national identification, while directing attention to asymmetrical relations of power in the performance and construction of self and community, whether defined as the ethnic group, the village, or the nation.

Accordingly, throughout the text, I engage in a close 'reading' and interrogation of a range of audio-visual materials and representations, including historical photographs and my own images, newspaper articles and travel writings, field audio recordings of song performances, prayer gatherings, and personal histories, and videotapes of festivals, fashion shows, and other performance events. This particular mode of 'reading' is an attempt to convey something of the sensory pleasures and anxieties, principally in the realms of sight and sound, to which the participant-observer willingly submits or is subjected in the course of public performances.

My narrative intervention is cognizant of the fact that where individuals and groups have historically been subject to and marginalized by dominant social and political forces, the nation-state in particular, any attempt to 'give voice' to or 'speak for' those on the margins may lead to a further hardening of dominant and subordinate social positions. Throughout the text I foreground individual voices and perspectives on the history and expressive traditions of Indians in Jamaica. While the myriad sentiments and experiences of community members, cultural producers, and historical figures stand out, I weave my own words into their ongoing dialogue of argument and critique. My representations are

filtered through experiences of playing music at festivals, helping with preparations at cultural programs, attending religious functions in private homes, and my positioning as an "authentic" Indian researching local Indians.

That my own experiences, attitudes, and confusions figure so prominently in such encounters is intended to dispel any sense of a neat fit between the experiences and interpretations of cultural processes, practices, and histories on the part of my ethnographic 'subjects' and my own readings of the same. This differential understanding of what and how performances mean they matter to a range of individuals involved in the act, rather than why, emerges most clearly in the text when I describe specific encounters at performance events where I was a co-participant.

The research strategy I employed was to move between the urban setting of Kingston and the rural areas of Vere district in southern Jamaica. To a large extent, this methodology is at odds with standard fieldwork practice that relies on sustained dwelling in a place to capture the ebbs and flows of daily life, but my aims were rather different. My multi-sited research echoes Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson's sentiment that ethnographic practice is a "flexible and opportunistic strategy for diversifying and making more complex our understanding of various places, people, and

predicaments through an attentiveness to the different forms of knowledge that are available from different social and political locations" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:46). Tracking the production of culture in varied locations (as we know from James Clifford (1992) culture 'travels') — its material manifestations, ideological grounding, and the agents responsible for these productions — helped me understand, if partially, the uneven and mutually interpenetrated aspects of distinct Indian diaspora(s) in Jamaica and the interplay of the local and the extralocal. The success or failure of such an approach is not for me to judge, but at the least my travels enabled me to realize the full truth of the Jamaican adage, "Jamaica a small place, but it big like hell in the miggle [middle]."

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Following this introductory chapter, I provide an overview of Jamaica's social, cultural, and historical development, with special reference to the Indian experience in the region and the nation since indentured laborers from the subcontinent first arrived in the mid-nineteenth century in Chapter Two. Moreover, this chapter is situated in the context of other representations of the South Asian diaspora in Jamaica and the Caribbean. These other sources range

from scholarly literature and travel writings to broadcast media programs to debates among and between colonial authorities and leading men of Jamaica. Through these materials I address and analyze the overlapping constructions of Indian culture in different areas of Jamaican society.

In this chapter I initiate the argument that historical representations from Jamaica's conflicted past continue to impact current discourse and mediate relations among and within communities — the 'coolie Indian' and related metaphors such as 'naygur' (meaning an unsophisticated and/or rural Black Jamaican) sustain hierarchies both between different social classes and individuals of different national/racial origins. These signifiers enable us to track the diffusion of hegemonic ideologies throughout society and to assess their power to significantly shape the self-perceptions, social relationships and practices of subaltern communities. This is an argument I develop further in subsequent chapters.

The next three chapters form the ethnographic core of my project and are structured by the idea that there are at least two versions or models of Indian culture extant in Jamaica, corresponding to two distinct diasporas. The first version is grounded in village-based practices that are remarkably open to

external influences; the second involves elaborate, ethnically exclusive productions sponsored by urban-based elite. In separate chapters, I describe cultural performances in two very different places–the first, Vere, a rural district in southern Jamaica, the other, Kingston, the national capital. I am primarily concerned with the poetics and politics of representation. I pay particular attention to the production of different genres of performance, their visual, aural, and emotionally evocative aspects, and the exegetical meanings accorded acts of representation. I examine the aesthetic dimensions of production, and detail the ways in which material and human resources are brought together in creating performances.

Descriptive detail and analysis are critical here for several reasons: (a) in order to reveal how individuals and groups mobilize a knowledge of the cultural past, maintain and create everyday social relationships in producing representative performances; (b) to demonstrate the interplay between artistic imagination, processes of cultural transformation and the demands of tradition, and (c) to provide key insights into the distinctive aesthetic/ethical considerations and world-views that underlie cultural production in communities of widely varying socio-economic status and historical provenance.

Accordingly, Chapter Three, “Muharram to Hussay, Mourning to Festival”, focuses on the annual Hussay festival in Vere, which is produced by the area’s predominantly working-class residents and descendants of 19th-century indentured laborers from India — the first South Asian diaspora in Jamaica. The festival features the construction of a large multicolored float, percussion music, dancing and processions, well attended and supported by different ethnic and religious groups. In many ways Hussay contrasts sharply with its parent tradition, the Shi’a Muslim muharram ritual, while also retaining key symbols of this transnational cultural phenomenon. I show how colonial attitudes and anxieties regarding Indian laborers and the containment procedures enacted on their cultural practices proved decisive in the transformation of muharram to Hussay. My conversations with craftspersons and visual documentation of Hussay demonstrate how artists innovatively localize expressive forms from distinct cultural and geographical domains within the space of performance, i.e., South Asian Islam, Afro-Caribbean Carnival.

In a broader context, I argue that Hussay crystallizes the ambivalent and complicated relations between local and national senses of community and identity. I treat Hussay as a "hybrid” performance genre that simultaneously affirms Indian "roots”,

manifests aspects of both spirituality and carnivalesque celebration, and creates a sense of community among different racial groups. At the same time, the expression of a distinct ethnic and local identity is evident in other dimensions of performance. The speech-play of some locals and community elders, who nostalgically link Hussay to the shared sacrifices of ancestors on the estates and decry the lack of community today, indexes inter-generational, racial, and gender conflicts within the community, and reproduces a sense of difference from wider Jamaican society. In this perspective Hussay and its representations are important instances of an Indian counter-public sphere in a country whose African (and European, Christian) heritages are hegemonically reinscribed through national events such as Emancipation Day, which commemorates the end of African slavery, and Carnival.

In Chapter Four, I contrast the loosely structured atmosphere of village performances with the stylized productions of the Kingston-based National Council for Indian Culture-Jamaica. Recent expatriates from India — the second diaspora — and local (Jamaica-born) Indians who are prominent in the country's business, professional and educational sectors constitute the Council's leadership structure. The productions are dominated by Hindu, Sanskritic, and North Indian performance styles, and

juxtapose classical dances and devotional songs with reinterpretations of pop songs from Hindi films. Featured artists are flown in from other Caribbean nations or the United States, while Indo-Jamaicans are relegated to the role of supporting acts.

M.N. Srinivas's classic model of 'Sanskritization' (1967) in the Indian subcontinent is particularly apt in this context; by Sanskritization, Srinivas meant the processes whereby lower-caste groups attempted to raise their status by adopting the prestigious practices and other symbolic forms associated with Sanskrit-language texts and Brahmanical rituals. Expanding on the particularities of the model, I also suggest these efforts are the instrumental means by which Sanskrit and Hindu-derived practices and ideologies are hegemonically reinscribed as 'Indian' in the South Asian diaspora.

I begin the concluding chapter, Chapter Five, by situating public spaces and cultural forms at the intersection of contradictory discourses on the raced and gendered Indian body. I specifically examine the approbation that accompanied the dancing of a group of women at an 'Indian function,' the negative responses of producers and audiences to an Indo-Trinidadian musical group's public repertoire that included Afro-Jamaican performance styles. I bring together the several strands of my study by sifting through

the multiple meanings produced through cultural representation, and by analyzing the relationship of expressive culture and poetics to society, authority and the constitution of identity. These discourses are salient because they provide ‘empirical’ evidence of the extent to which community standards regarding self-expression, racial boundaries, individual conduct and public behavior, are deployed in the language of ordinary individuals in Jamaica.

Chapter Two — Indians in the Jamaican Imaginary: Racial Logics and Social Meanings in the (Ex)Colony

> Over the last several months, [skin] bleaching has sparked an intense public debate about black identity and self-respect in this nation of 2.6 million people, about 90 percent of whom are black, as well as the influence of American and European models of success and glamour. "With Jamaica so close to North America, we are bombarded with images of a white culture. People have come to feel that lighter skin is a passport for better relationships and making it in this world," said Kingston dermatologist Clive Anderson. (Kovalevsky, Washington Post Foreign Service, 1999:A15)

This chapter is concerned with explicating a range of narratives concerning Indians in Jamaica and more generally the Anglophone Caribbean, beginning with their arrival as indentured laborers in the mid nineteenth century to the British sugar colonies, and continuing with contemporary representations up to the period of my fieldwork in the late 1990's. As such, I attend only selectively to the facts of their recruitment in the subcontinent and

travel to the New World, their lives and labors on agricultural estates in the early days of their arrival, and their subsequent movement off the plantations and into a range of occupations and social environments. That history has been comprehensively documented by Verene Shepherd (1993), especially, and also by Harinder Singh Sohal (1979). To a significant extent I have depended on their research on these topics for my own understanding of the early experiences of Indians in Jamaica.

Instead, I look into the particulars of the representations of Indians as contained in: correspondence among and between the members of the plantocracy, for whose benefit Indians were imported to the island, and the planter's opponents; official reports of colonial administrators responsible for the living conditions of the laborers; narratives of other colonial memoirists; newspaper articles; the words of the descendants of indentured laborers. My concern is to convey something of the discursive density of the representations of Indians from the colonial to the post-Independence period and beyond; most of these accounts are largely submerged in various archival repositories in Jamaica and England. In this endeavor, I tread the well-worn path established by Edward Said's Orientalism (1978), which text's central concern was how the narratives of colonialists, adventurers, and observers

produced the degraded and exoticized stereotypes of colonized peoples that have been regnant in Western imaginings of 'the Orient.'

Like Said, I do not claim a direct and unmediated link between the descriptions and interpretations of yesteryear and the contemporary era — even if there was an abundance of empirical data on the topic to draw upon, such a claim would entail a reduction of disparate and contradictory historical discourses to an unsustainable teleology. Rather, the overall aim of this chapter is to map how colonial-era discourses about Indians are refracted and changed over time and yet persist as traces in the present day, in other words, to track the recursive nature of image production (Greenblatt 1991). By doing we get a sense of the differential understandings of culture, race, and history that are produced through the representational strategies of individuals and various sectors of Jamaican society to support their own expansive and/or narrow political economic interests, identity projects, and pursuit of hegemony.

Without hoping to exhaust the inventory on these topics, I offer a few pertinent examples of the ways in which ideas, attributions, opinions, and wish fantasies all combined and collided in the imaginative and material dimensions of Jamaican

social life. I begin by looking at the thickest concentration of these attributions as they surface at the advent of immigration and continue until immigration's cessation prior to the end of World War I. I contend that in this period the long-standing attributions of racial and cultural superiority (European) and inferiority (Black) were modified and widened to account for the presence of Indians, without really changing certain bedrock assumptions about those various groups. In triangulating between these three groups, I deliberately omit, perhaps to my detriment, the entry of Chinese, Syrians, and Jews into the Jamaican racial landscape. I then look at examples drawn from the next pertinent time period, post-indenture to the present, to underscore the ways racial and cultural logics in latter-day Jamaica reconstitute images, attitudes, and experiences of those previous years.

THE STRUCTURING STRUCTURES OF COLONIAL SOCIETY

A few basic facts concerning the world historical circumstances of Indian arrival in the Caribbean: Beginning in the early to mid-nineteenth century, subjects of Britain's imperial possessions in India made their way across the globe to colonial peripheries ranging from Mauritius in the Indian Ocean to Fiji the Crown colonies of the British West Indies. Their mobilization was

for the single-minded reason of providing labor power for the emerging capitalistic economies of England, still struggling with the looming presence of the plantation system, especially in the Caribbean. In the Caribbean, their presence was the outcome of a complicated series of negotiations, struggles, and debates over the importance of a single commodity — sugar — and how to produce the most of it at the cheapest possible cost. African slaves, the previously available source of cheap labor, had been reluctantly freed in the sugar colonies (Jamaica, Trinidad, and British Guiana) in 1838. The planters attempted to compel the ex-slaves to remain a pliant laboring population by denying them access to idle land and destroying the provision grounds on which they grew produce for their own consumption, or the words of Mintz, "in effect the planter classes sought to re-create pre-emancipation conditions—to replace the discipline of slavery with the discipline of hunger" (Mintz 1985:70), but to little avail.[6]

The West India planters who had relied on protectionist policies for their product were not only faced with a shortage of labor brought on by their attempts to coerce free blacks, but also

[6] One colonial observer commented that not only had the thought of free black settlements never entered the planter's minds, but that instead of accepting the inevitability of wage-earning blacks, the planters "resolved that the free labourer should, if he worked upon the Sugar property at all, work there as a mere serf" (Rev. J.E. Henderson, August 1st, 1876).

competition from the burgeoning sugar economies of newer colonies in Mauritius, Natal, and Fiji (ibid). The success of the latter, in turn, fueled stiff opposition to the planters from proponents of 'free trade' in the colonial metropole. But many in England argued convincingly for the need to support the planters and their scheme to recruit workers from the subcontinent for the purposes of providing labor power in the New World. In actuality, indentureship had been broached as a possible solution in the 1830's as the dawning reality of Emancipation took hold in planter's minds. Attempts were made to attract white Europeans, then other Blacks from North America and the Caribbean, free Africans from Sierra Leone, and Chinese from the mainland to shore up the labor supply (Shepherd 1993: 22-30), but Indians emerged as the eventual front runners. During the period of time that indenture was in force, 1845-1916, an estimated 36,000 Indians were brought to the island. By the time it ended, some 18,000 Indians, both indentured laborers and those born on the island, remained in Jamaica.

To put the case as directly as possible, Indians were brought to the island under conditions of servitude, and interpellated into positions that rendered them from the outset as 'other' in the Jamaican imaginary. Various reasons can be cited for this: For

one, Indians were seen not as permanent members of colonial society in the way that 'native laborers" (i.e., Blacks) were, but a stopgap to the labor shortage plaguing the largely sugar-producing economies of Jamaica, Trinidad, and Guyana, following the virtual abandonment of post-Emancipation estates by former slaves. Recruited first from the hill communities (tribes) of Eastern India, and then from the Central provinces of British colonial India, the laborers were initially indentured for periods of one year, which was then changed to five years, to work on a particular estate. At the end of that period they could re-indenture to the same estate or to another one or return to the subcontinent taking the wages saved with them. In Verene Shepherd's phrase, they were seen as 'sojourners' instead of 'settlers' (1993), a claim often made by opponents of indentured labor.

Moreover, Indians arrived in the New World some two hundred and more years after African slaves had been brought to the region and steadily infused, if tenuously and often covertly, the region's societies with their myriad social, political, cultural, and moral resources. White planter society alternately opposed, tried to eradicate, change, and uneasily came to tolerate them, but a relationship had been established between the white minority and the black majority, especially in Jamaica. Shepherd claims, with

some justification, that the Indian population in Jamaica did nothing to "alter the essentially bi-racial structure of Jamaican society," and "ethnic conflicts remained primarily black-white" in "a society stratified along class and colour lines and dominated by an essentially white elite" (ibid: 19). According to Shepherd, Indians' "powerlessness" was predicated in large part on the "community's own internal weakness of organization and separation from sources of cultural renewal" (ibid).

ORIENTING DEFINITIONS- ARTICULATION, RACIAL FORMATION, RACIALIZATION

Leaving aside the question of "the Indian community," I want to direct the analysis along slightly different lines, that is, examine the content and, where it is possible, the provenance of dominant interpellations that construct "Indian-ness" in the Jamaican social imaginary. An appropriate cover term that comes to hand is that of "articulation" (Hall 1980) in its double sense, referring both to enunciation, practices of naming and identification and the processes that connect and link different domains (politics, culture, economy) and subject positions.

Articticuation diasvows Manichaean notions of absolute and incommensurable distances between discursive formations, so that

categories such as the “Indian” and the “coolie” are not immanent in their own creation. Instead, they emerge out of a relationship, structured by similarities with and differences from other discursive projections and identifications, such as the “Negro,” the “European,” and a host of other signs. On this view, paired concepts such as colonizer/colonized, masters/slaves, nations/subjects, delineate the (sovereign) subject and the object of subjectification. At the same time they bring putative opposites into the same interpretive space so that the contingent and arbitrary nature of these positions can be put under question. That these procedures of distinction and identification are alive and well in the contemporary landscape will become apparent through examples that I look at later in this chapter.

In the context of struggles between racial polities for ascendancy and self-expression in colonial and ex-colonial societies, the processes of articulation I seek to uncover resonate with Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s definition of racial formation (1986), (leaving aside their problematic invocation of ‘determination’). As they put it, a racial formation is the mutually constitutive “process by which social, economic and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by

which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings" (1986:61).[7] This overly structuralist model must be articulated against the cultural and historical bases of racial meanings if we are to properly understand their impact.

Racialization, as a concomitant of racial domination and subordination, relies on the mobilization of subjective criteria such as embodied understandings and stylistic markers to create social distances and hierarchies among and between social groups. In the classic work of the noted Trinidadian historian, Eric Williams, racialization of Blacks in the New World (the formulation and projection of usually pejorative, essential habitus, physical, mental, and moral traits onto a collectivity) emerged after the fact of their appearance as an economic force in the plantations of the New World in the sixteenth century. The paramount factor in the calculus of racial subordination was the colonialist's estimation of the ability of different racial groups to provide maximum returns - labor power - for the least expenses involved in sustaining that population. In Williams' view (seconded by others), blacks were

[7] Hebdige, after Hall, notes that articulation "acknowledges the constitutive role played by (ideological!) discourse in the shaping of historical subjectivities and … insists that there is somewhere outside 'discourse' a world where groups and classes differentiated by conflicting interests, cultures, goals, aspirations; by the positions they occupy in various hierarchies are working in and on dynamic power structures) — a world which has…to be linked with, shaped, acted upon, struggled over, intervened in: changed" (1996:196).

viewed by Europeans as a positive advance on Indian (indigenous peoples) and white indentured labor. The main reason for this, and the impetus for "Negro slavery", wrote Williams, "was economic, not racial…The features of the [black] man, his hair, color, and dentifrice, his 'subhuman' characteristics so widely pleaded, were only the later rationalizations to justify a simple fact: that the colonies needed labor and resorted to Negro labor because it was cheapest and best," contra other subjugated groups (Williams 1971[1944]:61).

Regardless of Williams's periodization of racial typing as a latter-day phenomenon, cognizance of the prevalence of a somatic norm image (Hoetink 1971) in the colonial imaginary (and extant still) is fundamental for understanding racialization and racial formations in the context of Indian-Black relationships. Moreover, the degree to which different groups performed behaviors and properly displayed the civilizing marks of European-ness was crucial for this process. In other words, we cannot overstate the importance of the extent to which phenotypical characteristics, physical dispositions, styles of dress, speech, and other means of self-expression by Blacks and Indians impinged on their position in the colonial social hierarchy, the apotheosis of which was the white European.

A comment of Antonio Gramsci's prefaces my recall of past history. To widen Gramsci's original meaning without distorting it, a critical elaboration of racial formations in Jamaica must involve retrospective analysis: "The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory" (1971:324).

"COOLIE" AND "NEGRO" IN COLONIAL JAMAICA

Coincident with the beginning of Indian indenture and in some cases even before a single Indian had actually set foot on Caribbean shores, images and evaluations proliferated and went some way toward establishing their place as 'other' in the colonial imaginary. With the arrival of Indians imminent in the West Indies, many voiced their objection to the process. A representative example can be found in the words of John Clarkson of the Anti-Slavery Society, who lodged yet another protest to Sir Robert Peel, the British Prime Minister. In a letter, dated November 12, 1944,[8] Clarkson deplores the system and the recruiting standards, which brought Indian laborers in the 1930's to Mauritius "under

[8] Peel Papers, Vol. CCCLXXIII, 1844, Add. MS. 40, 553.ff.396-412, British library, Department of Manuscripts.

fraudulent contracts to labor for years on scanty wages and meagre fare, and compelled [them] to perform the hardest agricultural labor at the discretion of their masters, [and] neglected [them] when sick". He then goes on to voice a standard judgment of planters opponents, that being indentured labor is a ploy by the planters to depress wages earned by 'creoles" (freed blacks). Clarkson continues to inveigh against the arbitrariness of indentureship, and the mendacity of the term 'free labor' and 'free immigration' noting that "no liberty of choice is allowed [laborers] either as it respects employments or employers" (ibid:f.405).

But, all of a sudden, another rationale enters the discursive space, so that the plea to respect the humanity of the Indian is taken over by another characterization - that of his radical incommensurability with the British civilizing mission in the West Indies:

> The Committee feel it to be their duty respectfully but decidedly to protest against the introduction of masses of adult laborers into the emancipated colonies as likely to prove morally injurious to the emancipated Negroes and their families as well as to the Immigrants themselves. In Mauritius an unbounded licentiousness prevails frequently manifesting itself in forms the most loathsome, revolting and unnatural; and the same will undoubtedly be the case in Jamaica, Trinidad and British Guiana, should they be afflicted by the presence of a large influx of idolatrous and sensual Asiatics. (Peel Papers: f.406, p.11); emphasis mine)

These arguments found ready favor in Jamaica with other opponents of immigration, such as the Baptist Union, which claimed that the recently arrived immigrants would be a regressive influence on the freshly-civilized natives. One charge was that the immigrants "'pagan' religion and cultural practices would act 'most injuriously on the morals of the [Black] inhabitants and hinder…the efforts that are now in operation for their moral and religious advancement" (Rev. J.E. Henderson, 1858, in Shepherd 1993:30). Arguing on the same discursive terrain, the planters in Jamaica took issue with the opponents of Indian immigration and argued for the positive influences of the 'coolie' on the 'lazy Negro'. A celebrated exchange of letters in 1876[9] between W. B. Espeut, representing the planters, and the afore-mentioned Reverend Henderson centers on the capacities of the native versus the coolie. In Espeut's estimation, the coolie comes off decidedly better.

> [The] coolie is much more intelligent, teachable, industrious, reliable, and truthful than the native is. He is certainly less dishonest and less immoral than the Creole… I have always thought and still think that the natives derive much benefit from the presence among them of the much more industrious, intelligent, and thrifty coolie. (Labor Question, pp. 12-13)

[9] The Labour Question in and the Condition of Jamaica. Correspondence, ca. 1877, publisher unknown.

Espeut goes on to note that forty years of Emancipation have done little to improve the native, and that missionary work has had little impact on the Black's indifferent attitudes towards labor, even the new post- slavery generation that has been "blessed with all the advantages of freedom and comparative civilization…[Whilst] the native was properly taught to keep the Sabbath as a day of rest, he was kept ignorant of, or was not so rigidly taught, that other Divine law: 'Six Days shalt thou labor.' No negro will work on a Sunday, but how few will work on a weekday!" (ibid. p.14). Espeut's invests the figure of the coolie with impeccable moral qualities, as an individual who is thus capable of ameliorating the negativity of the native's behavior: "[It] seems to me wrong to abstain from compelling the native by example, and by precept to give up idleness and to take to work, either on his own account, or in some other way" (ibid.)

Henderson counters that planter's claims that estates would have to be abandoned without the immigration scheme and resulting lowering of wages would be more than offset by a "decided gain" in "morals." The Sugar Estates, "are the centres and sources of everything which is dark and bad," and the prisoners who fill up the jails and three-quarters of the bastard children in the country emanate not from the Free (Black) villages,

but from the estates (where the immigrants reside) and towns (ibid:20).

From other perspectives, the introduction of Indians is not merely a question of labor but also expedites the progress of European civilization, the chief aim of British conquest and colonization.[10] The writer of the travel account, Warmer Islands: A Trip to Madeira and Jamaica, (1881) offers the opinion that the present system of immigration is "thin and fitful" and of little use to a country capable of supporting twice the present population of half a million (p. 82). One benefit to be gained by an increase in the immigrants' numbers would mean more labor for much needed public works projects such as "roads, bridges, railroads and irrigation" (p.83). But, more significant would the impact be on the native population: "[The] introduction of another race would be a vast safeguard against rebellion, and would excite a competition

[10] The premise of one essayist's address to the Social Science Congress in Manchester, Great Britain was that the native races of Africa, Asia, and other colonial possessions were not outside the sphere of humanity, but represented different "stages in the general growth of society" (p. 12). They required the patient, nurturing hand of Europeans to train them in the art of civilization and government. The first order of business when seeking to 'transmute [savage life] in the crucible of higher civilization, by the force of example, and by the cautious and patient introduction of European institutions" was to inculcate, under the auspices of law and the police, 'habits of settled industry" (p. 13). In this manner, the 'ground will have been prepared for the action of moral agencies, and the barbarous people will have become amenable to the most potent and efficacious instruments of civilization, namely, education and the influences of Christianity" (p.14). In England and Her Subject-Races with Special Reference to Jamaica, Anonymous, London: Spottiswoode and Co., ca. 1876.

elevating the public civilization of the Island, if not eventually edging out the black race in favour of a more capable one" (p.83-84; emphasis mine).

Another memoirist states the case for Indian immigration and against Jamaican Blacks in terms even more stark, which I have reproduced in spite of its length. At one point he claims a 'relationship' between whites and Indians, which could equally mean similarities in morals, attitudes towards labor, and physiognomic similarities (see below):

> The question is whether it is the negro's point of view which is to prevail, to the exclusion of any other; whether Jamaica is to be retained as a British colony, or allowed to turn itself into a black Paradise—into another Hayti, with out the French polish…We are under no obligation whatever to surrender this fertile land to the negroes. I believe that to rescue it from the Africans and to replant it with Asiatics is the best service we can render to humanity…[The coolie] is even more related to us than those who in the catalogue 'do go for men.'… By coolie immigration alone will Jamaica be preserved from sinking into a hideous ruin—into another Congo or Dahomey. The African has had a fair trial and he has been found wanting…the new generation of negroes is worse than the old: worse in morals, in intellect, in capacity for any kind of civilization… There is no hope for Jamaica except in the selection of a fitter race to supply the place of the negro. (Jamaica, Kingston: J. Murray Auld & Co., 1877)

These views resonate with the sentiments of an earlier time, in that fears of an impending takeover by hostile blacks, foreign affairs, the possibility of enormous economic losses for the British

imperium, the impending demise of civilization through racial degeneracy, the iniquities of bad government, are all squeezed into the same representative domain and equivalences thereby established between widely differing conceptual categories and historical developments. One Robert Neilson, keeping watch on affairs in both the United State and the Caribbean, urged the implementation of the indenture system in a letter to Robert Peel in 1844. On the one hand, 'coolie labor' would aid in cotton production in British Guiana and free Great Britain from her "dependence on her greatest earthly enemy," the United States (Peel Papers, f.179). On the other hand, "introduction of an ample supply of East India Labourers would not only add to the Prosperity of those Possessions [in the British West Indies], but act as Guarantee against those scenes of destruction [in San Domingo and Cuba], to which every Settlement will ere long be exposed, where the Labouring Population is confined to Africans or their descendants" (ibid).

Indian women rarely figure in these early accounts of Indian immigration, and when they are mentioned, women are assigned conventional gendered roles in the domestic sphere and secondary occupations in estate society. Their morality and capacity for labor (which amounts to the same thing) is also of great concern, and

again the language of progress through the inculcation of precepts and by example is prominent. Among the recommendations of the Parliamentary Subcommittee on promoting Female Emigration are: 1) that female candidates for emigration not exceed 35 years of age; 2) they should be "entirely free from any mental or bodily defect, likely to impair their usefulness as settlers"; 3) either they should have had small-pox or been vaccinated against it; 4) their "character for industry and morality should be satisfactory and it is desirable that they should read and write"; and 5) "they should have been accustomed to washing and cooking, or have had some experience in domestic service, as housemaids or nurses" (Peel Papers, 1850, f.36-37). In order to ensure that only those women will be selected "whose characters for morality and industrial habits will bear the strictest scrutiny", it is proposed that a "probationary house" be established in the recruiting depots in India that could house up to 50 females so their background and other particulars could be checked out before they are sent on to the colonies. Women's capacity to cause mischief and moral contamination to the entire group of immigrants is a particular concern of the Commission, which urges both vigilance and discipline:

> The evils occasioned by the admission of even one bad character into an Emigrant ship are incalculable, not only on account of the moral contamination to which the remainder of the females on board are exposed during the voyage, but also in consequence of the suspicions which the known misconduct of individuals engenders in the minds of the colonists against the whole party, by which they are liable to be deprived, on their arrival, of all chance of obtaining respectable situations, and to be exposed to the dangers and temptations from which they can scarcely escape…[On board ship] women are generally benefitted by the surveillance of a clergyman or a schoolmaster (ibid.)

Given the difficulty that recruiters had enticing whole families to emigrate, the proportion of women to men among the immigrants was inordinately low, les than one-third that of men. Shepherd notes that the planters saw women as desirable only in terms of their ability to "satisfy the domestic and sexual needs of male workers" and remained suspicious of any women who was not attached to a male laborer as she was "'likely to get into mischief'" and were of the view that single women were generally prostitutes and 'women of doubtful character' (Shepherd 1993:50). In an oddly coy note, the North Cornwall Baptist Association included in its catalogue of indenture's evils, 'the inequality of the sexes [in terms of numbers]," because of which "crimes which cannot be named are constantly committed on the Estates," resulting in large numbers of coolies in jails (Labor Question, Appendix, 1877:39). (The resolution also mentions three cases of

immigrant women murdered by their husbands, which crimes apparently are not unspeakable enough to be named publicly.) The jealousy of the coolie man regarding the coolie woman is one of the recurring tropes in newspapers, official reports, and other accounts, so much so that the Reverend McNeill could confidently assert in 1909 that coolies who had committed murder had usually done so as “a result of jealousy, to which they are peculiarly liable” (McNeil 1911:65).

‘Hard Names Break No Bones’[11]

Even after the turn of the century, the construction/deconstruction of Indians continues apace, an aggregate process in which signifiers, types, and tropes all congregate. The language of ‘uplift,’ ‘improvement,’ contribution,” and ‘civilization’ is all about the place, including the notion of progress as cultivation - of habit and of intellect, and especially of morals. In virtually every instance, the character of the Indian is cast in sharp relief against that of the Black, as noted in the statements of several witnesses called to testify before a British Parliamentary Committee, the Sanderson, Commission, on

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[11] Sanderson Commission, Appendix:Jamaica, p. 87.

emigration from India in 1909[12]. A revealing question (statement actually) posed by the commission to the noted chronicler of West Indian life, Sir Harry Hamilton Johnston, is phrased in this manner, "Do you suppose the introduction of the Indian would have an effect on them [Africans]–as you found the introduction of the Indian has, we will say, in Trinidad, and so forth—in stimulating them to higher wants and a greater cultivation?" Johnston answers in the affirmative and agrees again with the commission that the Indian immigrant is useful not only because of his [sic] capacity for labor, but especially "on account of his moral effect upon the [native] population which is not inclined to labour in the same way" (ibid:154). 'Cultivation' was a prominent synonym for 'culture' in the eighteenth century, meaning human development by direct intervention (R. Williams 1983). Its recurrence in this context indicates the position of Indians as visible exemplars of the proper attititudes to labor, and whose function was to uplift the Negro's 'culture' to an appropriate standard.

By contrast, the testimony of Josiah Edwards, a colored estate proprietor in the parish of St, Mary, is noteworthy for the

[12] Report of the Sanderson Commission on Emigration from India to the Crown Colonies and Protectorates, Parts 1 & 2 and 3, 1910, London: Spottiswoode, 1910.

extent to which his characterizations of the Indian oscillate between negative and positive poles, or perhaps more accurately, arbitrarily mobilize several contradictory representations. On the one hand, "the coolie is more useful in] many respects than the Creole labourer; that is, you can depend on them more, because they live on the plantations and they seem more subjected to take orders, and carry out orders more punctually than the native labourers do...you can depend on their labor being regular" (Sanderson Report, Minutes of Evidence, p. 325; emphases mine). But a contrary image appears in the course of his testimony. The coolies may be regular workers, he says, but they are well capable of taking advantage of the system under which they are contracted, so that the planter is at "their mercy. They scheme to avoid work, as I know as a medical man who knows about them" (ibid.) On the question of whether the Indians are useful to the colony, the answer is in the affirmative, but in response to whether they contribute to the well-being of the colony, the answer is qualified, as "they are very mean [stingy]..if they can save a penny, they will not spend it, so they are very close in that way" (ibid). Moreover, they are also "spiteful" (ibid.)

Later on he reiterates the point about the proverbial stinginess of the immigrant and claims that, "all their moneys are

sent over to India or nearly all, and none spent for the benefit of the island, except that [which] he cannot help [spending]. And in addition, they do not improve, to a certain extent, the manners of the natives, What I mean is, they improve themselves, they come up to a certain standard, and they are benefited; but there are certain habits which they do bring to the island. For instance this drug — Ganga [sic] they call it Leaf of Friendship — is now universally smoked by the native laborer and it is very bad" (ibid:326; emphasis mine).

The Jamaica Baptist Union, representing the native laboring population, takes the stance that "neither directly nor indirectly does [the Indian labourer] contribute anything substantial to the island revenues" (Sanderson Report, Appendix:Jamaica, p. 77). There are several telling phrases here including one about the Indian as the "stranger within our gates" (ibid.)[13] Moreover, when

[13] "The theory that the Asiatic laborer financially benefits the country is about as fictitious a theory as was ever propounded. He enjoys the benefits of good government, good roads, protection, hospital treatment, ad just laws to the same extent as (and in some respects more than) the native population. To this we do not object, as being British colonists, we do not desire to see 'the stranger within our gates' suffer any disadvantage. But the East Indian labourer eats little except rice, which he can generally grow for himself; a few yards of calico about his loins suffice for him clothing, and he pays no taxes while on the estates. So that neither directly nor indirectly does he contribute anything substantial to the island revenues. If a balance were struck showing what the government gets from the Asiatic and what he costs as an ordinary citizen, the difference would be decidedly against the East Indian." (Sanderson Report, Appendix:Jamaica, p. 77).

comparing the gains to the colony accrued from “Asiatic” laborers and the expense involved in providing them the same privileges—roads, protections, hospital treatment—that “ordinary citizen[s]” get, “the difference would be decidedly against the East Indian” (ibid.). In the instances mentioned above, the sins of penuriousness, marijuana smoking, resistance to certain forms of labor, and a cost-benefit analysis occupy the same interpretive realm. These negative attributions to the coolie are a means of countering the long-standing notion in Jamaica that Indians benefit the island by setting an example for the natives and contributing to the moral uplift of Black people.[14]

As to how Indians and Blacks regarded each other, the little evidence that is available is replete with ambiguity and contradiction. According to Sohal, creoles welcomed the arrival of the Indians, even joking, “Make them come now massa, they will buy our provisions fro’ we’” (1978:38). The newspapers noted that the “negroes who were present at the first landing of the East

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[14] Charles Doorly, Acting Protector of Immigrants for Jamaica, plainly noted that “it is absurd to say [as the Baptist Union does] that the imported East Indian has been the means of depriving the native labourer of employment. Rather…without the aid of imported labour it would have been impossible to develop the industries of the country” (Sanderson Commission, Appendix: Jamaica, p. 79).

Indians [May 10, 1845] seemed rather pleased than otherwise and mingled with them readily" (Falmouth Post, May 20, 1845).

But, in Mr. Cork's deposition to the Sanderson Commission (Appendix, p. 87), he notes that, "The fact that Jamaicans habitually speak of indentured coolies as 'slave-coolies' is familiar to everyone acquainted with the people of this island." The naming practice indicates that Blacks and Indians, like their colonial superiors, dipped into a reservoir of historical experiences and signs in society at large to constitute the other. For Blacks, the willingness of immigrants from India to labor under terms that they themselves would not entertain, gave rise to pejorative attributions. Cork quoted from R.A. Walcott's deposition to the West India Royal Commission in 1897, "The aversion of [natives] to any indenture for long periods to one estate arises from its supposed similarity to slavery, the former existence of which is the only fact recorded in their past history, and the fear of a return to which is the ruling principle that guides their actions. They never refer to an indentured immigrant otherwise than as 'slave-coolie'. This shows how they regard his position" (ibid.).

Shepherd claims that the term 'slave coolie' reflects the view of Creole laborers' that the Indians were 'transients… who would return to India at the expiration of their ten-year compulsory

residence in Jamaica" (Shepherd 1996:81). Creoles views of the Indians as transients were likely augmented by wide-spread opposition toward the immigrants in favor of the native, which was voiced by their representatives in the religious establishment, in particular the Baptist Union (see above). This is borne out in the memoirs of the Reverend George McNeill, of the United Free Church of Scotland. He notes that the question of a Christian mission to the Indians in Jamaica was not even considered until 1894, fifty years after their arrival on the island:

> For a long time no special effort was made by any of the religious bodies in the island to attack the problem presented by these immigrants. They were regarded as a transient element in the populations, and the language difficulty barred any attempt to reach them in the ordinary way. They stood aloof, an alien community, steeped in an atmosphere of Eastern heathenism. (McNeill, 1911:54; emphasis mine). [15]

Indians views of Blacks could just as readily be pejorative. In a wider purview, we may take note of the fact that late nineteenth century Guyanese laborers returning to India were reported to harbor feelings of the 'greatest disgust' towards Blacks (Cumpston1969:156). As the indenture scheme wound down in the

[15] Commenting on the lack of missionary activity, the deputation sent by the Religious Society of Friends to the island in 1866, concluded that "the christian education of the coolies is almost neglected. [Only] a few of the children are found in the [church] schools" (Harvey and Brewin, 1867)

years prior to World War I, Charles Doorly, the Protector of Immigrants, stated that East Indians would not allow their children to attend the same schools as Black children, "owing to deep-rooted prejudice which they entertain against Negroes, and their objection to any intercourse with them…{moreover] they use they word 'Kafari,' meaning 'infidel' to describe Negroes" (Doorly 1909, in Shepherd 1986:19).

OUT OF THE PAST

Relationships between Indians and Blacks in the post-indenture years scarcely improved, indeed, according to Shepherd (1986), there was noticeable deterioration in race relations across the island, exemplified by the attacks on the properties of Jews, 'Syrians' (Lebanese), and Chinese in the 1938 riots in Kingston. Shepherd unambiguously states that "there was a direct causal link between economic competition and such Indian-black hostility which was evident" (ibid:19). She points attention to the competition for increasingly scarce jobs in the banana and sugar industries after indentured immigration came to an end in 1917, and repeated complaints from Indians about being denied labor on the agricultural estates and public works projects (up to the pre WWI years) bear out her claim (ibid:20-21). In retrospect, the

positivistic nineteenth-century idea that Blacks could be stimulated by and learn much about labor from competition with Indians, had borne strange and bitter fruit.

Scarcity of job opportunities may have been the proximate cause of the rising racial tensions, which extended to hostility by the Black rank and file against Indians who sought membership in labor unions after the 1930's (ibid). But in the competition between Blacks and Indians, we also hear the reverberation of the racial ideology that divided Blacks and Indians into specific labor niches in the New World. It is worth recalling the broad outlines of this process for present purposes: From the very beginning, coercive labor, African slavery, was essential to the maintenance of European imperial possessions and the development of capitalism in the New World. But it was not, at the moment of its inception, racist as we have come to understand the term in its present sense[16].

However, in the context of colonial plantation life, claims about European record of human achievement were articulated with increasingly inflexible notions of civilizational difference, the

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[16] Oliver Cox (1948:333) states: "[Racial] exploitation is merely one aspect of the proletarianization of labor, regardless of the color of the laborer. Hence racial antagonism is essentially political-class conflict. The capitalist exploiter…will utilize any convenience to keep his labor and other resources freely exploitable. He will devise and employ race prejudice when that becomes convenient".

material division of black labor and white domination, and definitions of “certain physical differences as socially significant (e.g., the importance of ‘whiteness’ over ‘blackness’)” (B. Headley 1994, in Shepherd 1986). I treat the issue of ‘whiteness’ as an embodied attribute of superiority separately in this chapter. For the moment, I want to emphasize the oscillation between labor practices, including spatial segregation and work-time discipline, and speculations on European supremacy and progress were transformed into the material facts and discursive rationale of superior white and subordinate black cultures in the New World. Following Eric Williams’s earlier thesis, the late historian Walter Rodney noted:

> Slavery in the West Indies started as an economic phenomenon [but] it rapidly became racist as all white labor was withdrawn from the fields, leaving blacks to be identified with slave labor and whites to be linked with property and domination. Out of this situation where blacks had an inferior status in practice, there grew social and scientific theories relating to the supposed inherent inferiority of the black man, who was considered as having been created to bring water and hew wood for the white man. (1967:25)

Brackette Williams writes, ”Ideological rationalizations have little force if they do not [emanate from and] become lodged in sites significant to the everyday struggles of those who might ultimately come to see their world through them” (1989:148). Williams notes

that Indians and Blacks in the Caribbean had few choices in their occupational pursuits, but that the marketable skills of Africans (vis a vis Indians) gave them "a competitive advantage in urban environments and in a few industries developing at that time [the late nineteenth century]' (1983:148). By marketable skills, Williams means that Africans had been socialized into European-dominated society because they had been in the country longer, had a better grasp of White English, and had been educated in Christian-run schools. Extrapolating Williams' comments to the Jamaican scene, Blacks came to dominate manual labor on the docks in ports, public works, and so on, while Indians who had not the requisite background for such jobs, or the freedom to move to urban areas, were relegated to work on and around the estates. In the Caribbean, the narrow occupational opportunities that Indians and Africans were afforded and took up, were viewed by Europeans as a concomitant of their "innate intellectual and physical capabilities" (1983:149).

Life's vicissitudes were thus transformed into natural virtues. Indians were deemed to have a love of the land and were naturally inclined to agriculture, as a number of witnesses to the Sanderson Commission testified. Moreover in Jamaica, as in Guyana and Trinidad, their "greater success in the rural areas

(relative to that of African villagers) was attributed to their greater intellectual ability, their cultural values that encouraged greater thrift and industry, and their cultural institutions, presumed to have positively organized their patterns of interpersonal interaction" (Williams 1983:149). Africans were deemed physically superior, which was commensurate with the feminization of Indians as frail, inconstant workers due to their frequently taking ill, among other pejorative characterizations (Labor Question 1877; Sanderson Commission 1909). But, Blacks were also infantilized as indolent, "lacking "values for saving, sacrificing, and planning for the future," and as characters that "naturally sought the excitement of the urban environment" (Williams 1989:149). As Indians and Africans maneuvered to consolidate what increasingly came to be accepted as their own respective occupational niches, they were also engaged in evaluating each other on the above-mentioned bases. Rodney's comment on the process in Trinidad and Guyana (1969:34) is entirely applicable to Jamaica as well: "[Both] groups are held captive by the European way of seeing things. When an African abuses an Indian he repeats all that the white man has said about Indian indentured 'coolies', and in turn the Indian has borrowed from the whites the stereotypes of the 'lazy nigger' to apply to the African beside him".

To reiterate Shepherd's claim (above), Indian indentured laborers in Jamaica barely inflected Black/White relationships of subordination and domination, and were positioned by the racial logic of the times with the Black masses of ex-slaves in the lowest stratum of Jamaican society — below the colored class (light-skinned offspring of African and European parentage) in the middle layer and the top layer of whites. However, as the example of the refusal of indentured laborers to have their children schooled alongside Black children demonstrates, Indians did in some respects think themselves as superior to Blacks. But other imaginings and beliefs were deployed to position Indians in superior positions vis a vis Blacks in Jamaica's racial hierarchy.

A key means of distinction was in terms of the prevailing somatic norm image. The concept was first mooted in Harry Hoetink's classic monograph The Two Variants in Caribbean Race Relations (1967)[17], in which he defined it as the "complex of physical (somatic) characteristics which are accepted by a group as its norm and ideals" (1967:120). As Mintz notes, "the concept of somatic norm image is tied to normative — that is shared, and judgmental — ideas about how people look. In culturally

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[17] Reprinted as Caribbean Race Relations: A Study of Two Variants (1971), Oxford University Press

conventionalized terms it is also tied to how they should look. Hoetink effectively introduces the concept as a 'way of looking' (the double entendre here is intended) that is at once historically determined and historically determining" (Mintz 1996:39). Thus, as Hoetink argued, the ideals of a society's dominant segment will over time influence other segments of society to accept that image as their own. In Jamaican colonial society, "One's occupation, social position, and later property rights, depended specifically upon one's blood quantum and how these genetic combinations were imagined to manifest somatically…The colored population often received differential treatment than blacks from the planter/master class because of racial proximity [and to keep receiving those benefits] emulated the manners/customs of the dominant class" (Ulysse 1999:149-150).

Even in the post-Indpendence era, the prevalence of European ideals as markers of class privilege and class power were much in evidence. Jamaican scholar Rupert Lewis has written that the surge of popular and intellectual interest in and espousal of African-derived consciousness movements (Rastafarianism, Pan-Africanism, Black Power) in the turbulent 1960's was a conscious disavowal of 'conventional West-Indian middle-class values. [These were] the striving for status, the distancing from one's social

background, the imitation of an English accent, [and for males] the marrying of an English wife or marrying what was considered the next best, a light-skinned woman' (1994:9; parentheses mine). Gina Ulysse's research on the differences between "uptown" and "downtown" women demonstrates the prevalence of the idea that somatic differences and styles of self-expression index a "person's worth" – ideas reproduced and reified by various segments of Jamaican society in the colonial past down to the present.

In terms of somatic or embodied attributes, I do not intend to detail the bewildering and complex categorizations and calculations of body shape, color, hair type, historical provenance, racial origin, and ethnicity that go into the construction of currently popular categories as "coolie Royal," "Jamaica white," "red gyaal," or ones given so much prominence in the colonial-era such as "samba, "mulatto," "mustee," and so on (see Henriques 1953). However, as a shortcut to the issue at hand, lighter-colored skin, straight hair (and for women, long, straight hair or 'tall hair'), are generally esteemed as markers of attractiveness and desirability, and correlate in intricate ways to attributes of success, prestige, and power, which historically and invariably accrued to whites and then creole elites.

The opening epigraph, which concerns the attempts of young women, during the time of my fieldwork, to alter the physical facts of their 'blackness' through means of chemicals, attests to the continuing power of the somatic norm image. The stories had every public media outlet and public intellectual (of whom there are many in the country) up in arms over the practice. As I engaged friends on the topic on several occasions, I discerned a palpable sense of anger (and even humiliation) that 'whiteness' was still so valorized in the country. The empowering symbols and discourse of 'blackness' and Africanicity, so much a part of the decolonization efforts in the 1960's and 1970's seemed to have run their course in the 1980's and 1990's, in spite of Bob Marley and the valorization of 'rootical culture.' I made few friends by suggesting that the Black intelligentsia and power-holders, drawn from the middle-class, had failed to deliver materially on their promise of a better tomorrow to the overwhelmingly Black working masses (the 'massive'), hence the widespread indifference to their exhortations. The dream images and icons of advertising, music videos, films, and television, and the faces behind the bank counters, corporate offices, and other places of business were all 'brownins', not Black, so why not emulate them or better yet, whites? As twenty-two year old Sherry Roth noted in the Post article, "I have nothing to lose in

wanting to be a 'brownin'. I am poor and bored and being whiter would make me happier." That "crossing over" is a tactics of subalterns may make sense on the intellectual level, but in a country where issues of true culture, roots culture, whose culture are serious issues, such behaviors are seen as transgressive and out of bounds. I foreground this incident here, because in Chapter Four, I detail a similar instance, drawn from fieldwork, of the ways in which a performance event called into question the arbitrary links between culture, phenotype, race, gender, and expressive culture in Indo-Jamaican circles.

For the moment however, I want to maintain my focus on the past: An early indication of how Indians were positioned in relation to Africans in terms of these distinctions can be found in the travel narratives of Bessie Pullen-Berry.

> The laziness of the Negro is proverbial in the West Indies…I was told by an old gentleman…that he had often watched hardworking coolies cultivating their little patch of garden [and also] some lazy niggers asleep all day under trees. At night…he had watched woolly heads creep along the low fence and steal yams and anything they could lay their hands upon, which the industrious Hindoo had planted.

> In most cases the West Indian black finds the labor of three days sufficient to keep him for a week, thus the property owners suffered greatly from lack of labour. To supply this want, the Government imported coolies from India, and it is interesting to compare the lithe, sinewy Hindoos [sic] with their intelligent dark eyes and black straight hair with the

> ofttimes lumbering gait of the woolly-haired, thick-lipped sons of Ham. (Jamaica as it Is, 1903:12)

In this account, an appraisal of each group's worth augments the long-standing image of the industrious coolie, and his negation, the lazy Black, by invoking and articulating those attributes against their intellectual capacities, as embodied in their phenotypical traits. Moreover, the reference to the 'sons of Ham' invokes a commonsensical racist belief, based in Biblical imagery and Christian ideology, that the skin color of black people is a result of a curse on Ham, the son of Noah, and Ham's descendants.

Allen Ehrlich's ethnographic work (1969) in Westmoreland parish in the 1960's vividly demonstrates the salience of phenotypical differences that Indians utilized to distinguish between themselves and Blacks. For the Indians of Canelot, "Black physical features are seen as intrinsically bad, while white ones are seen as good…[It] is s straight or 'good hair', which is most continuously singled out by the Indians [as the greatest positive differentiator]" from Blacks (ibid:127). Ehrlich also noted that in spite of attending church with Blacks and being led in services by Black preachers, Indians in the village, called forth Biblical proof

that blacks carried the “bad seed” - of Cain, in this version, not Ham (ibid: 125-136).

During the course of my research I came across both these attributions. I was walking down the road in the company of B., an older Indian man in his fifties, when the topic of whether Indians and Blacks mixed socially in Vere came up. After answering that there was no problem between Indians and Blacks, the following exchange took place:

> B: Well, you know Indian and naygur [colloquialism for Negro or black person] cyaan [can’t] mix.
>
> Me: Oh? What do you mean?
>
> B: Because they different.
>
> Me: How you mean…different?
>
> B: Well, like their hair, you know. Our hair is straght… [tugging on his own hair] But their hair is all…twist up.

It is an open question whether B. meant Indo- and Afro-Jamaicans can’t or ought not to mingle socially, or whether he intended mixing as a metaphor for sexual union or marriage and offspring. According to Ehrlich, Indians in Canelot were adamantly against children from mixed race unions (ibid). I couldn’t get any clarification from B. on the matter, and eventually finding out that he ‘visited’ an Afro-Jamaican woman, and had been doing so for a

number of years made me revaluate his stated position against the grain of his own experience.

A few weeks later, during Hussay, I was having a talk with another older Indian, who, from the moment he found out I was born in India, insisted on tracing his family connection back to his grandfather and through his grandfather to India. He claimed that his grandfather had given him the birth name Quaid–E-Azam, the honorific conferred on Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the putative “Father of Pakistan,” who was instrumental in the Partition of the subcontinent in the 1940’s. I asked whether he was still a practicing Muslim, to which he said no, that he had been baptized a Christian, but that he still held to Islam as his own religion.

A little later as we watched the drummers prepare for their regular musical session, he abruptly called attention to the numerous Black youth in the yard, and said disparagingly, “There’s too many niggers in the Hussay yard these days.” Startled, but trying to control my anger, I asked him what was wrong with that. His reply was, “Well, they’re a cursed race, you know.” I asked where he got that notion, to which he replied, ”Well, it says so in the Bible…they’re a cursed people!” I said, “I thought you were a Muslim,” and pointed out to him that that if he really believed in Islam, then he couldn’t hold to that position because

according to Islam, all people were brothers and sisters, regardless of their race. The conversation ended abruptly as he shrugged and said, "Well, I guess I am just prejudiced," and we moved apart.[18]

SUMMARY

Rather than seeing racial subordination as principally emerging from the (semi)rational calculation of incipient capitalists, as some historians have stated, in this chapter I have drawn attention to discourses whose semantic charge is inflected, contaminated, and made coherent by congeries of contradictory signs. This maneuver underscores the notion of "the imagination as a social practice" and of the central importance of the image, the imagined, and the imaginary in the constitution of social life in the global ecumene and Jamaica (to paraphrase Appadurai 1990:5). From this vantage point, the idea, now in vogue, that "national cultures are inescapably open to change" and "refract the ceaseless global flow of persons, commodities, and ideologies" (Foster 1991:251), appears to be an old story.

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[18] I am not certain whether the situation can be termed tragic or farcical, given that my remove from and limited knowledge of local identity politics puts me at a considerable distance from the historical circumstances under which this man has come to espouse such racist views. The irony is definitely grim in that I, born a Hindu Brahmin in India, and having lived over three-quarters of my life in a society defined by racial privilege —the US— found myself attempting to espouse racial tolerance by invoking the precepts of Islam!

Insofar as racial formations are constituted on the terrain of popular consciousness, it is perhaps unnecessary to note that the process is fraught with contradictions, given a Gramscian understanding of consciousness as a fragmented ensemble of commonsensical notions, everyday prejudices, and high, philosophical ideas. The muddled evaluations of colonialists regarding laboring populations calls into question the 'rational' calculations that determined the worthiness of racial groups to benefit from their own labors in the (ex)colony), and reaffirm the truth of Gramsci's assertion that, "Every social stratum has its own 'common sense' and its own 'good sense'…every philosophical current leaves behind a sedimentation of 'common sense'; this is the document of its historical effectiveness" (1971:326, ff. 5).

Thus, it is wise to resist the temptation to counterpose a vast machinery of colonial racism that reduced all subordinate groups to an undifferentiated mass - here Africans, there Indians, over there Chinese, and so on. Rather, in the interactions between colonialists and the laboring populations, discontinuous and opposed ideas, images, and meanings converged and collided, were borrowed from different ideological domains, geographical locations, and past experiences to construct the social imaginary in Jamaica. These images and tropes reappear in different

configurations in the following two chapters, which explore in grater detail the ethnographic contours of Indo-Jamaican public space and culture.

Chapter Three — Muharram to Hussay, Mourning to Festival: The 'Changing Same' of Traditional Performances

> Every experience, every thought … is internally dialogic, adorned with polemic, filled with struggle, … open to inspiration from outside itself - but it is not in any case concentrated simply on its own object; it is accompanied by a continual sideways glance at another person
> (M. Bakhtin, 1984:32)

> [In Jameson's model of reading] there is…the hegemonic internalization of individualism as the proper stance for all reading. In contrast, we have the shared, collective model…where a community takes multiple readings of the same text and in so doing produces and enhances their collectivity even while allowing their different perspectives
> (Limón 1994:185)

This chapter is about representations of identities and cultures, the persistence of the past in the present, and the re-invention of tradition in and by communities of 'local' Indians, as distinct from the productions of elite Indians and Indo-Jamaicans

in the urban enclave of Kingston. I have structured this chapter in two sections. The first part of the first section includes a ground-level description of the Hussay festival, the chief site and performance event that informs the analysis I undertake in the remainder of the chapter. I draw upon my experiences as I observed and participated in Hussay on three separate occasions. In the second part of this section, I also situate the festival in a historical framework, paying particular attention to the representations of Hussay's precursors engendered by colonial-era observers in India and the British crown colonies in the Caribbean. I am interested in those instances where colonial power arrogated to itself the privilege of altering and authoring (producing) the cultural practices of Indian populations in different cultural contexts and the extent to which this power was resisted, modified, and accepted by those groups. But, I am also concerned to note that these wider struggles must be juxtaposed and contextualized with tensions and the specific historical antagonisms at the level of local community.

These historical details serve as the bridge to the chapter's second section in which I narrate the events surrounding a specific incident from my fieldwork and subsequently analyze it against the grain of contemporary debates regarding Hussay and the meanings

of ‘culture’ in Jamaica. In this regard as well, I am keen to see how cultural performances are imbricated in the play of power and authority. A cautionary note: The way I move between ‘ethnography’ and ‘history’ in my textual description and analysis is an attempt, crude perhaps, to mime the oscillation between past and present that inheres in the realms of expressive culture. Particularly in the second half of the chapter, I try to write in a manner that mirrors the urgency of the ethnographic moment and tries to capture the tension, confusion, and exhilaration I felt at being caught up within performance.

The overarching trope I wish to employ in this chapter is that of dialogism which, in Bakhtin’s estimation, permeates every social situation and individual consciousness, and crucially involves argumentation and struggle (see epigraph above).

This insight is of some importance, particularly because the understanding I want to sustain throughout this text is that all performance genres, all expressive forms, involve several levels of contestation among and between actors differentially positioned in relation to one another in a given social formation. As Roger Abrahams argued:

> Individual items, genre, or even total expressive traditions have within them, when given voice, a capacity for both

> coercion and normation. The two are not necessarily contradictory; indeed they usually are not. An item of folklore may act both as an instrument of continuity and as a mechanism to further change. What may be in one man's [sic] rendition an argument for maintaining the way things are (because that is where he supposes his best interests lie), may be in the enactment of another man a device for progressive or repressive change (because that is where he sees his best interests) (1972:30)

This somewhat instrumental understanding of cultural processes notwithstanding, the key idea that I want to extract from this formulation is the notion of tradition ('item of folklore') as steeped in flux and creative instability. We also have to keep in mind that this tension and strain is fundamental to the process of artistic creativity and for the essential health of the tradition itself. Otherwise, as Walter Benjamin noted, the danger is that "every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably" (Benjamin, 1968:255).

HUSSAY IN VERE, PART I

Hussay in Jamaica has been identified as an 'Indian session' ever since it first made its appearance in the late nineteenth century on and near the sugar estates where Indian indentured laborers lived and worked. Martha Beckwith wrote the earliest ethnographic account of the Hussay in the Caribbean with her

1924 monograph and aspects of the performances she observed are still extant. Once found in virtually every parish with a sizeable Indian community, Hussay has steadily disappeared, and nowadays is produced only in the adjoining communities of Race Course and Kemps Hill, in Vere district, Clarendon parish. (In the summer of 2000 an older Indian woman mentioned in passing that she 'kept' a Hussay intermittently in the village of Gimmi-mi-bit, which, if documented, would be an extraordinarily valuable addition to the study of Indo-Jamaican cultural forms.) The area has sustained a large population of people of Indian descent ever since the earliest years of the indenture period (Shepherd, 1993). In passing, I will note that the density of the ethnic population in an area is posited by scholars as the major reason for the persistence or disappearance of this and other cultural forms in Jamaica (Ehrlich, 1970; Shepherd, 1993).

Based on my participation in Hussay over the course of three different years (1997, 1999, 2000) I have synthesized below those aspects of performance and aesthetic judgments commonly deployed by Hussay's producers. But where I deem it important, I note variations in techniques between them as well. My participation in the activities 'backstage' and out of public view afforded me the opportunity to understand the extent to which the

performance event is saturated by multiple, differential, and antagonistic understandings and meanings.

Hussay today features the construction and public procession of a large float also called the Hussay and percussion music through the streets of the district over the first weekend in August. A group of men, under the supervision of a master builder, are in charge of producing the event, which alternates between the two communities every year. The builders (between 5-7) are for the most part long-time friends and neighbors, and men, now in their 30's and 40's who 'grew up in the Hussay'. That is, most of the men have had a lifelong exposure to the art of designing and building; in the case of the Race Course yard, L.J., the master builder, learned how to cut patterns under the supervision of his now-deceased father who had maintained the tradition for over 30 years. By contrast, S.B. in Kemps Hill learned from another famed builder, Mr. E., but only began building his own Hussay in the last five years. A third yard in Kemps Hill, the afore-mentioned Singhs, claims to also build Hussays, but it is not clear that they do so on a regular basis. To my knowledge, they have not built one after 1997, when I first went to the area. When the individuals associated with one yard are not building a Hussay, the convention is that they help their counterparts in the

other yard.

The main focus of activity in the months prior to the actual weekend of processions, is the construction of the Hussay, which consists of a bamboo frame, covered first with brown wrapping paper, and ultimately pasted over with both solid sheets of colored paper, into which patterns are etched by hand, and clear sheets of cellophane. The patterns are often based on geometric designs found on tablecloths and curtains. Arches and other flourishes are added to many of the 'faces' of the Hussay. The basic design consists of at least two, sometimes three, parts – a bottom or base, a middle section, and a top section, an onion-shaped dome. The whole edifice is adorned by the figure of a bird, with long trailing 'feathers' of crepe paper and, according to one individual, is supposed to resemble a peacock. Visually, the multicolored Hussay is reminiscent of the stained glass windows of churches. It is also similar to a wedding cake in that the sections are nested one on top of each other, but given the inherent problem in bending bamboo into curves, the structure seldom displays rounded edges; it usually takes the shape of a square or a pentagon. When complete the Hussay may measure between 19 and 21 feet in height and 6 feet at the widest part, the base. The wheeled cart on which it is pulled through the streets adds another

2 to 3 feet in height, so the visual impact of the Hussay on the streets is striking. The shape the Hussay takes is entirely up to individual vision of the master builder – S.B. told me that one year he simply woke up one morning and sketched the shape of the Hussay he had dreamt about the night before.

Color schemes for the Hussay are also a matter of personal taste, although L.J.'s comments one afternoon reveal the extent to which the desire to engage the eye of the viewer is a primary concern of builders. It was Friday afternoon, the day when the Hussay was supposed to come out into the yard, but as the rain fell on the roof of the shed, the six of us huddled inside were applying the final sheets of foil paper to the topmost part of the structure. We were already behind schedule as the rain had made it necessary to abandon whole days of work in the final two weeks before the festival day arrived. Now, the race was on to finish papering and then pray the rain would stop before the evening. But, as we began applying paper it became apparent that S.B.'s idea of covering the entire top in an alternating pattern of red and green would have to be modified due to the lack of red foil paper. There was a momentary pause as we mulled over the possibilities, and then L.J. began asking for all the available colored paper, mixing them indiscriminately and applying paste to the back of the

sheets. All the while he kept saying "Shocking colors! Shocking colors!" On the street the following day, the riot of colors on the top of the Hussay dazzled the spectators.

The materials themselves are obtained from any number of sources, including the local sugar mill, which provides the brown paper, and the school and art supply shops in 'town', that is , Kingston, from which the 'fancy' paper is purchased. The bamboo for the frame is cut from any one of several wild stands of the plant in the area. An incident from early in my fieldwork suggests the extent to which craftsmen (note the gendered term) exploit all available resources to maintain their art. This is hardly surprising given the generally constrained economic circumstance in which Vere residents find themselves, as described in Chapter 2. A constant complaint during my first visit to the Hussay yards was the steady increase in price of supplies, especially shiny foil paper. The price, along with its increasing un-availability, made L.J. quite pessimistic of completing an appropriate Hussay the next year (1998). I arranged for a friend to bring several rolls of foil paper from the States and then delivered them to L.J., only to discover that he had a virtual storehouse of the material. It turned out he was fairly well supplied by friends and relatives in Canada and in town. Apparently, the pessimism that he displayed every year was

a calculated strategy aimed at encouraging visitors to help fund his work. I will address the economics of Hussay in greater detail in the following section with reference to the awkward circumstances that enveloped S.B. in 1999.

As August approaches, percussion practice begins in the Hussay yard. Every weekend night, a number of kettle drums (4 to 6 in number) and also a couple of larger double-headed bass drums are played in the Hussay yard along with cymbals. The kettle drums are alternately referred to as 'tassa' or 'yabba'. The former is a term of Indian origin and the instrument itself, a shallow clay shell over which goat-hide has been secured, is still used in the subcontinent and in the Caribbean.[19] The latter term is of African origin (Yoruba) and refers to a cooking pot, once commonly used in Jamaica.[20]

The tassa (weighing about 8-10 lbs) is tied around the waist of the musician by means of a rope and played with two slender, curved sticks; the heavier bass drum, or 'boom', is slung over the shoulder of the musician and struck with a heavy rounded stick (6" long) on one end of the skin surface and with the bare hand on the opposite side. To obtain the proper sound, the tassa's skin is

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[19] Personal observation; also see Wolf (2000) on drumming in muharram
[20] Maureen Warner-Lewis, personal communication

periodically heated over a wood fire. As the interior of the clay shell heats up, air inside the drum expands and tautens the skin, giving the instrument its characteristic high-pitched sound. The musicians are usually youth from the neighborhood, all of whom gather in the relative darkness of the yards to drum until late in the evening. There are no distinct tunes or 'hands' that I have discerned[21], instead the bass drummer and cymbal players beat out a fast rhythm, while the tassa drummer 'cuts' (beats) and improvises a melody line over the rhythm of the bass.

The master builder and his family provide refreshment and occasional meals to those who have been helping build the Hussay or who perform other maintenance duties in the yard. Many of these, usually, young men are chronically underemployed and Hussay affords them one of the rare opportunities in the area to earn some ready cash.

Over the next several weeks, work on the Hussay proceeds at a leisurely pace, behind the walls of a temporarily erected shed. The shed offers both protection from the elements and heightens the sense of anticipation on the part of spectators and community members who are not allowed to enter the structure during the

[21] For a detailed analysis of how 'drum language' narrativizes speech and verbal performances in Trinidad's Hosay, see Korom,1995

construction phase. As the vignette with I opened the dissertation demonstrates, the Hussay shed is a manifestly masculine space whose defining characteristic is one of reproducing solidary relationships among and between males.

However, the extent to which the space of production/performance is an ethnically defined one is not at all clear. When I was first becoming acquainted with the workings of a Hussay yard, I was under the distinct impression that it was exclusively an 'Indian affair' given that for several days the only people working there, were the aforementioned Johnny and Dennis Singh, both Indo-Jamaicans. Certainly, Dennis's first comments to me after we were introduced kept ringing in the back of my head. When we met, he looked me up and down, took a drag from his cigarette and asked, "So you're from India?" Invoking location rather than origins, I replied that I was actually from the US, but had been born in India. He looked at me blankly and then said, "Good, as long as you're not a n----- [racial epithet], you're alright."

Convinced of the racially exclusive nature of Hussay, I had to rapidly reassess that opinion a couple of weekends after this incident, when a number of visitors showed up in the yard, including several Afro-Jamaican men and women. Dennis walked over, shook hands and joked with the men, hugged several women,

and then gesturing to an Afro-Jamaican man, said to me, “This is the guy who cut all the patterns for the Hussay. He’s the artist here.” I subsequently learned that Richard was a close friend of Dennis, but was not able to be a part of the crew since he had a regular job far from the district, in contrast to Dennis and Johnny. Both of them were unemployed and consequently had time to attend to the Hussay.

Since that initial encounter, it has become readily apparent that race is not a criterion for exclusion from or inclusion in the production process, given the number of Afro-Jamaicans who moved freely in and out of the yard and who help in the production process.[22] Other factors dictate who gets in and who stays out of the shed, notably an individual’s availability for work and capacity for sticking with the most mundane or troublesome tasks. As a general rule, those who demonstrate a talent for a particular aspect of the craft process are charged with the responsibility of completing that task. For instance, Gary is particularly adept at cutting very fine, freehand patterns into the fancy paper, and is the only one, other than the master-builder, L.J. who has unrestricted

[22] I never learned why Dennis used the racial slur, a remark made even more inexplicable after I met his girlfriend, an Afro-Jamaican woman. It may well be a particular aspect of youth culture - young Jamaicans casually and regularly address friends by the pejorative terms ‘coolie’ and ‘naygur’ (this denotes a rural, unsophisticated, black Jamaican).

access to the materials.

As August draws near, the percussion ensembles become larger and larger. Every night that music is played there are usually two or three people waiting (again, exclusively males) to step in and beat the drums and the hand cymbals, or jaing (a word of Persian origin).

While women are present and listening to the music and socializing in the yard, it has never been my experience that they participate as musicians. The wives, partners, and other female relatives of the builders do lend a hand in making the flower decorations and other detail work for the Hussay, but again I have never observed them working directly with the structure. Women are invariably found in the kitchen, cooking and providing food for the builders, and keeping an eye on the children. In Chapter 5, I specifically address the gendered dimensions of Jamaican social life through a reading of Peter Wilson's elaboration of 'reputation' and 'respectability' (1969; cf. Besson 1993) and Roger Abraham's work on the distinction between 'yard' and 'road' (1983).

During the week of the festival, there is a final flurry of preparations, including tidying up the yard, laying in large supplies of beer, soft drinks, and other items for sale, and accommodating family and friends who have arrived for the

festival. In L.J.'s case, family members who have emigrated to Canada use Hussay as an occasion for a reunion and regularly return to Vere to participate in the festival. During the last days before the festival occurs, the onlookers are increasingly composed of people from communities located several miles distant from Vere, and not just those from the immediate neighborhood. In conversations, many of these 'old head' Indians (mostly male) remarked how they used to "jump up inna de Hussay" during their youth, and now came to Race Course and Kemps Hill to participate in the one recognizably Indian event still being performed in the district. It was often these older individuals who expressed the strongest opinions about the multi-racial character of the Hussay, which they unfavorably contrasted with the 'pure Indian' affairs of yester-year. During the course of one such conversation, one of the young Indo-Jamaican builders who had been listening to the talk, loudly sucked his teeth (a classic Jamaican gesture of disapproval) and muttered loud enough for us to hear, "Mahn chat too much!"

On Thursday evening, the builder and other older men in the community go and 'cut dirt', an activity that echoes Beckwith's decades-old description of a ceremony in Annotto Bay in the northern part of the island. I will return to the significance of 'dirt-

cutting' later in this chapter.

Late in the afternoon on Friday, the Hussay is brought out of its shed in two parts and set off to the side of a raised earthen bed (chowk) that has been prepared in the yard. By dusk, the streets in front of the Hussay yard are a solid mass of people, although cars still have to traverse them, given that these are main roads in the communities. The audience is comprised of both the regular visitors from the neighboring communities, and also spectators who have made the longer trek from Kingston, ninety miles away. Food and drink vendors are doing brisk business along the parade route.

At sunset, small clay lamps filled with lighted camphor and oil ('frankincense', in S.B.'s words) are placed around the chowk. The two sections of the Hussay are joined together and then the builders lift the Hussay onto the chowk and circle the dirt platform several times. A senior member of the community sometimes leads the craftsmen in prayers (in 1997, the first year that I conducted preliminary research in the area, it was an self-identified Muslim 'teacher'). The youth who have been waiting in the yard, fetch the drums and begin playing music. Visitors pose for photographs in front of the Hussay and the party in the streets is now in full swing. Late at night the festivities grow even more raucous and

the drummers start to really beat. Then the Hussay is placed on a wheeled cart, and pulled a few hundred yards up the street, stopping at various places of business (if these are located nearby) that have contributed monetarily and in other ways to the builders, before finally returning to its home base.

Late Saturday morning the drummers gather at the yard, and after a few minutes of music, the procession heads out into the streets around noontime, stopping again in front of the bars and corner stores along the parade route. The racially mixed crowd, Indo- and Afro-Jamaican mostly, is at maximum density; the order of the day is drinking and dancing, especially 'winin' (winding, as in 'wind your waist'). When 'winin', male-female couples are tightly pressed together, grinding pelvis against pelvis. The procession slowly winds its way through the streets in the direction of the Alley River (Rio Minho), four to five miles away from the two communities. As the sun sets, the structure is dismantled and disposed of in the waters.

In the second part of this section, I want to deepen our understanding of the performance by describing the historical precursors of the contemporary festival. This backwards gaze is important in several respects: First, it enables is to comprehend the ways in which social forms are both transformed and

maintained in the movement from one physical and cultural space to another. My aim is to highlight the ways in which dominant colonial discourses and tropes regarding the innate racial and cultural attributes of subject populations were produced and circulated though time and space in the accounts of scholars, travelers, and journalists. This is a brief elaboration on one of the main themes of the previous chapter, in which I detailed how representations, materials, and ideological perspectives are "transferred from one discursive sphere to another" (Greenblatt 1989:11). In this particular instance, reading against the grain of official representations (discourses) of subaltern cultural practices makes possible a historicized understanding of how identities are produced in relations of power. In turn, we can then see in what ways the struggles of the past resonate with those in the present and how the past is made to serve the present — that is the aim of the second section of this chapter.

THE PAST IS PROLOGUE

Muharram in the subcontinent

Hussay's roots lie in Shi'a Muslim's ritual observances commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, in 680 C.E. (61 A.H.) near present-day

Karbala, Iraq. The murder of Hussein by decapitation and the slaughter of most of his small band of followers in a struggle for succession to the leadership of the nascent Islamic community precipitated the historical split between Sunnis and Shi'a. In the tenth century, Shi'a Muslims in Iraq began commemorating his death during muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar, a practice that spread to the Indian subcontinent in the twelfth century. The observances varied widely from place to place in India, and included prayer gatherings, self-mortification with chains and knives, laments in memory of the martyr and his family, and public processions of tazias, model tombs built for the occasion (Waugh, 1977:202). In some versions of the Karbala myth, Hussein's brother Hassan, is incorporated into the story and also dies in the same battle so that both brothers are rendered martyrs in the cause of Islam.

In the mid-nineteenth century as indentured laborers were recruited for work on the British crown's sugar estates in the Caribbean — Trinidad, Guyana, and Jamaica — muharram traveled to the New World, and eventually became "Hussay" (or "Hosay") — a creolization of the name of the martyr, Hussein (Beckwith 1924; Korom 1994; Thaiss 1994). In Vere, according to a lifelong resident, the transformation of ritual observance to

festival occurred in the last two to three decades as most of the few practicing Shi'a died out, leaving few traces of its religious roots, a phenomenon that generally occurred throughout the whole island.

In the rest of the Islamic world, the yearly public, reenactment of the tragedy in the desert was, and remains, a crucial means of creating and maintaining social relationships and consciousness of shared struggle among members of the worldwide community of Shi'i Muslims. The image of the martyr and the "Karbala paradigm," provides Shi'i Muslims, with few exceptions a minority sect in almost every part of the world, a "model for living and a mnemonic for thinking about how to live." (Fischer 1980:21). Waugh notes that of muharram observances that "the central point appears to be the continuity and identification the rituals give the [Shi'a] community" (ibid). This notion of community is fairly elastic, moreover, and expands to include individuals from other religious, ethnic, and social groups depending on the social and historical context in which observances take place.

In India, the view by colonial observers in the nineteenth century was very nearly the opposite. Writing of the observances of muharram in the north-central provinces of India, William Crooke, one of British colonial India's ablest administrators, and Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute had this to say:

> One of the most impressive religious spectacles in India is to watch the long procession of Tazias and flags which streams along the streets, with a vast crowd of mourners, who scream out their lamentations and beat their breasts till the blood flows, or they sink fainting in an ecstasy of sorrow...The air often rings with the cries of these ardent fanatics, and their zeal often urges them to violence against Hindus or rival sectaries. But the English Gallio is no judge of such matters, and his anxieties do not end until he has steered without conflict or disturbance the howling crowd of devotees through the stifling city lanes into the open fields beyond. (W. Crooke, 1897:263-64; my emphasis)

To point out the obvious, in this passage key linkages are made between performative spaces – the city streets — and 'blood,' the anticipation of "violence" and the "zeal" that "often" turns these "fanatics" against co-religionist and Hindus indiscriminately - the target doesn't much matter. The claustrophobia stimulated by the "howling crowds" that hem the British administrator/policeman in on all sides in the "stifling city lanes" is also pronounced — graphic examples of the "powerful hostile associations" that have historically developed around the image of the 'city' and its other, the 'country' (R. Williams, 1973:1).

The images of disorder and chaos that are prevalent in the discourse of the colonial administrator Crooke, reappear in the realm of fiction-writing in British India. Kipling's short story, "On the City Wall", culminates with dramatic and graphic descriptions of the city as a space of riot, disorder and chaos occasioned by

muharram observances:

> Everywhere men struck aimlessly with sticks, grasping each other by the throat, howling and foaming with rage, or beat with their bare hands on the doors of the houses…The crowd pressed by with renewed riot - a gang of Musulmans hard-pressed by some hundred Hindu fanatics (Kipling, 190_:304).

Within the arena of muharram performances, colonial subjects are rendered incomprehensible, victims of their own senseless violence:

> I stumbled over a man at the threshold. He was sobbing hysterically and his arms flapped like the wings of a goose. It was Wali Dad, Agnostic and Unbeliever, shoeless, turbanless, and frothing at the mouth, the flesh on his chest bruised and bleeding from the vehemence with which he had smitten himself. A broken torch-handle lay by his side, and his quivering lips murmured, 'Ya Hasan! Ya Husain!' (ibid:309).

The historical writings that involve muharram share a distinctive characteristic with Kipling's fictional tale of an unnamed city – namely a blurring of time and space to the extent that it is difficult to pinpoint the specificity of events born out of particular historical circumstances or even the actual place itself. The Reverend C.P. Cape, a historian, wrote with such vagueness about the site of a clash in the city of Banaras in North India "that it becomes impossible to tell the exact location of even the buildings he specifically names; indeed it becomes clear that in his

reckoning one place was as good as any other as an excuse for the violence" (Pandey, 1990:38). This fuzziness serves to emphasize the timeless quality of Indian subjects actions, so that historical and political change in their lives is irrelevant, even non-existent. To accentuate this quality of timelessness, colonial writings highlight the confrontational nature of the observances, underscoring the fact that the space of performance is always tense and overflowing with emotions, wherein participants are always prone to volatile displays.

For Pandey, the implications are clear:

> …'Muharram' becomes a metaphor for the representation of the Other. This public exhibition of grief [during muharram]…,is the kind of dramatized and ritualized behavior that stands for the primitive - once found in the West, still widespread in the Orient. It is that aspect of Oriental life that is furthest removed from the restrained, privatized, 'civilized' life of modern Europe. It is volatile as well; insurgency and violence lurk just beneath the surface here; it is all too easy for the primitive to get out of control (1990:36-7).

Complementing the notion of muharram as a metaphor then, is that of muharram as metonymy. The colonial eyewitness "sees only a fragment and then imagines the rest…the bit that has actually been seen […] becomes a representation of the whole" (Greenblatt, 1991:122). In the accounts of colonial observers, the repeated reference to sporadic outbreaks of violence flaring up

without rhyme or reason during muharram metonymically assimilates localized manifestations of political, economic and other tensions to the wider unreason and elemental passions of the Indian masses in general, and Muslims in particular. The threat of violence spreading throughout the city is assimilated to the image of a contagion that threatens to infect the body politic.

That this particular reading is also deployed with only passing reference or dismissive comment on the central political event in the history of Islam is a point not to be missed. I want to emphasize that muharram, with its themes of redemption, sacrifice and struggle, provided the frame, in and through which performance communities expressed local, and hence historical, protests against injustices that affected them in the give and take of everyday life.

Thus, the violence which did occur during performances cannot simply and easily be reduced to diffuse and ancient antagonisms between Shias and Sunnis, or between Muslims and Hindus, which is the prevailing opinion for most observers of colonial India. The persistent deployment of images of violent religious sentiments, simmering hatreds, of fundamental passions, enacts discursive violence on a cultural form which registered colonized subalterns reaction to the colonial reordering of their

social lives, consciousness, and relationships — changes that the Raj almost always intensified, and often precipitated, during its rule in the subcontinent.

Take for example, the city of Bombay in the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. As Jim Masselos demonstrates, the idiom for neighborhood or community such as mohalla, wadi, or chawl was derived from residents "caste, sect, religion, occupation, district of origin, region or language, and it was one that encompassed most of those residing in that locality" (Masselos, 1991:37). The preeminent form of observance during muharram was for each mohalla to erect tabuts or model tombs in memory of the martyr, Hussein. The tabuts were constructed by funds raised in the mohalla (sometimes by means of coercion) and in the final phases of the observances, paraded through the streets and alleys of adjacent communities before being taken to the sea for their final immersion. In one regard, the tabuts were powerful symbols of religious identification with the Karbala legend. But as Masselos interprets it, there were much more complex relationships and identities expressed through performance:

> The tabuts …were also a significant expression of the ecology of the mohalla and of its relation with other around it. Each mohalla raised funds to install its tabut under the aegis of its eminent personalities, either traditional authority figures or

> those possessed of other forms of power — or sometimes both together.... Whatever their religious significance the tabuts in addition signified the home mohalla, the power structures that went with it, and the external rivalries that resulted (1991:52)

The ways in which a particular tabut acted in concert with that of another mohalla, for instance, joining with another in the nightly parade, signified cooperation between their respective mohallas, whether that cooperation reflected interactions in the everyday world between occupational and ethnic communities or formal and informal political alliances between authority figures in those spaces. Conversely violence during muharram was not divorced from those same social relationships that obtained between communities. When the tabut of a mohalla invaded the side streets of an adjacent mohalla, it did so as an explicit challenge to the territory of a rival Muslim group, and expressed the hostility of the first to the other's access to economic resources, or sometimes a nativist resentment of newly-arrived ethnic Muslims, such as the Persians, and their prominence in local politics (Masselos, 1982, 1991). Masselos points to three levels of division in the local socio-political landscape of Bombay, namely, "doctrinal and sectarian divergences, mohalla antagonism, and economic contrast" (1976:82); these divisions manifested themselves with varying degrees of intensity during performances

in different years.

I have dwelt at some length on this aspect of performance because, I will argue in the second half of this chapter, distinctions between localities and social actors that are a concomitant of performance in the subcontinent, are rearticulated in Jamaica's Hussay today. Members of 'local communities' in Jamaica as elsewhere, demonstrate keenly developed and well-defined senses of belonging to and particular places and their affinity with others from those places – these are most overtly on display during Hussay.)

Muharram in the West Indies

Half-way around the world in the West Indies, the tropes of dangerous Asiatics and imminent riot that characterize customary practices were re-inscribed in the Caribbean colonial imaginary as indentured laborers began work on the British crown's sugar estates in the mid-nineteenth century. In the observations of colonial masters, the metaphors of disease and contamination make a striking reappearance, as do the injunctions to police the social body; the Indian 'coolie' threatens to undo the progress made with Africans by the guardians of colonial law and order. Political events in India such as the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, which

claimed hundreds of British lives, also intensified the concerns of West Indian colonists regarding the presence of so many members of this "race...crafty and intelligent" (Singh, 1988:14). White colonial observers were made especially nervous by the possibility of emancipated Africans intermingling with the Indians, which was seen as detrimental to the former. Referring to the recently arrived Indian laborers in Jamaica, the Reverend Warrand Carlile observed:

> Some of them are Mahomedans [Muslims], but the greater part are idolators, and sometime make great parade of their image-worship [this being the processions of Hussay][23] I need not say how extremely dangerous it is to our poor negroes, who are just emerging from darkness, and whose minds are generally to a considerable extent under the influence of superstition, to be called upon constantly to mingle with a people so debased in all their habits as the coolies (1934 [ca.1865])

I follow Singh in suggesting that the nervousness over moral contamination masks a more real fear that, provided opportunities to interact and communicate on a regular basis, African and Indian laboring populations might make common cause against colonial rule. To paraphrase Ranajit Guha "the analogy of the

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[23] It has been pointed out that Carlile makes a distinction between Mahomedans (Muslims) and idol worshippers (which hearken to the stereotype of Hindus) so that my interpretation of 'parade' need not at all refer to Hussay processions. But given that the only legal ordinances issued by the Protector of Immigrants for processions of any kind on the sugar estates were for muharram /Hussay, I remain convinced of my gloss on the Reverend's description.

corps consumed by an uncontrollable virus could hardly be stretched further. When therefore, the virus [coolie contamination] hit the countryside it was almost invariably regarded by the gentry as a morbid poison bound to destroy the peasant's healthy sense of loyalty to his master and undermine thus the moral edifice of the latter's authority" (Guha, 1983:221). In both Jamaica and Trinidad, pass laws which severely limited the ability of laborers to leave the estates and to enter adjacent towns without suffering harsh penalties were among the pieces of legislation crafted to contain the contaminating Asiatic on the periphery of civil/civilized urban spaces (Brereton, 1981; Shepherd, 1993).

Moreover, muharram in the Caribbean, with its dramatic displays of emotional affiliation also impressed upon colonial authorities the essentially irredeemable character of the 'coolie'; given the low numbers of Shias who emigrated, the sectarian aspects of muharram were not as pronounced as in India and Hindus and Muslims were equally represented from the very first years of observances. But the signifying chain that links Indian customary practices and violence makes its appearance in the West Indian context as well, demonstrating the recursive character of such representations. About the 1865 Hosay in Trinidad, for

instance, the observations of a correspondent seem virtually of a piece with accounts produced in India:

> [There] was the usual annual procession of coolies of Chaguanas and no less exhibition of fanaticism. About a dozen men maintained a mock fight with long clubs and with shields … Towards the termination of the ceremony, [police] corporal Oxley, by moral influence prevented an incipient riot arising from a dispute about precedence between two bodies of coolies… (Port of Spain Gazette, June 14, 1865; see Singh, 1988)

As the estate owners and superiors sought to extract more labor from the Indians without proper remuneration, and to restrict their choice of occupation strictly to work on the estates, the laborers increasingly refused to acquiesce. In growing numbers in Jamaica and Trinidad, they regularly complained about unfair working conditions, rioted against injustices on estates, demanded repatriation to India, and defied authorities in several other ways toward the latter part of the 1800's and into the next century (Brereton, 1981; Singh, 1988; Shepherd 1993).

These agitations were manifest in the spaces of public performance as well. Following disturbances during muharram processions in several parts of Jamaica, the Protector of Immigrants and the Inspector General of Police, enacted a ban on all processions from entering the town near which Indian estate laborers lived. Verene Shepherd states that, "These regulations

forced the Indians either to abandon the practice [in virtually all areas but Vere] or change the nature of the celebration and procedures" (1993:173).

In bringing this historical section to a close, I want to take slight issue with scholarship on Caribbean muharram. On the one hand, I am in agreement with the conclusion of Singh, et.al. that through the festival laborers expressed their resistance to the plantation system. The archives are replete with official reports and popular press accounts of disturbances during muharram, most notably in Trinidad, and also in Jamaica. But the Colonial Secretary's Office in Jamaica's "Notes on the Tajeah [sic]" CSO1B/5/75/1768), issued in 1911 cast these disturbances in a slightly different light. The report stated that since its inception, the 'Tajeah festival' involved physical conflicts between the members of Hussays from different (rival) estates who were vying to be at the head of the procession through the streets.

My point is that by focusing attention on the resistance of Hussay practitioners to the 'external' threat of colonial domination alone, scholars tend to reify an undifferentiated 'inside' locked in agonistic struggle against equally undistinguished forces from 'outside'. In contrast, I suggest that in these, and other instances, it would be more appropriate to see conflict in performance as

productive of local identities — i.e., the identity of one group of estate workers in relation to other groups — and to understand the expression of parochial concerns, pride of place, personal animus, and diverse pleasures as central to these productions. As José Limon notes of the space of the Mexican dance-hall in South Texas, "collective desire is not articulated against a repressive domination form beyond the dance hall. Rather, the adversarial culture is present within the dancehall; the site of contestation is at the point of dance production" (1994:164, emphasis mine).

Accordingly, in the second half of this chapter, I return to the ethnographic present in Vere and specific fieldwork encounters to underscore the notion of performance spaces as sites of contestation and cultural reproduction. Analyzing the form, content, and multiple understandings of Hussay — the performance event and display object — is crucial to uncovering the "internal hegemonies and systems of inequalities" that characterize "any cultural formation" (Ong and Nonini 1997b:324).

HUSSAY IN VERE, PART II

Vere, August 1999: Friday morning dawned with heavy rain showers, which given the absolutely parched conditions would have been just fine with most people in the area. However, in S.B's

shed, at 8:00 in the morning, the builders kept glancing at the sky even as the final bits of decoration and paper was put on the Hussay. Lee kept repeating "Shocking colors," as S.B. cut the last remaining strips of paper for the topmost part of the Hussay. Whether the paper was pink or blue or red or lime green - it all went on the Hussay. The rain still hadn't stopped and toward mid-day the water started coming in through the bottom of the door to the cramped shed where the six of us – S.B., L.J., Gary, Bagga, Mr. H. and myself - were crowded together. At some point someone had sent off beers and we all drank, me especially feeling quite guilty, and thinking of what my Trini friends would say about this clear breach of protocols/convention. In Trinidad, Hussay is produced for the most part by Muslim families in the community of St. James and accordingly the consumption of alcohol is prohibited; other ritual proscriptions are also strictly enforced.[24]

Finally around three or four, all was done, and everyone left for a couple of hours to go get cleaned up. I returned around sunset, when the Hussay was supposed to come out onto the earthen platform, but S.B. wasn't about to do that until the threat of rain had passed. This prompted some grumbling from an older woman, Mrs. B, from the adjacent district of Gimme-mi-bit, who

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[24] Personal observations, Trinidad, 1991, 1992; see also Korom, 2002.

had come with "prasad" – a flour pancake, chopped up and mixed with sugar and raisins[25]. She wasn't happy with the fact that S.B. had bypassed the proper hour to get the Hussay on the chowk. We talked and she told me about the "manautee" [in Hindustani, "minnat" or promise] Hussay which people once built as a promise for prayers granted to an individual and the community ("panchayati") Hussay that was built for and with the help of all Indians in the district. But, she said matter-of-factly, "No one keep up with that now [no one practices that anymore]."

S.B. finally decided that they would bring the Hussay out in two sections, but to wait until the next day to join the two together. So around 8:00 a whole group of men brought the Hussay out from the shed. They circumambulated the chowk several times, placed the bottom half of the Hussay on it, with the top half off to the side. The prasad was also placed on the chowk, along with two lit deyas. No prayers as such were recited although in the clamor of the moment, Mrs. B. may have said something. After a brief flurry of activity with people asking questions that were never answered, the prasad was taken off the chowk and distributed to nearby audience members. In the meanwhile someone had come

[25] 'Prasad' is a Sanskritic term indicating an offering to Hindu deities; the use of 'prasad' in the Hussay indicates the extent to which the festival is a syncretic one and has been so for some time now

up with a bag of rice and some of the Indians (the older heads ones mostly) threw some grains on the Hussay (much like on the occasion of Hindu pujas, or Christian weddings). The music had started by this time, and after a few minutes, a group of men picked up the Hussay, and then put the bottom half of the Hussay on a wheeled cart and went out on the street. Others were carrying the top half, and began making their way up the street. The crowds were huge, and cars unfortunate enough to have to travel up the road were finding it slow going.

I had to get back down the road to the Singh's house where I was staying at the time and as the music and drinking were showing every sign of continuing on until early morning, I left around 10:30 or 11:00, not realizing that what was going to transpire.

Saturday morning:

I got back to S.B.'s place around 10:00. There were no signs of life in the yard, but when I called, his elderly mother walked up from behind the house. She looked even more lugubrious than normal, and as I walked through the gates, she said, "Them want to kill S.B." I was a bit startled so I walked around the back where I met Norman, S.B's brother, who had come over from Kingston for the occasion and S.B., himself wearing a frown on his face. To my

query of, "Wh' gwaan?" he said, "Bwai, mi get some licks [blows] last night," and said he had been attacked at a bar up the road in Kemps Hill. One of the regulars in the yard, M., came up at that moment and angrily began denouncing S.B.'s attackers. "Never build this again, man, never do it," he was proclaiming. "They don't deserve it. Them man pure fockery!" This was all sounding very confusing, but I didn't quite know who to ask about what had transpired.

Around 11:00 or so, as the sun broke through the clouds, some of the younger set came into the yard. The Hussay was brought out of the shed and into the front yard in two sections, the bird already mounted on the top section. The drummers started playing, and after a few moments, a group of men picked up the Hussay, circumambulated the chowk,[26] and placed it on the cart. I was a bit startled at all this, as I had anticipated from previous festivals that the Hussay would stay a while longer in the yard, especially as he bar operated by S.B's friends, the Dunya family, was directly across the street from S.B.'s gates. But it was obvious that the procession was leaving. There was a further surprise at

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[26] This particular action although performed at all the Hussays I have attended, has never been explained to me. Usually it is characterized as ‘something we do’. Others have surmised that, given the origins of the Hussay in symbolic funerary rites, this has to do with funerary practices or a remembrance of the departed martyr, Hussain.

the gate, because instead of turning to the right, going up the length of the road toward the upper part of Kemps Hill and then turning back towards Race Course, the procession immediately turned left out of the yard in the direction of that community.

At the gate an obvious argument was taking place between a few of the men - S.B. and his brother on side, and on the other, an older heavy-set guy and a younger version of the same man. I heard something about "What about the money?" and S.B.'s rejoinder, "I gave it back." Norman was remonstrating, pleading with them, "Just let us pass, just let us pass." He and S.B. began walking down the road.

The Hussay was moving fast, disappearing around the curve in the road as the paper tail of the bird fluttered in the breeze. The drummers who were walking beside it were not even playing. N.D., one of the drummers, had stayed behind. He was walking around, shaking his head. A number of people were sitting on the sidewalk next to his family's bar across the street, all of them looking grim. Someone said, "Hussay gaan. Wi nah see it again." At the gate, the older heavy-set guy was vociferous in his anger, yelling at poor Mrs. B., who listened with weary patience, along with a couple of other men - including Rupert, S.B.'s oldest brother. N.D., now at the gate, was saying "Bad management," and still shaking his

head. He and I walked back across the road to the bar. I asked him for a soft drink, and listened to the conversation at the entrance, with several voices now raised in condemnation of that 'blood-claat,' S.B.

I gestured to N.D. to follow me, and he came out from behind the bar and into the open yard behind the building. "So, man," I demanded, "what happened? What's going on?" He paused for a long minute, "Okay, what really happened is bad management [on S.B.'s part]." The story, as it unfolded in N.D.'s words was this: The finances necessary to 'keep' (produce) Hussay, especially S.B's in Kemps Hill, are provided by the proprietors of the numerous bars and shops along the road in the village. As the shop owners have given funds (and also donated other items like a case of beer or soft drinks to be distributed to the musicians who play in the yard) their expectations are that the Hussay will stop at each place of business on Friday night and Saturday morning. On those occasions, the percussion ensembles play music, people dance, buy drinks and cigarettes or whatever else is being sold (the price for almost every commodity doubles, quite by design, around Hussay time).

The understanding is that the Hussay will stop for roughly equal amounts of time at each place of business. But one of the

shop owners at the top of Kemps Hill was especially tight with S.B. and had carried him to town to get supplies, paper, and other items for the Hussay over the preceding weeks. On Friday night, S.B. made a huge blunder – he bypassed the other shops and bars on the way, and basically "parked up" the Hussay at his acquaintance's shop for the better part of the evening. So that at the end of the night, when it came time to bring the Hussay back into the yard, he did so without having spent an appropriate length of time at other businesses. Small wonder, then, that bad feelings were generated.

S.B. and Gary, who lived closer to Race Course, were physically attacked by the irate bar owner and his son that night – there were claims that a bottle was wielded and that Gary had been cut (this wasn't true). Even though S.B. told the bar owner, Mr. Heavy-set, that he was returning whatever money he had received, the man's argument was that he didn't want the money back, as he felt cheated out of a good night's profits. Hence the diatribe: "He gi' mi back the money after Hussay done?!" That was one of the few things I managed to glean from his yelling.

S.B. then compounded the problem of having contributed to the decline of the local economy by leaving Kemps Hill without so much as a cursory attempt to perform for the "home" audience.

According to N.D. people, himself included, were upset that the Hussay did not stay in Kemps Hill, and instead left for Race Course so abruptly. "Its fi wi enjoyment," he said plaintively. The theme was reiterated by others in the bar.

I stayed in the area for about another half hour and then, gathering up Rupert, proceeded down the road after the Hussay. Along the way, he was hailed by several men at one of the businesses, all of whom very, very unkind to S.B. As one said, "S.B. cyaan [can't[manage this," which in this context may have meant that S.B. wasn't capable of handling the responsibility of representing the community. Rupert could only agree, placating them and not really defending his brother. In response to my, "So wha' really happen'?" he could only say, memorably, "It come like… something flare up in S.B.'s brain." His assessment was that the brother in New York who had supplied the paper for the Hussay wasn't going to do it anymore, because following the altercations, people were now "passing remarks" (making malicious comments) about S.B. and by extension, denigrating the family.

We caught up with the Hussay around the post office in Race Course. I saw several of my Kingston friends whom I had told to come to the show and walked with them to where the Hussay was parked – a shop off the main road. The crowds were getting

larger – it was around 1:00 and people were dancing in time to the music, and drinking. Vendors were selling jerk chicken, watermelon, and other food and drinks. Near the Hussay, S.B. was holding his young son, Alan, in his arms. He didn't seem too disturbed, just preoccupied with looking around and drinking. As I walked up to the shop, I was hailed by Gary, one of the other participants in last night's events. Gesturing at the ground, he yelled, to the amusement of others on the road, "Guha! You come to the right side, mon! You leave the country [Kemps Hill] and come a 'Noo Yaark' [Race Course]!"

The procession eventually began moving east in the direction of Alley and the Rio Minho. I walked all the way up, listening to the drummers, and the ever-swelling crowds. I was nearly run over on more than one occasion by the vendors who were dragging their cargo of beer and soft drinks in front of the Hussay. They were doing brisk business.

Eventually about half way to Alley, on the side of the road, I came across a crew consisting of the young women who work at the Dunya family's bar – the two Dunya sisters, both in their mid twenties, and three of their friends. They were all dressed in fairly modest dancehall fashions as were many other women in the crowd (see-through lace tops and gauzy blouses, plunging

necklines, tight jeans, and high heels). I walked over to the group and took some photographs of them. I was beginning to get a little skittish from the explicit sexual vibe being generated. The men in the crowd were openly and frankly staring at, talking to, and 'encountering' the various women in various stages of (un)dress in the audience.

The young women, who had so far been content to merely smile at me and say polite hellos back at the bar, were obviously feeling their oats. As we chatted, Sophie Dunya started the proceedings by asking, "So come nah, you going to dance with us?" The others took up the chorus. I may or may not have gaped, but I was most certainly discomfited. The bar-tender, Nicky's girlfriend, stepped up very close, smiled hugely and bumped me with her hip, provoking gales of laughter from the rest of her 'posse'. The crowd's attention focused on us, and people were looking very interested and amused at the same time. I tried to save myself from by pointing to the gear I had and pleading ignorance of such matters.

N.D., who had walked over from the Hussay with his tassa tied around his waist, immediately understood what was going on and began imploring me to dance, saying loudly and to the delight of all nearby, "Guha! You haffi dance! All deim negro gal wan' dance wid coolie and wi short of coolie man to dance wi' dem!"

Seizing the opportunity to save (or redeem) myself I quickly replied, 'Yeah man, you short of coolie man dem AND all you SHORT lickle coolie man, too!"

While he and the others laughed very hard, I proclaimed my intention to go take pictures and quickly moved away from the teasing and all-too-knowing smiles of the cadre of young women; one of them had begun sidling into me and moving me out into the middle of the road. The day wore on, the crowds grew thick, the drummers sweated profusely as they passed off the instruments to each other to catch a break, clusters of dancers (mostly young) pressed tightly against each other - two men sandwiching a woman and rocking back and forth, and also in the reverse configuration. People were smiling, yelling, moving, the bird rotated on top of the Hussay as the breeze occasionally gusted up, and the party was in full swing. Operating on the assumption that they didn't have any money to buy it for themselves, I bought beers for a couple of the drummers, mostly black youths I had come to know by sight in S.B.'s yard. "Thanks. thanks," said one, as we knocked fists all around.

As the day wound down, S.B., in another example of bad management, somehow tarried with the Hussay in Alley, where the crowds were impassable. The Hussay is supposed to reach the

river by sunset, but as darkness fell, it was still a kilometer or so away. Leaving the drummers at the final large store where the district line ends, the Hussay was dragged to the river at top speed. One of my Kingston friends and myself followed it as best we could, but by the time it reached the crossroads just before the Rio Minho, we were practically running. At the crossroads, under the lamp post the men who had been looking after the Hussay all day unlashed the guide ropes that held it on the cart. We were far enough back in the crowd and it was dark as well, so that by the time the men began running down the road carrying the Hussay, we could only just make out what was going on. We reached the top of the bridge to see the Hussay, without any ceremony, being lifted up and flung into the water as the evening dark descended all of a sudden. The undignified last few moments of the event were somehow in keeping with events of the preceding days.

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At this juncture I want to connect these and ethnographic moments to the notion of dialogism that I introduced at the beginning of the chapter. Dialogism, which is a cover term for argument, debate, (im)polite conversation, among others, permeates all performance genres and traditions. Through their actions and interpretations, individuals may instantiate a dialogue

with a performance tradition as a means of challenging others understandings of the past. Or they may destabilize and subvert the text of tradition, to inflect and imbue it with personal and 'local' understandings and meanings. All of these possibilities are present in Hussay.

This is especially the case when it comes to the discursive contestation regarding Hussay's form, content, and meanings. As previously noted, the racial mixture of Indo- and Afro-Jamaicans who are involved in the production process and the heterogeneity of the audiences is pronounced. Specifically addressing this issue, one of the drummers commented on a local television program that the display of amity at Hussay made the festival a model to be emulated by the rest of Jamaican society. In this sense, Hussay can be said to engender communitas, a diffuse sense of fellowship (Turner 1969) that binds different racial groups together in the space of performance.

But the responses of other Vere residents, both African and Indo-Jamaican, betray an ambivalence with regard to the Hussay's hybrid character: Some are disturbed by the increased multi-racial participation and remember when Hussay was 'more Indian' in years past, that is, fewer 'Negroes' participated in the event. Speaking to a pleasant, middle-aged Indo-Jamaican one evening in

the Hussay yard, I was taken aback when he looked around at the people gathered there and with a shake of his head, stated, “Long time back, nigger wouldn’t set foot in a Hussay yard.”

Discursive clashes unfold in other ways as well. For every 'older head' who views Hussay as a spiritual occasion, as Mrs. B. noted, and that it is filled with 'true meaning', there are voices such as S.B’s who have other definitions in mind. As he said to me one day when I asked him what Hussay was about, his reply was: “You can make it for a blessing…[and] you can make it for enjoyment.” The statement was punctuated by a tilt of the head to his friends, young Afro- and Indo-Jamaicans, lounging near the shed where he was building the structure. He continued, “Wi do it fi wi enjoyment. It come as a sport, eh?”

There is ample documentation demonstrating that the awareness of Hussain’s sacrifice is universal in Shia Muslim communities around the world, and Frank Korom’s work in Trinidad (1994, 1995, 2002) confirms that the themes of Hussein’s sacrifice and the Karbala myth are known by Hussay practitioners in other parts of the Caribbean as well. However, this hegemonic meaning of the ritual’s religious origins and the meaning of Hussein’s sacrifice has been destabilized and reinflected in another idiom in Jamaica.

In 1999, I accompanied Mr. E., as he, S.B., and some other men went to 'cut dirt' on Thursday night before the Hussay began. Mr. E. who was once active in Hussay, but no longer participates due to health reasons, was the adviser to S.B. on the ceremonial aspects of Hussay. In the darkness, we left S.B.'s yard in Kemps Hill and began walking toward Race Course, accompanied by a troupe of drummers, who stopped periodically to play while others jumped up in time to the music. Sidney was carrying a metal basin with a towel wrapped over it. After walking with the drummers for about ten minutes, the five of us peeled off from the larger group and ducked into a yard, whose residents apparently knew were coming. A younger man, with only a flashlight dimly lighting the way, led us behind the house and to a small patch of cultivated land where provisions were being grown. Our party halted near a tree and began digging in the dirt with a machete. A hole about a foot deep and round was dug into which a container of milk was poured, along with perfume, and flower petals. Mr. E. made a mud paste out of this, and formed two crude, fist-sized balls of dirt. These were wrapped in the towel and placed in the basin.

As we walked back to the yard, I asked Mr. E. what exactly the two balls of dirt were. His reply was, "We call them 'mud

babies'. That's Hasan and Hussein." I asked who Hassan and Hussein were. He replied, "Well, the Hussay is for them. Hassan and Hussain were two brothers and they catch a quarrel [fought] and they killed each other." But why did they fight? "It was over water," Mr. E. said. And Hassan and Hussein fought each other? "Yes," came the reply. "They come like [are similar to] Cain and Abel…they're Muslim Cain and Abel."

In the yard the "mud babies" were interred in the chowk, a process hidden from public view by a cardboard box. The following day when the Hussay was placed on the chowk the mud babies were transferred inside the structure, completing the symbolic image of the Hussay as a mausoleum. However, while the convention that the Hussay is a tomb is maintained, assimilation of the Islamic martyrs to Biblical fratricides demonstrates the rearticulation of established discourse in idioms that may be antithetical to the tradition, but which is more relevant to the Christian residents of Vere.

These conflicts sustain the truth of Edmund Leach's classic statement on ritual performance (1990[1954]:278):

> Myth and ritual is a language of signs in terms of which claims to rights and status are expressed, but it is a language of argument, not a chorus of harmony. If ritual is

sometimes a mechanism of integration, one could as well argue that it is often a mechanism of disintegration.

Having demonstrated the language of argument above, the idea I want to tease out now is that of “claims to rights and status”, especially as it pertains to the clash between S.B. and the members of the Kemps Hill community. In the first instance, the bar owner believed his rights to share in the economic benefits from the Hussay had been denied, in clear violation of established custom. S.B. had ignored the ritual protocol that required the Hussay to be situated in front of the man’s place of business. But while the argument was apparently about money, I also suggest that in ignoring the bar owner’s claim on the Hussay, S.B. disrespected the proprietor’s status as patron/sponsor, or in Jamaican parlance, his standing as a ‘big man’ in the community. Briefly, and at the risk of reductionism, a ‘big man’ is an individual known for his largesse and power, official and unofficial, in the locality and treated with deference and circumspection in most social situations, especially by those, such as the unemployed S.B., who rely on him to for badly-needed financial and material resources.

For his part, S.B. felt that his efforts on behalf of the community had been rewarded with blows and no effort could be

made to dissuade him from leaving. There was probably a fair amount of resentment that his own status as builder wasn't accorded proper respect. But in asserting his independence from Kemps Hill and decamping for Race Course, he antagonized his neighbors who felt that their claims to enjoy the Hussay had been ignored in turn. Here I reiterate N.D.'s complaint, "Its fi wi [for our] enjoyment." Moreover, the good times that had been denied them were now being enjoyed by their neighbors, and rivals, in Race Course. The opposition between the two communities was apparent at the previous Hussay I attended in Kemps Hill. That year, the Hussay stayed in the area and never traveled though Race Course to the river. In a clear breach of custom and to the irritation of Race Course residents, the builders dismantled the Hussay at the end of the day in the yard and trucked the pieces to the Alley River.

SUMMARY

Katie Stewart says we ought to:

> Picture 'culture' …not as a finished text to be read or as a transparent 'object' that can be abstracted into a fixed representation but as a texted, interpretive space in itself – a space produced in the slippage, or gap, between sign and referent, event and meaning, and gathered into performed forms and tactile reminders. (1994:53)

Following Stewart, I have tried to demonstrate that the space

of the Hussay yard, the public arenas of performance, the contradictory, public, and polyphonic interpretations and representations of representations, all rubbing against each other, are emblematic of the reproduction of social life in Vere. Crucially, performances - both large-scale, heterogeneous public enactments and conversations and speech play – index the ongoing struggle for and emergence of community, identities and self-expression; in these sites expressive forms provide the very means by and through which cultural knowledge, social power and historical relationships are enacted and contested.

Through the preceding narratives and descriptions of events I have tried to demonstrate in a very small way my ongoing confrontation with 'culture' as it is embodied and reproduced through debate and dissension in a small, but by no means isolated, segment of the Jamaican 'social imaginary'. The notion that culture is 'dialogic' and identities are performances produced in relations of power is a particularly compelling one. Fundamentally, this stance opens up a way of understanding the production of representative cultural performances as the complex and contradictory articulation of several dimensions of social life – discourses on race, roots, history, and religion, and differential senses of community and locality are unevenly mobilized in

cultural production and reproduction.

In the next chapter I look at how these themes play out in the very different cultural and historical context of Kingston.

Chapter Four – Culture! What is it Good For?

Vere, 1999: I was passing the time on a July afternoon over several Red Stripes with my friend Sam at the bar next to his house. From the juke box in the corner - the old-fashioned kind that plays 45 rpm vinyl single records— the mellow voice of Jim Reeves alternated with the 'filmi' pop stylings of the great Indian duo, Jagjit and Lalitha, and Marty Robbins singing about a Mexican girl he met in El Paso. Without breaking the flow of his words, Sam occasionally raised a hand and waved to passing cars, which competed for space on the road with thoughtful cows that had escaped their pen down the road. At some point during the conversation, I made a remark about the profusion of billboards and other notices posted around Kingston announcing the upcoming Emancipation Day and Independence Day celebrations in August. Sam didn't immediately respond, but turned thoughtful. A little later he abruptly mentioned

how some Indians in Clarendon were going to approach the area MP (Member of Parliament) about doing "something'. "Yes, we want to do something, y'know, " he said, nodding as though I had acknowledged or agreed with his point. Baffled and intrigued about this 'something', I pressed him for details: "What do you mean? What're you going to do? " His response was, "Well, we want to have a national holiday too – just like the black man's, y' know, but for Indians." I asked whether he and his friends were going to work on the idea with the National Council for Indian Culture in Jamaica. I prompted Sam by reminding him that the Kingston based organization had produced a very successful program commemorating Indian Arrival day that May. His response was emphatic: "No, man! Wi want a day fi wi! Indians from Jamaica, y'know!"

In the two preceding chapters, I introduced and analyzed a range of narratives and images from the colonial past —Chapter Two— that, in my view, are necessary for understanding the historical constitution of racialized subjects, Indians and Blacks, in Jamaica today. In Chapter Three, I followed up that intervention with an ethnographic and historical exploration of the changing dimensions of Hussay, a key expression of "Indian culture" that crystallizes the complex relationship between local and national

senses of community and identity. I also used the space of this performance to call attention to the boundary between 'old' and 'new' Indian diasporas in Jamaica.

The present chapter is concerned foremost with exploring in greater detail distinctions between past and more recent diasporic formations in Jamaica, and their identification with and differentiation from Jamaican identity and culture. This is in keeping with my overarching concern to note that the self-identification of a social collective as a distinct entity in its own right (Indians) is articulated against the external ascriptions of other social formations (Blacks) and dominant actors (Europeans and elite Indians). In this perspective, senses of identity emerge out of struggles for hegemony that are internal to subaltern, ethnic groups (Ong and Nonnini 1997a, b; cf. Limon's (1994) example of the Mexican dance hall in south Texas), particularly over issues pertaining to the culture concept. With respect to culture, 'creolization' in contemporary theorizing is taken to mark the ways that 'traveling cultures,' predicated on processes of pastiche, bricolage, and radical resignifications of pre-existing forms and styles of expression, supposedly trouble settled ways of thinking and orthodoxies of all sorts - the nation-state, racial purity, cultural homogeneity (Clifford 1992; Mercer 1988). While I am

sympathetic to this claim, I also want to pay attention to the fact that creative reinterpretations of the past are susceptible to criticism from the doxic position that valorizes culture's rootedness in a singular, rather than multiple, source of inspiration and origins. In this view, 'creolization' is regarded as deviation and loss. The projects of Kingston-based Indian elite happen to be among a range of cultural revitalization movements in which this instrumental vision of culture is of decided importance.

In the course of this chapter, I provide examples of the backstage discussions among and between cultural producers in Kingston about the meaning and content of the events they are responsible for producing and presenting to audiences in Jamaica. Insofar as the producers are not themselves performing artists, the portions of the chapter that deal with their decision-making processes have mainly to do with the tenor of the discourse and the rationale they espouse for promoting their particular vision of culture.

THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION AND THE NATIONAL IMAGINARY

The conversation that prefaces this chapter underscores Bakhtin's claim that the dialogic principle governs all social life, contaminates individual thoughts with the traces of others desires

and apprehensions. As he notes, "Every experience, every thought … is internally dialogic, adorned with polemic, filled with struggle … open to inspiration from outside itself - but it is not in any case concentrated simply on its own object; it is accompanied by a continual sideways glance at another person" (Bakhtin, 1984:32).

Taken seriously, such a formulation considerably widens the horizon of references that Sam's declaration indexes, and they relate in obvious and not so obvious ways to the points I've laid out above. For one thing, Sam is evaluating one of the officially-sanctioned representations of national history - particularly Emancipation Day that celebrates the end of slavery, - and marking himself and fellow Indians as 'other' in terms of that dominant representation. Our conversation took place in the days preceding Emancipation Day and Independence Day celebrations, which generated daily arguments and polemics in the media about the African-ness of Jamaica and the importance of African culture and heritage to the nation. But the occasion was only an intensification of the daily volume (pun intended) of commentaries and rhetoric about Jamaican culture and its contents. During the time that I spent in Jamaica, virtually every day a news article or editorial in The Gleaner, the national daily, or a radio talk show signified on some aspect of Jamaican culture — from language to

dancehall music, from Rastafari to tourism, from politics to 'gun' culture — and raised anxious questions about exactly which direction the nation was heading. (Down an incline, according to most commentators.) These topics and themes are constructed and interpreted as so many manifestations of Jamaica's 'black' experience', in its celebratory, political, and pathological dimensions. So Sam's comments about demarcating commemorative events into a 'day' for 'blacks and a 'day' for Indians, is a situated response to these widely circulating representations of what constitutes national culture in the Jamaican mediascape.

Sam's notion of Indian otherness is also contaminated by historical memories of the area's distant past. These memories center on the differential privileges that Afro- and Indo Jamaicans have experienced with regard first, to colonial power and subsequently, the independent nation-state. In Vere, there are a number of older individuals who recall the hard times that accompanied the riots of the 1930's, especially of being displaced from their traditional labor niches. This happened when Afro-Jamaicans began competing with them for increasingly scarce jobs on agricultural estates. Others nostalgically remember when Vere was 'pure Indian' prior to Independence in 1962. After

Independence, according to local memory, Afro-Jamaicans began settling in greater numbers in the area supported by privileges, such as labor and housing schemes, which were not available to Indo-Jamaicans.

In the contemporary era, the ascension to power of the P. J. Patterson-led People's National Party in the early 90's is another source of tension. The elevation of the PNP to power was accompanied by the popular saying, "black man time now," an obvious reference to Prime Minister Patterson who is a very dark-skinned man and identified as being like most of the Jamaican masses or "the massive" – the ninety percent of the population that is composed of black, working-class people. This formulation reinforces for some, not all, that Indians are yet again at some remove from the national patrimony. A subaltern response to the dominance of a 'black' national leadership is to point out that Jamaica is rapidly heading toward economic ruin under this government, and that the 'black man mash up evr'yt'ing." This response is not unique to Indo-Jamaicans, I have heard Afro-Jamaicans employ it as well, particularly those who are partisans of the Jamaica Labor party, the PNP's bitter political rivals.

Thus, the local Indian notion of alterity vis –a vis the nation is mediated by wider historical-political developments and current

hegemonic discourses about the heritage and culture of the nation. However, Bakhtin's insight is no less true when considering the local terrain. In the racially heterogeneous context of Vere, Sam's claim is one side of a dialogue with friends and neighbors, for instance, the retired Afro-Jamaican school teacher who lives just down the road from him. I was speaking to the elderly man one afternoon while he and I were visiting one of the yards not far from Sam's. In the middle of a rambling talk on the effort and sacrifice that ordinary people made to build up the nation, their betrayal by corrupt politicians, and African and Indian culture, the schoolteacher paused on the topic of Emancipation Day, and said sharply to me, "That's not for you. Its not your celebration."

But a sense of Indian otherness need not diminish, indeed does not mitigate, the keen sense of Jamaicanness that Indo-Jamaicans feel. Indians in Vere may pride themselves on their 'independence' as one older head told me repeatedly, but they are also staunch nationalists, no matter the present and deep dissatisfaction with the "politricksters'. So in reconsidering Sam's utterance (cf. Bakhtin), while it is the case that he resists the monologic and monochromatic construction of Jamaica, it also is certainly not the case that he rejects his sense of belonging to the nation.

As Dick Hebdige writes, “The struggle between different discourses, different definitions and meanings [is] a struggle… for possession of the sign which extends to the most mundane elements of everyday life' (1979:19). Sam’s call for recognition of difference within the nation at once marks his difference from racial others in Jamaica, but also upholds the hegemony of the nation-sign ‘Jamaica’. In doing so, the national subject is reconfigured and reconstituted anew, reinforcing the spirit, if not the letter, of the aphoristic national motto – “Out of Many, One People.” This feeling of national affinity is markedly different from Ehrlich’s findings of three decades ago, that the Indians of Canelot “simply do not feel they belong” (1970:182) to the nation-state, not to mention the alienated consciousness that was claimed to prevail among Indians several generations earlier[27].

In Sam’s view, the Indian presence within the nation demands recognition in the form of commemoration. In this he is only different in focus than I Ras Concerned, who wrote the Gleaner to praise, to ‘big up’,” the Chinese for their contributions

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[27] This is noted in the testimony of the solicitor for the East Indian National Union, Mr. Coy, before the Moyne Commission - charged with looking into the conditions of immigrants in various British colonies in the early part of the last century. Coy stated the majority of the Indians in Jamaica regarded themselves as a separate community from the Indians, and a small minority alone felt they were Jamaicans (in Shepherd 1986:22).

to the nation.[28] The letter is significant for its invocation of the entire array of racial and class formations in Jamaica (excepting the Indians), beginning with his identification of "the Chinese" ("them") in contrast to 'us," that is, Jamaican Blacks, who in turn are identified as different from the "brown upper classes" and the "upper class whites". I Ras Concerned elicited an immediate response from an Elvena Williams-Reittie, who noted that "persons of East Indian descent are still…excelling and making their sterling contribution in the field of medicine, education, technology, and commerce" (my emphasis). [29]

As I have maintained, social relationships and discourses (representations) in contemporary Jamaica bear the significant traces of categories, meanings, and social boundaries that date back to the colonial past (cf. Brackette Williams' ghosts of Anglo-European hegemony ,1991). My examples suggest that individuals, consciously and unknowingly, call up these specters when they reaffirm the nation, speak of culture's origins in a particular place, refer to Indians and Blacks' achievements or to who does or does not belong to the local and national community and ethnic group.

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[28] "In Praise of Chinese Community," The Daily Gleaner, April 3, 2000.

[29] "In Praise of Ethnic Minorities," The Daily Gleaner, April 5, 2000. Why the composing editor chose to elide the specificity of the "East Indian" subject of the letter and substitute the neutral phrase "ethnic minority" is curious.

The language of argument elevates otherwise parochial concerns into political claims for representation in the realm of the "national imaginary," which following Ginsburg I take to be "a social formation that operates by the conflation of rhetorics and implicit ideologies of individual and national selfhood" (1994:124).

Moreover, this demand for representation is also a claim to identity or to be more precise, identities. With regard to the question of identity for individuals and groups in diaspora I want to invoke Stuart Hall's by-now familiar and important précis: "Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think…Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact…we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process and always constituted within, not outside representation…" (Hall, 1990). This salutary warning from Hall to not reify identity into fast-frozen forms unequivocally asks that we situate the production and reproduction of identities (in the plural) in the conjuncture of power and historical representations (ibid) while calling attention to the dialogic dimensions of all social processes, especially consciousness. That is to say, one's identity as an individual and his or her consciousness of being a member of specific ethnic, racial, national, and sub-national communities is

always a relational, contingent process — in tension with and subject to the desires, positioning, and representations of others. Thus, identities are not merely derived or synthesized from historical and temporally co-present representations, but are reconstituted and reinforced in explicit and oblique dialogues, which circles back to the complicated issue of social relationships and senses of belonging and difference among and between various Jamaican collectivities as indexed in Sam's words and in the Jamaican mediascape.

THE POETICS AND POLITICS OF DIFFERENTIAL DIASPORAS

Up to this point, I have framed these discursive performances of identity, belonging, and differentiation in the frame of struggles for hegemony between a diasporic group and larger social groups. But, paying close attention to the poetics of Sam's words considerably widens the horizon of identity formation in Indo-Jamaica. By poetics I mean that Sam's message is willfully ambiguous; ambiguity, as Roman Jakobson noted, is the "intrinsic, inalienable character of any self-focused message" and "'among the very roots of poetry'" (1960:370). The poetic message is multi-referential and "double-sensed," and "finds correspondence

in a split addresser, in a split addressee, and besides in a split reference...." (ibid: 370-71)

If we remember that what Sam said was, "We want a day for Indians from Jamaica," we can then understand Sam's identity claims as articulated against the presence of the other Indian diasporas in the country so that the first notion of us and them (Indians and Blacks) is supplemented by another pairing (local Indians and expats). This other diaspora is composed of affluent, medical and business professionals mostly located in Kingston. Many of them are relatively recent expatriates from India, having arrived in the last two to three decades when British Commonwealth nations, after achieving independence in the 1960's, began to attract professionals in significant numbers from the subcontinent.[30]

The expats, as they are often characterized, along with 'local Indian' professionals (descendants of the nineteenth-century diaspora) are prominent in various cultural organizations, almost all which are based in Kingston. In 1998, the National Council for Indian Culture in Jamaica (hereafter NCICJ) was formed as an umbrella group, and under its aegis, representatives of a dozen

[30] For reasons of practical necessity, I deliberately restricted my interactions to Vere and Kingston, thereby bypassing research in Montego Bay and the western parts of the island, where other affluent expatriates live.

different Indian organizations coordinate plans for producing various programs of Indian culture which are concentrated in and around Kingston, such as the annual Indian Arrival Day celebrations every May. I was very generously invited to attend several meetings of the NCICJ where the logistics and content of cultural productions and other issues of cultural representation were the main topics of discussion. As a result, I became involved to some extent with their production activities: I produced publicity fliers and lent a hand with the physical set-up of performance stages for an Indian festival at Chedwin Park, a public venue outside Kingston, in 2000, and at a fundraising BBQ that year, and also helped hang banners and decorations for a talent show sponsored by the Indian Cultural Society in Jamaica (ICSJ, on of the member organizations.

Producing Culture

> "The National Council for Indian Culture in Jamaica recognizes with gratitude, respect and love, the contributions and efforts of our ancestors who paved the way for us in this our home — Jamaica."
> (Dedication, Indian Heritage Week program booklet, 2000)

The meetings I did attend provided a different perspective into productions of 'Indian culture' from the one I was accustomed to in Vere. The Council's bureaucratic structure consists of several

officers elected annually, the key positions being the President, Secretary, Directors/Executive members, and Treasurers. The majority of the members are men, while about a fourth to two thirds are women. There are bi-monthly meetings and the agenda for each was primarily dictated by planning for upcoming cultural functions, a few of which are calendrical events, like the Diwali celebrations (October), Indian Arrival Day (May), and the annual Festival of Indian culture (August). As far as I could determine, the organizations made a contribution to a common fund for productions, which was supplemented by sales of food and beverages at the various sites.[31]

The meetings which I attended were efficiently organized and managed, which could be attributed to Council members experience acquired over several years of running their individual organizations. There were one or two occasions when discussion of particular issues never seemed to come to a resolution. But, given the strong personalities involved in the organization, the high degree of cooperation was impressive. One reason might have been the underlying ethos which expressed itself on more than one occasion as "Let's not have divisions (any more)", which to me

[31] I could never get a firm handle on the actual members as at every meeting representatives of some organizations were absent, others had two in attendance, and often there were invited guests from other parts of the island.

indicated that there were past tensions which people were trying to overcome, or at least put aside for the sake of 'unity." The give and take was frank and open, even tending on occasions to become a little tense as individuals defended their particular positions and views on how the council ought to proceed with affairs. But given that every member had a chance to express themselves frankly and openly, it appeared to me that a consensual ethos prevailed, albeit couched in the language of parliamentary procedures with motions put to a vote and seconded, resolutions passed and minutes meticulously recorded.

A meeting I attended in the spring of 2000 is representative of the wide-ranging deliberations that take place during these gatherings: Approximately twelve members of the Council had gathered one Saturday afternoon at 'Club India', a whitewashed building off Trafalgar Road which connects up to the main business area of New Kingston. An opening invocation, in Sanskrit, was offered by a local Indian businessman who is also a pandit (indicating some amount of Hindu religious training), after which the President of the Council, who is an officer of the Jamaican Court, brought the meeting to order. Photocopies of the meeting agenda were passed around, the main order of business involving discussions of logistics and planning for the upcoming Diwali

(Hindu festival) celebrations in October. Dr. P. started things off by asking what changes members wanted to make in the upcoming celebrations. The previous year, for instance, there were food stalls at which masala dosais had been vended. (These are potato filled rice crepes, a typical Indian dish, although entirely foreign to Jamaican born Indian's palates). Did people think that was alright? Taking the lead, Dr. G. a founding member of one of the leading organizations in Jamaica, proposed that the function provided an opportunity to do something "different", even while acknowledging that there were always problems with food at these venues, especially since Jamaicans came to eat. Moreover, he added, for Jamaicans an "Indian function means curry goat." eliciting laughter from the members. His proposal was that the NCICJ "should have [organize] a full Diwali…[since] what we are projecting is India" at the venue.

Dr. K., an Indian-born man, who has lived in Jamaica for over twenty years like the previous member, chimed in that the Council should celebrate Diwali fully, by which he meant there ought to be both a puja [religious ceremony] and celebrations (which were to include a performance component featuring music and dance, food stalls, and other vendors). Apparently, the religious aspect had been elided or downplayed in years past. His

point was that both were necessary if the aim was to impress upon the Jamaican public what Indian culture was all about. Mr. G's response was that the event could be divided into two parts, with the mela or festival portion taking place after the puja had been observed. Mrs. M,. another stalwart of cultural productions, agreed and emphasized that the puja and meat-eating could not happen at the same time.

Mr. N. reiterated the consensus that as the NCICJ was "trying to promote Indian culture" the mela and the puja had to be kept separate, with one member stating that the sanctity of the festival ought to be honored. Alternative scenarios, including holding the separate functions on separate days were voted down for logistical reasons. Mrs. M. said with some force that the mela itself had no relevance to Diwali, in her words it was just a "food fair." In an interesting move, she commented that anywhere one went in Trinidad and Guyana, there were organized celebrations of Diawali, and that the Council should go to Westmoreland, to the countryside, and "celebrate Diwali in a proper manner." Although every one nodded or voiced assent, the matter was not taken up in any further detail. Talk then focused on to how to take advantage of the opportunity for teaching the attendees the meaning of Diwali, including having a "talk" before the event.

An interesting note to the proceedings came in the form of an appeal from one man that that ”we should try for union [among all cultural organizations].” I couldn’t make out the specifics of the statement at the time, but a member later told me that a smaller group had accused the NCICJ of trying to “take over” their organization, and that accusation was still on the minds of some on the Council. Eventually, business turned to the nuts and bolts of parceling out committee assignments (refreshments, chairs, ticket sales) for the celebrations, shortly after which the meeting adjourned.

The concern in this meeting as with others centers on the responsibility that Council members feel for representing (“projecting”) an appropriate or “proper” image of India to the public. In this case there is a conflict initially between putting on a good show for the audience by providing them the standard repertoire, in terms of food and entertainment, which attendees at most such functions have come to expect. But the countervailing sentiment is that the didactic purpose of the function has to be maintained, and that audiences must be exposed to “something new” and in being so exposed, “they will learn something,” as one member said.

That these productions have a serious purpose was brought home at another meeting at which the topic on the table was how to utilize two performers of classical dance styles from Trinidad during their visit to Jamaica. The women, well-known exponents of Indian dance in the region, were to be the star performers at a fairly pricey function to be held at an uptown hotel. The Council member in charge of entertainment for the hotel function, Mr. G, raised the possibility that they might be persuaded to perform again later in their visit, but this time at an outdoor venue that traditionally involved a more 'downtown' audience.

While several members thought it would be a good idea to explore the possibility, Mr. P expressed his reservations and said it wouldn't go over with the crowd. In response, Mr. S. sarcastically reframed the dissenting council member's objections in terms of a characterization of the festival crowd as "lower classes" that could not appreciate culture. Mr. P. pressed the point by asking whether the dancers performed "chutney" dances, the hugely popular blend of Indian and soca (Afro-Trinidadian) music and dance styles because "that's what the crowd wants." Mr. G's response was that he was trying to show the audience the "culture – [to] let the crowd get a taste of India." Taking note of the opposition to his position, Mr. P. pointed out that the audience members at these events were

prone to jump up on stage and join in the performance. (The unstated conclusion was that audience participation went against the grain of the classical dance genre, which required the audience's undivided attention. What he meant to indicate with regard to the crowd was unclear.)

Others joined in, supporting Mr. G. who stated that if "we [the NCICJ feel we should have classical dances then we should do it; we should expose the people to other kinds of dances." Mr. M expressed support by stating that the producers ought to make the effort to have the performers dance at the festival and that the NCICJ had to be prepared to take criticism. Mr. G's final statement on the topic was that people came to the festival to see dances, and that they had to be involved at all levels (by which I took him to mean that audiences had to be engaged by, shown, a range of expressive cultural forms).

I leave aside for now the complicated discussion of the role of traditional and organic intellectuals, to take note of Gramsci's postulate that hegemony over a social class involves not only "a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity (Gramsci 1971:181). At another juncture he notes that cultural hegemony within a group must be achieved before any economic or political hegemony can be attempted [cite]. In this

respect, the NCICJ resembles a 'vanguard party' among Indians in Jamaica, attempting through cultural programs to educate and turn 'common sense' into 'good sense,' but a party whose hegemonic projects are still in the formative stage.

The anthropologist-cum-novelist (or perhaps novelist-cum-anthropologist) Amitav Ghosh (1989:76) asserts that "the links between India and her diaspora are lived in the imagination." A legitimate question to be raised at this juncture, then, is what kind of India is imagined and reproduced in performances of culture in Kingston? Taking Raymond Williams at his word that traditions are always selective, it is an India that has been assembled and chosen in a dialogue between Jamaican producers and diasporic Indians elsewhere. This India manifests itself through expressive forms that convey what these collaborative forces feel to be the core of the mother-country's cultural legacy and heritage. Thus, Jamaican cultural producers call upon transnational sources — dance troupes, musicians, pandits, and cultural brokers — to mediate between India and Indo-Jamaica.

The cultural forms are in no way held captive to a conservative concern for historicity, that is, there is no attempt made to specifically re-present the popular or folk traditions of the spaces from which the ancestors of Indo-Jamaicans originated –

mostly the Central Provinces (current-day Uttar Pradesh, Bihar), and to a lesser extent, south India. I would dare say that the Indian culture that is represented in Jamaica is of a piece with the classical repertoire that has come to stand in for Indian culture in various diasporic milieus across the globe – dance genres such as kutchi pudi and Baratha Natyam; light classical song styles such as gazaals and geets; staged presentations of the Hindu epic the Ramayana.

M.N. Srinivas's classic model of 'Sanskritization' (1967) in the Indian subcontinent is particularly apt in this context; by Sanskritization, Srinivas meant the processes whereby lower-caste groups attempted to raise their status by adopting the prestigious practices and other symbolic forms associated with Sanskrit-language texts and Brahmanical rituals. Expanding on the particularities of the model, I also suggest these efforts are the instrumental means by which Sanskritic and Hindu-derived practices and ideologies are hegemonically reinscribed as 'Indian' in the South Asian diaspora. These expressive genres are taught, promulgated and reified as Indian culture to a significant extent in the Western Hemisphere, in the cosmopolitan centers of New York or Miami, and in a regional context, of Trinidad. In these places, particularly locales in the United States, there is an ongoing effort

fueled by diasporic Indians to expose their children to Indian culture or the particular version noted above, and thus performers and teachers from the subcontinent, themselves in diaspora, find willing students.[32]

My claims as to the provenance of this process of cultural transmission are based on first-hand information I collected from members of the Indo-Guyanese Youth Corps while they were on a teaching visit to Jamaica. These young people have learned their moves in New York under the tutelage of former artists-turned-teachers from the subcontinent. As I could not, at the time, look deeper into this aspect of cultural production and dissemination, my claims in this specific regard are necessarily provisional and preliminary.

However, a distinct worry was expressed in Council meetings on precisely this issue, that is, the sense that the organization was developing a reputation as a Hindu organization. Much debate

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[32] The literature on this phenomenon is scanty at best. The most sustained research on the global flow of expressive culture from the subcontinent has been conducted with reference to bhangra music, which has gained emblematic status as the globalized Indian cultural form. I say this with all due respect to the qawaali music of Pakistan's Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan which, by virtue of the incendiary performances that gained Nusrat much respect and acclaim in World Beat and pop music circles, managed to shed its identification with its problematic national and subcontinental origins (for Western consumers, at least). But virtually all else about the historical contours, the latest wave of transnational 'culture bearers', and the modes of performance in the south Asian diaspora, has gone unnoticed.

ensued over how to let all Indians know that the focus was on cultural, and not religious activity. On result was that at the National Prayer Meeting held on May 10th,2000 in Kingston, to commemorate the arrival of the first indentured Indians in Jamaica, prayers from representatives of many of India's religious communities were offered.[33] Moreover, the distinctions between the recent and the older diasporas were skillfully elided. As the acknowledgment in the program seeks to establish, in the Jamaican "home" everyone has the same "ancestors," a move that subsumes temporally grounded stories of distinctly different arrivals to an emergent text that grounds everyone in the same space.

The larger point I want to address here and explore more fully in the following section is the implicit understanding of cultural producers that "Indian culture" is fully developed everywhere else but Jamaica, and that every effort has to be made to provide authoritative models and cultural exemplars by bringing them to the people. Consequently, Jamaican artists such as Wally Byroo, Thaddeus Bessi, and others who are long-time crowd

[33] The program book from the occasion included Hindu invocations, naturally, along with readings that drew from Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, and Christian traditions, and also from Ba'hai and Sri Sathya Sai Baba devotees, although the representatives themselves were not all Indians.

favorites in Jamaica, share the stage at public occasions with overseas artists from around the region, usually as supporting acts.[34]

Regardless of Kingston producers' considerable efforts to provide local Indians with something new in the way of culture, Vere residents are quite aware of both the implicit and overt criticism leveled at them. In response, they often express, if not antipathy, at least a pronounced difference from the recent arrivals because the prevailing sentiment, by and large, is that the expatriates look down on Vere's Indo-Jamaicans and others as well. One of my very first encounters with this perception came during the initial phases of my research in Vere. There was a young man who was prone to asking me a plethora of questions about where I was born and where I was from. One day he blurted out, "You're the first Indian who mix with us, y'know. Dem man [Indians] from Kingston –they don't mix with us - they say wi not real Indian at all."

The uneasy relations between local/rural Indians and expatriate/urban Indians can by and large be traced to the

[34] With all the talk centering on teaching culture, the related import of a point that I heard made only once becomes apparent, that being the comment of a member who on the eve of a cultural event commented, "We will be expecting mostly our crowd [Indians] tomorrow; if the Blacks want to come, that's well and good, and we will welcome them."

uncharitable characterizations that the urbanites and expats leveled against local Indians in years past. Ascriptions of cultural loss and deviation were attached to local expressive culture, particularly in the written works of Dr. Ajay Mansingh, who along with his wife Laxmi and others in Kingston, founded the Indo Jamaican Cultural Society. Although the doctor is no longer active in any of the cultural organizations, he is still prominent as the expert on Indian culture in Jamaica, and a controversial figure and lightning rod for people in Vere and in Kingston.

Fighting Words

October 1999: Its mid-afternoon and on the cool verandah of Raj Singh's house in the village of Race Course in Vere district, Jamaica, the two of us are reliving his memories of Indian history and culture in the area. As our conversation turns to contemporary affairs and the present state of Indian culture in the country, Mr. Singh, who has been casually sprawled out in a chair begins to shift in his seat. When I mention that I have been reading the recently-published book by the expatriate Indian scholars, Ajay Mansingh and his wife Laxmi, on the topic of Indians in Jamaica, Mr. Singh stiffens. Sensing his irritation, which I have encountered in others of my Indo-Jamaican friends with regard to this matter, I ask him what

he thinks of the authors' contention that there is no 'true' Indian culture in Jamaica, that it has been decisively lost. Mr. Singh sucks teeth, and shakes his head. "Mansingh," he pronounces, "he a joker, mahn!" I press the point. " So what's wrong with what he says?" Mr. Singh's deep sigh — derisive, frustrated, perhaps both — startles me and the dog sleeping under his chair. "Gu-aah," he groans, "he doesn't understand that we are West Indian - East Indians, not Indians."

Recalling the characterizations of Indians up to the period of Independence from previous chapters, a somewhat different view appeared, after Independence, as the struggle to de-colonize Black Jamaica was mounted by Afro-Jamaican intellectuals. Appropriately, in a conflict whose parameters were formed by centuries of Black subordination and White domination, scant attention was given other racial groups in society. Indians are so irrelevant in the years up to and after Independence (1962) that they all but disappear into the social landscape; a couple of different texts fleetingly note their absorption into the rural and urban laboring classes, and one leading Black intellectual concludes that the Indian peasant "hardly has any significance outside of his membership of the lower classes where he marries and still lives and has his being" [Nettleford, 1972:25). Greatly

simplifying these complex processes then, the Indian is represented in one era as the perpetual outsider in relation to Jamaican society and at another time is rendered meaningless to the workings of the newly formed nation – lack, loss, and erasure are the dominant themes in these narratives.

These themes also form the basis of the Mansingh's book, Home Away from Home (1999), which represents over thirty years of research into Indian culture in Jamaica, which I want to frame as another site of cultural production. It is a lavishly illustrated text, and hit the bookstands some four months after I arrived in Jamaica in late 1999. The Mansinghs are professional scholars in the natural sciences at the University of the West Indies [35]and have written extensively about Indian history and culture in Jamaica. They are expatriates from India, who arrived in Jamaica in the late 60's and have remained there ever since. The book was launched officially at the Indian Ambassador's residence in November, accompanied by laudatory reviews from most press commentators and muted and indirect criticism from Indo-Jamaicans in Kingston, which I will detail further ahead in the text.

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[35] Ajay Mansingh was on the verge of retiring from UWI during my stay in Jamaica, according to some sources. Whether he did so later is unknown.

I do not propose a thoroughgoing deconstruction of the text, rather I foreground some of the discursive features of the book in order to note not only their resonance with earlier characterizations of Indians in Jamaica but also the ways in which cultural capital is mobilized to maintain class, national, and ethnic distinctions.

One passage in the book is especially representative of the author's assessment of their fellow ethnics: "Today Indo-Jamaicans who wish to retain their ethnic and cultural identity are led mainly by emotion, instinct and tradition than knowledge and understanding" (Mansingh & Mansingh 1999:96). Writing about representative organizations that existed prior to the establishment of their own the authors have this to say: "The fact that various Indo-Jamaican organisations remained introverted was probably due to ignorance of the membership about their own history and culture, and a failure of the leadership to educate their members" (ibid:112). Then in 1978, the narrative continues, the Indo-Jamaican Cultural Society was founded by the authors, along with other expatriates and Indo-Jamaicans, with the express goal of encouraging "cultural self-confidence among Indo-Jamaicans and develop[ing] an awareness of Indian cultural heritage in the wider society" (ibid).

In characterizing the book as a site of cultural production, it is apparent that what is being produced is the authoritative position on what constitutes legitimate Indian culture in Jamaica. At base, this process involves an appeal to a past ratified by historical evidence. The authors' sweeping survey of Indian history and pre-history and the constant assertion of Vedic sources of Indian civilization (pp 7-36), significantly resembles the Hindutva (Hindu fundamentalist) movement in India's obsession with verifying the pre-Muslim past of the nation. The book, based on extensive interviews with Indians, manifests some of the same preoccupations with cultural continuity and tradition as does anthropology, but in a declarative mode that leaves very little room for other anthropological concerns such as cultural change, hybrid social formations, situated and multiple identities, and so on. Above all, what is being ratified is the legitimacy of elite Indians, expats and locals, in asserting and assuming the burden of leadership in a situation where such direction is absent or at the very least negligent. In the authors' assessment, there is much work to be done to educate the Indian masses and wider Jamaican society and provide "creative, informative, educational, and effective" information across the island (ibid).

"The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living" (Marx, [1852], in R. Tucker, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, 1978:594). That famous phrase of Marx's provides an illustrative frame in which to situate these confident pronouncements as instrumental uses of cultural knowledge of the past. What I mean is that I read these authoritative discourses about heritage as not only serving to disaggregate ethnically identified populations into local and 'real' Indians. These notions about Indian culture also reinforce a hierarchical structure in which certain representative performances are authorized and validated, because of their intimate, direct links to the heritage of India. That is to say the legitimacy of Kingston performances of Indian culture is based on the idea that there is a 'correct' past to which Indians must turn, while the local 'vershan' of past traditions are abjured as irremediably distorted and having lost their meaning.

Ajay Mansingh's disparaging comments about Hussay practitioners illustrate starkly the singularity of this vision, which equates Indian culture with Hindu culture. During the course of an interview he asked him about my research into Hussay, and then said dismissively, "You can't tell them anything. I went there and they had mixed up everything." The issue at hand was a visit

to Vere in the 1980's during the festival, where he noticed that on the Hussay the builders had integrated a representation (a printed reproduction perhaps) of the Hindu deity Krishna into the structure. Mansingh, years later, still maintained that the juxtaposition of Hindu and Muslim elements was wrong, eliding the fact that the builder in question, Simeon Jagassar, was a Hindu man whose zeal for maintaining Indian culture is still remarked upon, years after his death. Mansingh's criticism abjures local aesthetics and the dynamics of an emergent tradition that mobilizes local consciousness and experiences of inter-religious cooperation as distortions and inauthentic, while legitimizing the viewpoint of the sovereign subject and exemplar of cultural authority — himself.

Another source of antagonism in Vere, at any rate, was the Mansinghs repeated use of the term 'coolie' to refer to local cultural forms (1976); the term is deemed one of abuse in the Caribbean and was banned from public usage by executive order in the colonial era. Whether the Mansinghs were consciously aware of this source of tension is not known. But, in a strangely disconnected passage in the book, the Mansinghs take some pains to write about the term. They deliberately ignore the deployment of the term in contemporary social situations to denigrate an entire

community. Instead, they claim an unconvincing linguistic provenance for the word (Chinese and Tamil), writing that it has no abusive connotations etymologically, and moreover that it "was the most logical term for the indentureship contract worker" (ibid:48).

Needless to say, these and other pejorative evaluations of local Indians antagonize Vere residents, as witness the comments of Mr. Singh. Interestingly enough, they also provoked a similarly irate response from the local Indians on the Council, who debated extensively the utility of publicizing their strong opposition to the book's publication. They were particularly angered by a passage in the book which referenced colonial sources that claimed "'single women on board were professional prostitutes…all had V.D.'" (ibid:42). In the text, the claim appears twice, the second time without the scare quotes indicating an acceptance of a speculative argument as fact (ibid: 43). One argument against going public was that that it would actually encourage sales of the book, because "anything that is controversial will sell." Particularly significant was the viewpoint of one member who claimed anything the Council said publicly on this matter would "show the division within Indians [sic]." Later in the discussions, this view was rearticulated in the comment of one man who said that the controversy would only fuel further negative evaluations "in a

country which is hostile to Indians." The matter eventually resolved itself in favor of a letter of protest to the Indian High Commissioner, at whose residence the book launch was going to be held. At the ceremony later that week, I noticed that not one member of the Council had accepted the invitation to attend.

SUMMARY

The interpretations, ascriptions, arguments and counter-discourses that flow between local and national cultural spaces reinforce both Indian senses of distinctiveness and belonging to the nation-space and the ethnic group itself. Multiple senses of identity are produced and reinforced in these interchanges. When leading groups attempt to inculcate hegemonic understandings of ethnic selves and community, subalterns mobilize their indigenous cultural resources and particular historical reservoirs of memory to resist or inject their own meanings into those projects. Leading groups also have to struggle to overcome their own prior and extant representations that antagonize the subjects of their discourse.

The immediate efforts of the Council to ameliorate local Indians resentment caused by critical representations of culture by expat groups is not necessarily new. One recent and public spat

took place in 1995 shortly after the 150th anniversary of Indian arrival to Jamaica hade been celebrated in grand fashion, with television appearances by leading Indians in the country in a panel forum, a restaging of the first landing in 1845 complete with people performing a simulated arrival scene at Old Harbor, and musical and dance performances. All of this, according to everyone who participated, was extraordinarily moving. But, in the wake of the proceedings, Roy Mattai, a local Indian businessman, publicly opined in the paper that this valorization of Indian presence was solely due to the efforts of the expat community (he himself was an IJCS member, and the Mansinghs were active in organizing the celebrations.) Barbara Persaud, another local Indian, took immediate exception, and fired back in a letter to the paper that the local Indians (and she named a long list), had been active in maintaining Indian culture in Jamaica long before the expats came along[36]. The repeated references to union or unity and the differences of opinion that are manifested have a historical reach, and the Council, I surmise represents a new and concerted effort to remedy perceptions of divisiveness and to ensure equal representation to all groups. In the following, and final chapter, I

[36] I was shown printed copies of this exchange almost on the eve of my departure from Jamaica and could not verify the exact dates of the letters.

look at a particular instance where elite and local ideologies of race, gender, and expressive styles unexpectedly did converge to construct Indianness in the space of public performance.

Chapter Five – Cultural Interruptions and Conclusions

By way of concluding remarks, in this chapter I listen to the 'language of argument' that cultural representations engender. In signifying on (reading, critiquing, interpreting) and producing their individual versions of culture, as refracted through music, bodily practices, and styles of dress, subaltern actors construct their senses of identity and similarity with respect to each other and dominant groups. From a performance-centered perspective such interactions support the notion of reality as dialogically generated, co-constructed, in intersubjective interchanges between differently positioned actors in a given social situation (Scheiffelin 1985, Brenneis 1993). A lengthy narrative provides the final examples of cultural critique on which I focus. The scenes I describe center on the responses of producers and audiences to an Indo-Trinidadian musical group whose repertoire included Afro-Jamaican performance styles, the prohibition that attended the dancing of a

group of women at an 'Indian function,' and conversations and interviews with members of the two diasporas in Vere and Kingston.

Chedwin Park, 1999: On Sunday there was an IJCS (Indo-Jamaican Cultural Society) sponsored festival in Chedwin Park, a few miles outside of Kingston. I made the hour-long drive there from Vere on my way back to Kingston. The highlight of the event was supposed to be the appearance of the Dil-e-Nadaan musical group and an accompanying troupe of female dancers, both from Trinidad. Friends from Vere and Kingston had situated themselves right next to the mixing console, a prime viewing area. We were primed for a good show, because according to one of the women who had seen the group the previous evening in Kingston, they had perfectly performed the standards and even some of the popular hits from contemporary Indian films, which got played on the weekends on a radio program of Indian music.

Starting around 3:00 PM, the show got under way with the local talent appearing on-stage first. There were several local Indian singers, backed up by a band, whose members played both electronic synthesizers, guitars, and tablas (Indian drums). All around the grounds, the crowd of perhaps 500 to 600, overwhelmingly Indo-Jamaicans, was taking it all in. Seeing familiar

faces from both Vere and Kingston, I thought that it was fairly representative of the 'local Indian' population, in terms of the class and residential dimensions. I did notice a few expats, but they seemed to part of the event producers set. I noticed several of the IJCS officials in attendance, talking and greeting and being greeted. A distinguishing feature of the local Indians, the working classes specifically, is their style of clothing which is no different than the typical Jamaican attire for public occasions, skirts and dresses form women, pant-shirt combinations for men. By contrast, upper-class (local) and expat women, are distinct in their shalwar kameez's (North Indian pantaloons and long-sleeved blouses) or even the occasional sari. There were vendors selling drinks, food, trinkets - admission was $150.00 Jamaican

Sometime around 5:00, as the shadows started to lengthen the main act hit the stage – four young men and a woman, dressed in green shirts/tops and white pants, to enthusiastic approval. The mood of anticipation quickly turned to one of apprehension as the Trinidadians got into their set. The lead singer set the tone by saying, "Listen…as we do this selection….it's a mixture ,a song done originally by …I think its Udit Narayan…arranged by Dil-E-Nadaan with a Caribbean feeling…" A synthesizer riff accompanied

a drum machine rhythm track kicked off the song. “Lovely, lovely girl, say…we rule t’ings”, was shouted out over the music.

In the opening verses of the song the vocalizations by the band leader perfectly mimicked the staccato rapping and rhyming which are typical of the reggae dance hall DJ, and to some extent Trinidadian soca stylings. The band then launched into a loud and enthusiastic intro, very much in the style of Jamaican reggae dance-hall DJ’s, even at one point invoking the dance hall term, “Jamaica Posse” and the Rastafari greeting, “Selaissie-I! The music segued into a an Indian 'filmi' lyric, “Dhiray, dhiray, ankhô main…” but just as quickly shifted back again, as the stage announcement noted, to dance-hall style

This went on for some time, as the band, expertly created a sonic pastiche of sound and words, referencing disparate performance genres, and paying respect, or so they thought, to the most popular musical style in the land, dance hall: “You know we [can’t] come to Jamaica and we do no [not perform] Jamaica music.” At which point they played a riff from the popular reggae dancehall hit, “Kill ‘em with the now,” by Mr. Vegas.

I was fascinated by the performance – after all it provided authentic, first-hand confirmation of the hybridized, creolized Caribbean social imaginary, and of the ‘cut ’n mix’ culture (Hebdige)

that we as social theorists and cultural consumers are so enamored of. I could see a dissertation chapter writing itself then and there. However, as I turned to check my friends' reactions a different understanding was readily apparent. They seemed to be rather underwhelmed – irritated actually by the sonic explosion. During a break between songs, one of my friends, Pat a bank employee in her mid-30's, exclaimed loudly, "I didn't come all the way out here to hear the same thing I can hear on my radio [dance-hall music]. We expect to hear some Indian songs." This animated the crowd around us, everyone laughing loudly but agreeing all the same with her.

The discrepancy between performers' musical expressions and the audiences interpretations was pretty profound. The Trinis expected the home-town Jamaican audience to groove to their interpretation of Indian music in a familiar mode. The Jamaican audience, however (at least the ones I spoke to), were clearly disturbed that the visitors were adulterating 'true' Indian sound with a song style all too familiar- and in the spaces of Jamaican public culture, the dominant one, at that. Another way of putting it, the novelty of dance-hall for Trinis was utterly familiar to, and hence disdained by the Jamaicans. I was later told by one of the IJCS officials that the same sentiment apparently moved her and other

organizers to go to the band at the intermission and ask them to lay off the dance-hall stuff, which they did.

Speaking to another acquaintance later in the day, I quizzed her about the performance. In response to my comment that it didn't seem that the crowd liked the musical selection, she responded, "No! Look around you [at the lack of audience response] …when they were doing it [performing] …I think the Indians here are used to listening to the traditional …old-time music." I asked which particular artist the audience wanted to hear, but all she said was, "A lot of the Indians here probably don't even know the name of the artist [they hear]…but they are at least familiar with the sounds!"

The reference to sound suggests that musical and styles in themselves evoke a sense of identity and community – in this instance, comprehending the content and verbal meanings of a performance genre are of secondary importance to the impact that sound and musical style have on one's affect, the sense of pleasure and feeling of community generated by rhythm, tone, movement. To bend Benedict Anderson's succinct note (1983:6) about community to my own purposes, such entities are to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness but by the styles in which they are imagined and mobilized.. Accordingly, the irruption of dancehall at

the festival site engendered a negative affect, and signaled for many in the audience the unwelcome intrusion of dominant popular cultural style, read as black, into the imagined space of Indian culture. The notion that this was a 'pure Indian' session', as so many said to me in the days and weeks preceding the event, was very directly challenged by the dancehall 'riddims' pumping out of the speaker stacks. The audience at any performance brings to the setting certain expectations and conventional understandings with which to evaluate performative acts (Bauman, 1990). When those expectations are not met or when performances rub against the grain of what was expected, as happened with the Trinidadian musicians playing dance hall music, tensions surface.

Were it just the style of music alone that engendered such a negative reaction that evening in Chedwin Park, this would prove to be a different reading. And so at this moment from off-stage enters the dancing woman.

After the introductory gambit, the lead singer repeatedly requested the women in the audience to come up to the front of the stage: "Let me see the ladies get on…[come on] all the ladies in the front…Wine [short for wind your waist] and go down…" A number of young women then rushed into the space between the stage and the audience. As the electronic drumbeats strained the PA's capacity,

they expertly danced in “Indian” fashion – sinuously moving their hips and forming figures in the air with their hands– miming the song and dance numbers in Bollywood films. One young dancer in the group however performed, as it turned out, against type. She danced expertly in the style associated with reggae dance-halls – lots of motion from the hips and waist, the pelvis, and especially, the dancers posterior - in Jamaican parlance – the ‘batty’. Moreover, her “batty riders” – very short shorts and typical dance-hall attire— in defiance of the laws of gravity kept climbing up her legs, and her attempts to simultaneously move to the music while pulling down on the material only focused our attention on her ineffectual struggle. She was firmly in the spotlight, and having a good time. The differences in the reaction of the crowd behind the mixing console and those audience members sitting toward the front of the stage couldn’t have been more pronounced. There was an enthusiastic response from many in the crowd further away from the stage—predominantly males and youth —including cat calls, shouts, and whistles. In front of the board, the men seated near their families looked amused, but are refraining from commentary, while the women— their wives and partners—are looking positively vexed. Someone in the crowd audibly sucks their teeth, and Lorna, a woman I knew, deploying a broadly exaggerated rural Jamaican

accent, exclaimed loudly, "Wha' di gyurl t'ink she doin', eeeh?!!". This brought laughter from the people sitting near her and a couple of them shook their heads further signifying disapproval. After a few minutes, the same IJCS member who would later intervene in the band's repertoire, walked up to the dancers and spoke specifically to the woman wearing the shorts, with the outcome being that all the dancers dispersed, some melting into the crowd, and others moving to the side of the stage and out of sight.

Donna Haraway cautions that we must take into account the 'local knowledges' that set the limits and exert pressures on the constitution of gendered identities. "Gender," she writes, "is a field of structured and structuring difference, in which the tones of extreme localization, of the intimately personal and individual body, vibrate in the same field of global high-tension emissions" (1991:195). In order to understand the un-ease that accompanied the performance at Chedwin Park, we need to have some grasp of the local understandings of the national and transnational phenomenon of dance hall style and culture. And again it is important to note how local interpretations resonate with images and meanings that circulate in broader social imaginaries, as with the earlier example of Sam.

One widely held notion is that dancehall is the cultural vehicle, par excellence for articulating black working-class protest and anger over their continuing marginalization by upper-classes in virtually every aspect of Jamaican society. Dance hall music elaborates on themes of survival, suffering, and struggle that inner-city black Jamaicans face on a daily basis, albeit in a more aggressive idiom than the Rasta- inspired reggae of previous years. Critics have decried the glorification of 'gunmen' and also the often misogynistic and hypersexualized depictions of women in the lyrics of dancehall DJ's, both of which reinforce heterosexual and masculinist dominance of public space and women. Articles and editorials in the press, radio and television programs, and feature films all weigh in on the topic of music and the body and confirm for the public, the images of excess, incipient violence, female and male slackness and excessive sexuality as inhering in dancehall.

In this last regard, the gender and class implications of dancehall style are especially intriguing with regard to the Afro-Jamaican working-class woman. Gina Ulysse notes that, "In dancehall, the [black] female body is the ultimate cultural capital — a canvas that is adorned with jewelry and bedecked in clothing that reveals body parts, which are typically covered in daily life among good women and especially among uptown ladies"

(1998:159). Ulysse's excellent semiotic decoding affirms that dance hall style is black working-class style expressed through fashion and sexually explicit dancing, both of which challenge bourgeois morality and notions of feminine modesty and appropriate public behavior. In Ulysse's reading, dance hall style as black working-class style and as expressed through fashion and sexually explicit dancing, challenges bourgeois morality and notions of feminine modesty and public behavior.

Judith Butler's theorization of gender and performance is particularly apt in this regard. She writes:

> [Gendered] bodies are so many 'styles of the flesh.' These styles are never fully self-styled, for styles have a history and these histories condition and limit the possibilities. Consider gender, for instance as a corporeal style, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning. (Butler 1990:139)

While this formulation is enormously productive in many regards, the liberatory and subversive potential of performance is explicitly negated in specific social situations that involve the charged vectors of race and sexuality. In such moments, female bodies are compelled under the watchful eye of other females to perform both gender and race right. In these circumstances, the "[female] gender is made to comply with a model of truth and

falsity…which serves as a social policy of gender regulation and control" (ibid). And here another local understanding enters the interpretive frame: In this perspective, the female Indian body is constructed on the basis of difference from, and in opposition to, the Afro-Jamaican female body, especially since the popular stereotyped view of Indian females tends to stress their domesticity, modesty, and demureness in contrast to the libidinous, sexually charged persona of the Afro-Jamaican female, symbolized in this regard by the dancehall patron.

The salience of the somatic norm image is undeniable in this and other public contexts where issues of representation are the prime focus. The dancer 'looked' Indian, that is she displayed Indian phenotypical attributes – 'tall hair,' aquiline features— and she was in the company of similarly marked females, but she displayed a cultural affect and style that ran counter to that attribution. It is a facile conclusion, but appropriate nevertheless, that through her performance she brought into view, materialized, the boundaries that traverse the Jamaican social imaginary.

Almost a year after the Chedwin Park show, a newspaper article on the recently completed Miss Jamaica Universe pageant gave the view from the 'other side.' Saphire Longmore, the winner, was the subject of some speculation as to her appropriateness to

represent the nation at the Miss Universe pageant. “Dismissing those that point to the fact that she is of Indian extraction, the look that is always preferred in Jamaican beauty pageants, Saphire said without flinching, ‘My father is a Black man’” (Mark, 2000). Here the subject of interpellation recodes herself as Black, by tracing that essence through her father (unsurprising in a masculinist society). This essentializing self-identification complements and undercuts her earlier pronouncement that she “loves her ‘Caribbean look’ …stressing the point that she is a mixture true to our motto, ‘Out of Many, One People’ (ibid.)

Other specific tensions that are manifest in the situation of the festival approximate, but do not duplicate, the ways in which Roger Abrahams delineates differences in social interaction and personal expression in the domestic, familial, and feminine confines of the house and "yard" and those that take place in the freer, undomesticated domains of male privilege, the "road" in the Caribbean: "[The] house and yard are deeply identified with the symbolic constraints, concepts, and the rules governing the practices of privacy and family…which are also the value system of the entire group" (ibid:135). By contrast, the road "symbolizes male gregariousness and mobility—a public world of energy, action, and freedom" (ibid.)

Assimilating Peter Wilson's earlier formulation on the distinctions between reputation and respectability (Wilson 1969) to the street and the house yard respectively, Abrahams explores the dichotomous genres of performances in these domains. Performances in the house/yard can be classified as sensible speech, logical texts, serial performances, in short, the reaffirmation of social order. At the opposite, and related end of the social continuum, the performances in the street are defined by, among other things, social disorder (ibid:154-55).

In this light, the policing maneuver by the IJCS representative and the approval of that action by Lorna might be most accurately seen as efforts to reproduce the distinctions between public and private, and to maintain the distinctions between Indian women and Afro-Jamaican women, by stressing the affinity of the former with respectability and that of the latter with reputation. Some days after the festival I asked Lorna what was so wrong with the girl's performance. Her reply was, "They shouldn't be dancing like that. Its not proper for Indian girls to be carrying on like that." To my question, "So its okay if black girls dance like that?" her rejoinder was, "That's fine for them. But not for Indian girls!"

The incident of the dancing woman and the responses to her resonates with Mary Russo's (1993:118) memory of the sobering phrase, "She is making a spectacle out of herself". Uttered by women and "directed toward the behavior of other women," it is harsh, matronizing and illuminates the extent to which "making a spectacle out of oneself seem[s] a specifically feminine danger." Russo goes on to note:

> For a woman, making a spectacle out of herself had more to do with a kind of inadvertency and loss of boundaries: the possessors of large, aging, and dimpled thighs displayed at the public beach, of overly rouged cheeks, of a voice shrill in laughter, or of a sliding bra strap [...] were at once caught by fate and blameworthy. It was my impression that these women had done something wrong, had stepped, as it were, into the limelight out of turn —too young or too old, too early or too late, and yet anyone, any woman could make a spectacle out of herself if she were not careful (ibid.)

Thus, while it is permissible for black female bodies to be seen comporting themselves in ways and in spaces that are the privilege of men, Indian women need to be reminded not to engage in this semiotically confusing behavior. Embodying and displaying behaviors, pleasures and bodily postures which are at odds with what is considered the norm for the Indian female body, engender reactions ranging from pleasure to discomfort to disdain and censure, eventually leading to the prohibition and removal of the inappropriately performing body from the full view of the social

body. Policing the boundaries of appropriate behavior becomes a moral imperative in Chedwin Park, and in the disciplinary procedures effected on the dancers and musicians, a sense of community is produced between 'town' and 'country' Indians in the space of expressive culture.

FINAL SUMMARY

Throughout the course of this text, I have tried to convey something of the consensual debates, rhetorical flourishes, material forms, and vivid images through which a sense of Indianness in Jamaica is constructed, critiqued, and reproduced. The principal strategy has been that of tracking the competing representations of culture and tradition that are produced, flow between different socio-economic realms and historical eras, and influence conceptualizations of self and community. It is apparent that representative performances engender a variety of interpretations, all of them shaped by the conjunctions of culture, power and history.

My interpretive focus has principally involved the deployment of rhetorical tropes such as 'cultural loss,' 'Indian tradition,' and the like, in the realms of cultural performances. I have argued that as social practices these discourses are in

dialogue with one another, and that they compel individuals and groups to periodically reassess their sense of identity and community. For instance, a recurring theme in elite narratives concerns educating Jamaicans about 'authentic' Indian culture, as opposed to local practices that have 'lost' their 'true meaning'. In its particular applications, the discourse of loss encodes a (negative) evaluation of the racial and cultural mixing which are visible features of local culture. I have shown how these discourses betray fundamental tensions and bring to light hegemonic struggles within the putatively homogeneous Indian community. The struggle for possession of the sign centers on such fundamental issues as which community performances best represent Indian culture and whether this minority population can assert cultural autonomy in the context of dominant Afro-Jamaican society.

The paired theme of cultural loss/cultural creativity emerge as particularly salient in my research: On the one hand, the multi-faceted nature of public performances affords participants a means of challenging community conventions and of representing a multiplicity of identities — local, Jamaican and Indian. On the other hand, multi-valent representations leave performers vulnerable to charges that border-crossings introduce

contaminating elements into reputedly pure traditions—representations that connect up to procedures of containment by community-minders.

I may have initially overstated the impression that the space of cultural performance is one of debate and argumentation, not necessarily polite and often quite abrupt , but still a space in which people agree to disagree about mixing up culture. It is also tempting to characterize performances in terms of hybridity and heterogeneity and to smother this cultural form in celebratory terms such as transgression, creativity, and open-endedness – in other words, the creolization of culture.

However, the reaction from people on the ground, in Jamaica and in Trinidad, make me very cautious in asserting that all West Indians willingly embrace their heterogeneous social reality. And that is because border crossings provoke deep anxieties and translating across cultures entails some special problems for the transgressive individual. Another way of looking at it, is that the dominant discourses in Indo-Jamaica are not necessarily those that valorize cultural process, inter-mixing and change or ones that celebrate transformation and contingency. Rather, they tend to stress culture's integrity and articulate metaphors of distortion, cultural encroachment, and breached boundaries that flow

between various levels of Indo-Jamaican community. Inevitably, the notion of loss and lack of integrity in the space of cultural performance gets mapped onto the character and identity of individuals and by extension the collectivity.

The willfulness involved in the act of making a space for oneself and the performative construction of the Indo-Jamaican community indexes a defensive reaction born from the nameless anxiety that is, perhaps, particular to subaltern groups who must coexist with larger polities, in this case Indians vis avis Afro-Jamaicans, or others with greater cultural and economic capital—expatriate and elite Indians. However, while I have attempted in the wake of Paul Gilroy and others (DuBois before him, most notably) to convey the problematic and hierarchical relationship between diasporas and host societies, I have also tried to demonstrate the dialogic nature of social relationships 'within' diasporas (an inexact phrase). Focusing on the Indian experience in Jamaica complexifies our thinking about such social formations, in that it urges us to think them as fluidary, rather than solidary, social entities, to borrow from Diane Nelson (Nelson, 1999:64.) A fluidary view sees the Indian "body politic as open and contingent," (ibid.) and of Indian identity as emerging in relation to processes of political, cultural and class formations and emergence. In contrast

to preconceived notions of a ready made community and of a singular identity, this position argues for an analysis of the multiplicity, partiality, and vulnerability of subject positions in the Indian diaspora in Jamaica.

As a study of representative practices, “Imagining Indians” encompasses questions of cultural transformation, invention, and hybridity, but fundamentally implicates the domain of political practice and raises questions concerning community, nationality, and subalternity. The dissertation has attempted to demonstrate the effectiveness of analyzing referential and non-referential ways of producing meaning in conjunction with questions of the importance of place, race, gender, class, and power in and through performance. In trying to track the historical reach of ascriptions and attributions that constitute(d) subjects then and now, I have been guided to a large extent by the idea that names and signs are not merely words and images attached randomly to objects and bodies, but the points at which we can see the effects of power. These names become the very ground on which struggles for individual and collective expression are waged. In this regard, Judith Butler’s assessment of interpellation prove particularly apt for the selective archaeology of knowledge I have undertaken.

> The mark interpellation makes is not descriptive, but inaugurative. It seeks to introduce a reality rather than report on an existing one; it accomplishes this introduction through a citation of existing convention. Interpellation is an act of speech whose "content" is neither true nor false: it does not have description as its primary task. Its purpose is to indicate and establish a subject in subjection, to produce its social contours in time and space. Its reiterative operation has the effect of sedimenting its 'positionality' over time. (Butler 1997:33-34)

As I have taken pains to note throughout the text, the subjects of interpellation have not remained content in their subjectification, but have attempted to shift the discourse and the material conditions in which they have been positioned. Their arguments with traditional authority figures and older cultural models are shifting and transmutating, as exemplified by the changes that Vere's younger generation of Hussay builders has introduced into the event and by the growing presence of local Indians who are making common cause with the expats to challenge Afro-Jamaican cultural hegemony. But, even as they challenge hegemonic attributions and authority in one arena of social life, they reproduce and reinforce it in another, in the realms of gender and race and culture.

Which brings me to the last words on the subject, and here the evocative and extraordinary words of William Morris, as E.P.

Thompson invoked them (1978:72), seem the most fitting note on which to end:

> "I pondered all these things and how men fight and lose the battle, and the thing they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes about turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name."

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