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**THE DIASPORIC MO(VE)MENT:
INDENTURESHIP AND INDO-CARIBBEAN IDENTITY**

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Prepared for publication in Patrick Taylor (ed.),
Nation Dance: Religion, Identity and Cultural Difference in the Caribbean.

CERLAC / CRP Working Paper

September, 1998

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**THE DIASPORIC MO(VE)MENT:
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Nation Dance: Religion, Identity and Cultural Difference in the Caribbean.

Abstract:

This paper is organized around the concept of the diasporic mo(ve)ment - both a moment in time and a movement in space, that historical and cultural point of rupture between diaspora and home. It begins by posing diaspora as a style, or “signifying practice” following the work of Dick Hebdige, of identity formation. In approaching the ontological meaning articulated in this style, the relationship between diaspora and modernity is then considered, following the works of C.L.R. James, Cornel West and Paul Gilroy on what is termed in this paper “black modernity”. Turning towards the Indo-Caribbean diaspora in particular, the formation of Indo-Caribbean identity is addressed next in relation to South Asian and Afro-Caribbean diasporic identities. Addressing the peculiar sense of “doubled diaspora” in both Indo- and Afro-Caribbean identities, the paper concludes by returning to a theoretical proposition for the articulation of “critical difference” in diaspora. A critique of the emerging academic field of Indo-Caribbean studies is initiated in attending to the relationship between indentureship and slavery in Indo-Caribbean scholarship and culture.

Introduction

The concept of diaspora is currently being used in both academic and popular discourse with a growing frequency and breadth. Yet this growth does not necessarily reflect a common understanding of the term. Indeed, the meaning of diaspora is perhaps now more than ever contested precisely through its widespread usage. Not only does the concept of diaspora have a long established legacy of intricate exegetic interpretation in the Jewish intellectual tradition, but the term has further been adopted relatively recently by the international African community in the fifties and sixties and by other cultural communities in the eighties and nineties, including the South Asian, Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean communities. This increasingly popular claiming of diasporic cultural identities is surely linked to recent international trends in migration, particularly to the metropolitan cities of Europe and North America, and related developments in social and aesthetic practices. As such, in the current cultural politics of diaspora, even as distinct identities are claimed, they are being so in conjunction with the historical episode of largescale, regulated migrations to the multicultural state.

Diaspora, then, is neither an intra- nor an extra-cultural concept. That is, the concept of diaspora cannot be theorized without reference to specific cultural identities, and yet, diaspora always exceeds any such reference. As such, before tracing the discursive formation of Indo-Caribbean identity, I begin by establishing a conceptualization of diaspora which exceeds the boundaries of specific cultural identities; after confronting the problematics of the cultural politics of diaspora, I conclude by referring to the history of Indian indentureship which constitutes the very foundation of Indo-Caribbean identity. I argue that the cultural meaning of diaspora lies neither fully inside nor fully outside of specific cultural identities, but may be approached through the ongoing articulation of these identities.

My argument is organized around the concept of the *diasporic mo(ve)ment* – that historical point of rupture between diaspora and home, which pins but does not fix diasporic

identity in both time and space. In the diasporic formation of Indo-Caribbean identity, this mo(ve)ment is constituted by the originary and traumatic event of indentureship. Before discussing Indo-Caribbean identity in this paper, the formation of diasporic identity in itself is analyzed. Qualifying the concept of style as signifying practice, diaspora is posited as a style of identity formation. The ontological meaning articulated in this style is approached in charting the relationship between diaspora and modernity, following the theoretical work on what may be called black modernity. The meaning of Indo-Caribbean identity is then addressed in relation to South Asian and Afro-Caribbean diasporic identities. Returning to the theoretical proposition for the articulation of critical difference in diaspora, I attend to the treatment of indentureship and its comparison to slavery in the emerging field of Indo-Caribbean studies. This critical revision of the diasporic mo(ve)ment of indentureship, I suggest, offers important insights not only into Indo-Caribbean identity but into the intercultural politics of diaspora.

Style and Ontology

Diaspora is not the objective result of dispersal through any sort of migration from an already constituted cultural centre as much as the cultural process of articulation of both this centre and its dispersal. That is, home itself is produced only through diaspora. Thus, the naturalness of diaspora as well as home must be brought into reckoning with their artificiality. This dialectical relationship between diaspora and home is radically unstable and fraught with all those tensions which so characteristically exist between and among those living in diaspora and those living at home. In many circumstances, communication between those in diaspora and those at home may seem to be strained beyond the possibility of mutual recognition. However, the relationship between diaspora and home must be maintained, for not only is home always present in the articulation of diaspora, but diaspora is always present in the articulation of home. As is often the case indeed, the more tenuous the bond between

diaspora and home, the more tenacious is its claim. Now, this is not to say that no other sense of home may be produced besides that of the diasporic process. However, for those engaged in the formation of diasporic identities, the familiarity of home is recognized only through this cultural process.

Diasporic culture may be theoretically approached, then, as a *style* of identity formation rather than a specific cultural identity. The articulation of diasporic identities works through the popular cultural processes of recognition and repetition, substitution and subversion. The concept of style has been most carefully theorized by Dick Hebdige in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979). In analyzing the race politics and aesthetic practices of the British post-war working-class youth subcultures of reggae, rock and punk, Hebdige offers a reading of style as “signifying practice” (117-27). Drawing from the theoretical work in semiotics of the Tel Quel group including Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes, Hebdige argues against “the simple notion of reading as the revelation of a fixed number of concealed meanings ... in favour of the idea of *polysemy* whereby each text is seen to generate a potentially infinite range of meanings” (117, his emphasis). The meaning of style, as such, is approached in “the *process* of meaning-construction rather than [in] the final product” (118, his emphasis). Hebdige further argues that this concept of style as signifying practice allows for a “rethink[ing] in a more subtle and complex way the relations not only between marginal and mainstream cultural formations but between the various subcultural styles themselves” (120). Thus, while Hebdige does not attend to the theoretical concept of diaspora in his study of black and white British youth subcultures, his theoretical work on style may be productively if somewhat stretched to accommodate the concept of diaspora.

This theorization of diaspora as style or signifying practice has some important and interrelated implications. While the concept of diaspora is highly developed in certain cultural traditions and in particular the Jewish intellectual tradition, diaspora as cultural process is not culturally specific, that is, peculiar to certain “ethnic” groups. Rather, as a set of creative practices, this style of identity formation is always receptive to collaboration and innovation, even in

the process of the articulation of specific cultural identities. It is in this sense that diaspora is neither an intra- nor an extra-cultural concept, neither inside nor outside specific cultural identities, but is rather a cultural style through which specific identities are formed.

As such, diaspora cannot be said to be a new cultural form. Rather, diaspora constitutes an old and even traditional style of historically conceptualizing new and ever-changing circumstances. In some cultural contexts including the formation of African-American, South Asian, Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean identities, the current proliferation of cultural practices associated with the articulation of these diasporic identities is certainly a remarkably recent phenomenon. Yet, even in these contexts, these practices are historically related to those much older cultural practices which articulated various versions of what may be called proto-diasporic African and Indian identities. At the same time, this current proliferation of diasporic identities is also a matter of style, for the concept of diaspora is certainly subject to trends of popularity. The widespread currency of the term itself in its varied cultural contexts indicates precisely its present fashionability in aesthetic, political and academic practices alike.

As diaspora constitutes a particular cultural style, then, there surely exist other styles or sets of signifying practices. Popularly circulating in current cultural politics are a number of salient styles of identity formation, including those of First Nations and Latin American cultural identities. This is not to mention other formations in current cultural politics organized around gender and sexual as well as national and religious identities. Certainly, these cultural styles are not impervious to each other, and there is much mutual influence and overlap between them. Yet each of these styles as a particular set of signifying practices articulates different meanings. First Nations cultural identities are articulated through a sense of nativeness, aboriginality or indigeneity and connection to the environment. In contrast, diasporic cultural identities are marked by a sense of exile and often alienation from the land of residence. Meanwhile, Latin American cultural identities selectively incorporate these concerns of indigeneity and alienation through the articulation of *mestizaje*, or cultural mixing. Each of these

cultural styles carries certain sets of meanings as much as it works through certain sets of practices. “Substance”, therefore, is inscribed within the concept of “style” as signifying practice. Simply put, diaspora means something to “diasporics.” Diaspora, as such, constitutes a particularly meaningful though currently popular style of identity formation.

The theorization of diaspora as style may be extended, then, to the *ontological* level. Diasporic identities are marked by ontological significance for those who are engaged in the creative practices of their articulation. It is at this theoretical move to diaspora as ontology where my stretching of Hebdige’s work on style must be addressed. One of the most basic though important points of Hebdige’s semiotic approach to style is his insistence on the meaning of style. As he emphatically puts it, “Style in subculture is ... pregnant with significance” (1979: 18). However, specific meanings of particular styles are not fixed but rather constantly contested in the ongoing struggle for cultural hegemony. Hebdige argues:

The meaning of subculture is, then, always in dispute, and style is the area in which the opposing definitions clash with most dramatic force... [T]he tensions between dominant and subordinate groups can be found reflected in the surfaces of subculture – in the styles made up of mundane objects which have a double meaning...

[T]he challenge to hegemony which subcultures represent is not issued directly by them. Rather, it is expressed obliquely, in style. The objections are lodged, the contradictions displayed ... at the profoundly superficial level of appearances: that is, at the level of signs. (2-3, 17)

Two interrelated theoretical issues from this semiotic approach to style must here be qualified for the theorization of diaspora as ontology: the relationship between the signifier and the signified; and the relationship between dominant culture and subordinate subculture.

Hebdige’s approach to the relationship between the signifier and the signified is informed by both his theoretical influences and his subject of study. While he argues that the concept of

signifying practice “sets out to counter the prevailing notion of transparent relation between sign and referent, signification and reality,” he summarizes this semiotic project as “the triumph of process over fixity, disruption over unity, ‘collision’ over ‘linkage’ – the triumph, that is, of the signifier over the signified” (118-9). Similarly, Hebdige refers to Kristeva’s concept of “*signifiante*,” which “describe[s] the work of the signifier in the text in contrast to signification which refers to the work of the signified” (124). In adopting this approach to style, Hebdige, originally writing in 1979, is obviously responding to then current trends in semiotic and cultural theory which conventionally treated the signifier as a mere descriptor of a fixed signified. However, the reactionary overvaluation of the work of the signifier as opposed to the signified is just as problematic as the reverse for the theorization of diaspora as ontology. For if the “style” and “substance”, or practice and meaning, of diaspora are inseparable, then theoretical fixation on either concept of the signifier or the signified is misleading.

Yet Hebdige is certainly aware of this problem. As he explains, it is the reading of punk style which he attempts that encourages his theoretical emphasis on the subversion of meaning. Analyzing the aesthetics of punk subculture, Hebdige discusses this style as “bricolage” (102-6) and “revolt” (106-12); meanwhile, he encounters the limits of reading style as “homology” (113-7), noting that “[i]nstead of arriving at the point where we can begin to make sense of [punk] style, we have reached the very place where meaning itself evaporates” (117). He recognizes, however, that not all subcultural styles subvert meaning as does punk, concluding his comparison of punk and teddy boy subcultures by stating that “[t]he relationship between experience, expression and signification is therefore not a constant in subculture” (126). This emphasis on the subversion of meaning, then, must not be assumed in the theorization of diaspora as ontology. Yet in much of the recent work in cultural theory on diaspora, there is a characteristic overvaluation of subversion and the attendant evasion of meaning which, rather paradoxically, work through a theoretical fixation on versions of such concepts as “hybridity” and “difference.” I suggest that this is also the result of theoretical influences as much as

subjects of study. Theoretical analyses of diaspora have often taken as subjects of study the aesthetic practices of diasporic cultures (see, for example, Gilroy 1991, 1993b; Hall 1996, 1996; Mercer 1994). Many current aesthetic practices, particularly in music and film, participate in the style of pastiche and the subversion of meaning, but these practices are not unique to diasporic cultures. Hebdige's own reading of punk, a British youth subculture identified as white, attests to the intercultural popularity of such aesthetic practices. In shifting the theorization of diaspora as style from the aesthetic to the ontological level, I suggest that the articulation of diaspora may be appreciated for its constitution of "identity" as much as for its revelry in "difference". In theorizing diaspora as ontology, then, I stretch Hebdige's approach to the meaning *of* style to accommodate my approach to meaning *as* style.

The relationship between dominant culture and subordinate subculture is also affected in my stretching of Hebdige's reading of style. For Hebdige, style has a special significance for subculture. He approaches style as "intentional communication" (100-2), distinguishing it from conventional systems of signification. In reference to punk style, Hebdige allows that "the conventional outfits worn by the average man and woman in the street are chosen within the constraints of finance, 'taste', preference, etc. and these choices are undoubtedly significant" and argues that "[u]ltimately, if nothing else, [these choices] are expressive of 'normality' as opposed to 'deviance' (i.e. they are distinguished by their relative invisibility, their appropriateness, their 'naturalness')" (101). Nonetheless, Hebdige asserts that "intentional communication is of a different order. It stands apart – a visible construction, a loaded choice. It directs attention to itself; it gives itself to be read" (101). For Hebdige, then, style is an oppositional practice. He argues for the "interpret[ation of] subculture as a form of resistance in which experienced contradictions and objections to [the] ruling ideology are obliquely represented in style" (133). Indeed, throughout his book he characterizes style variously as "noise (as opposed to sound)" (90) and "a Refusal" (3, 132). These negative characterizations of style are, again, surely related to his theoretical influences in semiotics and his subject of study, punk. The *sub-* in subculture

which Hebdige regularly uses to indicate youth styles also indicates a negative relationship to the parent culture of ruling ideology.

In theorizing diaspora as style on the ontological level, this issue of dominance and subordination is not so clear. For those engaged in the articulation of diasporic cultural identities, diaspora is not always a negative concept. Diasporic identities are often based on a positive sense of identification, and probably more often, they cannot be simply read as either negative or positive. Of course, Hebdige himself is cautious in his reading of subcultural style, admitting that his work "no doubt succumbs to a kind of romanticism" in his "emphasis ... on deformity, transformation and Refusal" (138). He further claims that he "avoid[s] the temptation to portray subculture ... as the repository of 'Truth', to locate in its forms some obscure revolutionary potential" (138). Similarly, in my theorization of diaspora as ontology, I assert that there is not necessarily anything "resistant," in the negative sense, or "progressive," in the positive sense, about this style of identity formation. For the conceptualization of diaspora as signifying practice implies that there is no guarantee of effective resistance in the process of articulation. And yet, it also implies that there is always the possibility, not necessarily of "revolution" but perhaps of creative transformation in diaspora.

Temporality, Spatiality and Historical Rupture

In theorizing diaspora, then, I move on to consider the ambivalent relationship between diaspora and modernity, as well as the problematics within the articulation of diaspora itself. In working towards the particular meaning of diaspora as style, the work of C.L.R. James, Cornel West and Paul Gilroy on what may be called black modernity have for me been most constructive in thinking through diaspora as ontology. Much like modernity, diaspora is based on an acute sense of *historical rupture*. Yet it is conceptually different from modernity, or at least Eurocentric modernity, in a significant way. My counterposition of diaspora and modernity as styles of identity formation is primarily informed by this work on black modernity. Although of these theorists only Gilroy deals specifically with the

concept of diaspora as well as that of modernity, it is important to realize that James, West and Gilroy have all written during the historical period when the concept of diaspora was taken up by Caribbean, American and British national citizens in identifying themselves culturally as diasporic Africans. While James wrote early in this period, when the concept of diaspora as adopted from Jewish cultural tradition was just beginning to gain currency among pan-African advocates, West and Gilroy wrote more recently, when the diaspora concept was being extended further by diasporic cultural communities other than the international African community. Of course, we are still in this historical period which is marked by the proliferation of diasporic identities.

In his appendix to the second edition of *The Black Jacobins*, "From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro" (1963), James inaugurates this work on black modernity in a brief though succinct argument:

When three centuries ago the slaves came to the West Indies, they entered directly into the large-scale agriculture of the sugar plantation, which was a modern system. It further required that the slaves live together in a social relation far closer than any proletariat of the time. The cane when reaped had to be rapidly transported to what was factory production. The product was shipped abroad for sale. Even the cloth the slaves wore and the food they ate was imported. The Negroes, therefore, from the very start lived a life that was in its essence a modern life. That is their history – as far as I have been able to discover, a unique history. (392)

For James, then, modernity is constituted by the international economic system, in which the African slaves were central both in terms of production and consumption from its early beginnings. As such, James suggests that the African slaves on the Caribbean plantations were the first fully-fledged moderns, not the European capitalists or even the workers. James's theorization of modernity, then, is significantly different from and yet very relevant to my own, for I maintain that his revision of Eurocentric modernity is itself a prerogative of diasporic identity.

West also briefly addresses black modernity in discussing his commitment to what he calls "prophetic criticism" in his preface to *Keeping Faith* (1993). West places this "prophetic vision and practice ... at the core of [his] intellectual vocation and existential engagement" (x). Citing DuBois's notion of double-consciousness, he posits that prophetic criticism draws from both Euro-American modernity and New World African modernity. He describes this New World African modernity as "what we get when Africans in the Americas ... remake and recreate themselves into a distinctly *new* people" (xii-xiii, his emphasis). Recalling yet significantly revising the argument of James, West asserts, "If modernity is measured in terms of newness and novelty, innovation and improvisation – and not simply in terms of science, technology, markets, bureaucracies and nation-states – then New World African modernity is more thoroughly *modern* than any American novel, painting, dance or even skyscraper" (xiii, his emphasis). In further considering the relationship between these multiple modernities, West argues, "New World African modernity radically interrogates and creatively appropriates Euro-American modernity by examining how 'race' and 'Africa' – themselves modern European constructs – yield insights and blindnesses, springboards and roadblocks for our understanding of multivarious and multileveled modernities" (xii).

While West does not particularly address the concept of diaspora, he does deal with migration, the attendant concerns with temporality and spatiality, and the concept of home. Arguing that "[t]he fundamental theme of New World African modernity is neither integration nor separation but rather migration and emigration" (xiii), West explains that "[i]n the space-time of New World African modernity, to hope is to conceive of possible movement, to despair is to feel ossified, petrified, closed in" (xiv). He describes the search for home as historically exemplified in the Garveyite movement as the "wedding of black misery in America to transnational mobility to Africa, forging a sense of possible momentum and motion for a temporal people with few spatial options" (xiii-xiv). Indeed, West's own discussion is occasioned by his marriage and incorporation into a prominent Ethiopian family, raising for him "urgent issues of

inheritance and rootlessness, tradition and homelessness” (x). Questioning his urge to leave America and live in Ethiopia, “the land of New World African modern fantasies of ‘home’” (xv), he rhetorically asks, “Is this the urge of an émigré, an expatriate or an exile?” (x). Furthermore, embodying the dialectics of diasporic identity, West’s prefatory essay is itself divided by the three headings “In Ethiopia,” “In America” and “At Home.”

Writing at roughly the same time as West, Gilroy most thoroughly deals with both black modernity and the concept of diaspora in *The Black Atlantic* (1993a). In this work, he theorizes historical black thought on as well as current vernacular and literary cultures of modernity, employing, as does West, DuBois’s notion of double consciousness. Drawing from the work of Zygmunt Bauman, he posits the Black Atlantic diaspora as “a distinctive counterculture of modernity” (36). In his book, Gilroy is most concerned with the relationship between modernity and diaspora in dealing with current black cultural politics. Arguing that “integral” to modernity is the “decentred and inescapably plural nature of modern subjectivity and identity” (46, 48), he further claims that postmodernity is thus “foreshadowed, or prefigured, in the lineaments of modernity itself” (42). In addressing black discourse, Gilroy critiques what he calls “Africentrism” and more specifically the sustained ideological opposition between the modern and the traditional in “Africentric” politics. He argues that the “Africentric movement appears to rely upon a linear idea of time that is enclosed at each end by the grand narrative of African advancement” in which “the duration of a black civilisation anterior to modernity is invoked” (190). Those who subscribe to Africentrism claim a “ready access to and command of tradition – sometimes ancient, always anti-modern” through which “Africa is retained as one special measure [of] authenticity” (191). Gilroy seeks to unsettle this easy acceptance of tradition as the “antithesis” (187) of modernity, “outside of the erratic flows of history” (191).

In this project, Gilroy takes up “the undertheorized idea of diaspora” (6). In doing so, he rejects the theoretical symbolization of diaspora “as the fragmentary opposite of some imputed racial essence” in “the unhappy polar opposition

between a squeamish, nationalist essentialism and a skeptical, saturnalian pluralism” (95, 102). Rather, he claims that the cultural history of the Black Atlantic “explodes the dualistic structure which puts Africa, authenticity, purity, and origin in crude opposition to the Americas, hybridity, creolisation, and rootlessness” (199). Gilroy works towards an understanding of the concept of diaspora in tracing the attempts of black intellectuals to rewrite modernity:

DuBois, Douglass, Wright and the rest shared a sense that the modern world was fragmented along axes constituted by racial conflict and could accommodate non-synchronous, heterocultural modes of social life in close proximity. Their conceptions of modernity were periodised differently. They were founded on the catastrophic rupture of the middle passage rather than the dream of revolutionary transformation. (197)

Commenting on what may be called this diasporic revision of modernity in which James also participated, Gilroy suggests that “[t]he idea of diaspora might itself be understood as a response to these promptings – a utopian eruption of space into the linear temporal order of modern black politics which enforces the obligation that space and time must be considered relationally in their interarticulation with racialised being” (198). In his project, then, Gilroy proposes “to integrate the *spatial* focus on the diaspora idea ... with the diaspora temporality and historicity, memory and narrativity that are the articulating principles of the black political countercultures that grew inside modernity in a distinctive relationship of antagonistic indebtedness” (191, his emphasis). His work aims to “reckon with the tension between temporalities [in black political culture] that leads intellectuals to try to press original African time into the service of their attempts to come to terms with diaspora space” (196-7). As such, Gilroy, arguing that “[d]iaspora time is not, it would seem, African [as in Africentric] time” (196), theoretically articulates and politically commits himself to “[t]he desire to bring a new historicity into black political culture” (190).

In his discussion of diaspora and modernity, Gilroy’s work has most obviously stimulated my own approach to the concept of

diaspora, whether or not our theoretical treatments are fully compatible. I begin with the postulation that diasporic identity is articulated through the experience of historical rupture. Yet modern identity is also based on a sense of historical rupture. Thus, diaspora and modernity are conceptually different though ambivalently related. In theorizing the relationship between the historical rupture of diaspora and that of modernity, then, the concept of history itself must be problematized through the critical consideration of *temporality* and *spatiality*.

Modern identity is based on rupture, and this historical sense of rupture is temporal. Thus, modernity is not based on the material fact of social or technological progress, but it is rather this belief in progress which characterizes modern identity. Modernity is articulated through the assertion of the newness of current times, not in any banal sense of novelty but in a profound sense of a distinct order of newness. The modern is thus cleaved from the traditional. This cleavage is marked by a specific point in time. Regardless of any disagreement over which point in time this actually was, the significant feature of modernity is that the split between the traditional and the modern is identified within a linear temporal history. The traditional in this sense as well as the modern, then, are the dialectical products of modernity. The traditional is constructed as the very nemesis of the modern, the anti-modern.

The concept of tradition, however, may be used to undermine modernity. Tradition may be revived not as the anti-modern but as an irruption into the modern through which the separation between the modern and the traditional is problematized. Tradition is commonly used in this subversive sense in diasporic politics as well as in other styles of cultural politics, such as the First Nations movement, and other forms of politics which similarly challenge modernity, such as environmentalism.

Postmodernity, then, constitutes another production of modernity. Postmodernity certainly problematizes the modern notion of progress as it signifies that modernity is not the end of history. Yet in claiming a break not only with the traditional but also with the modern itself, the postmodern is thoroughly modern precisely in that this historical break is temporalized. Thus, the logic of modernity as characterized by the linear

temporality of history is not negated as much as multiplied, if not arithmetically then exponentially, in the logic of postmodernity.

Diasporic identity, like modern identity, is based on rupture, but the concept of history and thus the meaning of historical rupture differ significantly between these identities. Whereas the concept of history in modernity is strictly temporal, history in diaspora includes both the senses of temporality and spatiality. Diaspora is thus articulated through the experience of temporal *and* spatial rupture. The traumatic significance of this rupture is condensed into a specific historical point – a *mo(ve)ment* – both a moment in time and a movement in space. This is the point which pins but does not fix, like a thumbtack on a corkboard, that perpetually unstable dialectical structure of diasporic identity. Every diasporic identity hinges upon such a *mo(ve)ment*. For the Jewish diaspora, the Dispersion marks this *mo(ve)ment*, while for the African diaspora, the Middle Passage marks it. The significance of these foundational events does not lie in their historicity as such, but is rather approached through their condensation into particular historical, both temporal and spatial, points. This diasporic *mo(ve)ment* marks the split between diaspora and home. Now, while the concept of history in diaspora is both temporal and spatial, there is a characteristic emphasis on the latter dimension of spatiality within diasporic cultural practices.

Although the historical rupture of diaspora is thus significantly different from that of modernity, then, diasporic and modern identities are ontologically related. Certainly, the spatial dimension of diaspora is emphasized at least partly as a direct challenge to the linear temporal history of modernity. Diasporic history displaces modernist history or, rather more appropriately, diasporic history *places* modernist history. The claim to universality of modernity is challenged by diaspora in that diasporic history relativizes the linear temporal history of Eurocentric modernity. Diasporic identity introduces another history – a counter-history – into modern identity. Or rather again, as modern identity is not necessarily ontologically or chronologically prior to diasporic identity, diaspora and modernity provide counter-histories of each other.

As previously noted, West and Gilroy, in comparison to James, wrote on diaspora during the

recent period in which diasporic identity was being claimed by various cultural communities other than the African diasporic community. The relationship between these various diasporic identities must also be critically addressed. James, in his diasporic revision of modernity, comments on the “unique history” of the “Negro” slaves (1963: 392). Similarly, West notes that prophetic criticism is “primarily based on a distinctly black tragic sense of life” (1993: x). Considering these claims of what may be interpreted as cultural specificity, then, the appropriateness of the work of James, West and Gilroy on black modernity for my theorization of diaspora as ontology, which is not specific to the African cultural context, might well be questioned.

This issue of the relationship between diasporic communities, however, has not only recently become central to the cultural politics of diaspora, for the appropriation of the concept from the Jewish intellectual tradition by pan-African advocates in designating the African diaspora had already necessitated a primary attention to this issue. Gilroy, in taking up the concept of diaspora, calls for the collaboration between Black and Jewish thinkers in particular and provides an argument for “the intercultural history of the diaspora concept” (1993a: 211) that effectively addresses the issue of cultural specificity. Repudiating the “pointless and utterly immoral wrangle over which communities have experienced the most ineffable forms of degradation” (212), Gilroy emphatically states:

I want to resist the idea that the Holocaust is merely another instance of genocide. I accept arguments for its uniqueness. However, I do not want the recognition of that uniqueness to be an obstacle to better understanding of the complicity of rationality and ethnocidal terror to which this book is dedicated. This is a difficult line on which to balance but it should be possible, and enriching, to discuss these histories together. (213)

Similarly then, while the particularity of African slavery must be appreciated, this recognition must not limit the use of the black intellectual tradition in understanding the intercultural politics of diaspora. As such, the work on black modernity by James and West as well as Gilroy constitutes a

significant theoretical intervention into diasporic cultural politics in its broadest sense, not only black political discourse.

As there are indeed many diasporic identities besides African identity circulating in current cultural politics, there are certainly many diasporic histories challenging the linear temporal history of Eurocentric modernity. However, these various histories do not necessarily undermine each other, for their spatialization allows for the *relative* placing of all of them. Diasporic histories, as such, are concurrent. Furthermore, the articulation of diasporic identities challenges Eurocentric modernity precisely in its placing of modernist history as also concurrent with diasporic histories. The postmodernist break with the modern is at least partly a response to the entry of these diasporic identities into modernist political discourse. Of course, the success of postmodernism in grappling with the challenge of diaspora, as well as other such significant interventions into modernity as feminism and queer politics, is debatable.

However, this diasporic dimension of spatiality may seem to imply that these various diasporic histories are *parallel* – that is, that they never meet and are thus discrete. I argue that this is the most urgent problematic within the articulation of diaspora itself. The relative placing of diasporic histories suggests that diasporic identities coexist independently alongside of each other, each following its own linear course of historical progress. I contend that diasporic cultural identities are collaboratively produced and, refiguring the spatial imagery of diaspora, that diasporic histories are not parallel but regularly *intersect*. Even as distinct cultural identities are claimed through current articulations of diaspora, this cultural process of diasporic articulation must itself be recognized as an ontologically particular though currently popular style of identity formation.

As such, the problematic of cultural specificity may be effectively addressed through the further articulation of what may be called *critical difference* in diaspora. As the particularity of each diasporic history must be appreciated, so must the intercultural production of diasporic identity be recognized. It is only through this interplay of “identity” and “difference” that cultural difference takes on any critical

significance. For if claims of cultural specificity are regularly informed by the multiculturalist notion of absolute difference, then any politically challenging formation of diasporic identity must articulate this critical sense of cultural difference. The proliferation of diasporic identities in current cultural politics, then, may be theorized not simply as an exhibitionist display of the diversity of cultures in the mosaic sense but more saliently as a radical disruption of linear temporal historicity altogether.

Indo-Caribbean Identity and Doubled Diaspora

One such current diasporic formation is that of Indo-Caribbean identity. The term *Indo-Caribbean* itself is rather new, its earliest appearance in print and systematic use as far as I know dating from the mid-eighties in community newspapers and books published in Toronto. Certainly, there are many Indians (another loaded discursive formation of diasporic identity, of course, popularly used both within the Caribbean and throughout its diaspora) from the Caribbean who do not identify as Indo-Caribbean. However, many such as myself have come to claim this newly formed Indo-Caribbean identity, and the term seems to be gaining popularity, particularly outside of the Caribbean in the diasporic communities of the metropolitan cities of Europe and North America.

This Indo-Caribbean identity, then, is *doubly diasporic*. For the Indo-Caribbean diaspora is founded upon two mo(ve)ments – the first marking the colonial institution of Indian indentureship in the Caribbean during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the second the neocolonial regulation of Caribbean migration to Europe and North America after World War II until the present. In the diasporic commemoration of these historical ruptures, indentureship and migration have become inextricably linked, the first mo(ve)ment rhetorically figured as the crossing of *Kala Pani*, or the Dark Waters, upon the retrospective occasion of the second mo(ve)ment, which as yet remains nameless and perhaps is still unnameable. Those living in the Indo-Caribbean diaspora, then, claim the two diasporic homes of India *and* the Caribbean. As such, those who identify as Indo-

Caribbean claim not only national citizenship in the multicultural state but also both Indian and Caribbean cultural identities. The historical emergence of Indo-Caribbean identity is thus intimately related to the formation of Afro-Caribbean and South Asian diasporic identities and further informed by the encounters between these and other diasporas in the metropolitan cities of Europe and North America.

This doubled sense of historical rupture is inscribed within the term *Indo-Caribbean* itself, the first mo(ve)ment of indentureship recalled through the prefix *Indo-* and the second mo(ve)ment of migration through the suffix *-Caribbean*. The recollection of India in this “Indo-” is not that of the politically independent secular state of the same name but rather that of the cultural space of India which the indentured labourers left behind as home. This home of the first mo(ve)ment in Indo-Caribbean identity, then, is significantly different than the home of the South Asian diaspora. While the South Asian diaspora is founded upon a notion of home which redresses the political separation between the states of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, the thoroughly diasporic notion of a culturally integrated India still informs the articulation of Indo-Caribbean identity. What Seecharan (1993: 34) has notably called a “Gandhian India” thrives perhaps most strongly in the active memory of the Indian diaspora in the Caribbean.

Meanwhile, the Indo-Caribbean recollection in this *-Caribbean* is of a pan-Caribbean cultural space. While loyalty to the state and affinity to the local remain important to many Indo-Caribbean people as expressed in their simultaneous claiming of various national and even town or village identities, these are qualified by this broader sense of the Caribbean. Samuel Selvon recalls the diasporic production of pan-Caribbean identity:

When I left Trinidad in 1950 and went to England, one of my first experiences was living in a hostel with people from Africa and India and all over the Caribbean. It is strange to think I had to cross the Atlantic and be thousands of miles away, in a different culture and environment, for it to come about that, for the first time in my life, I was living among Barbadians and Jamaicans and others from my part of the

world. If I had remained in Trinidad I might never have had the opportunity to be at such close quarters to observe and try to understand the differences and prejudices that exist from islander to islander. (1987: 16)

Selvon further comments that “among the immigrants abroad, when they talk of returning home the concept has widened into the greater area rather than to any particular island” (22). However, this articulation of pan-Caribbean identity is not unique to the Indo-Caribbean diaspora but is rather similar in other diasporic Caribbean communities. Stuart Hall likewise describes the historical emergence of Black identity during the seventies in Britain:

Then Black erupted and people said, “Well, you’re from the Caribbean, in the midst of this, identifying with what’s going on, the Black population in England. You’re Black.”... People [began] to ask, “Are you from Jamaica, are you from Trinidad, are you from Barbados?” You can just see the process of divide and rule. “No. Just address me as I am. I know you can’t tell the difference so just call me Black.” (1991: 55)

While Hall specifically addresses the development of British Black politics in this passage, his use of examples of various Caribbean national or island identities is significant in its indication of the cultural formation of a pan-Caribbean identity within Britain. As such, this diasporic home of the second mo(ve)ment in Indo-Caribbean identity is collaboratively produced by Indo-, Afro- and other diasporic Caribbean communities.

More precisely, however, this articulation of a doubled sense of diasporic identity indicates the creative collaboration of Indo- and Afro-Caribbean communities in particular on the ontological level. For Afro-Caribbean identity is similarly founded upon two diasporic mo(ve)ments – colonial slavery, commemorated as the Middle Passage, and neocolonial migration, again nameless and unnameable. Those living in the Afro-Caribbean diaspora also claim two diasporic homes – the integrated cultural space of Africa, undivided by colonial and now postcolonial borders, and the Caribbean, in its pan-regional

sense. This articulation of doubled diaspora through the formation of Indo- and Afro-Caribbean identities is distinctly different from that of other hyphenated forms of cultural identity, thus radically altering the dialectics of diaspora and home. African-American diasporic identity, for example, though as a term of identity structurally similar to the term Afro-Caribbean, is constituted through only one diasporic mo(ve)ment, that of slavery. While the prefix *African-* recalls the historical rupture of the Middle Passage, the suffix *-American* refers not to any diasporic sense of dislocation but to national identity. Now, it is not that African-Americans have not participated in any significant flow of migration since slavery. The largescale migration of African-Americans between the onsets of World War I and the Depression from the rural regions of the southern United States to the urban cities of the north is historically commemorated as the Great Migration, yet this historical episode does not discursively rupture African-American identity. It seems that American national identity is strong enough to have contained this potentially traumatic historical episode.

Both Indo- and Afro-Caribbean identities as doubled diasporas, then, further complicate the dialectics of diaspora and home on the ontological level. For these formations of cultural identity are doubly diasporic not so much in an arithmetic as in an exponential sense, or perhaps in the figurative sense through which the character of diaspora has doubled over on itself. In this stylish style of diasporic articulation, the place of home becomes even more ambiguous, its location even more slippery. Through the current international circulation of these doubly diasporic identities, what I have called an old and even traditional style of cultural identity has been radically modified, the Caribbean as a site of diaspora now transformed into a site of home, those barely traceable connections to India and Africa yet further rarefied.

Indentureship and Critical Difference in Diaspora

This collaborative articulation of doubly diasporic Indo- and Afro-Caribbean identities certainly does not translate into any sort of cultural

equivalency between them. Indo- and Afro-Caribbean diasporic communities enter into uneasy alliances at best when this strategy of equivalence is employed. Returning to the articulation of critical difference in diasporic identity, I revisit here the diasporic mo(ve)ments of indentureship and slavery, those foundational historical points through which Indo- and Afro-Caribbean cultural identities are respectively constituted. The deep ambivalences towards both diaspora and home within the formation of Indo-Caribbean identity itself are traced through a critical reading of some inaugural texts in the emerging field of Indo-Caribbean studies. This revision of Indo-Caribbean history contributes to my theoretical proposition for the articulation of critical difference in the intercultural politics of diaspora and furthermore, I suggest, may well be extended to current studies on slavery in the African diaspora and other diasporic studies.

In recently published works of Indo-Caribbean history, there is a recurrent concern with the resemblance of indentureship to slavery. While concessions are usually allowed for cultural specificity, indentureship is regularly paralleled with slavery. Thus, the Indo- and Afro-Caribbean experiences are constituted as discrete and, in a sense, *replicable* histories. This argument on indentureship has only recently gained acceptance within the Indo-Caribbean community, let alone the Afro-Caribbean one, yet it has quickly become a foundation in the new academic discourse of Indo-Caribbean studies. However, this parallel historical treatment of indentureship and slavery was developed well before the emergence of Indo-Caribbean studies and even before the discursive formation of Indo-Caribbean diasporic identity itself.

This line of argument on indentureship as a form of slavery was postulated and popularized by the historian Hugh Tinker in his book aptly titled *A New System of Slavery* (1974). As he states, this historical work “represents the first attempt to provide a comprehensive study of the whole process of emigration from rural India, across the seas to more than a dozen countries” (xiii), dealing with the indenture and other forms of labour recruitment of Indians in the Caribbean, Africa and Southeast Asia. The book opens with a quote made in 1840 by the imperial official Lord Russell, “I should be unwilling to adopt any

measure to favour the transfer of labourers from British India ... which may lead to ... a new system of slavery” (v). Tinker states the premise of his own work:

The legacy of Negro slavery in the Caribbean and the Mascarenes was a new system of slavery, incorporating many of the repressive features of the old system, which induced in the Indians many of the responses of their African brothers [*sic*] in bondage. For ninety years after emancipation, sugar planters and sugar workers ... worked out the inheritance of slavery. (19)

He justifies this conclusion as well as the title of his book in describing his course of study:

When Lord John Russell’s announcement was discovered ... this seemed to promise the possibility of an arresting title: but it did not appear to represent a plain statement of the realities with which he was confronted. Only gradually did the accumulation of evidence produce the conclusion that indenture and other forms of servitude did, indeed, replicate the actual conditions of slavery. (xiv)

Tinker’s work certainly constitutes a valuable historical project and is indispensable for anyone conducting research in the area of Indian labour overseas, including indentureship. Moreover, his bold argument on indentureship has been readily adopted and widely circulated within Indo-Caribbean studies. Although Tinker is not Indo-Caribbean himself, his book has become a fundamental cultural text in an incipient Indo-Caribbean canon. *A New System of Slavery* is treated as an authoritative source in Indo-Caribbean historical scholarship and regularly featured on the book tables at community events. Indeed, much current Indo-Caribbean scholarship is informed by this argument on indentureship as slavery, if not modelled outright upon the work of Tinker.

Brinsley Samaroo’s “Two Abolitions: African Slavery and East Indian Indentureship” (1987) opens with the same quote by Lord Russell as does *A New System of Slavery*. The stated purpose of his essay is “to add to this debate by drawing further parallels between the systems of

slavery and indentureship than those elaborated by Professor Tinker ... [and] further, to indicate similar motivation and action among those who agitated against both systems” (25). Samaroo concludes that “[t]he movement for the abolition of indentureship bore many resemblances to that for the abolition of slavery” and summarizes that the historical forces “in both abolitions came together to end an era of slavery and of a new system of slavery” (38).

Basdeo Mangru’s *Indenture and Abolition* (1993), while not directly referring to Tinker’s work, resembles it in certain ways. Mangru’s book also opens with a quote, but by the Indian nationalist Gopal Krishna Gokhale in 1910, stating of indentureship that “such a system by whatever name it may be called, must really border on the servile” (iv). Mangru describes indentureship as “a system the essential characteristics of which were reminiscent of slavery” (ix) and further notes that “[t]he anti-indenture campaign in India paralleled that of the antislavery movement in England” (xi). He goes on to call Indian indentured labourers in British Guiana “semi-slaves,” arguing that they, “like the slave[s], [were] regarded merely as an instrument of production, one without any personality” (xii). He also cites Chief Justice Beaumont’s statement on the entire Guianese political system as “a mercantile oligarchy founded on the foundations of slavery” (xii).

Frank Birbalsingh in his successive introductory articles to *Jahaji Bhai, Indenture and Exile* and *Indo-Caribbean Resistance* increasingly emphasizes the parallel between indentureship and slavery, constructing this argument from one introduction to the next. In the relatively cautious approach of his first article, he states that “[t]he first indentured immigrants occupied lodgings vacated by the former slaves, and were employed by the former slave owners. Hence the themes spawned by slavery/indenture are identical” (1988: 8). In his second article, Birbalsingh more forcefully posits a number of parallels between “the satanic device of slavery” and “the devilish stratagem of slavery’s bedfellow – indenture” (1989: 9). He argues:

For a long time, slave and indentured labour, under grossly exploitative conditions of colonial domination, bore similar dehumanizing burdens and executed the same back-breaking

plantation tasks. There is much ... to support the view that this shared colonial victimization induced common attitudes of resistance and engendered unity of political purpose in Africans and Indians. (8)

He also refers to a common “exploitation [of] those who had crossed both the ‘middle passage’ from Africa, and the ‘kala pani’ (black water) from India” (10). In his third article, Birbalsingh this time explicitly argues:

The appalling conditions under which indentured Indian immigrants existed suggests that they were slaves in everything but name; for they lived in the very quarters vacated by the freed Africans, and performed their exact tasks... Just as the brutality of slavery had provoked many slave rebellions, so did the hardships of indenture provoke resistance and retaliation. (1993: viii)

As such, the argument that indentureship parallels slavery has occupied a place of strategic importance in the articulation of Indo-Caribbean identity. Birbalsingh himself explains the complicated international political situation in which this strategy was adopted:

[T]he better documented Afro-Caribbean suffering through slavery confer[s] a regional legitimacy that is acknowledged in the Euro-American metropolis which still controls the Third World as firmly as ever...

This condign sense of [the] historical legacy [of African slavery] ... justifie[s] the dominance of an Afrocentric ethos in the Caribbean which, in turn, tend[s] to downplay, if not obscure the parallel Indo-Caribbean experience of indenture... (1988: 13; 1993: xvi)

Of course, Birbalsingh is politically shrewd enough to qualify his criticism of Afrocentrism with appropriate deference to “the horror of the Atlantic slave trade, and the plight of its main victims – Afro-Americans and Afro-West Indians” and to the experience of “blacks in America and the Caribbean, who had endured the most heinous of all crimes, the trade in human beings as

merchandise, across the Atlantic, for nearly four centuries” (1993: xvi).

Most recently, David Dabydeen and Samaroo in their introductory article to *Across the Dark Waters* (1996) place a heavy emphasis on the parallel between indentureship and slavery. The only subheading in this introduction is titled “A comparison with slavery,” appearing rather anomalously in large, bold and italicized print. Directly crediting Tinker, they argue that “East Indian indentureship turned out to be, as Hugh Tinker wrote, ‘a new system of slavery’” (3). Dabydeen and Samaroo state that “[i]ndentureship, like slavery, furthered the creation of a new civilization in the Americas out of the blending of disparate traditions and the interaction of many peoples.” Furthermore, employing a quotation by the wife of a ship captain on the preparation of indentured labourers for prospective purchasers, they simply state that “indentureship was hardly any different [from slavery]” (4).

Certainly, the project of a critical comparison between indentureship and slavery as well as the publication of historical research on indentureship that is entailed in this project are very valuable, and not only so as an “ethnic” concern in the academic field of Indo-Caribbean studies. However, the strategy of paralleling indentureship and slavery, *and thus Indo- and Afro-Caribbean diasporic identities*, is worth reconsidering for reasons besides their obvious institutional distinctions and historical situations.

The argument for indentureship as a form of slavery affects the meaning of Indianness or the *Indo-* in Indo-Caribbean identity. The treatment of indentureship as slavery dismisses those choices made by Indian labourers themselves to migrate in search of employment opportunities and social mobility. The campaign of the Indian nationalists for the final abolition of indenture, achieved by 1920, and the further total prohibition of Indian labour migration, achieved in 1922, did not as such represent the interests of Indian migrant labourers. Yet, in my research, only Walton Look Lai (1993: 136-7, 156, 177), however sketchily, and P.C. Emmer (1986), however problematically, challenge the assumption that indentured labourers favoured the abolition of indenture. In another work theorizing the representation of Indian indentured labourers in the Caribbean (see Lokaisingh-Meighoo 1997), I systematically

critique the politics of class, race, gender and what I call *territoriality* in the abolition campaign of the Indian nationalists, and I further argue that Indians in the Caribbean advocated the reformation of labour migration rather than its abolition altogether.

This historical reading of indentureship challenges those ideological tenets of nationalism as developed by the colonial Indian elite, which continue to inform current articulations of both Indian national identity and South Asian and Indo-Caribbean cultural identities. In thus problematizing nationalist representations of Indian culture, the diasporic commemoration of indentureship may undermine monolithic notions of Indian identity. In this sense, the *Indo-* in Indo-Caribbean identity signifies that the Indo-Caribbean diaspora cannot be treated as a mere subcategory of the South Asian diaspora, and that the meanings of Indianness are significantly different between as well as within Indo-Caribbean and South Asian identities.

The argument for indentureship as a form of slavery also affects the meaning of Caribbeanness or the *-Caribbean* in Indo-Caribbean identity. For this argument also relies upon the contention that Indian labourers entered the Caribbean in the same historical circumstances as did African labourers and that their responses to these circumstances of entry into the Caribbean were basically similar. This reluctance to theorize the critical differences between, let alone within, Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean diasporic experiences only marks a failure in the understanding of the relationship between Africans and Indians in the Caribbean. Indeed, writing as long ago as the publication of Tinker’s work, John Gaffar La Guerre (1974) noted this failure in the Black Power movement in Trinidad, commenting that “the East Indians were asked to join with Negroes on the basis of ‘blackness’ and a common experience in the West Indies. Slavery and indentureship, they assumed, was enough to provide a common response to all oppression” (102). However, the diasporic histories of indentureship and slavery are *not* parallel, and Indo- and Afro-Caribbean identities are *not* discrete, the one a replica of the other.

It is not coincidental that what I have suggested is the central problematic of diaspora, the issue of critical difference, is raised by La

Guerre in his treatment of the Black Power movement and again in my own treatment of the emergence of Indo-Caribbean studies. For both of these occasions mark the historical formation of new diasporic identities. The argument for indentureship as a form of slavery exemplifies the problem of cultural relativization in the articulation of diasporic identities. In the diasporic spatialization of history, cultural identities are often posited as parallel, reflecting each other but never meeting. As such, the cultural politics of diaspora are often only too readily compatible with multiculturalist notions of cultural diversity, based as they are on the concept of *absolute difference*. However, the diasporic spatialization of history may be theoretically reconfigured to account for the regular intersection of cultural identities. Thus, the idea of cultural difference takes on critical significance as the current proliferation of the concept of diaspora itself becomes an important point of intersection among those engaged in this historical process. What I am arguing for, then, is the concept of critical difference in diaspora. That is, while diaspora is a currently popular style of identity formation, a critical sense of cultural difference may yet be articulated both *between* and *within* diasporic identities. As the diasporic production of identity through the commemoration of a foundational historical mo(ve)ment is presently becoming an increasingly common strategy for cultural mobilization, the success of this strategy in resisting those newly dominant notions of multiculturalism depends upon the negotiation of social, political and aesthetic differences among those communities constituted through diaspora.

The theorization of this issue of critical difference in diaspora is all the more urgent as it ultimately bears upon the historical appropriation of the concept of diaspora itself from Jewish cultural politics. For the very use of the term *diaspora* by Afro- and Indo-Caribbean and other diasporic communities necessitates this articulation of critical difference. If neither the powerful concept of diaspora is to be reserved exclusively for the Jewish community, nor various histories of displacement and disenfranchisement to be measured against each other or some ahistorical ideal, then the task of theorizing the current proliferation of diasporic identities requires not the simple collapsing of, but rather a

profound reckoning with the politically significant differences between diasporic identities. Through this articulation of critical difference in diaspora, those absurd competitions between diasporic communities over the claim to the most oppressive form of cultural persecution might be replaced by some mutual realization of the political relationships between the many historical structures of dominance as well as the many historical projects of resistance.

Working through these theoretical possibilities of diaspora, then, I suggest that the better strategy for claiming Indo-Caribbean identity may be pursued in the recognition of critical difference between indentureship and slavery. Indeed, this strategy is already the more successful one, if not within Indo-Caribbean studies, then in the popular historical Indo-Caribbean memory. For, while Africans in the Caribbean generally celebrate the abolition of slavery upon emancipation, Indians have long celebrated not the abolition of indentureship but rather their *arrival* in the Caribbean. On 5 May 1938 in British Guiana, the centenary of the arrival of Indians in the colony was celebrated. The British Guiana East Indian Association had requested that the day be declared an official holiday by the government; however, their attempt was unsuccessful. Nonetheless, a public ceremony, an organizational session, a number of dinners, an evening fair, a dance drama and the opening of a library were held in celebration of the centenary (Ruhomon 1988 [1947]: 248, 290-2). Similarly, on 30 May 1945 in Trinidad, the centenary of the arrival of Indians in that colony was celebrated among “[t]he greatest concourse of Indians ever to have assembled in Trinidad” (Kirpalani et al. 1995 [1945]: 119). Zoning regulations were lifted, while stores in the cities and major commercial centres were closed for the day and governmental departments closed for half of the day. A procession, public ceremony, a fair and a dance were held, with over 30,000 people in attendance during the evening (119). Presently, the celebration of Indian Arrival Day has been regularly observed as an annual event since 1978 when the first such celebration was organized by some Indo-Trinidadians from San Juan and Curepe (Singh 1987: 4).

This commemoration of diasporic history among Indians in the Caribbean certainly

contradicts the argument that indentureship and slavery are parallel, as postulated in much current Indo-Caribbean scholarship. However, this contradiction does not necessarily imply any theoretical opposition between Indo-Caribbean popular culture and academic production. Indeed, their creative interaction has characterized the historical emergence of Indo-Caribbean identity in the late eighties and nineties. For this contradiction exists both within the Indo-Caribbean popular historical memory and in the academic field of Indo-Caribbean studies. In this Indo-Caribbean popular historical memory, a complex type of diasporic Indian nationalism has emerged. In the international development of Indian nationalism, diasporic Indians have not simply adopted the ideology of the Indian nationalist elite. Rather, not only have diasporic Indians been instrumental in the ideological formation of nationalism within India, but furthermore Indian nationalism has been articulated in radically different ways throughout India and its diaspora. Among Indians in the Caribbean, the mythologizing of the nationalist struggle in the protest songs as presented by Vatuk (1964) and the romanticizing of Indian society in the life narratives as presented by Mahabir (1985) embody a type of Indian nationalism that certainly valorizes a territorial sense of India, much in keeping with that form of nationalism developed by the colonial Indian elite. However, diasporic Indians have simultaneously articulated Indian nationalism in ways more peculiar to the diaspora. Particularly, the territorialist insistence on compulsory residence within India has not been entrenched in the popular history of Indians in the Caribbean. The celebration of Indian arrival in the Caribbean attests to the ambivalence towards home in the formation of diasporic identity. Similarly, the academic field of Indo-Caribbean studies displays an ambivalence towards indentureship. Those texts by Samaroo, Mangru, Birbalsingh and Dabydeen and Samaroo in which the argument for indentureship as a form of slavery is adopted from Tinker have all been published on or around the celebration of the hundredth and fiftieth anniversaries of Indian arrival in Guyana and Trinidad. Indeed, the diasporic theme of Indian arrival in the Caribbean permeates both Indo-Caribbean popular culture and academic production, in diaspora and at home.

The hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of Indians in British Guiana, also marking the earliest arrival of Indians in the Caribbean colonies, was celebrated in 1988 and the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of Indians in Trinidad and Jamaica in 1995. Between these celebrations, significant changes within the Caribbean had taken place as Indians were elected heads of state in Guyana and in Trinidad and Tobago as leaders not of “ethnic” parties but of democratic parties with leftist sympathies to varying degrees. Indian Arrival Day was officially instituted as a national annual holiday in Trinidad and Tobago, as Emancipation Day had been some years before. Thus, in both popular and official arenas of Caribbean culture, the critical difference between Indian and African diasporic identities has already in some ways been articulated. Meanwhile, in the Indo-Caribbean diaspora of Toronto and other diasporic sites, Indian Arrival Day is also celebrated annually with an increasing popularity. Perhaps Indians finally *have* arrived in the Caribbean – yet only after a second migration from the Caribbean to the metropolitan cities of Europe and North America has profoundly transformed the diasporic identity occasioned by the first migration from India to the colonies of Africa, Southeast Asia and the Caribbean.

Acknowledgements

This paper is an edited version of work contained in my thesis, “Dialectics of Diaspora and Home: Indentureship, Migration and Indo-Caribbean Identity” (Lokaisingh-Meighoo 1997). Thanks to Patrick Taylor, Ramabai Espinet and Daniel Yon for their comments on this work.

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