

UNSILENCING HI(STORIES) OF INDO-CARIBBEAN WOMEN:
RE-WRITING AND RE-PRESENTING SELF AND COMMUNITY

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Abstract

This study unearths and explores stories of six Indo-Caribbean women (including myself) who live in Canada. We remembered, wrote, shared, and discussed in the context of a group writing practice. We met eleven times over a period of three months in 2012. In addition, I collected family stories from my mother, her sister—my aunt, and my father’s brother—my uncle, as I sought to fill in huge spaces of not knowing with understandings. While there is no doubt that I have learnt a great deal about the lives of people in the Caribbean, and while there is still much that I may never know, this project has shown me that when I ask, there is a chance to know.

Caribbean politics and culture have historically been a source of alienation for all of us, and yet we have a growing sense of belonging to the region. Our discussions spanned formal and traditional education, immigration, negotiations of race relations, gendered roles and stipulations of class and caste.

My analysis uncovered and formed new understandings about the lives of women in the study and Indo-Caribbean women more generally. I situate this study within a theoretical framework of colonial and postcolonial theory and history that integrates constructs of identity and memory; of Caribbean feminist discourse; and dominant traditional, cultural and political systems.

The stories, combined with interviews, are a gateway into histories that have been silenced. Silences, questions and gaps in this work are as important as the stories that were told. In this dissertation, I have discussed alienation and hardship as core aspects of experience for Indo-Caribbean women. In citing the scarcity of their published work, I ask, can mental abandonment of one’s environment be thought of as a form of silencing

that is characteristic of formerly subjugated people? I consider the possibility of silence when there is nothing to applaud, and the silences of women as a form of resistance. As a work of remembrance and creative narration, this dissertation contributes to the growing body of literature and theoretical discourse of Indo-Caribbean women.

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Chapter 1

The Beginnings of a Study

Maa sunaao mujhe woh kahaani, jisme raaja na ho, na ho raani.
 Jo hamaari tumhaari katha ho, jo sabhi key hriday ki vyatha ho.
 Gandh jisme bhari ho dharaa ki, baat jisme naho apsara ki.
 Ho na pariyaan jahaan aasmaani, pet kii bhookh ko jo bhula de.
 Jisme sach ki bhari chaandni ho, jisme umeed ki roshni ho, jisme nah o kahaani
 puraani.

O mother tell me that story, in which there is no king nor queen. It should be our story (yours and mine), it should be a heartfelt story. The story should be filled with the smell of the earth. It should not tell about fairies, neither should there be angels from the sky. It should be able to help one to forget the pangs of hunger. Truly, it should be filled with the moonlight (to brighten up one's mind), in which there should be hope for one's desire, and it should not have the old saying of "living happily ever after." (Pathak, 1995, track 3)

It is ironic to hear my mother sing the words of Pathak's song at family gatherings: during my childhood, the stories that she told were ones of fairies, magic, and heroes. There was always a happy ending, and there were often lessons to be learned. Some were on the merits of virtue; others spoke of fantastic opportunities for the good. My mother had inherited many of these stories from her mother, and from a traditional culture that is influenced by a primary narrative (see p. 120). Many years later, as a graduate student taking courses in writing and life history research, I would begin asking questions about my family and the historical experiences that had never received mention in my mother's stories. After leaving my home country of Trinidad and taking up residence in my new homeland of Canada, I became aware of the uncomfortable and urgent sense that much about me and my family had been silenced. Through my literary education, I gradually came to understand that my experience was not anomalous: more and more, I came to realize that there was an absence of stories of Indo-Trinidadian women's experiences.

As a child, I was an avid reader. My love of literature would lead me to complete a Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature. Until that time, I had not read any novels by an Indo-Trinidadian woman. I loved writing stories, yet I had difficulty writing about the reality of my childhood. I did not know how to represent an experience that I had not spent time understanding. In fact, I realise now that I had inherited more than the Indian-ness of a diasporic community—I had inherited the silence that accompanied it. My formal education had been focused on the lives of others; as a consequence, I had little chance to understand my community and myself.

The Research Study

For this research, I assembled a group of five participants. Together, we talked and remembered, and we wrote extensively for three months. We produced thirty-six stories from writing prompts that I had designed.

I came to the study with the following questions: What are some key experiences of Indo-Caribbean women that are silenced? How might these experiences be discovered, revealed and re-valued through the collaborative sharing and writing of life histories between study participants? How can histories and relationships that are expressed in the stories of participants become helpful in this search for identity? Through a carefully structured group process, how can writing offer new social/political possibilities that contribute to more visible representation of the Indo-Caribbean woman within the canon of Caribbean literature?

Study Objectives

I wanted to explore the historical reasons for the absence of writing from this demographic, and for the cultural acceptance of such a phenomenon. Equally, I wished to encourage the practice of writing by Indo-Caribbean women, to retrieve the stories of women who have been silenced, and to expand and enrich what is currently a very limited scholarly discourse surrounding this topic.

Background and Rationale

Although Caribbean literature has evolved and grown into a distinctive corpus over the past fifty years, the current body of work inadequately reflects Caribbean cultural diversity. As a student in Trinidad, I found that my literary studies required me to read far more British authors than Caribbean ones. As a teenager, I was so accustomed to reading foreign literature that I had no interest in reading work by Caribbean writers. Moreover, when I did read Caribbean narratives in high school, I noticed that they were written exclusively by male authors. Not until my undergraduate studies at the University of the West Indies was I introduced to a novel by a Trinidadian woman: Merle Hodge is the author of two novels, *Crick, Crack Monkey* (1970) and *For the Life of Laetitia* (1993). My interest was piqued. For a research project toward my Bachelor's degree in English, I chose to write about the work of Jamaica Kincaid, an Antiguan-born woman writer who had immigrated to the United States. Kincaid's work examines the experience of the Afro-Caribbean woman subject both in the Caribbean and in the United States. In the year 2000, while deciding on a topic for my Master's Thesis in English Literature, I discovered the work of the most prolific Indo-Trinidadian woman writer at that time: Lakshmi Persaud, who had three novels to her name. Set in the 1950s in pre-independent

Trinidad, Persaud's *Butterfly in the Wind* (1990) recounts the life of an Indo-Trinidadian girl and also depicts the experience of a diasporic group that is steeped in Hindu tradition. Her work incorporates Indian and Hindu cultural traditions that had long been absent in Afro-Caribbean literature.

Only a few years later, while undertaking a Master's degree in Education, I was delighted to discover a burgeoning body of literature written by Indo-Trinidadian women. Including works by Shani Mootoo, Ramabai Espinet and Joy Mahabir, this corpus became the basis for my research project, "Journeys from Place to Space: A Story of an Indo-Trinidadian Woman." In this project, I explored notions of identity as they are represented in the work of these authors and as they relate to my own experience. Through journal entries and memoir writing, I recorded some of my ongoing reflections on that work. I use some of those observations to support my analysis in this study.

Not surprisingly, given the nascent state of this work, there are huge gaps in the representation of Indo-Caribbean women's life experience; in fact, there is reason to believe that many of their experiences are at risk of being ignored and forgotten. Many women of previous generations did not possess the literacy skills to pursue such projects. On a personal level, I have found that there are gaps in the history of my own family, and my questions about my family's past often remain unanswered because my parents and other relatives simply do not know about certain events and periods. Such was also the case with the participants in this study. There are many silences in their family histories, and they could not answer many questions that I asked about their stories.

While oral stories of Indo-Caribbean women are not readily available, I found that I could excavate them through life history research. There is a greater chance for future

generations to understand the legacies embedded within stories if those stories are recorded in written forms. Through life history research, I explore stories and histories that contribute to “the opening up of important new areas of inquiry” (Thompson, 1978, p. 6). Through such processes, social and political transformations may become possible:

In all these fields of history, by introducing new evidence from the underside, by shifting the focus and opening new areas of inquiry, by challenging some of the assumptions and accepted judgements of historians, by bringing recognition to substantial groups of people who had been ignored, a cumulative process of transformation is set in motion. (Thompson, 1978, p. 7)

In the case of my project, the prevailing histories include literature, history texts, critical literary and theoretical discourse, and narratives.

Delimitations and Definitions

In this project, I situate the Indo-Caribbean woman subject within an ideological frame that has historically been Afro-Caribbean. The existing body of theoretical discourse is generally named regionally as “Caribbean.” In terms of identity, the Trinidadian subject is also Caribbean, and this study uses both descriptors, “Indo-Trinidadian” and “Indo-Caribbean.” The scope of my study includes other Indo-Caribbean women, such as Indo-Guyanese subjects, whose history is similar to that of Indo-Trinidadians. Hence, I use the term “Indo-Caribbean” to describe the regional politics and discourse, but I also use “Indo-Trinidadian” or “Indo-Guyanese” when referring to a particular country.

Historically, the Caribbean region has been called the West Indies. In Toronto, the term “West Indian” is used to describe the culture from that region. Some of the

participants use the descriptors “West Indian” and “Caribbean.” For the purpose of this study, I will also use “West Indian” and “Caribbean” interchangeably.

From West Indian to Caribbean

The term “West Indian” has been used historically to describe the region now known as the Caribbean. Donnell and Lawson Welsh (1996) cite “the surge of nationalisms” in certain countries, especially Jamaica and Trinidad, as being responsible for a more individualistic philosophy of country and of literature (p. 6). They adopt a distinction made by Kamau Brathwaite (1977, p.54), which identifies a historical shift in the region from a “West Indian island” paradigm towards a “Caribbean matrix.” The former suggests a parallel working towards independence, reflected in the political impetus of Jamaica and Trinidad in the 1960s, while the latter was probably initially featured in the federalist activities of that time (p. 5). In more recent time, the Caribbean has become increasingly exoticized as a result of its popularity as a tropical destination for global tourism. My research mainly concerns those countries where Indo-Caribbean people have tended to settle—namely, Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana.

Language. While I attempt to write primarily in Standard English, there are instances of Caribbean dialects in the stories written by the participants. It is important to explain that these occurrences are not “mistakes,” but examples of non-Standard language forms that carry important and meaningful cultural and communicative significance.

“First-generation immigrants.” Definitions of the term “first-generation immigrants” vary. A definition provided by Dan Moffett¹, an American journalist, notes the ambiguity of the term. It can relate to the first set of immigrants who arrive in a new country, or it

¹ Retrieved on June 5th 2014 from <http://immigration.about.com/od/glossary/f/How-Is-First-generation-Immigrant-Defined.htm>

can be the first generation to be born in the new country. For the purposes of this study, I use the term “first-generation immigrants” to describe the first group of people born in the Caribbean. Culturally, they were far more Indian than they were Caribbean.

Stories generated through the writing practice, as well as my own personal stories, serve as data for analysis. I make a distinction between my own analysis and narrative forms such as stories, journals, and other autobiographical writing.

The Significance of the Study

Opening up spaces for stories and writing. One of the most recent publications that theorizes Indo-Caribbean literature is the edited compilation *Critical Perspectives on Indo-Caribbean Women's Literature* (Pirbhai & Mahabir, 2013). It offers an overview of what has become the canon of Indo-Caribbean literature: namely, novels by the Indo-Trinidadian writers Lakshmi Persaud, Shani Mootoo, Niala Maharaj and Ramabai Espinet, and poetry by Guyanese-born Mahadai Das. However, my research moves from engaging in thematic and historical discussions of the region's published literature toward opening up a space for new stories and for examining conditions that have contributed to a historical silencing of the oral and written experiences of Indo-Caribbean women.

When I began searching for a group of women with whom to conduct a creative writing practice, I thought about undertaking the project in Trinidad with women who were living there. I began to think about women with whom I had taught High School English Language and Literature in Trinidad. When I eventually asked them and others about their interest in writing, I was surprised to learn that none of them was interested in writing creatively. These women were educators who had been university educated. I was

disappointed, but I began thinking about possible reasons for their lack of interest in writing.

Caribbean communities work as smaller social groups within larger countries and communities such as Toronto, Ontario. There is an anonymity that seems possible in larger metropolitan areas and opens up a space for the telling of stories. Indo-Caribbean people have an inherited, traditional culture that is Indian. When they migrate to another country, as in the case of the participants in this study, there is a double diasporic quality to their cultural tradition. That is, they inhabit cultural spaces that are characterized by both Indian and Caribbean traditions within a country that often boasts of its multiculturalism.

Moreover, this double diasporic quality of life in Toronto also works to distance participants from the less-than-attractive stories of struggle without triumph (in the former countries). I am interested in the distinctions between stories that receive many retellings in oral history and those that remain largely unvoiced. The funny stories that are kept alive as family stories may work to suppress harsher realities. Nonetheless, although themes such as poverty and a lack of education are not highlighted within many orally transmitted stories, they are often implicit within the narratives.

The stories crafted for this project were written during group meetings held between March and May 2012. Shalini and I were born in Trinidad but moved to Toronto, she at fifteen and I as an adult after completing a Master's degree in English at the University of the West Indies. Kristy and Carla were both born in Canada but spent much of their childhoods in Guyana and Trinidad respectively. They eventually moved back to Toronto, Kristy at fourteen and Carla at eighteen. Arti and Amera were born in Canada

and have never lived in the Caribbean. Each of the participants identifies as Indo-Caribbean. We all struggle with defining our identity: we are influenced by traditional Indian culture, but we also feel a sense of belonging to the Caribbean, specifically the countries in which our parents or we ourselves were born. Identifying as Canadian is also problematic for us. As Canadian citizens, we live and work here, but our nostalgia for home endures. This study reveals a longing for home reminiscent of the longings of the first and second generations of Indo-Caribbean immigrants. Indo-Caribbean culture is distinct from East Indian culture, and is reflected primarily in language differences. More important, later generations often exhibit a cultural blend of Indian and other Caribbean influences.

My research project generates a new body of literature in the form of stories by a group of women living in the Greater Toronto Area in Canada. It entails a focus on community and dialogue within the Indo-Caribbean community. The analyses of the stories, the participants, and the practice contain new insights into the lives of Indo-Caribbean women.

The act of writing by this group of women unleashed stories that have long been buried. These stories generated questions that are relevant to the women themselves and to the community/communities of women “characters” who appear in their writing. Although I was not surprised at the profusion of questions (as many of them were characteristic of the gaps and silences), I was taken aback by an initial reticence. Neither the participants nor the women “characters” in the stories were actively searching for explanations or answers. The narratives were not linear. The history represented in the

stories is a fragmented one that expanded my research questions about the workings of political and social conditions that cause and sustain silences within communities.

This study engages in a systematic practice of story-production and analysis. The collective writing practice was designed to include a memory work methodology, which seeks to understand the ways in which women write themselves in relation to larger social structures. Drawing on Haug et al. (1987), I adapted the process to include earliest memories of participants as outlined by Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, and Benton (1992). My analysis considers the content of the stories, and the interviews with participants, conducted over the phone and e-mail. I also include information from my own family history and stories. Many of my family stories came out during the course of this study and were pertinent to the emerging themes of the participants' stories. Where relevant, I also insert my own thinking and reflection in the form of journals. This writing has helped me link the analysis of broader themes with my own thoughts and experience

Overview of Chapters

Chapter Two sets forth a theoretical structure and presents a historical overview of the Caribbean region in order to contextualize the experience of Indo-Caribbean women. It includes an explanation of the traditional influences that have affected their experience, including the Brahminic patriarchal tradition and the Naparima tradition. The power structures underlying both traditions have both empowered and disempowered women. I position the Indo-Caribbean woman subject within Caribbean women's literary and theoretical discourse as a means to understand some differences and similarities between her experience and how she is represented in dominant discourse. I use a framework that

takes into account multiple concepts of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and caste as they contribute to an understanding of Indo-Caribbean women.

Chapter Three explains underlying theoretical structures of experience: life history research, memory and identity, race and colour. I review some life histories that have been published and situate the subject within an experience of post-colonialism. I review the power of literature and story writing as art and its possibilities for transformative education.

Chapter Four presents the research methodology. Life history research and memory work, both central to this study, provide spaces for representation and give voice to previously subjugated Indo-Caribbean women amidst male Caribbean and Afro-Caribbean feminist thought. Using “alternative ways of knowing,” I draw upon story writing as a means for women to write for themselves, about themselves, and about the relationships they have had with others (Jacobs, 2008). I describe the participants of the writing-practice, the writing prompts, the plans and outcomes of the practice, and the methodological framework within which they are situated.

Chapter Five probes the stories that were generated and the general themes that they offer. In this chapter, I discuss themes of class-consciousness, schooling, and education, and their significance for Indo-Caribbean women. Lessons within the stories pertain to issues such as socially acceptable behaviours and the culture of food. I also include a discussion of a primary Hindu narrative and its implications, illustrating parallels among the stories of participants. In this chapter, I analyze stories and suggest reasons why some types of stories are told at the expense of others.

Chapter Six addresses silences and gaps in participants' stories. Sometimes glaring omissions point to corresponding silences within the histories of Indo-Caribbean women. In this chapter, I look at the types of stories that are privileged and those that are barely mentioned. The practice of "not-talking back" is learned as part of Indo-Caribbean women's culture. Silencing takes place within relationships that privilege one person over the other—in the case of Indo-Caribbean women, such relationships are usually with men. I also look at versions of my own family's history, stories that illustrate male privilege by virtue of their content and by virtue of the fact that they are told by men.

Chapter Seven analyses the themes of identity and experience as they relate to the participants and their narratives about cultural artifacts, including music and family photographs. Cultural artifacts are used to activate memory and generate stories as a basis for probing themes of family structure and social and cultural practices. I explore music, history, family, tradition, and photographs. In this chapter, I highlight the practices of Chutney and Soca music, two indigenous forms of Caribbean music that are negotiated in culturally significant ways.

Chapter Eight analyses stories in relation to the larger themes of belonging and not belonging. Ideas of "home" include the smaller domestic physical spaces and the larger "homes" of family origin and inherited traditions. The chapter explores the voices of all six participants including myself as representative of the political, social, historical, and cultural realities of the Indo-Caribbean woman subject, especially in relation to identity, notions of home, diaspora, and the complicated experience of immigration.

Chapter Nine reflects on the completed research project and returns to some of the major relationships among the women as a community and as writers. I conclude with a

discussion of the implications of silencing within literary, social, and theoretical discourse. This chapter reflects on the transformational capacity of writing as a means for increasing visibility and representation and for healing from violence and hurt. It highlights the power of stories, spoken and written texts, and questions—answered or not—to generate a continuing dialogue surrounding the experience of Indo-Caribbean women.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Structures:

A Historical Context

Historically, there has been a dearth of stories by Indo-Caribbean women within the published literature of the Caribbean region. Experiences of Indo and Afro-Caribbean men and those of Afro-Caribbean women have dominated literary works. Caribbean identity has become synonymous with Afro-Caribbean identity. The dominant literature and accompanying discourse privilege Afro-Caribbeanism as the primary national identity within a greater dynamic of postcolonialism—one whereby the dominance of previously colonial cultural systems still prevails. Afro-Caribbean dominance remains central in discourses of national identity; conversely, there are negligible resources representing minority positions.

The Indo-Caribbean woman is an integral component of the cosmopolitan reality of the region. However, she has been late to appear in published literature. There is also scant literary material on her historic experience. In gaining greater representation within the discourse of the region, the silences and gaps in the literature deserve closer examination. As Haug et al. (1999) insist, when a story gets silenced or forgotten, the “fact that it was not said is important” (p. 65). The excluded experience of the Indo-Caribbean woman is glaring in the history of the region.

In constructing a theoretical framework, I pay specific attention to the historical context in which Caribbean feminist theory and the peculiarities of diaspora studies elucidate some aspects of experience. As well, I consider traditional and institutional practices as systems that characterize the experience of Indo-Caribbean people. I include

life history research and memory work as a context for the writing practice. Finally, I explore specific theories of writing that inform this study.

Historical Considerations of the Indian Presence in the West Indies

The historical background of the region has produced a cosmopolitan culture that is at once instilled with diversity and also, at times, characterized by tensions within ethnic, social and political relationships (Birbalsingh, 1993, pp. viii-xx; Birbalsingh, 1997, pp. ix-xxi; Dabydeen & Samaroo, 1996, pp. 1-11; Oostindie, 1996, pp. 6-14). I consider stories written by women whose experiences are framed primarily by the history of Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana. The histories of these two countries are similar in terms of their former European domination and influence. Racial tensions between the two major groups, Indo and African people, continue to affect relationships of both. At times, I explore more detailed historical accounts of Trinidad and Tobago, specifically for the purposes of examining the social and educational relationships that inform my analysis. I primarily examine the presence of Indians² in Trinidad rather than Trinidad and Tobago, as Indians lived only in Trinidad during their initial settlement in the country. In more recent times, Indians reside in both Trinidad and Tobago although Trinidad is still home to the majority.

A historical overview of the region. The West Indies, as the Caribbean was previously known, does not have a singular history. The singular term of reference inaccurately implies homogeneity. Consisting of a group of islands and mainland countries that were previously colonized by the European nations from the early 15th century onwards, including Spain, Netherlands, France and Britain, the West Indies became a much-contested region for economic reasons. Although Christopher Columbus

² Within the Caribbean, the term “Indian” has been used to describe people whose origins lie in South Asia.

did not discover the West Indies, the Spanish conquerors extended their empire in the West by occupying the land in the name of Christianity. As with many conquests, their occupation began with attempts to convert the natives. It also entailed exporting gold and other resources from the colonies in order to secure Spain's wealth and status among other major European nations at the time. From the 15th century, major European countries including Spain, France, Britain, Portugal and the Netherlands engaged in political battles over West Indian territories. To stake total claim to the colony, the Europeans decimated the Amerindians native to that region, namely the Arawaks, Caribs and Ciconeys. The various peoples who have inhabited the land since the genocide of its native population have influenced the region's cultural inheritance.

The peopling of the West Indies with specific reference to Trinidad and Guyana.

By the 17th century, the sugar-cane industry had become a significant factor in the act of brutal enslavement known as the slave trade. At this time, the British had dominated certain West Indian countries, including Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana (also known as British Guiana). Labour was needed for the sugar-cane plantations, which in turn produced sugar that was shipped to Europe. R.N. Murray (1971) notes that the profits from sugar and slavery were crucial to financing the Industrial Revolution in Britain and France (p. 64). One of the results of this moment in history was the peopling of the West Indies with Africans.

After English abolitionists fought relentlessly to establish anti-slavery legislation, the Emancipation Bill was passed on 29th August 1833. Although the transition to freedom was not simple, and although many plantation owners resented losing their free labour-force, eventually the former slaves moved away from the plantations. Plantation owners

and overseers were known as the “planter class,” or “planters.” In West Indian society, this class of predominantly White people remained distinct from former slaves and indentured workers. Lacking a ready supply of labour for the plantations, the British needed to secure a new labour force. There were attempts to entice indentured labourers from the Portuguese island of Fayal, the port of Le Havre in France, Madeira and China. While such attempts failed to yield a steady flow of indentured labourers from these areas, individuals from those regions have contributed to the racial and cultural diversity of the Caribbean (Anthony, 1975).

The East Indians: Arrival, marginalization and political representation. Frank Birbalsingh (2000) notes that, from 1838 to 1945, approximately three quarters of the four hundred thousand Indians who “came under contract or indenture” to the West Indies, settled in Trinidad and Guiana.³ They were enticed to move to the West Indies to provide labour for the sugar plantations that had been abandoned by former slaves and indentured workers (p. viii). He explains that, in Trinidad and Guyana, “their large numbers allowed them to grow and outnumber or equal the freed Africans” (p. ix).

Birbalsingh (2000) describes the political marginalization that Indians in both Guyana and Trinidad experienced. He claims that it “coincided with independence in Trinidad and Tobago (1962) and in Guyana (1966)” while “independence was perceived as the political expression of creole cultural hegemony, historically claimed by Afro-Caribbeans for the English-speaking Caribbean as a whole” (p. ix). In the Caribbean, to be “creolized” means being more Afro and also being less Indo. Birbalsingh summarizes the political inequality between ethnic groups by illustrating the politically dominant

³ Historically, Guyana has been written as Guiana. I use the latter when the context has originated in a text with the same spelling and the former as a more contemporary form of the country’s name.

governments as representative of Afro-Guyanese and Afro-Trinidadian. This remained the case until Cheddi Jagan became the political leader of Guyana in 1992 and Basdeo Panday became Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago in 1995. Both Indo, they changed the pattern of a previously Afro dominated government. In terms of political representation, Indo-Caribbean people were gaining power.

Colonial Considerations

Treatment of the Indians by “Protectors,” “Governors” and “Authors.” Although my research is set in the present time, the lack of subjective tellings of history has had an effect on my work. As the title of my project suggests, an objective of the study includes a re-casting of personal stories sometimes in response to official records of history. I stress the importance of subjective writing and re-presenting to intervene in former works that offer dehumanized and racist accounts of both formerly enslaved Africans and Indian immigrants. Until both countries Trinidad and Guyana gained independence in 1962 and 1966 respectively, they were under British rule. Until then, their treatment of Indians was apparent in the political literature of the time. British colonialism contributed to the social injustice that Indians endured far beyond the occurrence of national independence.

Lord Macauley, a British official who was appointed Secretary at War (1839-1841) and Paymaster-General (1846-1848), was highly esteemed as a writer of essays and history. His work for the English Parliament included advocating for the use of English as a superior language while diminishing the use and worth of Indian languages. In his seminal work, *The History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago* (1964), Eric Williams, who later became Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, notes Macaulay’s disparaging

report on Indian history, culture and tradition. Williams quotes an excerpt of Macaulay's "Minute on Indian Education":

I have never found one among them (Indians whom Macaulay called Orientalists), who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.... It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanscrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England. (Williams, 1964, p. 10)

Another figure in British colonial history, who was hailed as beneficent in his role as Governor of Trinidad from 1846 to 1854 was disdainful of non-white settlers in the West Indies. Michael Anthony (1970) credits Harris as "the man considered to be mainly responsible for the settlement of the Indian community in Trinidad" (p. 151). Anthony describes Harris's work to improve transportation, to initiate a postal service, and to restructure local government aimed to increase economic prosperity. Anthony notes that Harris "was often accused of being more sympathetic to the planters than to the labourers; this was because of his enthusiasm in promoting (the country as) an economic revival for the colony" (p. 153). His views on the non-white settlers however were derogatory. Williams (1964) references the writings of Harris when he refers to the Indians as "fatalist worshippers of Mahomet and Brahma" (p. 111). He makes disparaging judgements about both Indian and African settlers in the West Indies. The following is a statement made by Harris during his term as "protector":

After having given my best consideration to the subject, it appears to me that, in the first place, the immigrants must pass through an initiatory process: they are not, neither Africans nor Coolies, fit to be placed in a position which the labourers of civilised countries may at once occupy. They must be treated like children—and wayward ones, too—the former, from the utterly savage state in which they arrive, the latter, from their habits and religion. (Williams, 1964, p. 111)

The initial Indian immigrants to the West Indies were ridiculed and their traditions condemned. The social injustice they endured continued as part of the dominant culture even after the countries had gained independence and an Afro-centric or Creolised culture gradually overtook that of the colonizer.

Colonial education. In the former British colonies, literacy and the use of “good English” became a marker of education. Westernization and Christianization were the main, underlying currents of colonial education. Colonial education proved to be a means of continued domination over former colonial subjects. However, the Indians⁴ were further subjugated because of language and culture. Brereton (1981) describes the position of the Indians within a society where their culture was devalued. She explains that “The normative cultural system was western, and literacy in English, command of ‘good English’ were essential to gain respect” (p. 112). She discusses illiteracy among Indians and links it to “their late entry into high-prestige occupations” (p. 113). Brereton notes that “very few Indians were literate in English before 1917; in 1911, ninety-seven percent of the Indian-born population was illiterate” (p. 112).

⁴ I use the term “Indian” to refer to people who originated from India. Historically, the descriptor “Indian” has been used to describe people belonging to the country India as well as to the diaspora that has developed.

As early as 1868, the Canadian Mission schools provided primary education for Indian children however, part of their objective was also to Christianize and westernize them. Brereton (1981) comments, “Many parents kept their children away for fear of conversion; others took advantage of the education while rejecting Christianity. Indians were far behind in the education stakes by the end of the indenture system” (pp. 112-113). Indians were marginalized because of their culture and educational opportunity sometimes was at the expense of their culture.

The aim of the British was “to create imperial subjects under the guise of education” (Willinsky, 1998, p. 98). Willinsky notes that this education can be “worrisome if it goes unspoken and unexamined” (p. 214). The remnants of colonial education remain present in my life through my education, and specifically through the influence of literature and history.

From under-privilege to privilege. In educating and Christianizing Indian children, the Canadian Missionaries facilitated social mobility for them. Carl C. Campbell (1997) notes:

No fact is as well known in the history of education in Trinidad as the sterling contribution of the Canadian Presbyterian Church to the education of the Indians. They came, they saw and, working partly through the culture of the Indians, they took on, nearly singlehandedly, the education of a race of underprivileged workers neglected on the estates and in the villages. (p. 10)

The Canadian Missionaries began work in Trinidad in 1868 and by 1911 there were 61 Canadian mission schools in Trinidad. In addition to the initial primary schools, there was the establishment of secondary schools that allowed for further education of the

Indians. Naparima⁵ College was founded using that name in 1900 and Naparima Girls' High School in 1912 (Gosine, 2005, p. 538). As illustrated in the subsequent section on "The Naparima tradition", The Naparima schools have been recognized as effective in Western education for many individuals who have become part of a more privileged group within the society.

Traditions Within the Indo-Caribbean Experience

The Naparima tradition. Kamla Persaud-Bissessar is the first Indo-Trinidadian woman to become a Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. In an address to the Canadian Alumni Association of Canada in 2002, Persad-Bissessar applauded the work of the Canadian Mission in the emancipation of women through education. Persad-Bissessar is herself, a product of that tradition. Of the published Indo-Trinidadian women writers, Shani Mootoo, Ramabai Espinet, Joy Mahabir and Lakshmi Persaud belong to the "Naparima Tradition" that Kamla Persad-Bissessar cites in her speech. Persad-Bissessar (2010) notes in her address:

The Canadian missionaries and the Naparima institutions performed a decisive role in the emancipation of our men and women from the plantations into positions of leadership at all levels of our community...And so began our journey to full emancipation. They built a spirit of self-esteem among a formerly enslaved womanhood, thereby fostering a cadre of women leaders.... The line of successful women educated in the Naparima tradition does not end there.... And now we have finally claimed our political space.... Apart from the liberation of our women folk, the missionaries instilled in all of us an insatiable desire for knowledge....

⁵ The word "Naparima" is thought to have been derived from the Amerindian word "anaparima." The southern parts of Trinidad were called the Naparimas. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naparima>

Education allowed our grandparents and parents into the centres of power and authority. (pp. 17-19)

Education has been one of the factors that could afford the Indo-Caribbean woman an opportunity for social mobility and independence.

I have had to reconcile my own individual privilege with the lack of historical social equity of groups of Indo-Caribbean people. In my study, during one of the writing practice sessions, a participant Amera, brought up the point that, “We have been a group of privileged individuals.” Immediately, I denied that this applied to me. I explained that as a child, my family had been financially constrained. Another participant, Shalini opened her eyes wide and stared at me, “What are you talking about? You went to Naparima!” It was at that moment that I realized how my educational opportunities had indeed been privileged.

The system of education in Trinidad requires that all elementary students, at age eleven, write a common exam. On the basis of merit, the students with the highest marks are awarded scholarships for five years at prestigious high schools including Naparima College and Naparima Girls’ High School. I have been a beneficiary of this system, which I believe has given me the confidence to pursue higher education.

Although some people benefitted from colonial school systems, many more people were marginalized because they could not win scholarships to prestigious schools. The result of such a system was another example of social injustice to the majority of people. There was no equal opportunity for schooling. People who received education from more favourable schools perpetuated a hierarchy that was intrinsic to colonialism.

The Brahminic patriarchal tradition. The Brahminic, patriarchal tradition is the inherited, Hindu, patriarchal system that survives within Indo-Caribbean life. The caste system, a feature of the inherited patriarchal system is present in varying degrees within the society (Mohammed, 1993). Within my study, I employ Wendy Doniger's (2009) term of "The Brahminic patriarchal tradition" to describe both the formal and the informal traditions that influence the workings of the caste system. In the West Indies, Indian culture has historically been viewed with contempt, initially by the plantation owners and later by the Christian missionaries. On their arrival to the West Indies, Indian immigrants did not have the opportunity for learning or scholarly experience in terms of their inherited tradition. Instead, their past is marked by "the remnants of a folk tradition." The Ramayana and Mahabharata form the basis of scriptural guidance for Hindus. There are still "residual caste relations where people fall back upon explanations based on the expectations of 'high' and 'low' conduct" (Haraksingh, 2005, pp. 238-239). The traditional stories that inform Indo-Caribbean people provide a primary narrative that offers a model for behaviour and a belief system (see p. 120). Wendy Doniger (2009) explains the Brahminic patriarchal tradition as that of scriptural texts "from the standpoint of most high-caste Hindu males" (p. 1). There is a sense of inferiority through which there is a "sense of otherness" toward "people of other religions or cultures, or castes, or species (animals), or gender (women)" (p. 1). The inherited value system and scriptural authority have been integral components of the lives of Indo-Caribbean people.

Patricia Mohammed (1995) cites the workings of three patriarchal systems that existed simultaneously and affected the Indo-Trinidadian community in the post-indentureship period. She lists them as:

The dominant white patriarchy which controlled state power, as it existed; the “creole” patriarchy of the Africans and the mixed group, functioning in and emerging from the dominant white group; and the Indian patriarchy found among the Indian population. (p. 35)

Mohammed proposes that among the three systems that coexisted, the Indian man found himself at the bottom of that patriarchal hierarchy. Given the complex of a tri-patriarchal situation, if women were subordinate to men within these dominant social structures, what was the position of the Indo-Caribbean woman? In Mohammed’s model, she would be relegated to the lowest rung in society. Such a perspective within dominant historical accounts suggests reasons for her silence and under-representation in prevailing literary and theoretical discourse. Historically, there have been social structures that contribute to her under-representation. It is important to situate her experience among other women in the Caribbean.

Caribbean Feminist Thought: Positioning the Indo-Caribbean Woman Subject

Similarities and differences of Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean women.

Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean women have had parallel experiences including a past of colonialism and a postcolonial present. The possibilities of education for the women subjects have been stymied by patriarchal systems within Caribbean societies. The differences between the Afro and Indo-Caribbean women incorporate the varying traditional, cultural inheritances of Africa and India. The violence of slavery involved a rupture of African cultural practices for Afro-Caribbean people; however, the terms of East Indian indentureship allowed for continued cultural practices including music,

religion and language of Indo-Caribbeans. Ramabai Espinet (1993) summarizes the position of the Indo-Caribbean woman subject:

There is no question that Indians in the Caribbean, for all their presence in the national population statistics, are a marginalized racial group. This is especially evident in the countries where they are present in largest numbers—Trinidad, Guyana and Suriname. But, this being the case, Indian women, who are marginalized and relegated to the women's quarters within an already recessive grouping, have to fight doubly hard to even begin to find the ground for emergence. And they must wage this battle in isolation from support of the males in their domestic sphere, as well as in that isolation from each other that patriarchal societies have always been careful to construct. (p. 43)

Espinete speaks of compounded marginalization of the Indo-Caribbean, woman subject within the society. This may account for her absence within the early literature of the region. Relationships that are characterized by the compounded marginalization described by Espinete show up in the stories and analysis of this study.

Literature by men and an absence of literature by Indo-Caribbean women. There is no doubt that the body of existing literature by women from the Caribbean is small but growing. In 2002, while doing research for a Masters Degree in English, I discovered Lakshmi Persaud who was the most published Indo-Trinidadian woman. Work by men has been more popularized, so much so that in the past, critics have tried to engender feminist readings of work by men. David Williams (2002) rationalises his analysis of work by men for a feminist reading in his essay, "Rereading Our Classics: *In the Castle of My Skin* and *Lonely Londoners*":

Feminist criticism in the Caribbean, for practical as well as ideological reasons, has to address itself to the works of the male writers who have thus far dominated the literature. The canon of Anglophone West Indian literature is too firmly established, and the output of women writers too small, for the activities of rereading and reassessment to remain on the periphery of feminist concern.

(Williams, p. 291)

This preamble is his rationale for analyzing the work of two Caribbean, male writers—George Lamming and Samuel Selvon, in lieu of work by women. While there is a viable study of the role of women as represented by men, the lack of writing by women begs to be explored and better understood. In April of 2011, while travelling to Trinidad, I discovered “The Bocas Literary Festival: The Trinidad and Tobago Literary Festival” advertised in *The Caribbean Beat* (p. 23), the travel magazine of Caribbean Airlines. My excitement was soon subdued when I learned that only three writers from the list of ten were Caribbean. Andre Alexis, Rabindranath Maharaj and V.S. Naipaul are men. There were no Caribbean women included in this list.

I have not encountered stories by Caribbean women that represent my experience or the experience of my family. I believe that the personal histories of Indo-Caribbean women are important and are at risk of being forgotten if there is not a definite attempt to recover, research and record stories that are representative of first generation immigrant women and the generations that follow.

Ethnicity and Gender

Ethnicity and gender are crucial components of identification within a wider feminist discourse. Initial studies on gender within the Caribbean context exclude the Indo-

Caribbean woman subject. Patricia Mohammed (2002) has explored the lives of women in her theory and writing within a sociological-gendered perspective. In her essay in *Gendered Realities: Essays in Caribbean Feminist Thought*, she explores the work of selected male and female authors in relation to class, ethnicity and race. The Indo-Caribbean woman is not included either as a writer/author or as a subject. Her absence has been apparent in both the early literary and theoretical discourse of the region.

Ethnicity and Class

The question of ethnicity is crucial to a discussion of any Caribbean life-story or history. Yelvington (1993) explains that, “In Trinidad, ethnicity permeates all of the society’s social, cultural, political and economic institutions and practices because ethnicity is implicated in the power struggles of everyday life” (p. 1). In the previous section, I have considered the issue of educational opportunity for ethnic groups in Trinidad. The East Indians suffered as a result of the government’s policies and discriminatory practices. Yelvington (1993) traces the effects of an Afro-centric government under the regime of Eric Williams who led the People’s National Movement after 1962, when the country became independent, until 1992. He explains:

Williams, and the PNM took up the banner of “creolisation,” but this ideology constructed “Caribbean” and “national” as Afro-Caribbean-derived “culture” and labelled practices (such as East Indian culture), which deviated from such a process as “racist” and “unpatriotic.” This was evident in Williams’ allusion in 1958 to the “East Indians” as a “recalcitrant and hostile minority.” (p. 13)

An understanding of the social and political history elucidates racial and ethnic tensions that are an intrinsic to the stories and analysis within this study.

Gendered Class and Caste

The caste system⁶ has survived within the experience of Indo-Caribbean people although it can be devalued if financial status overpowers it. Economic success enables social mobility but in the absence of wealth, caste demarcates superiority.

In the edited collection, *Trinidad Ethnicity* (Yelvington, 1993), Patricia Mohammed, examines the oral stories of two Indo-Caribbean women in “Structures of experience: gender, ethnicity and class in the lives of two East Indian women.” Mohammed includes two interviews with Mrs. Droapatie Naipaul and Mrs. Dassie Parsan to deliver a commentary on their lives in relation to class, gender and Indian experience.

Droapatie Naipaul is the mother of famous writers V.S. Naipaul and Shiva Naipaul. In her interview she acknowledges acceptance of her role as a woman, and her expected behaviours. In describing her role as an Indian woman, Naipaul emphasizes an importance of accepting her duty as a wife and mother. Her family’s wealth added to her educational opportunity—her father who was progressive in his thinking, encouraged her elementary schooling. In contrast to her is Dassie Parsan, a working class Indo-Trinidadian woman and the second participant in Mohammed’s project. She had an experience that was different because of her family’s poverty. When asked about how many years of schooling she received, she replies:

Well I wouldn’t say years, eh, because sometimes when you go to school you have to go to school like four times for the month, five times for the month, and then you stay home, you help out, and then next month you go four or five days for the

⁶ In Hinduism, there is a caste system that has historically defined the social structure of society. At the top are the *Brahmins*—the priests and teachers, then there are the *Kshatriyas* of soldiers/military group, then there are the *Vaishnavas* or agriculturalists, and the lowest of the groupings is the *Shudras* or service workers.

month again and it's like that. We grow up in the hard way; we grow up knowing that my father was a sickly man. (p. 221)

Mohammed uses the women's stories to contrast their experiences as they are affected by traditions, class and caste, ethnicity and gender. She poses important questions that are highlighted through interviews with the women:

How does the fact of being born female to a poor working class East Indian family influence a woman's life? How does this affect the decisions she makes about marriage and family? What factors influence the jobs she takes? What is her relation to other ethnic groups in the society at different points in her life? (p. 210)

Mohammed notes that the women accepted an assigned gender role—the men in their families determined their experience of education and marriage. When Mrs. Naipaul's father dies, her brothers take his place as the figure of authority. These women negotiate the relationship between class and caste differently. Mrs. Naipaul retains a sense of privilege because of both a high class and caste. Mrs. Parsan has to compromise and marry someone from a lower caste because her family is not as successful financially. Mohammed suggests, "High caste, like high class, predisposes certain patterns of behaviour and possibly preservation of an elite culture" (p. 231). The higher classed Mrs. Naipaul does not interact with many non-Indians, but Mrs. Parsan does so to a greater extent. Of importance to her study and also to mine, Mohammed recognizes that "In the triad of gender, ethnicity and class, class is the variable which would most likely influence changes in either gender or ethnicity" (p. 232).

The two women in Mohammed's study "have both forged a happiness out of a given set of social circumstances. They maintain that they have no regrets or unfulfilled

ambitions for themselves but have found satisfaction in their ethnic group” (p. 233).

While this account of Indian women in Trinidad is important in that the women speak about their lives, there are times when they choose to be silent. When asked why she felt she had to get married within a year after finishing school, Mrs. Naipaul responds: “Don’t ask that question again” (p. 212).

I am reminded of other examples of conscious silencing that occur within the analysis of stories for my research. One such example is that of my aunt warning her daughter to be silent about a story that exposed my uncle’s eating of pork (see pp. 248-250). Since eating pork was not sanctioned by my family’s religious tradition, she attempted to protect her brother, my uncle, by stifling the story.

Using silence for a different purpose, Mrs. Naipaul suggests that it is a means of dealing with anger, suffering or hurt emphasizing that it is the behaviour that she has been taught:

Well, they always tell you you have to be obedient and do your duty, and not too much as the people say “backchat.” If you feel sometimes something offend you, you go in your room or something and you sit down and cry and give vent to your feelings and then you come out. (p. 216)

The “they” in her account represents the traditional authoritative figures in her life, which may include parents and teachers. There is also the inherent tradition that characterizes the ideals of some Indo-Caribbean people and may influence the behaviour of women as they feel subjected to various authoritative social structures. I discussed this in a previous section as the Brahminic, patriarchal tradition (see p. 24).

Mrs. Naipaul refuses to answer certain questions. Her silence about certain topics reveals a personal awareness of what should or should not be discussed. Being well known within the community presents possible risk of societal judgement. I believe that anonymity in story writing and life history research methods offers a greater chance of uncovering relationships that do not necessarily have to be edited or sanctioned because of the possible criticism from people in the community.

I have provoked discussions similar to Mohammed's within my own research, but I have also incorporated characteristics of life that define the larger group of Indo-Caribbean women. Some of the questions are: What are the traditions that are inherent to our culture? How do these traditions influence our place within the family and within the society? How has education for later generations of women affected relationships with the inherited traditions? How does privilege of class support greater representation of the Indo-Caribbean woman?

In my thesis for a Masters in English Degree entitled, "The World of Lakshmi Persaud: Empowerment of the Indo-Trinidadian Female" (2002), I examined the work of the first Indo-Trinidadian woman to have published as many as three novels at the time of my research in 2002. Kamla, the protagonist of Persaud's autobiographical novel *Butterfly in the Wind* (1990) belongs to a family who successfully run a grocery store. Kamla's mother speaks to her grandchildren about her arranged marriage:

It was your great grandfather [her father-in-law] who chose me, I don't know why. My eldest sister was already married, to a jeweller, a good one. Three of us were left. I was the youngest. They were all very pretty. I have very small eyes—I can't help it; and my nose bridge is not high, what to do? So when your great

grandfather came down to see us and chose me for his eldest son, my parents were a little surprised. To tell you the truth, I was too. My sisters didn't say anything because though this was a good Brahmin family, compared to us, they were poor.

(Persaud, 1990, p. 115)

Kamla's mother is doubly privileged—she is Brahmin and her family is not poor.

Lakshmi Persaud, the author comes from a well-known business family in Trinidad.

Because of her family's wealth, she was able to study in Ireland where she obtained a doctoral degree in Geography. In a personal interview with her, she explained to me how she was able to choose her husband and also had the approval of her family.

(Jerrybandan, 2002)

Yelvington (1993) notes that scholars from Trinidad have historically come from “the upper classes, educated abroad, and imbued with North Atlantic culture” (p. 17). He uses this argument to substantiate the choice of contributors to *“Trinidad Ethnicity”* as “they are drawn from Caribbean people living and working in Trinidad, Britain, Canada and the United States” (p. 17). As with my study of Lakshmi Persaud and her work, I have found a similar co-relation with the women writers whose work I have incorporated into my research. I do not think that scholars and writers initially come from financially and socially privileged classes of people. As the history of the country reminds us, the majority of the citizens of the newly independent Trinidad had recently been enslaved workers and indentured labourers. However, in varying degrees, class and education can work toward opportunity for independence and self-representation of the Indo-Caribbean female subject. Writers and scholars may become more visible through their work and there is a chance that there is social mobility as an accompaniment to their success.

Visibility of Indo-Caribbeans: Historical Developments in Representation

Memorializing Indian Arrival Day. One goal of my research is to increase representation of the Indo-Caribbean woman within literary and theoretical discourse. As a community, there has been increased visibility in public representation specifically in terms of national celebrations. Examples of holidays that are related to Indian presence in the Caribbean include Divali, Eid and Indian Arrival Day. One of the most visible forms of recognizing the Indian presence in the Caribbean is the development of cultural representation through Indian Arrival Day celebrations.

The memorialization of Indian Arrival Day⁷ through music, drama and literature has become increasingly popular especially since the 150th Anniversary of the Indian presence in the Caribbean. East Indian descendants in Trinidad attempt to collectively remember the journeys between 1845 and 1917 that led their ancestors to the New World, thus creating a new homeland.

Mahin Gosine (2005) recaps the political activity within Trinidad that led to the observance of Indian Arrival Day as public holiday. He credits work by the Hindu Javan Sangh.⁸ After the effects of The Black Power Movement (a time of political upheaval that included advocacy for trade unions), the group's name was changed to the Hindu Seva Sangh.⁹ Initially, the group's interests focused on Trinidadian Hindu youths but later became involved in other aspects of culture, specifically in observance of Indian Arrival Day. It was not until the first Indo-Trinidadian Prime Minister took office in 1995, that

⁷ The first set of East Indian immigrants arrived in British Guiana in 1838, and in Trinidad in 1845. In Trinidad, Indian Arrival Day is commemorated according to the 1845 arrival date however, observances that commemorate East Indian arrival in the West Indies observe an 1838 arrival date.

⁸ Hindu Javan Sangh means Hindu Youth Association. The objectives of the group included promoting Hindu recognition in Trinidad.

⁹ Seva is a Hindi word that means service and Sangha means association.

the day became a national observance.¹⁰ As a community, it took one hundred and fifty years for Indo-Trinidadians to become validated within the national calendar.

For Indian Arrival Day 2014 celebrations in Trinidad, my parents attended a function commemorating the event. The main performer was Kalpana Patowary, a Bhojpuri singer from India. They learned about a publication that showcases life stories of Trinidadians and were eager to tell me about it. *Golconda: Our Voices Our Lives* (Scott, 2011) was introduced to the audience as a part of the celebration. The work is described as an activity by a Research Fellow “to carry out an activity related to their expertise in collaboration with a particular community or community group” (p. ix). Scott’s choice to gather stories from the community of Golconda, a former sugar estate in south Trinidad was because it was close to the birthplace of Michel Jean Cazabon¹¹—his primary research subject. The book contains commentaries by various contributors who had been living in the geographical area of Golconda, a part of the Petit Morne Estate of Usine Ste. Madeleine. The ages of the twelve subjects ranges from forty one to eighty five and since many of them are not “formally literate,” the researcher decided to “look for its outcomes through oral contributions which would then be recorded and transcribed, rather than

¹⁰ Mahin Gosine (2005) notes:

Indian Arrival Day became a public holiday for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago when the then Prime Minister Patrick Manning granted a public holiday to the citizens of this nation to mark 150 years of Indians in Trinidad. This was supposed to be a holiday given only for the year 1995, and not any subsequent year. However, in 1995, an Indian Prime Minister, Basdeo Panday assumed office and Indian Arrival Day was put permanently on the books as a national holiday of Trinidad and Tobago. The person that was instrumental in sponsoring the Bill that made Indian Arrival Day a national holiday was the then Member of Parliament, Trevor Sudama of South Trinidad, who was at that time a Minister with the political party. (pp. 544-545)

¹¹ The *Wikipedia* entry on Cazabon states,

Michel-Jean Cazabon (September 20, 1813 – November 20, 1888) is regarded as the first great Trinidadian painter and is Trinidad's first internationally known artist. He is also known as the layman painter. He is renowned for his paintings of Trinidad scenery and for his portraits of planters, merchants and their family in the 19th century. Cazabon’s paintings are to be cherished not only for their beauty but also their historical importance: his painting has left us with a clear picture of the many aspects of life in Trinidad through much of the nineteenth century.

through written pieces” (Scott, p. 130). Many of the stories describe snippets of life on the sugar estate under the headings of “Sugar,” “Estate Life,” “Religion, Traditions and Festivals,” “Childhood and School Days,” “Marriage” and “Life Stories.” Walcott (2007) reminds us that “The sigh of History rises over ruins, not over landscapes, and in the Antilles there are few ruins to sigh over, apart from the ruins of sugar estates and abandoned forts” (p. 194). The sugar ruins represent a period in history when the Indian population endured social and political hardships. It is a glance into the lives associated with the remnants of the sugar-cane industry for which Indians originally crossed the Kala Pani.¹² The episodic presentations are fragmented but give glimpses into the lives of people who inhabited the former sugar estate. *Golconda* works as a tribute to the ruinous sugar industry, a peek at individual challenges and triumphs within a community characterized by indentureship and struggle.

Inviting artists from India to perform at the celebrations implies reverence for the original culture, much of which has become hybridized and altered within the region. In his Nobel Lecture in 1992, Derek Walcott contemplates the phenomenon of a fragmented inheritance: “Memory that yearns to join the center, a limb remembering the body from which it has been severed, like those bamboo thighs of the god. In other words, the way that the Caribbean is still looked at, illegitimate, rootless, mongrelized” (2002, p. 194). Walcott comments on the cultural inheritance of Indians in the Caribbean as “broken,” a view that has been shared by other diasporic Indians who have retained Indian languages and customs. Amera and Arti, participants in my study, describe being treated as different from “real” Indians (personal communication, May 2013).

¹² The Kala Pani literally means the “Black Water” and refers to the ocean journey that East Indians made from India to the West Indies during the period 1845 to 1917.

Possibilities for Increased Visibility of Indo-Caribbean Women

The stories and interviews for this project identify characteristics of life that are not easily explained but sometimes fit into the inherited socio-political and cultural traditions of Indo-Caribbean people. The steadfastness with which Hindus have held on to the traditionally, religiously inclined, patriarchy show up in participants' stories. Part of their experience includes conflict with Afro-Caribbeans based on racial difference. However, there have been shifts in representation and Indo-Caribbean women have become increasingly visible within the society (see discussion of the Naparima tradition on p. 22). I work toward understanding the effects of inherited traditions on the lives of the women and, I believe that the subjective accounts through written stories allow for a shift from "being spoken about" to one of Indo-Caribbean women "speaking" for themselves.

Distance from communities within the Caribbean region can provide an anonymity that encourages the unsilencing of stories. Contrasted with the stories of Dassie Parsan and Mrs. Naipaul, Maria Cristina Rodríguez (2005) contends that people, especially women, enjoy anonymity within the metropolis as opposed to the shame and inhibitions associated with knowing about happenings in small communities such as those in the Caribbean (pp. 1-20). This phenomenon also explains why distance from the homeland encourages writing about experiences for Indo-Caribbean writers such as Joy Mahabir, Ramabai Espinet, Lakshmi Persaud and Shani Mootoo (Jerrybandan, 2009). I believe that locating my research and writing practice in Toronto, away from the Caribbean, has also encouraged the telling of stories. Given my initial search for research participants in Trinidad and not having been successful, there is also the question of whether there is a similar reason for the unwillingness of women to write there.

Chapter 3

Life History Research and Structures of Experience

Theoretical Grounding of a Life History Research Project

I draw on the work of Cole and Knowles (2001) in their discussion of the use of autobiographical research that is both creative and responsive (p. 10). Through process and representation, using life history allows for individual stories to operate as a “window into broader social and societal conditions” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 12). Individual stories allow for personal constructions of identity and also considerations of the larger social and political relationships. Life history research facilitates “personal, social, temporal and contextual” contributions and understandings from “conceptualization through to representation” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 10). The “eventual communication of new understandings to others” is of utmost significance to my work (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 10).

Goodson and Sikes (2001) argue for life history research as a means of questioning dominant, cultural conventions, thereby challenging power structures while tending to the relationships among the individual, the society and cultural modes of being (pp. 9-11). The research process and applications of life history aid in subverting power structures that in turn “assert and insist that ‘power’ should listen to the people it claims to serve” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 8).

My study focuses on a historically marginalized group that has in turn received minority representation. Feminist groups have supported life history methods because of the ways in which they can uncover knowledges of formerly subjugated groups (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 10). Weiler and Middleton (1999) highlight the possibility for a

gendered study of life histories. Citing feminist social theory, they note “gender is an unstable and constantly shifting construct, always being recreated through the process and language through which we understand and define ourselves” (p. 2). Contextualized in a historical and cultural framework, the body of stories gathered as life history research in this study, offers material for analysing gender, identity and the contextual social structures.

Life history research in the form of collective biography has the potential to move beyond individual identities. Davies (2008) notes:

The stories are not serving to construct a pre (or post or apart and outside of) discursive self, but to make visible some of the invisible threads within which all subjects are entangled, and it can make visible and open for interrogation the discourses in which they have constituted others and have themselves been constituted as particular kinds of subjects. (p. 53)

Predicated on the work of Haug et al. (1987), collective biography focuses on “the ways in which individuals construct their identity, the things that become subjectively significant to them” (p. 40). Especially important is “the individual’s relationship to the ‘givens’ of her everyday life” and the accompanying “structures of society” (Haug et al. 1987, p. 40). Davies (2008) notes, “present social and moral orders are not inevitable. They do not grant viable lives to everyone” (p. 60). And so it is with the experiences of Indo-Caribbean women and their specific historical and cultural contexts.

Through process and practice life history research offers means for envisioning alternatives and promise; creates possibilities for empowered representations of the individual together with the collective; provides frames for understanding the individual’s

ever-changing relationships with larger contextual structures; and allows for modes of response and creativity as expressions of our making sense of being in the world.

Memory and Identity

Frigga Haug's model for memory work and identity. I engage a practice using memory work to research, unearth and recover stories that have been silenced. This methodological chapter explores memory work as a practice. Here I explore the dynamic of memory work and the implications on identity. I draw on the work of Frigga Haug et al. (1987) in which she constructs a writing project where memory is the empirical element. She argues against "usual social-scientific modes of research" focusing on the use of past experiences in constructing oneself within existing relationships. Haug's collective, memory work project cites the method as a means to find new versions of self and the ability to retrieve "forgotten traces," "abandoned intentions" and "lost desires" (p. 47). Through intense examination of a single situation, "we learn to recall and to reassess history" (p. 47). It is a means through which possible alternatives for the future may be constructed (pp. 32-49).

I follow Frigga Haug's (1987) model for theorizing memory and experience. There are differences in our methodological structures that I discuss in the Chapter Four (see p. 75). Using memory work, the subject tells her own story. In constructing her identity, the subject moves from a position of objectivity to subjectivity. The process of writing, according to Haug, is a "transgression of boundaries and an exploration of new territory" (p. 38). To present one's experience in writing is to consciously make it significant and move to a perspective where one is seeing oneself instead of being seen by others. In writing about oneself, the subject also becomes the object. Haug proposes that subjective-

objective positioning is essential to memory work and has transformative and liberatory potential. Memory work allows for analysis of the ways in which one's life is socially constructed. By employing memory work into a collective process, there is the possibility of representations for both the individual and collective (pp. 33-72).

Identity and the Indo-Caribbean woman. The indentured immigrants who travelled to the West Indies between 1838 and 1917 ultimately made their home in the new countries. The inheritance of Indian traditions plays heavily into the characterization the Indo-Caribbean population. Music, food, religion and language are some of the elements that distinguish them from other ethnic groups. In addition to racial ostracization and limited educational opportunities by an Afro-centric government, the group of East-Indians who were not proficient in the official language, English, were further alienated from the mainstream population (Campbell, 1997; Jain, 2009; Williams, 1964). (Also see section on colonial education, p. 20.)

Indo-Caribbean writers and participants—the complexities of identity. To my knowledge, all Indo-Caribbean women writers with published works have emigrated from the region. I too, have left home to pursue education in Canada. In a research project for a Master in Education Degree, I explored some of the debilitating experiences that led to my move to another home. Citing my inheritance of racial and political tensions in Trinidad, and schooling, that continued to represent colonial education, I immigrated to Canada in search of a more liberal environment for pursuing higher education. The participants in my study identify as Indo-Caribbean and presently live in Toronto. (See Chapter 3 for a detailed description of their experiences as related to self-identity within the Caribbean region.) Participant stories also narrate the experiences of

people who continue to live in Trinidad. The physical location of experience—in both the Caribbean and outside of the region, migration and self-identity further complicate diasporic relations. There are diaspora dynamics within the Caribbean region that become more complex as the subjects move to metropolitan centres.

Maria Cristina Rodríguez (2005) denounces a sense of sisterhood or of belonging within literature by Caribbean women. The result is a solitary struggle that suggests a lack of community within the new country and a consequent anonymity. In seeking to describe the migratory experience of characters within the literature, she highlights the “opportunity to study, to work, to shape one’s own life without social or family pressures, and in the eyes of the people back home, to be successful” (p. xiii). She offers an analysis of what women negotiate between “island cities” and the “faraway metropole”—migration to the distant new urban centres “represents more apprehension but less fear. The anonymity of the big city favours single women: failure, shame, rejection become individual experiences that are rarely heard back home” (p. 6). Has this been instrumental for Caribbean women-writers as well, in facilitating the courage and willingness to write in countries to which they migrate? Most Indo-Caribbean writers of literature have left the region and write from their new homelands. Lakshmi Persaud, Shani Mootoo, Ramabai Espinet, Joy Mahabir and Niala Maharaj write outside of Trinidad and Tobago. Ryhaan Shah and Narmala Shewcharan have left Guyana and write in their new countries of Canada and Britain. I never felt the urge to write creatively while I lived in Trinidad. When I moved to Toronto, I felt for the first time that I wanted to write creatively. It was also the first time I thought anyone would listen.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2006) discusses feminism and decolonization in relation to identity and writing. She notes that published narratives are usually demands of the marketplace and do not necessarily “decenter hegemonic histories and subjectivities” (p. 77). However, “it is the way in which they are read, understood, and located institutionally” that makes a difference. The “knowledge, skills, motivation, and location” of the writer can defy oppressive institutions and situate the subject within a more conscious representation of self. By virtue of my location and motivation, I have designed this research project to help empower the Indo-Caribbean woman subject to write her place and subsequently contribute to a “formation of politicized consciousness and self-identity” (pp. 77-78).

Matikor: The Politics of Identity for Indo-Caribbean Women (Kanhai, 1999) is an edited collection of essays that focus closely on a range of topics including stereotypes of East Indian women in the Caribbean; gender roles within family and societal structures; marital-violence; identity issues such as “douglarisation”¹³—the mixing of Indian and African races and the workings of Indian identity within creative forms of expression such as Calypso, Poetry, Visual-Art, Performance and Film. The section entitled “Narratives of Self” contain two stories of Indo-Caribbean women somewhat similar to those I had wished to encourage with my research-project. They are examples of life-stories of women as told by their daughters and granddaughters. I believe that the appearance of these stories in the collection points to the latency of stories (of previous generations) within the community. Both women are well educated: Sheila Rampersad is an academic and Janis Kanhai-Winter is a secondary schoolteacher. They both articulate

¹³ Yelvington (1993) describes “douglarisation” as the term used to describe a person of mixed Indian and African ancestry. The word is derived from the Hindi term for bastard (Yelvington, 1993, p. 255).

stories about their mothers and grandmothers, each noting the older women's limits of not being able to read or write proficiently.

My work continues to inform and transform a dialogue about under-representation that may also be self-imposed by Indo-Caribbean women who do not want to voice their experiences or choose which experiences they want to make public. The study highlights and incorporates an acknowledgement of some of the factors that contribute to the accompanying specific, cultural system.

Holman-Jones (2013) suggests, "writing stories offers us a powerful form for theorizing the daily workings of culture" (p. 19). I cite the wretchedness of experiences that may have resisted becoming a part of the family stories of participants. The stories give voice to the women and their families who have been unheard. I believe that my study has made important critical contributions to both the practice of writing within the Indo-Caribbean community, and to the understandings of previous and present silences within the discourse. The analyses of stories offer an understanding of a prevailing theoretical ideology as experience.

Unfitting, hybridized ideals of representation. Some Caribbean theory has deceptively focused on "idealized representations of Caribbean society" (Edmondson, 1999, p. 2). The result has been a disconnect between lived realities and theoretical discourse, "at times bearing only a cursory relation to the events of today" (p. 2). The prevalence of Afro-Caribbean issues within Caribbean theory denies an Indo-Caribbean reality. The politics of "douglarization" negates the Indo-Caribbean's struggle for a specific identity that at times is in conflict with the prevalent, dominant ideology.

Nationalism and symbols of nationalism have been historically aligned with a “multi-ethnic” or “dougla” politic. Yelvington (1993) explains:

The PNM’s brand of nationalism consisted of putative attempts at erasure of ethnic differences in the forging of a new “nation.” Williams always maintained that the PNM was multi-ethnic and a few East Indians and other minorities were given prominent (but token) posts within the government. On the one hand, Trinidad was politically depicted as a melting pot. For example, the national anthem features the line describing Trinidad and Tobago as the country “where every creed and race finds an equal place.” But, on the other hand ethnicity became implicated in the PNM’s nationalism as the symbols of this melting pot were constructed as “national” symbols, which were interpreted as Afro-Caribbean-derived. These included steelband, calypso, and carnival. (pp. 12-13)

The Afro-Caribbean, dominant ideology has infiltrated theoretical discourse while simultaneously suppressing the voices of subjects who have automatically occupied positions of difference. In Chapters 5 to 8, the national symbols of “steelband, calypso and carnival” are discussed as dominant cultural features, occupying sites for contestation, since Indo and Afro people are distinct groups that negotiate them differently.

Race and “colour” in the Caribbean. Historically, ethnicity has not been a common term in Caribbean discourse. The alternative term has been “race” probably owing to the use of racialized categories since colonial times. As an elementary student in Trinidad, I learnt about the various “races” of people living in the Country. In retrospect, some of the terms are now considered racist and contribute to a resistance to using the historical

vocabulary within formal discourse. For Social Studies, we studied the different races that make up the population of Trinidad (Tobago was not included). Daniel Segal (1993) describes the complexity of how the term “race” was used in a Trinidadian context:

Two of these three races—the “European” and “African”—were also denominated by colour terms, specifically the binary opposition of “white” and “black.” There was, however, no conventional colour correspondence for “East Indians.” For “Africans” or “blacks” we find yet a third referential synonym, “Negroes,” a term of phylogeny. There were, in addition, other “races”—also from other lands—which, as they were counted, were less significant components of Trinidad’s twentieth-century population. These included the “Portuguese,” the “Chinese,” and the “Syrian,” all of which were distinguished from “whites,” blacks” and “East Indians.” “Race”—variously represented in terms of ancestral lands, colour, and phylogeny—was, among other things, an inherited property that was passed on by both parents. (pp. 82-83)

The following is a story that, although it was not written as part of the group practice. It explores race-relations within the school system of which I was a part, as well as the way children understand race-relations from their own experiences.

Prabha, May 2014.

For Social Studies, we studied the different races that make up the population of Trinidad. There were four main races: Indian, Negro, White and Chinese. I fitted into the category of Indian. My parents, my grandparents and all my relatives also described themselves as Indian. Most of the people who were my classmates and school friends were Negro. The next-door neighbour owned a

shop—he was Chinese. The Whites included the Syrians who owned most of the “cloth stores”(stores in which fabric was sold) in San Fernando and Port of Spain (the two major commercial centres on the island).

In Standard Four (Grade Six), our class teacher attempted to organize a Carnival band for ‘Kiddies Carnival’. I don’t remember the proposed name of the band but there were categories according to nationalities, even though I did not know that word at the time. She looked at me and said that I was “fair” so I would be a “French.” I had never thought about myself as “fair” skinned enough to be anything other than Indian although many people commented that my sister was dark skinned.

Race-relations emerge within the stories of my participants as an illustration of reality of experience in the Caribbean. Difference of skin colour is also an important aspect of discrimination that even young children understand. The following story describes a childhood memory. It has become a family story that gets told from time to time.

Prabha, May 2014

When I was a young child, my aunt and uncle who were much richer than we were held a Christmas party. They made sure to give gifts to all the children. Tantie Dulcie gave me a straw basket. I was so excited because I had never owned anything resembling a handbag before. I felt like a big girl. My sister was crying uncontrollably so my brother, my mother and I tried to figure out what was wrong with her present. My aunt had given her a black-skinned dolly. At six years old, she was too young to explain why she did not appreciate her gift, but she was also old enough to feel offended that my aunt had likened her to the “dark” skinned

toy. Tantie Dulcie took back her gift but up till today, my sister has not forgiven her for making her feel that she deserved a black dolly.

My sister was offended because she felt that my aunt's gesture was also a derogatory comment on her dark skin. Being dark-skinned was not a favourable feature for her nor was it for many Indian people who associate lightness or darkness of skin with social categories of caste. People of higher castes tend to be lighter skinned and those of the lower castes tend to be darker skinned. In Trinidad, skin colour also became correlated with race. My family and I also understood my sister's reaction. I too, felt that it was offensive. Although I was never told that being dark skinned was an inferior condition to being light skinned, I had learned the value placed on skin colour through my socialization. At that time, no one in my family refuted the notion of inferiority because of skin colour.

Kamala Kempadoo (1999) discusses her identity as a "dougla" in an intimate perspective of race relations among Caribbean people. Her story also includes means by which children are socialized into the dominant discourse of race relations. She relates a story set in England, of her parents searching out black dolls for her sister and herself. The girls, unlike my sister, embrace the dolls. My sister had a completely different reaction. Kempadoo recalls:

These dolls were dearly cherished, achieving the status of favourite baby-dolls, and were handed down through the family for many years. Even with this exposure to Indian and Black heritages and histories, our lives were, however, heavily conditioned by my parents' internalized colonial notions of the superiority

of Britishness. In England, this meant confining our “Doglaisms” to the secluded home environment, and to adopting “proper” British habits. (p.106)

Kempadoo attributes her Indian influence to her father whom she describes as coming from “a Madrasi community from a sugar estate” (p. 105). Madrasi is a term used to describe people or culture originating from Madras in India. The people are usually darker-skinned as compared to people from Northern regions of India. Being born and raised in England provided a different environment for race relations. Although she and her sisters accept the black dolls as “favourite” models, these behaviours are restricted to the physical private space of their home. They learn that the dominant culture relegates pride and “blackness” to spheres that are not public. My sister and my socialization model was very different. “Blackness” was not attractive to us. Kempadoo (1999) describes the more Caribbean perspective of the “Dougla”:

The name “Dogla”¹⁴ traditionally carries a derogatory connotation, and it is not only by Hindus that such a person is considered an outcast or impure. Afro-Guyanese also hold a low regard for Doglas, and the term is often used to insult or to reject those of us of “mixed-race.” Besides the specific label in the Caribbean, the categorization of people of mixed race as contaminated, impure and ethnic bastards occurs in other societies, pointing to a phenomenon which has less to do with the type of mix and more to do with notions of “race” and “ethnic purity.” (p. 104)

There is a complex of race within the Caribbean that encompasses difference among racial classifications of people.

¹⁴ The term is spelt differently—Dougla or Dogla are both accepted forms of the word.

Segal (1999) describes the potential towards “whiteness,” a move towards “respectability” by people of colour, specifically those of African descent (pp. 91-92). For Indian people however, “ethnic purity” is the ideal and “colour” is the means by which difference is discriminated. He examines the use of “colour” terms:

Though “colour” was considered an observable sign of “racial ancestry,” colour terms were not governed strictly by genealogical principles. As something observable, “colour” diverged from ancestry in being an individual trait of persons: full siblings, for instance, could be different in their “colour” identities.

(p. 89)

My sister has been plagued by comments about the colour of her skin as compared to my brothers and me. As a child of six, she already understood the implications of darker skin as a marker of so-called inferiority. My parents did not consciously contribute to her negotiations with colour within a social context. They never discussed colour as either good or bad however, my sister understood that there are implications for one’s dark skin.

Reluctance to consciously engage with facets of social inequality does not provoke understandings and change. How can one negate the effects of such discrimination within the society and what are the practices of resistance that can produce such change? If the issues are not spoken and questioned, how can members of the social group and individuals hope to move toward transformation? (Freire, 1987, p. 129).

The use of race-descriptors in present discourse. Although the terms “Negro” and “Indian” are not sanctioned in some discourse, especially in North America, they are still commonly used in Trinidad and Tobago. There is a disconnect between the lived reality of the people of the country and the theoretical discourse of and within the region. The

terms are still used as racial descriptors without negative implications within the specific geographical setting of Trinidad and Tobago. People who migrate to metropolitan centres are affected by the contextual cultures that mediate the “rightness” and “wrongness” of vocabulary and experiences that have been traditionally practised.

Those more politically aware within the Caribbean recognize conflicts associated with racial terminology that are unacceptable within wider dominant discourse. Though commonly used among people in the Caribbean, out of the region, vocabulary and experiences that include “Indian” and “Negro” have the chance of being muted. How might we engage in dialogue about tensions of race without access to a corresponding vocabulary—one that is politically appropriate and also recognizable to the user? Unless everyone within a conversation has a common knowledge of the particular language, there is the risk of stymied conversations. How does the subject negotiate tensions of race within the new country while moving toward political appropriateness? Do these experiences get edited out of stories that are perpetuated outside the initial home country? How far do we risk erasure of stories and experiences because of the unsuitability of a corresponding, sanctioned language/vocabulary?

Vijay Agnew (2005) cites memory as “key to personal, social, and cultural history” (p. 184). Use of memory within the creative discourse such as the recollection above, allows the subject—in this case I am the subject—to place herself within a theoretically and politically unsanctioned space. When experiences are characterized as politically incorrect, there is a greater chance of silencing or omitting. Without an understanding of the social, cultural and political implications of history, we risk denying a past and its collateral understanding.

In my recollection above, I was allotted a place as a “French” person in the proposed Carnival band. My parents were going to allow me to “play mas”¹⁵ through my school. Set in an urban centre, the school was able to contribute to celebrations that were becoming more aligned with the national culture at that time. This is one example of episodic assimilation within the dominant culture because of geographic proximity. Life and circumstance allowed for my blending in with the dominant Trinidadian culture—I was living and being schooled in an urban area. Within the confines of the school, my parents were willing to allow their Indo-Trinidadian girl child to take part in the mainly Afro-Trinidadian celebration.

In “Diaspora and Cultural Memory,” Anh Hua (2005) explores the use of memory work as a critique against “forgetting.” She discusses the move by politically dominant groups to control the memory of subjugated groups and thus the significance of their “cultural or collective memory” (p. 200). In an attempt to understand the history of Indo-Caribbean women and “resist the definition of Others,” I incorporate memory as a means to further define myself through my own voice (Hua, 2005, p. 205). Collective-memory work offers new perspectives in subjective positions as related to the Indo-Caribbean woman. Writing of memories has been used in this project to offer the possibility “for self-recovery and community building” (Hua, 2005, p. 205).

Self-identification by participants. One of the major threads within this study was self-identity among the participants and the ways that they identified their mothers. The participants in my study were all able to speak about the ways in which they relate to the hyphenated identities that change depending on context. Arti talked about being Indo-

¹⁵ To “play mas” is to take part in masquerading in costumes as a parade, either on the street or in other public venues. “Mas” is short for masquerade. To “play mas” has become accepted for describing the activity of wearing costumes and parading in them for Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago.

Caribbean-Canadian as a formal descriptor for self-placement. Among Caribbean people and within the localized Canadian community however, she identifies as Guyanese. Her mother's vocabulary, as in the case of all the mothers of participants, does not include the term "Indo-Caribbean." No one told stories about mothers who use the identifier of Indo-Caribbean or as belonging to the Caribbean. The term "West Indian" has been used historically as a descriptor pertaining to the Caribbean region. Although more recent discourse has popularized the term "Caribbean" more than "West Indian," the lived reality of the people of the region still includes the use of "West Indian" (see page 6). I have found that a regional descriptor becomes more common when people of the Caribbean move to metropolitan centres such as Toronto.

Similarly, according to another participant Shalini, her understanding is that her mother identifies as "Trinidadian" and has never used the term Caribbean in describing herself. Within the individual countries of origin, namely Guyana and Trinidad, the women identify according to racial group—Indian. My own mother calls herself "Indian" in Trinidad, but when she ventures into North America, she calls herself Trinidadian. I look more closely at identity issues in the chapters on the analysis of the stories (see Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8)).

Previous life histories of the Indo-Caribbean woman subject. There have been published stories and life histories that coincide with more social and political activity, specifically in relation to public displays of celebration and observances of the phenomenon of "Indian arrival." In my research of existing literature and studies by and about Caribbean women, I encountered a study that was edited by Bori Clark, *Trinidad Women Speak* (1981) that contains an introduction by Patricia Mohammed. The stories

contained in Clark's work are drawn from autobiographical interviews and are written by a range of women whose writing skills are varied. Of importance to my study, is the absence of the Indo-Caribbean woman which is explained by Mohammed in the Introduction to Clark's work: "The rural female proletariat of East Indian descent sadly had to be omitted because these women are rather inaccessible for such types of self-revelations" (p. iv). The reticence of Indian women to tell their stories thus created a void. I cite the importance of this work in tracing the absence of Indo-Caribbean voices within early studies of Caribbean women's life stories.

While visiting a bookshop in Trinidad, which has become my main research tactic for discovering new works by Caribbean writers, I stumbled upon Anthony de Verteuil's (2011) "Eight East Indian Immigrants." De Verteuil attributes the necessity of his work to the 150th anniversary of Indian arrival in the Caribbean. He is a Catholic priest and school Principal. Although he does not clearly outline his objectives, he prefaces his work with:

In a general way their stories are all the same. In India, money was a problem, and so they all came penniless to Trinidad and found their fortunes, or at least a new life, there. But in many important ways three immigrants differed from one another: Gokool, a Muslim, won his wealth through the cinema; Bunsee Partap's land floated on oil; Capildeo was a Hindu Pundit; Soodeen a Presbyterian catechist. (p. i)

De Verteuil includes the accounts of two women in this collection of life stories. Beccani was an estate owner and the wife of a French Creole. Valiama is described as a Tamil matriarch and mother-in-law of the Pillais—a family that is well known for owning a thriving business in Trinidad. The underlying themes that mark the accounts of the

individuals in this work are wealth and success. In the bibliography, de Verteuil lists four sources including, “The Registers on Indian Immigrants,” “Family Traditions,” “Newspaper Accounts” and six books named under “Books on Indian Immigrants or with Chapters on them.” He gives details of his research method under Family Traditions:

In all cases these were oral and obtained from the children or grandchildren of the immigrants concerned. In some cases the information could be checked against outside sources. In many cases if the story rang true I recorded it as such or as probably true. Where I did not think it likely, I recorded it as “reputedly” or “it is said.” (p. 318)

De Verteuil’s work focuses on eight Indian immigrants and contains an overview of some of the debilitating conditions in India that may have encouraged immigration to the West Indies. His main topic is that of success. He writes about the Tamil matriarch, Valiama:

She had come virtually penniless to Trinidad in 1888, a stranger in a foreign land. She died without ever having accumulated many worldly possessions. Her wealth however lay not in money but in her large family, in them and in the love she lavished on them all. (p. 234)

Without discounting the worth of any study of immigrant life of Indo-Caribbean people, I believe that stories may be stifled because of a close-knit society such as that of Trinidad and Tobago. The first generation women belong to financially successful families in Trinidad and are well known. As a result, their stories are limited to their roles as wives and mothers.

The Experience of Post-Colonialism

By means of living in the present time, any project can take on a post-colonial concern. The topics of my research: the Indo-Caribbean female-subject, Caribbean literature, a writing-practice and diasporic issues situate theoretically within a post-colonial construct. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures* is a comprehensive work on the basic features of post-colonialism as a body of theory (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1989). I situate my work within the terms of a counter-discourse as explained by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin. This project offers a critique of imperialism as pertaining to the subaltern subject (Spivak, 1988). The study is predicated on re-positioning of the subject as different from a former positioning of “Other” in the cultural context of Orientalism that has been popularised by Edward Said (1994). Said has been “important in elucidating the dialectical encounters between Europe and the Other” where the “Other” is positioned as the colonized or marginalized in the “imperial-colonial literary encounter” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1989, p. 30). “Marginality is the condition constructed by the posited relation to a privileged centre, an “Othering” directed by the imperial authority” (p. 102). The Indo-Caribbean woman subject has occupied a position of “Other” in a historical context while my project offers rewriting and subjective representation of her experience.

Nana Wilson-Tagoe (1998) describes Caribbean people as those “whose circumstances and consciousness have been shaped by systems of domination and dependency and who must therefore create their own subjectification” (p. 3). She further suggests that forms of representation should include the “unknown and non-literary” (p. 3). She cites the interplay between a “historical perception” and “literary imagination” as

most important to any endeavour of Caribbean representation. Previous histories as told by Europeans and colonizers have conformed to a linear chronicling that characterizes the West Indian as a victim, however my stories and writing, participants' stories and voices offer a move toward being "creators of history" through imaginative representations that defy the ordering of "space and time" (pp. 1-13).

Story as Literature, Practice as Art

Maxine Greene (1995) argues for the worth of the arts in education in *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts and Social Change*. In describing the value of literature in education, Greene contrasts literature with history (documentary) and also highlights the potential for transformation. She rationalises her choice of literary works:

Literature, unlike documentary material, resonates. That is, the words mean more than they denote, evoking in those willing to pay heed other images, memories, things desired, things lost, things never entirely grasped or understood. With these images, I want to recall to you aspects of an intersubjective world, a dangerous and endangered world about which we need to choose to teach. We have somehow to understand this world and provoke others to understand it if we are in some fashion to transform it. (pp. 44-45)

My work engages Greene's thesis and explores the possibilities of literature as an art form even as it exposes the inherent dangers in the world. In attempting to understand the world, Greene proposes that the resulting dialogue of arts in education also holds the potential for a common good. I present my work as a form and means of education for my community and myself.

I explore specific transformational features within my research through an opportunity to share my work and stories of others and encourage a practice of writing among Indo-Caribbean women. In contributing to the growing literature and literary and theoretical discourse of the region, there is the potential to encourage Indo-Caribbean women to think more about a history that has been silenced and possibly stimulate the searching out and telling of stories related to their experiences.

Chapter 4

Memory Work and Stories:

A Writing Practice with a Group of Indo-Caribbean Women

The very notion that our own past experience may offer some insight into the ways in which individuals construct themselves into existing relations, thereby themselves reproducing a social formation, itself contains an implicit argument for a particular methodology. (Haug et al., 1987, pp. 34-35)

In this chapter, I examine the methodological inquiry that generates data through storytelling and writing; explore socio-political and thematic concerns that emerge through a reflexive practice of autoethnography, life history research methods including interviewing and oral history; and engage a process of re-writing and reconstruction through a re-presentation of previously, unearthed experiences. I employ memory work as “a bridge to span the gap between ‘theory’ and ‘experience’” (Haug et al., 1987, p. 14). Memory links our individual and collective pasts that include our origins, our traditions and history (Agnew, 2005 p. 1). With regard to the Caribbean, there is the privileging of Afro-centric experiences in the prevailing discourse of dominant ideological and theoretical structures (Cudjoe, 1990). Such a construct subjugates the Indo-Caribbean experience. As a group, the research participants and I enact social and political representation through our writing practice, and we work toward a parallel process of transformation (Haug et al., 1987; Hua, 2008). I uncover and explore experiences of Indo-Caribbean women by engaging a group of women in a consistent, regular practice of writing stories and engaging in forms of life history research methods. Life history research methods include oral history accounts, autoethnography, interviewing and writing through memory work. This allows for particularities of the

individuals and non-dominant groups to be re-defined in larger societal and political frameworks (Cole and Knowles, 2001; Kadar, 2005; Thompson, 1978).

Beginnings of a Research Practice Using the Story

The truth about stories is that that's all we are. (King, 2003, p. 2)

I was enrolled in a graduate course—"The Act of Writing" when I first heard Thomas King speak on the power of the story in a talk entitled "Narrative Works." His talk was part of the Ioan Davies Lecture Series at York University on September 20th 2007. He told his story. He gave his views on the price of water, his upbringing in California, his identity as an aboriginal person, building a home with eco-management in mind and even his candidacy as an NDP representative in the upcoming federal elections at that time. Through his story, he located himself within a social and political context. His story also situated him culturally. He was able to claim his identity and critique his experience both in the United States and Canada. In my formal education thus far, I had mostly read and listened to other people's stories. I walked back to class after his lecture wondering about my own story. If "the truth about stories is that's all we are," since I didn't know many stories about my family, did that mean that I had no history? If stories could validate my life then I needed to find them.

For the next two years I nurtured fragments of my own story through writing about various artefacts including family photographs, conversations with my mother and sporadic childhood memories. Although I didn't realize it at the time, I was constructing a representation of my family, my community and myself. For all of my major research work until my doctoral project, I had been examining works by other women writers from the Caribbean. While questioning my mother about my family's immigration story,

(my great grandfather was an Indian immigrant to Trinidad) I realized that my stories about my family were few. I had already determined that there was a dearth of literature by Indo-Caribbean women, and so I wanted to encourage story writing among this group. I employ a methodology that focuses on the story and its contextual analysis. Merriam (2002) cites narrative analysis as a form of qualitative research that uses the story and accounts of experience as the data for analysis. The primary data for my project is a collection of stories of experiences written by a group of research participants, including myself as a participant.

A Search for Research Participants

My Informed Consent Letter for my research reads: “The Purpose of the Project/Research—I will conduct life history research with a group of five Indo-Caribbean women. The purpose of the research will be to compile and examine life-stories that will be generated through a writing practice” (Research Proposal, 2011). I borrow the term “writing practice” from Luce-Kapler (2004) who describes it as, “the series of rituals, writing exercises and processes in which I (and participants) engage to write” and which I use in and for my dissertation (p. xvi).

Initially, when I had the idea to write with other women so that I could uncover histories of our families, specifically in relation to the experiences of women in our families, I had no idea where I would find them. In Trinidad, I asked many women whether they would be willing to sit and write stories with me. Except for my mother, no one was interested. I was shocked and also worried that I would not find anyone to participate. The many women I knew had no interest in creative writing.

Indo-Trinidadian or Indo-Caribbean. My identity as Indo-Trinidadian has characterized my work. My first attempt to invite participants focused on Trinidadian women. I tried to think about women in Toronto who identified as Indo-Trinidadian and who would be willing to write. If I expected women to write, they had to be educated enough to be *able* to write. I felt that a high-school education would be enough. I entertained the idea of getting oral stories from women who didn't want to write but then, that would defeat my initial objective to encourage writing by Indo-Trinidadian women. Another intention had been for people to share stories and in so doing, unsilence and shed light on our individual and collective histories as Indo-Trinidadians. As I searched through my list of friends and acquaintances, I began to e-mail people I knew to ask about their possible interest in my work and my proposed project. At that point I also realized that I should widen the scope of participants since the Indo-Trinidadian focus was not proving workable. A study including Indo-Caribbean women would also allow for a regional representation instead of just the single island of Trinidad.

Possibilities for finding writers within a specific cultural group, or not... From 2004 to 2009, I had worked with a Caribbean radio and television programme in Toronto. Through my work there, I had met people who were involved in the Caribbean community. They worked to promote cultural activities in the Greater Toronto Area, such as musical shows; national observances such as Guyanese and Trinidadian Independence days; and other social activities that became characterized by the Caribbean-Canadian, financial sponsors or organizers of the events. I searched my mind for women I had met through these events and wondered if they might be interested in writing stories. It was important to me that the participants wanted to write stories, so this was a main question

that I asked. Of all the people that I could think of, one person showed interest and met with me. I had known her for about four years. She was an Indo-Trinidadian lawyer who was also active in the Indo-Caribbean community. She was married to an Indo-Guyanese businessman who promoted Caribbean events in Canada. In spite of her interest in my work and possibly in writing stories, she did not commit to being a research participant. I wondered to myself, “Why would anyone want to be a part of this group?” “What would it do for her?” I became more and more doubtful about getting anyone to be a part of my group. Here I was, looking for people who felt a strong desire to write stories about their experiences. I also wanted them to share in my identification as Indo, (not South-Asian though)¹⁶ from Trinidad. Since that didn’t seem possible, I thought about other Indo women. The Indo women I knew were Indo-Guyanese. They were not interested in being a part of a writing group. I didn’t know where I could find my participants. In order to extend the scope and possibility for continuing I realized that I had to start looking for participants but not limit the search for either Indo-Trinidadian or Indo-Guyanese women.

A link to a group of women who identify as Indo-Caribbean. One of my professors at York University introduced me to a woman who like me, identified as Indo-Caribbean. She was enrolled in the Ph.D. program in Sociology at York University. While doing an Education course she communicated her work on the Caribbean to the professor. I contacted her to tell her about my work and hoped that she would be willing to be a part of my writing group. This was a serendipitous introduction. In spite of her never joining

¹⁶ I distinguish Indo culture as Trinidadian or Caribbean as that which is a diasporic version of practices that are different in the geographic area of South Asia. Mainly characterized by language, historical, ethnic and race differences between the two geographical areas, I believe that Indo-Caribbean experience is unique—different from that of people from the Indian subcontinent.

the group to write, we later planned to present papers as a panel at the Caribbean Studies Association Conference in Merida, Mexico in May 2014. She also invited me to join a group that was attempting to work together to promote issues involving the Indo-Caribbean community within the Greater Toronto Area. While introducing me to the group, she formally invited me to join them in their meetings. Out of a lack of consensus in terms of time availability and location preference, the group of about ten women did not meet. “The group did get together, maybe twice,” she recalls in a telephone conversation that we had during the writing phase of my dissertation work. “But we’ve never met since,” she continues (personal communication, May 9, 2014). Each individual within the group attempted to socially and politically locate herself in terms of what it meant to be Indo-Caribbean in Canada. They were unable to reach consensus on the collective aims. For the participants of my proposed group—I hoped that writing our stories would be the common thread that could hold us together.

After completing the Dissertation Comprehensive Proposal Examination in November 2011 and receiving the necessary ethics approval, I wrote e-mails to the women from the Indo-Caribbean group in order to introduce myself and invited them to participate in my proposed project. Five people responded with interest. Of the five, four of the women—Amera, Arti, Kristy and Shalini, eventually met with me and agreed to be a part of my writing-practice group. Although the fifth woman initially showed interest in my first group e-mail and eventually spoke with me during my meeting with Amera, she didn’t sustain an interest in the group. I e-mailed her to follow up but she never responded. I thought to myself, “If she didn’t respond then it means that she isn’t interested enough.” As I have noted before, it was important to me that everyone had a personal desire to

write and to actively be a part of the group so I didn't pressure anyone to join. I must admit, I always feared that some of these women would decide not to continue with the group writing, especially because it demanded time from very busy schedules. This was *my* work; it was my project and I kept hoping that all the participants who had shown interest could sustain their enthusiasm for the project.

The Participants: Five Women Who Identify as Indo-Caribbean

The age of the participants ranged from twenty-seven to forty-seven. Here, I introduce the participants from my practice-group, as closely as possible, to the way they have presented themselves. I have used their own ideas and words but I also include my perceptions as a fellow participant as well as researcher/writer. I introduce them according to the order in which I met them. I knew Carla before the inception of this project and met the other four women through a search for participants.

Carla

I find that a lot of times, writing groups become a refuge for things that should come up in counselling and therapy. (Carla, personal communication, May 2013)

In 2008 and 2009, I completed three writing workshops. At the first workshop entitled "Blue Shoes" held at the Toronto Women's Bookshop, I met Carla. While sharing our stories during the writing sessions, we realized that we were both from Trinidad. At least that's the way we identified to each other. After our writing sessions, we would walk together to the subway station. We became friends and she also attended another workshop that facilitated writing for "Women of Colour."

Carla was born in Canada to Trinidadian parents. Although her father was born in Trinidad, his father was Guyanese. Although Carla had been born in Canada, she spent most of her formative years in Trinidad. Moving there at the very young age of three or

four, she was raised by her paternal grandparents. She then returned to Canada at eighteen. Having spent almost fourteen years in Trinidad, Carla received both primary and secondary education there. She identifies as Trinidadian although identity is something with which she continues to struggle. During our writing practice, Carla was pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Toronto. She has since graduated.

Carla's mother had never been married to her father and so, succumbed to the demands of Carla's paternal grandparents who insisted that as a single mother, she was less able to bring up her child (than the paternal grandparents). The themes of societal pressures that affected Indo-Caribbean women are discussed in depth in Chapter 5.

Over the past six years, Carla and I have stayed in touch. We have gone out for dinners and movies. In spite of meeting through our shared interest in writing and having the intention to sit and write together, we had never gotten around to doing that. When I thought about a writing practice, I immediately thought about asking her to participate. She readily agreed when I briefed her on my proposed work. At last, we were going to write together again. During a personal interview, I asked Carla how she had felt while participating in the group. She replied, "It was great. But also, well to be honest, it was also exhausting. Because my memories, yours, Arti's –and then none of these are... pain-free at all" (personal communication, May 2013).

Two more... I was introduced to Shalini and Kristy through the e-mail list. Shalini and I spoke on the phone about my project and about her vibrant interest regarding Caribbean awareness in Toronto. Both Shalini and Kristy lived in the Scarborough area and they were also teachers. That meant that the weekend was the best time to meet. The three of us together, on a snowy, cold Saturday evening in February 2012, met at

Starbucks at Eglinton and Warden. They both carried their teacher work—papers for marking. I was extremely nervous about whether they would be interested enough in my research and more so whether or not they would want to commit to meet over an extended period of time. I felt like a salesperson, selling my work and myself. The feeling quickly went away as I sat with them, each of us sipping our hot drinks. Here we were, three strangers planning to work together. My work is important to me and I love writing stories. What if they hadn't felt that way? I introduced my work to them telling them about the origins of the project—the fact that I had found many gaps in the history of my family. They were both intrigued. Shalini was a lot more talkative than Kristy. I wondered about whether Kristy was having second thoughts about being a participant. We talked about their work and their interests. At the end of the meeting they both agreed to participate in the group writing practice.

Shalini

And here I get together with these three really great women and they're sharing the same things that I have lived through. And I felt validated a little bit and I felt good to share my stories and it felt really good to hear their stories. And to feel validated also that I wasn't the only one thinking about this stuff. It felt really good. (Shalini, personal communication, April 2013)

Shalini was born in Trinidad and educated at both primary and secondary levels there. She moved to Canada at age fifteen where she pursued university education. Shalini was one of the first participants to commit to the research practice. Her enthusiasm was encouraging. She was the first person to answer my questions throughout this process and was almost always the first to respond whenever I ask for contributions to my project—whether it's in the form of clarification of material or just keeping in touch. After sending out the transcribed interviews to each of the participants, Shalini was the one who always

responded with comments. Her interest and dedication to the project have been invaluable.

Shalini has shared personal experiences, offering valuable contributions to my research, especially regarding race relations. The following is an excerpt from our interview:

Prabha: And how do you feel about the group practice? And I know you have talked about that. You have talked about feeling that safe space, being able to feel.

Shalini: Validated, and that shared experience. I would honestly, Prabs, if you asked me to write again, I would say absolutely. Because I think for me, it gave me a time out. It gave me a time to reflect which I don't ever get. And it gave me a time to sort my own identity out. Because you asking these poignant questions, I have never thought about it before. Do I have to admit that I am one over the other? (Indo or Caribbean) Do I have to think about these things? It's a heavy discussion that we're having and I loved it. (Personal communication, April 2013)

During our initial meeting, Shalini and I realized that we knew each other's families in Trinidad. My aunt cared for her when she was a baby. I had known her as a baby. Her mother and I knew each other. During our writing practice sessions, I met her mother again. It felt like meeting family that I had not seen for a long time.

Kristy

It was a great experience to kind of sit down and share stories and look at how women who are just like me identify themselves. I think that it was very interesting to see how the women who are in our group identified very, particularly very strongly with what Indian was. I felt a little outcast when I didn't grow up listening to Indian music and why everything was very English. And even as a teenager the only thing I wanted to listen to was dub¹⁷ tapes. (Kristy, personal communication, April 2013)

¹⁷ *Dub* music is a reggae style music originating in Jamaica.

When I initially met Kristy at Starbucks, she was very quiet but I was thankful that she agreed to become a participant. Kristy was born in Canada to Guyanese parents. She moved to Guyana as a young child. Due to challenging family issues, she spent much time with her maternal grandmother. Kristy identifies as Guyanese. Although she wanted to “put them back” Kristy shared invaluable memories and experiences through her stories. She holds a Masters Degree and has since been enrolled in the Ph.D. program at York University (Kristy, personal communication, 2013).

Since our writing practice together, Kristy and I have remained friends. We have presented papers on the same panel at the Caribbean Studies Association Conference in Merida in May 2014. It is not uncommon for her to break into a strong Guyanese accent while speaking to me. She talks much more now than at the beginning of the study.

Arti

I love the idea of writing, um I always felt like um I write. So before I could write fictional stories, I need to write my stories and the reason I was attracted to this project is because of the idea of being able to write my stories, my lived experience. That piece of it I found really exciting to be able to engage in. (Arti, personal communication, May 2013)

Arti was one of the first to respond to my e-mail asking for willing participants. We had a telephone conversation and arranged our first meeting. On a cold, wintry evening in March, 2013, we met at Starbucks on Hurontario Street and Britannia Avenue in Mississauga. As we drank our hot drinks, we grew more comfortable talking about our interests and work in academics in our lives so far. Arti thought that my project was interesting enough and she agreed to participate.

Arti was born in Canada to Guyanese parents who had migrated here. She identifies as Guyanese in spite of her Canadian birth. She holds a Master’s Degree; has been active in

writing workshops before so considers herself a writer. She feels more comfortable using the term West Indian as opposed to Caribbean in identifying herself. Arti found the writing practice initially exciting although she admits that some of the questions that were raised led to a more difficult process. She says:

Once we started going into the questioning a little further to explore the stuff that was in the stories, it did feel like a process that at that point that I didn't have any control over that was not mine and there were things that we were exploring some pretty difficult dynamics of my family so it did, at that point, feel a level of discomfort, um not a bad thing in the sense that it raised questions for me like why, and almost from me like why haven't I asked these questions? Why haven't I been curious about these things? Why haven't I thought to ask some of this stuff? (Personal communication, 2013)

When I asked her how she felt about the group writing practice she responded:

I actually for me felt an initial safety, maybe because of you or you know um, the subject matter that we were writing about that I was prepared for as we walked in, um there was quite a few things about that, that I found myself sharing things that I wouldn't normally share. And the writing group itself, I think it is the topic we were writing about and the purpose felt quite a lot more meaningful. (Personal communication, 2013)

Amera

I thought it (the group writing practice) was great. Cause it gave me time to really reflect on my memories but also share with others but also get to write them down. (Amera, personal communication, May 2013)

It was a bit difficult to meet with Amera initially. We could not find a mutually acceptable time and the first time I went to her office, she was not there. We had e-mailed each other before. We had had a telephone conversation. I began wondering whether she would be willing to commit to meeting on a regular basis to write. The process of finding participants allowed me to realize that scheduling was not a simple task. When we finally met, Amera and I talked about work and she was willing to meet with the group to begin our writing. She was the last to commit to the writing practice group but did not lack in her enthusiasm while participating in our sessions.

Amera was born in Canada but identifies as Trinidadian. Her political views enable her to say, “I’m a settler here, in Canada” (personal communication, May 2013). Her father has been a DJ and restaurant owner. Thus her exposure to Caribbean food and music has been extensive. Her father was born in Trinidad and migrated to Canada in the 1970’s. Amera’s mother was born in Tanzania but moved to Canada at the age of nine. One of the major influences in Amera’s life has been her paternal grandmother whom she calls *nanee*¹⁸.

Amera had not written stories before the group writing-practice. She found the experience of writing and sharing with a group of women to be a great experience. Although she embraces her inherited identity of Trinidadian-ness, she admits to “romanticizing” life in Trinidad. The group practice has allowed people who have lived in Trinidad to “check” her on her ideas about life in that country (Amera, personal

¹⁸ Although *nanee* is the Hindi term for maternal grandmother, this is the name that all the grandchildren in Amera’s family call her father’s mother. She is actually her *ajee*—the Hindi term for paternal grandmother. For the purposes of this study, I employ Amera’s use of *nanee* as the name she calls her paternal grandmother. Amera’s *nanee* is Trinidadian and moved to Canada in her forties. She is Amera’s strongest influence in Hinduism. *Nanee* is also Amera’s mother’s link to Hinduism.

communication, May 2013). Amera holds a university degree as well as a college diploma.

Six Women and the Challenges of Finding a Common Place and Time for Writing

One of the early challenges of having a group of women come together to write was finding a time and place that was workable for all. I remembered that the group of women who had tried to get together, the group from which I got the original e mail and subsequently the list of women willing to participate in, were unable to meet due to constraints of time and the fact that they lived in different areas of the Greater Toronto Area. My research participants and I faced a dilemma, it was impossible for all six women to meet at any single time. The alternative was to have two groups. The problem was geography; there was the West End Group and East End Group. The two groups were formed purely on the basis of location.

The West End group. The West End Group was smaller. There were three of us—Carla, Arti and I. For all of our meetings, I drove to Mississauga after meeting Carla at the Wilson Subway Station. She would be waiting at the passenger pick-up area. Together we would drive to Starbucks on the corner of Hurontario Street and Britannia Road. Arti was working in Oakville. Our planned meetings were for Wednesday evenings at six o'clock in the evening. The initial group meeting happened on March 11th 2012. It was a Sunday evening and after a few phone calls to both Arti and Carla, we decided on a time that was convenient for all. I didn't want to think too much because I would just make myself worried about whether there would actually be stories. Nevertheless, I was a little nervous. When Arti and Carla met each other for the first time, we talked a bit about our writing backgrounds and ourselves. We felt like a group of writers since we realized

that we had all completed writing workshops at the Women's Bookstore in Toronto. On that Sunday evening in Mississauga we wrote stories about our grandmothers. Arti confessed at the end of the session that lasted until about six in the evening, that she had debated about leaving her boyfriend's house on a Sunday evening to come to a meeting. She would have preferred to relax on a Sunday after working all week. At the end of our writing she admitted that the session had been fulfilling for her. Carla also commented on how much she had enjoyed writing again. Over the next nine weeks we met four more times on 21st March, 5th April, 2nd and 9th May-- three Wednesdays and one Thursday at six in the evening.

Usually, we spent the first forty-five minutes getting coffee and updating each other on what was happening in our lives. When we were ready to write, I would introduce the prompt. It was important to me not to give many instructions, as I did not want to influence them beyond providing the actual prompt. Invoking the participants' stories was a major objective of my project. After introducing the prompt, (see discussion on prompts below) we wrote for about twenty to thirty minutes. I didn't stop the writing process. When everyone seemed finished, I would begin to talk again. Calling the group back together included asking whether everyone was ready to reconvene. It was important to me to ask whether everyone was okay and ready to talk about the process. Different prompts were difficult for different participants. We would then share our stories by reading them aloud. There was no set order. Whoever was willing to go first would begin. After the readings were completed, we would informally chat about relationships and issues that arose from the stories. I took notes about some of the conversations and followed up with questions about the practice during the interviews.

These sessions were helping us to bond as a group of women who had experiences that were at times similar because of our common Caribbean background. Being Caribbean was a strong component of our writing and also became an important part of our discussion.

The East End group. This group was made up of four writers including myself. Shalini, Amera and Kristy lived in Scarborough and all worked during the week. We planned our first group meeting for Saturday 24th March at met at Michel's Baguette at the Fairview Mall in Scarborough. After introducing ourselves to each other, we also talked about our common interest in Caribbean identity. I offered an outline of the practice and then introduced the prompt. We would write for about twenty minutes and then we would share our stories. Over the next eight weeks, we met and wrote twenty stories among us—each person writing five stories. I wrote seven since Kristy forgot the date for our practice on 14th April. She and I met on Friday 20th April and wrote together. The four of us had meetings and writing sessions on Sunday 1st April, Saturday 12th May and Wednesday 16th May.

There were more scheduling conversations for the East End group as there were four of us. Although we planned out four subsequent meeting dates after our initial gathering, we changed them as time went along. Because of changes in schedules we had to rearrange plans to find compatible times for everyone. I became worried at times, always hoping that I would be able to carry out the five set writing sessions.

Five Sessions for Each Participant—Five Writing Prompts

I employed the use of various artefacts and writing prompts to generate the stories as a “writing practice.” The term, “practice” refers to the design of the project where I

proposed that the participants would meet regularly and engage in a writing activity that was consistent. The project worked as a “practice” since we met and wrote consistently using the same pattern of activities. The five prompts were designed to engage memory work so that the writers became at once the subject and the object of research thus resisting the dominant representations of subjugated selves.

Frigga Haug’s Model for Memory Work: Similarities and Differences

Following Frigga Haug et al. (1987), I used memory work in a “collective and co-operative” venture, offering a possibility of a liberatory practice. The Indo-Caribbean woman simultaneously became the subject and object of the research (Haug et al., 1987, pp. 34-35). My work followed Haug’s example in that it incorporated memory work and writing as a collective process whereby the women as group members, wrote their own stories based on memories. My project differed from Haug’s in that the participants did not read the same theoretical literature; they did not subsequently theorize their written work (for the purposes of this project) although they responded through personal interviews to my questions on thematic concerns within their stories; and they did not engage in a formal critique of artefacts and stories although we shared discussions about personal experiences relating to the stories. When my writing practice sessions were complete and I retrieved the stories generated from the practice, the stories together with personal interviews became my primary data. I was the researcher and my analysis of the data became the findings of my work.

Kaufman, Ewing, Montgomery, and Hyle (2008) explain that Haug’s method using memory work has been refined by other researchers for the purpose of “being much more explicit” (p. 4). They refer to Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, and Benton (1992) as

responsible for outlining “three primary phases of memory work” that include writing on “her earliest memory of a particular episode, action or event” (Kaufman, Ewing, Montgomery, & Hyle, 2008, p. 4). I have incorporated the invocation of an earliest memory into the design of the practice but I have not encouraged writing in the third person. An integral objective of my work is for self-representation and using one’s voice to do so therefore, using the third person would have denied such a purpose.

Stories, Storytelling and Story writing: Memory Work, Oral History and Autoethnography

When an individual writer tells of her day-to-day struggles, what we’re seeing in operation is a person choosing to continue, to grow, to not be silent. (Sternburg, 1980, p. xix)

The stories that are generated through the writing practice as well as those that emerge from interviews and oral history accounts, call forth the individual lives of women and also of the society in which they live. Hannah Arendt proposes that storytelling implicates both the public and private in “the subjective in-between” (1958, p. 184). The story is grounded in the private, personal matters of the participant but as a shared medium, the story becomes public. Storytelling and story writing by Indo-Caribbean women about their own experiences is a shift from their lives being told from the perspective of men or being silenced. Writing one’s history and telling one’s story holds the recuperative tendencies of reconciling a history that has been imposed with one that is experienced (Freire, 1987; Giroux, 1987). In his essay “The Power of the Story,” Harold Rosen (1986) cites Ross Chambers (1984) in noting the political power of the story. Rosen highlights “the means by which the storyteller acquires the right to narrate,” and Chambers reinforces its utility in “producing authority where there is no power... a

means of converting historical weakness into discursive strength.” Writing becomes “an oppositional practice of considerable significance” (Rosen, 1986, p. 236). Collaborative writing has the potential to contribute to a pedagogy that both acknowledges and shapes community. It has the potential to contribute to an “emancipatory pedagogy” and also to “open spaces for new understandings, discourse and cultural production” (Fine, 1989, p. 508).

Re-telling, writing and re-writing are recognised in feminist discourse as a means of filling gaps and re-dressing erasures within dominant cultures. Re-telling our stories is a route to self-identity. The resultant writing is also a method of decolonizing imposed political hierarchies of power (Mohanty, 2006). Through personal memoir, oral history accounts from family members, and a writing-group, I encourage, record and compile stories from experiences of the Indo-Caribbean woman participants. Subsequently, I analyse experiences, examine aspects of self and community, and attempt to offer reconsidered and new perspectives on previously written relationships within the social, historical and political context of the work. My research methodology also conforms to Cole and Knowles (2001) description:

These data are then thematically interpreted and considered in relation to relevant discipline-based theories, and represented in the form of detailed and rich life history accounts. These accounts represent both the researcher’s interpretation of the research participants’ lives, and the researcher’s theorizing about those lives in relation to broader contextual situations and issues. (p. 13)

The data in this case consist of the stories collected from the writing practice group and the subsequent interviews carried out within the contexts of Caribbean socio-political

themes. Ardra L. Cole and J. Gary Knowles (2001) highlight the autobiographical aspect of research, especially in a methodology including life history research and its applications (p. 10). They also note the “explicit attention to the aesthetic, both throughout the process of researching and in the form of representation” (p. 10). This study is characterised by both these features of life history work. I incorporate my memoir, my family stories and the stories of other women. The autobiographical aspect of this project also informs concerns of the individuals, identity and agency (Kadar, 2005). The act of writing stories is a measure of self-determination because “when we tell our stories we demonstrate the agency we actually have in determining who we are” (Norquay, 1999, p. 6). My research process/project illustrates the potential to re-tell, re-create, and construct new representations of the Indo-Caribbean woman.

Through life history research I carry out an inquiry process that has the potential to “illuminate the central issues” surrounding the various historical subjects that are also being recovered (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 24). The collection of stories delves into the past through memory and experience while illuminating cultural and traditional themes that are explored in Chapters 5 to 8. One of the goals of my project has been to uncover experiences that have been under-represented through previous theoretical and literary discourse. Goodson and Sikes (2001) assert, “life history data disrupts the normal assumptions of what is ‘known’ by intellectuals in general and sociologists in particular” (p. 7). Through such a method, I offer “other people’s subjective perceptions” as voiced through stories and interviews; reasserting their power through contesting previously dominant ideologies; and opening up a continued dialectic through beginning to ask many questions (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, pp. 6-9). Many questions remain unanswered

but the act of questioning is also an act of empowerment illustrating the right to ask by formerly subjugated subjects.

This study incorporates a methodological inquiry of autoethnography. Carolyn Ellis (1999) defines autoethnography as “an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness” (p. 673). I “focus outward on social and cultural aspects of my personal experience, then look inward” at times, “resisting cultural interpretations” (Ellis, 1999, p. 673). There are “relational and institutional stories impacted by history, and social structure, which themselves are dialectically revealed through actions, feelings, thoughts, and language” (Ellis, 1999, p. 673). Anderson (2006) distinguishes “analytic autoethnography” as that whereby, the researcher is “a full member in the research group, visible as such a member in the (published) text and committed to an analytic research agenda and focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomenon” (p. 373). I work towards such an analytic project.

I do not suggest that my study is conclusive, neither is it complete or chronological. It is a fragmented representation of a history and culture of disruptions and silences. The subjects contribute to the generatively composed questions that address silences and gaps within the stories. Some of the questions remain unanswered and some are partially unanswered. The acknowledgement of “not knowing” in terms of the questions and a conscientious working within a context of limited stories, are crucial aspects of the experience of the Indo-Trinidadian woman subject.

I attribute the lack of passed along stories in my family and the scarcity of published stories by Indo-Trinidadian women to a situation described by Anderson and Jack (1991/1998):

Where experience does not “fit” dominant meanings, alternative concepts may not readily be available. Hence, inadvertently, women often mute their own thoughts and feelings when they try to describe their lives in the familiar and publicly acceptable terms of prevailing concepts and conventions. To hear women’s perspectives accurately, we have to learn to listen in stereo, receiving both the dominant and muted channels clearly and tuning into them carefully to understand the relationship between them. (p. 157)

I listen in the way suggested by Anderson and Jack.

This study conforms to a feminist practice as defined by Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2006) in that it operates at various levels:

At the level of daily life through the everyday acts that constitute our identities and relational communities; at the level of collective action in groups, networks, and movements constituted around feminist visions of social transformation and at the levels of theory, pedagogy, and textual creativity in the scholarly and writing practices of feminists engaged in the production of knowledge. (p. 5)

I engage in a creative writing practice together with women participants whose collective practice contributes to a pedagogy and theory of social transformation. I construct a critique of difference that I think has been neglected in the group-feminist work which emerges from the geographical area of the Caribbean. I use stories generated by the practice-group, my personal stories, and stories that I will search out from my family

members. I will employ a methodology of searching as described by Annette Kuhn (1995) in “Family Secrets: An Introduction”:

Memory work has a great deal in common with forms of inquiry which—like detective work and archaeology, say—involve working backwards searching for clues deciphering signs and traces, making deductions, patching together reconstructions out of fragments of evidence. (p. 4)

Kuhn (1995) notes: “Telling stories about the past, our past, is a key moment in the making of our selves” (p. 2). The stories are a part of my attempt to construct my history so that I could locate myself within that history.

Memory Work and Stories

Memory work allowed for examining narratives, representative of the socio-political and cultural relationships of the individual women and of the community with which they identify. Kaufman, Ewing, Montgomery, and Hyle (2008) argue, “the notion of a memory simultaneously reflecting the past, present and future calls into question the idea that the past, or more particularly, our memories of the past, determine who we are in the present” (p. 8). They recognize the power of memory work as a means of “becoming conscious through interrogating and interrupting the hegemonic messages that have shaped our traditional ways of knowing the world” (p. 9). I incorporated memory work as the most viable means of uncovering experiences of a historically, subjugated group of women.

I hoped that the stories would not only tell about ourselves, our experiences and our relationships but also work towards “constructing our identities, of finding purpose and meaning in our lives” (Berger & Quinney, 2005, p. 5). My Informed Consent Letter

included the following under the section “Benefits of the Research to Research Participants”:

You will engage in a process of telling stories and writing stories that will make you more aware of the political, social and cultural history of Indo-Caribbean women. You will examine memories of yourself and your community, which can possibly be fulfilling in understanding aspects of identity and self. (Research Proposal, 2011)

My stated objectives for the study were, “ to explore reasons and explanations for the lack of writing by women; to encourage the practice of writing by women; to retrieve some stories of women that have been silenced; and to contribute to very limited literary discourse concerning the Indo-Caribbean woman” (Research Proposal, 2011). The writing prompts were designed to complement the objectives of the study. Haug et al. (1987) propose that the act of writing our experiences works as “a transgression of boundaries” and “an exploration of new territory” (p. 36). They also highlight the power of such a practice of writing using memory work, to work against the dominant culture and also to be able to understand ways in which women “construct themselves into existing social relations” (p. 33). The stories give access to individual experiences, past and existing social structures and the possibility for a group to “remember collectively” and “theorize memory” (p. 39). The result is a work of self-representation by Indo-Caribbean women.

Writing prompts using “earliest memories.” Both groups followed the same sequence of prompts for writing. I chose to use “an early memory of a grandmother” as writing prompt number one. During the course of a Life History Research Methods and

Applications course taught by Naomi Norquay, I wrote about my family's immigration story. My great grandfather had been the initial immigrant from India to Trinidad. His daughter, my grandmother was a first generation Indo-Trinidadian woman. Before I started interviewing my mother, I had barely known about her early life and history. I knew less about her father. My work for that course entailed using life history research methods, specifically interviewing and oral history research to excavate details of my family's history. My memory work in conjunction with life history methods provided a platform for the beginnings of a recovery of information. Although fragmented the method allows for unsilencing previously neglected stories. My project is a feminist one. Relationships among women in the community provide information that is crucial to representation for a politically, socially and traditionally marginalized group. I focused on the experiences of Indo-Caribbean women therefore I felt that working with memories of grandmothers would work toward recovering stories of a generation that was not yet too lost for the participants. Some relationships were stronger than others but they all proved fruitful for examining present and past relationships of the participants. The stories also helped to uncover cultural, social, political and personal relationships of the individuals and of the societies and communities from which they have come. Although I never knew my paternal grandmother, writing about my memory of her in my family, I was able to use life history research methods to investigate further, to clarify and expose facets of her life that are at risk being buried even further if not passed along in writing in future generations.

Prompt Number One – Earliest memory of grandmother. In my initial meeting with potential participants, some of the questions I posed were “How much do you know

about your grandmother's early life?" "Do you have family stories about your grandparents' early lives?" "Do you know many family stories about any relatives from previous generations?" Not altogether surprising, everyone responded in the same way—there were not many family stories and no one knew many details of their grandparents' early lives. I believed that my research could begin to question reasons for silences and also at the same time to initiate an unearthing of stories.

Prompt Number Two—Earliest memory of mother. I felt that writing on this prompt would generate further insights into the community of women but at a very intimate point of view. "Children do not possess a social analysis of what is happening to them, or around them," and so I hoped that the writing practice would allow for "taking on meaning...from different circumstances" (Steedman, 1985, p. 104). Drawing on memory work, the prompt was designed to delve into the relationships between mothers and daughters and search for subtle lessons and inherited traditions that are often unconscious.

Prompt Number Three—Writing based on an early family photograph or earliest memory of a family photograph taken for an important traditional event in early childhood years/or a memory of that event. For example: a wedding or a birthday. I had written a paper using photographs as artefacts of memory for Life History Research Methods and Applications, as discussed above. Drawing on Annette Kuhn's (1995) work, I designed this prompt to "unearth" particular family stories that use the "readily available resource of the family album" and work towards revealing greater knowledge (p. 6).

Prompt Number Four—*Earliest memory of a song.* The first essay I wrote using memory work was based on a song. As an auditory learner and as a person who had extremely poor eyesight during childhood, I understood later that it was not strange that my earliest memory was that of a song. The song was a Hindi film song from the movie *Hamraaz* (1967). The complexities of an inherited cultural tradition is further complicated by a “different” dominant cultural climate. As an Indo-Caribbean woman, I felt that using memory work, songs and music would allow for further exploration into the complex cultural relationships in relation to identity. Angela Davis (2001) comments on the function of music to African people who were forced to provide slave labour to the Americas: “Through the vehicle of song, they were able to preserve their ethnic heritage, even as they were generations removed from their homeland and perhaps even unaware that their songs bore witness to and affirmed their...roots” (p. 218). This also holds true for Indo-Caribbean people who travelled from their original homeland to the West Indies.

Prompt Number Five—*Earliest memory of home.* Home spaces are elusive for the Indo-Caribbean person, complicated further when other migrations occur. In the case of this study, all participants identify as Indo-Caribbean but we all live in Canada. Vijay Agnew (2005) notes that the diaspora can contribute to “a transnational sense of self and community and create an understanding of ethnicity and ethnic bonds that transcends the borders and boundaries of nation states.” (p. 4). She highlights the tension that individuals experience between “living here” and “remembering there,” “between memories of places of origin and entanglements with places of residence, and between the metaphorical and the physical home” (p. 4). Home for Indo-Caribbean people can be a town, a village, a country and a region. The context of experiences complicates notions

of home, and I hoped that these discussions would arise out of the stories of ‘home’ and consequently allow for further analysis.

Referencing the Stories Written by Participants within Chapters Five to Seven

There were five prompts and six writers. There are thirty-six stories altogether. To identify each story within the chapters on analysis, I enclose the pseudonym of the writer and the prompt. For the stories generated through the first prompt (see above), an example is, “Carla’s Grandmother Story”; the second prompt reads, as an example, “Kristy’s Mother Story”; an example of the third prompt is “Amera’s Music/Song Story”; an example of the fourth prompt reads, “Shalini’s Photograph Story”; and the fifth prompt reads, for example, “Arti’s Home Story.”

What really happened. As discussed above, the participants wrote stories during the group meetings. Each participant wrote five stories. I wrote eleven—five with each group and one extra since Kristy missed a session and we had an extra practice together. In my proposal, I wrote that I hoped that the writers would go off and ruminate on the stories, the conversations and the experiences and then re-write the stories. This did not happen. Everyone wrote with pen or pencil and paper so the stories were handwritten at the meetings. The participants volunteered to type and edit their stories then pass them on to me. At the time, I didn’t want this. I was anxious about actually receiving the stories, as I was eager to start my analysis. I also wanted to respect my participants’ time and perhaps I didn’t have enough patience to wait until they could work further with their stories. Arti was determined to edit her stories and then send them to me. Both Kristy and Carla gave me photocopies of their handwritten stories and kept the original drafts. I did not get any other handwritten stories. I typed Kristy and Carla’s stories, using the handwritten drafts

from the writing practice meeting. Shalini, Arti and Amara eventually typed their stories. Although, the writing practice ended in May 2012, it was not until September that I had a collection of thirty-six stories. Initially, I waited for the participants to send me their redrafted stories. Then I texted and called to keep in touch but also to remind them that I was hoping to receive the stories soon. Arti was the only participant who edited and redrafted some of her work. For the writing practice, she had handwritten her stories. Subsequently, she typed them and edited them for spelling and structural errors. She wanted to write more about her mother's story but decided to leave it as it was written for the practice session.

As I began the analysis of the stories, I realized that it wasn't necessary to keep the two groups as distinct within the analysis of the stories. The women and their stories themselves became more important than the groupings that were made according to geographical constraints and meeting times.

Women—Writers—Friends

All of the women participants in my group writing practice were university educated. They had not all been writers before but were willing to begin the process of writing themselves. One of the objectives of this project has been to un-silence stories of Indo-Caribbean women. By virtue of writing their own stories, the women have revealed experiences, shared stories and questioned issues that characterize their (our) lives as Indo-Caribbean women. The meetings included sharing personal stories about our families and everyday lives. At the beginning of each meeting, we briefed each other on what was happening in our lives. We all shared our lives with each other every time we met. At the end of the practice sessions, we were a group of friends. I have been in touch

with all participants since the end of our writing sessions. We keep thinking about getting together as a group again but scheduling has not worked out. Maybe we should write again. Hopefully, we will.

Questioning and Personal Interviews

After working on the initial analysis of the stories, I asked questions for clarification and development of the ideas within the stories. I e-mailed each participant with questions to elucidate material from their stories. The information included more information about their families and their experiences. In January, I sent out e-mails and made phone calls to each participant in trying to keep our communication active and also to get an idea of how long they were likely to take to reply to my questions. Arti and Shalini replied with their answers by e-mail. I had phone conversations with Kristy and Amera and then typed their responses during those communications. Carla visited my home and I typed her answers to my questions as she answered orally. My analysis of the stories was deepened by these discussions and responses. This process was completed by March 2013. The following is an example of one of the questions and response between Arti and me about her grandparents' marriage.

Prabha: Do you know the circumstances of their marriage? At what age did they get married? At what age did she leave? Was it arranged? Was there a difference in their social class/es?

Arti: It was an arranged marriage, and she was not happy about marrying someone who was darker skinned. There was a difference in caste with my maternal grandmother in a higher caste than my maternal grandfather. She left when her last daughter was a teenager and came to Canada shortly after.

There were similar discussions with each of the other participants. Each set of questions was different as they were based on each woman's written stories.

In April and May 2013, I carried out personal interviews with each of the women and they were electronically recorded using my iPod device. The first was on Saturday 27th April with Shalini. She came to my home and we had a quick update on what was happening in each other's lives. My interview with Shalini was the longest. It lasted one hour and forty-one minutes. After the interview, we chatted for a while, she invited me over to dinner and we agreed to stay in touch.

On Monday 29th April I drove to Kristy's home arriving at eleven in the morning. She had to work in the afternoon so we planned to get the interview finished early that day. The interview lasted one hour after which we had lunch together. She said that I could not come to her home without having food. It is a custom of Indo-Caribbean people to always offer food to those who visit their homes. After lunch and chatting with her and her mother, I drove Kristy to her work place.

Two days later, on 1st May 2013 I drove to Carla's home to carry out the interview with her. She too had cooked a meal insisting that I eat lunch with her. I arrived at one o'clock in the afternoon, but did not begin the interview until three o'clock. When we were finished, I drove her to the library to return a huge bag full of overdue books. Although she wanted me to stay longer, I had to leave.

Amera changed the time of our planned interview from one in the afternoon to nine in the morning of 3rd May 2013. She was attending a documentary film in the afternoon. I was eager not to postpone the interview, as I was always anxious about postponing for too long. I arrived at her home on time, and we conducted the interview in between her

roommate's getting ready for work and the dog running all over the apartment. At the end of the interview, I drove Amera to the location where the film was being shown. We promised to stay in touch.

The final interview took place on Sunday 5th May. Arti came to my apartment, and I prepared lunch for her. She had an engagement later that day, and I was happy that she honoured our meeting day and time. Although she was running late for the event, she did not rush our interview and stayed to eat with me. We talked about getting together again and possibly writing again but we have not yet managed to do so.

Anderson and Jack (1991) note that "oral interviews are particularly valuable for uncovering women's perspectives" p. 157). Situated after the writing practice, some of my questions for the interview were designed to probe into relationships that emerged from the initial analysis of the stories. Another set of questions concerned the writing practice.

Through interviewing, I delved into my history and other personal histories to try to figure out more about my own identity and experiences and our community of women. I worked towards recovering stories that may have been forgotten. Norquay (1999) proposes that:

The imperative to forget may not be one's own choice; forgetting is often socially organized. What is worth remembering and what is to be remembered can be determined and regulated by larger social forces and structured and maintained through authoritative discourses. (p. 86)

I attempted to work through historically debilitating political and social-structures by engaging in a writing practice that un-silenced and exposed forgotten experiences.

As stated above, at the end of the writing practice phase, the research participants and I had become a group of friends. Measor and Sikes (1992) attribute the relationship and trust as instrumental in widening the scope through multiple “layers of access” (p. 213). Although the list of questions provided the general framework for the interview, each conversation took on its own characteristics based on the individual’s experiences and the relationship we have established.

As the research progressed, I continued to ask informal questions to clarify and inform concerns that arose. Measor and Sikes (1992) cite Ball’s (1983) use of the term “interactive research” as the process that emerges—the relationships that exist and continue to inform the research project (Measor and Sikes, 1992, p. 213). All participants have been interested in the common pursuit of questioning our experiences and have been willing to speak about such experiences through storytelling, writing and speaking.

Including My Own Family in Research: Personal Emotions and Risks

My practice of oral history research has involved my family and I realize how precarious that can be. In using my memory of stories that have been told to me, I have found myself editing out some of what I have written in order to protect my family from being hurt. The processes of life history research are very emotional for me, the researcher. I realize that there are risks involved with my project, especially for my parents whose memories of their parents are shaped by what they want to remember and what they are willing to tell. My analysis and re-telling of the stories through memory work at times, contain statements and analysis that do not coincide with what my parents may want to protect as their memories. Shoshana Felman (1982) postulates on ignorance, knowledge, remembering and forgetting:

Ignorance is linked to what is not remembered, what will not be memorized. But what will not be memorized is tied up with repression, with the imperative to forget—the imperative to exclude from consciousness, to not admit to knowledge. Ignorance, in other words, is not a passive state of absence—a simple lack of information: it is an active dynamic of negation, an active refusal of information. (p. 29)

Norquay (1999) discusses the implications for the researcher/interviewer within the process of life history research. She also highlights the relationship between the acts of silencing and speaking, remembering and forgetting as key to the construction of one's identity.

Within life history interviews what is not worth remembering appears in the questions not asked, the answers not given, the clichés, slippages and elisions, and the abrupt changes of topic. All of these hold important clues to aspects of the past that in their absence work to support our identity—both its construction and its day-to-day reproduction. (p. 85)

As the process evolved of unsilencing stories evolved, I realized that I had to acknowledge my responsibility in uncovering stories that some people do not wish to remember. With the participants of my group, I have been able to respectfully stay away from areas that they do not wish to speak about. In fact one of the participants specifically asked me to omit some discussions that we have had during the interview. With my own family it is no different. I include my memories of stories that I initially did not think would be hurtful. The risks however, are no less.

My parents obviously have chosen to silence the stories that they do not want to share.

I have dug elsewhere. My aunt and uncle have been more helpful in providing information about my grandparents. My parents have not shared these stories with me, they do not lay claim to any knowledge of the stories. Neither my mother nor my father tell stories in which his/her parents are featured unfavorably.

I feel responsible for safeguarding the emotions of my parents. I wonder if my search for previously untold experiences is unethical in terms of uncovering stories that my mother and father would prefer to keep silent. Am I hurting them by making certain stories visible? Should these stories remain preserved in silence? Carolyn Steedman (1985), probes previously silenced stories in “Landscape for a Good Woman” but both her parents are dead by the time she does this (pp. 103-126). My parents are very interested in my work on family-stories and have been very supportive. I have been very aware of the possible hurts to them with some of the stories and analysis work so I have tried my best to be aware of the purpose of my re-telling of the stories.

In discussions with my father on some of the seemingly fantastical stories that I have heard from him, he has always defended his “truths” within them. Sometimes in my research, I have doubted the veracity of the events within the story but editing out what I believed or not, would have been dishonest. In trying to be more objective, I have attempted to analyze the stories while trying to understand what may have accounted for the perpetuation of “myth-like” stories. Since my mother has also been part of the audience when my father tells his stories, she has raised her own questions of whether they are “true” or “untrue.” I have found myself explaining to her that I have not wanted to judge whether his stories are true or not. I have been more interested in why these stories are present and why there has been an absence of other stories. Why did he choose

to tell me this story? Why did he decide not to tell me anything else? He has constructed his identity whether conscious or unconscious. I reminded my mother that there are stories that my aunt tells—they are the stories that she (my mother) doesn't have in her repertoire. She agreed. Am I justifying my research process to the people through whom I've been searching for my family's history? Does the fact that it is my history, make it all right to risk uncovering stories that they wish to deny? Do I have a history that is different from that of others in my family? If the subject constructs identity, and I have used the rationale for women writing their own history as a part of my project, is it any different that I am doing the same? Equally my parents have the right to construct their own history, remembering and forgetting what they want, without telling me about the things I want to know about.

The research process implicates me as an interviewer and researcher and also as a subject of my own history. I will continue to critically examine and search for stories and histories about my family. I claim my belonging to their history, as I continue to work toward understanding and meanings while being respectful and caring. I cannot ignore the opportunity for information and in turn perpetuate the previous silences but while I excavate and pry, I will continue to try my best to be concerned with the well being of my family.

My Story of My Family's Stories

I believe that my own story has been important in the conception of this project. I also think it is important to include my story of the stories of women in my family because they fit into the major themes that emerge out of my participants' stories. I have had many informal conversations with my mother, my aunts and many of my female cousins.

This has become a part of how we communicate with each other. In our family tradition, the women usually get together and part of our custom has become telling stories to each other. Their stories contribute important layers to my writing project. I include my own stories within Chapters 5 to 9. Some of stories are included as correlated discussion and analysis to participants' stories and themes.

Journals: Recollection and reflection. At times, I include journal entries that are my memories and stories that have developed through the writing of this study. They contain my reflection and thinking as an ongoing dialogue and extension of the stories generated in the writing groups. I number the journal entries chronologically as they appear in the dissertation.

I insert my journals and recollections to include my “own embodied thinking and being in the world,” as I continue to work with “memory and language” (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 3). “By taking oneself and one’s own ongoing experiences as the data, in autoethnography the gap between memories and the interpretive analytic work of research is closed.” Working with a “technology of telling, listening and writing,” I engage the stories and memories of my participants with my own stories that in turn, trigger continued memory work that recalls instances in time as related to the thematic discussions. (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 3).

My memory work and writing mirror Pelias’ (2013) discussion of turning fragments into narratives:

I struggle, wrestling with memories, images, and glimpses of the past, hoping that they may come together, become momentarily set for my own and others’

consideration. I seek to reveal the human in humanity, to show how one human life might or might not find resonance with others. (p. 387)

Acknowledging the vulnerability of my work allows for an honest exposure of my experiences in the hope that it continues to facilitate scholarly engagements that work towards a better understanding of ourselves.

I also draw upon the examples of using autoethnography and specifically journal-type engagements within scholarly dissertations as exemplified by Karleen Pendleton-Jiménez (2005) and Arpi Panossian-Muttart (2013). Panossian-Muttart's work employs "a collective process of remembering, telling, writing and unravelling" (p. ii). She includes her personal voice within her study as an observer and researcher. I have used journal entries exemplified in her work as well as a methodology that is similar in some ways, specifically the group process of writing with women. Pendleton-Jiménez (2005) also engages a group of women in a writing practice over a period of over three years. She cites "communities of practice" as a model for research, focusing on major themes of "identity, community and practice (in this case writing), and their implications for education" (p. 4). I recognize and work with a similar practice.

I situate my research methods within "Decolonizing Methodologies" drawing on the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and Susan Dion (2009). Tuhiwai Smith articulates a perspective on history, writing and theory that also informs my project:

A dilemma posed by such a thorough critical approach to history, writing and theory is that whilst we may reject or dismiss them, this does not make them go away, nor does the critique necessarily offer the alternatives. We live simultaneously within such views while needing to pose, contest and struggle for

the legitimacy of oppositional or alternative histories, theories and ways of writing. At some points, there is, there has to be, dialogue across the boundaries of oppositions. This has to be because we constantly collide with dominant views while we are attempting to transform our lives on a larger scale than our own localized circumstances. This means struggling to make sense of our own world while also attempting to transform what counts as important in the world of the powerful. (p. 39)

In my quest to enact transformation I have opened up a dialogue with dominant narratives, employing a similar methodology of recovering, re-writing and recording.

As the process of writing with the group has progressed so too, has my personal work with memory and writing stories. Haug et al. (1987) validate the use of memory work and story writing as “a solid method” (p. 71). I have experienced a deeper commitment to working with memory and stories as a result of the writing practice with the group of participants. I have approached my stories with a keener “social perception” that has subsequently allowed me to “live my life more consciously” (p. 71). Within the course of analyzing data, continued oral history research and writing the dissertation, I have generated many written stories. Some appear within the dissertation as stories, recollections and journal entries. They are products of continuing memory work and a parallel writing practice. I have become much more aware of the overarching discourse, the situational culture that is embedded within the stories and factors that affect my memory, my writing and my telling of them.

Chapter 5

Histories of Experience:

Stories of Schooling and Traditional Lessons

For my research practice, six participants including myself, made up two writing groups, and wrote thirty-six stories. The prompts were based on earliest memories of people—grandmothers and mothers, a place—home, and cultural artefacts—family photographs and songs or music. Drawing on Haug’s (1987) practice of feminist, collective memory work, I focused on prompts that channelled women’s experiences—that of the participants and of their memories of their mothers and grandmothers—through writing stories. Employing memory work to construct events in the past, “tells something about the way the person relates to the social” and also the ways in which “we continually reconstruct our memories as we find new or different or more satisfying meanings according to our later life experiences and the changing social order in which we live” (Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, & Benton, 1992, p. 8).¹⁹ In Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8, I incorporate the larger social, cultural and political relationships as they emerge in the stories through the process of memory work.

General Themes Within the Stories

Themes within the following chapters include education practices that are both formal and informal, underlying dominant family structures, the way that skin colour, ethnicity and race are mediated within the society; the effects of violence and alcoholism, and some of the ways in which Indo-Caribbean women negotiate relationships and identity

¹⁹ The researchers Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, and Benton (1992) conduct memory work that is based on Frigga Haug’s (1987) model of feminist, collective memory work.

that oscillate between a traditional culture and an evolving colonized, political environment.

I employ cultural memory which according to Hirsch and Smith (2002) is “always mediated... a product of fragmentary personal and collective experiences articulated through technologies and media that shape even as they transmit memory” (p. 5). Identity within this chapter is personal and shared, “emerging out of a complex dynamic between past and present, individual and collective, public and private, recall and forgetting, power and powerlessness, history and myth, trauma and nostalgia” (p. 5). Feminist perspectives allow for subjectification rather than an objective, passive commentary towards an alternative method of ascertaining and assessing “truthfulness” by means of “analyzing and documenting the private everyday experience, recognizing that they are as politically revealing in their own way as any even played out in the public arena” (p. 12). Diasporic identity is complicated further by the voices of the writers as they all live in Canada. There is a triangulation of cultural inheritance—Indian, Caribbean and Canadian that continues to evolve within negotiations of identity.

The Grandmother Stories. “The Grandmother Stories” are the first set of stories that the participants wrote. The prompt used was “Write on your earliest memory of your grandmother.” In choosing this prompt, I hoped to unearth lived experiences of first generation women that are rarely, if ever included in the published literature. The ages of the participants range from twenty-seven to forty-seven. The mothers and fathers of the participants were born during the period of the 1940’s to 1960’s, and the grandmothers in the stories grew up during the period of 1920’s to 1940’s. Indian immigration to the West Indies took place from 1845 to 1917. For this group, none of the grandmothers are

immigrants. They are first generation Indo-Caribbean women except for one. The youngest participant is Amera; her grandmother is a second generation Indo-Trinidadian. She is also the only grandmother alive at the time of writing this study.

“The Grandmother Stories” are told from the perspective of the granddaughter and also involve relationships with other members of the family including mothers. The relationships that emerge are at times a seemingly naïve recollection through the eyes of the child. However, as Carolyn Steedman (1985) notes, “we rework past time to give current events meaning, and that reworking provides an understanding that the child at the time can’t possess” (p. 105). The narrator sometimes incorporates events when she is a child or very young person at the time. Although the child at that time may not have been able to consciously negotiate the nature or the range of relationships that influence the experience, the adult narrator has more access to such meanings. The subsequent analysis examines the stories; the relationships within the stories; and the memories within them as a means toward making meaning within the historical landscape.

(Steedman, 1985, p. 104)

The stories contained few examples of lived experiences of the grandmothers. As the initial writing was based on the earliest memory of a grandmother, much of the material was based on memories of the granddaughter. All the participants—Arti, Amera, Carla, Kristy, Shalini and I recalled our interactions with our grandmothers and memories of our relationships with them. There were also recollections of events through family stories that were preserved orally. Some lived experiences have been teased out through careful examination of the stories, excavated through questions, oral history research and personal interviews with the participants, as they were not explicit within the narratives.

The Mother Stories. The stories generated by the prompt, “Write on an early memory of your mother,” give rise to details on the intimate relationship between mothers and daughters. Transmission of cultural and social values and expectations are embedded within all the stories. Mothers have anxiety in preparing their daughters for lives within the cultural context they know, but more important, they guide them to a place that promises more opportunity and possibilities for better lives than they themselves have had. This study incorporates a scrutiny of generational issues. The stories highlight improvements in the standard of living for subsequent generations through education. They reveal that the mothers have been more encumbered by a patriarchal tradition than their daughters who have had access to education and, in turn greater independence.

Music/Song Stories. Stories that are based on earliest memories of songs or music generally recall experiences of family gatherings, parties or outings. Dynamics of dominant ideologies surface among relationships of people and cultural practices of music. The artefacts of music and songs prompted stories that contain unique cultural blends of Indian culture; Afro-centric creole culture and Western influences juxtapose episodes of harmony with underlying racial and cultural tensions.

Family Photograph Stories. The constructed images of family photographs are the basis of the participants writing on a snapshot of history where family members are represented individually and collectively. The stories reveal what can’t always be seen from the physical photograph. Annette Kuhn (1995) argues, “If we think of family ties as given, not chosen, they have this much at least in common with our other attachments:

nation, race, class and gender” (p. 1). The stories generated contain the workings of such categories as they relate to Indo-Caribbean experience at specific historical times.

The Home Stories. Stories written on the prompt, “Write on your earliest memory of home” are subsequently called “The Home Stories.” More than with any other prompt, the question of “Where do I come from?” and “Where do I belong?” arise in the stories of home. Diasporic people grapple with the question of belonging that is inherent in an experience of immigration. Inherited cultures and new cultures are negotiated in ways that affect notions of identity of Indo-Caribbean people. Living in Canada presents a further complication in terms of recognizing various home spaces and also highlights oscillations of identity among various cultural inheritances. These stories take up the political and social reasons for immigration and the consequences for the subjects. Agnew (2005) describes the dynamic of diasporic identity, “The past and the present are social constructs that are contested by those with different identities, experiences, genealogies, and histories. This relationship between the past and present is complex and dynamic, with meanings and interpretations that shift with time, place and social context” (p. 3). “The Home Stories” provide an entrance into the complex of diasporic identity and spaces of belonging and not belonging for Indo-Caribbean women subjects.

I work toward a conjecture of analysis, “derived from pre-existing theory or deduced from the data itself”; and also to highlight the significance of the stories as representations of self for the women writers by closely “seeking meaning in the stories themselves” (Berger & Quinney, 2005, p. 9).

Class Consciousness and Education

In the following section I analyse the lessons that are both implicit and explicit within the stories written by participants. There is the underlying push for more formal education by the participants' mothers for their daughters. Educational opportunities for first and second-generation Indo-Caribbean women have been few or none. Political and social changes increase the chances of education for the mothers, and daughters—the writers of the stories. There is an outstanding relationship between the writers and their acknowledgement of class-consciousness within the stories. Class-consciousness shows up as privileges of colour, wealth and educational opportunities. Birbalsingh (1997) refers to the existing social climate of Trinidad and Guyana prior to the 1950's as containing “the hierarchical feudal patterns, and brutal, social conditions bequeathed by slavery/indenture and the plantation system” (p. xix). There is an ever-present understanding of existing hierarchies within the stories of the participants in my study that resonates in the following excerpt from *A Maze of Colour* (Gomes, 1974):

It was this ubiquitous cruelty—of man to animal, of man to woman, of parent to child, of white housewife to Negro domestic, of almost everyone to the scorned and ostracized “coolie,” of the ruling classes to the masses—that fouled the spiritual climate of the community, and overcast my sunlit childhood. (As cited in Birbalsingh, 1997, p. xix)

Birbalsingh (1997) explains, “The humiliation and degradation of such conditions were part and parcel of Indo-Caribbean experience, and inevitably induced despair. Merely to survive such conditions would have been enough” (p. xix). The stories of my study contain underlying philosophies of success that include, better education through

schooling, more success through better jobs, migrations for better opportunities—all means by which social mobility could be attained. The writers of the stories are third and fourth generation Indo-Caribbean women who have had greater opportunities for achieving the described markers of success. Their first and second-generation grandmothers and mothers within the stories do not have the same opportunities. Gomes' (1974) description helps to contextualize the struggles of the “scorned and ostracized ‘coolie’” to move past a period of marginalization and subjugation (as cited in Birbalsingh, 1997, p. xix). One of the most viable ways of doing so was through education but as experiences within the stories reveal, this was an elusive goal for some mothers and grandmothers.

From “no schooling” to schooling. Statements about the lack of schooling and limited schooling appear mostly in *The Grandmother Stories*. None of the grandmothers had any secondary schooling and generally, primary education was limited or lacking. As a means of clarifying and exploring the ideas of education, I asked questions to the participants. These questions were answered through e-mail correspondence and telephone communications.

Shalini's story reads:

I now know that she lacked more than a Grade 5 education. I remember she asked me once when I was six how to spell her name M-A-R-I-A-N-N-E. She would practice as she washed clothes on the concrete pathway—**MARIANNE**. (Shalini's Grandmother Story)

Some of the grandmothers in *The Grandmother Stories* recognize their lack of education and attempt to learn from their grandchildren. In response to my inquiry of whether her

grandmother had practised writing her name or had verbally spelled it, Shalini responds, “We used to dot her name for her—she used to trace it and learn the curves of the lines—she eventually learned her ABC’s” (personal communication, April 27, 2013). In a personal interview, when I asked about her grandmother’s life in a town and the capacity for more independence from relying on the men in her family, Shalini explains that her grandmother learnt to take a taxi to the market where she would sell produce from her garden. She continues:

She had to take a kid with her because of course she didn’t get past a grade one education, so she took the oldest son to help her with the math cause her oldest daughter was in the kitchen taking care of the other children. (Personal communication, April 27, 2013)

For Shalini’s grandmother, a lack of education—limited literacy and numeracy skills, perpetuate dependency on others. The child who goes with her to the market is her son. The boy child is more likely to be encouraged out of the home space while the girl child learns to cook in order to take care of the family. I discuss the importance of cooking for women as a specifically gendered responsibility in a subsequent section, “Education and the culture of food.” (See p. 125) Lack of education is a reason for dependence on others and reduced chances for being more independent.

Arti writes:

My grandmother was about 87 when she died in 2009. We had been estranged for a while as the weeds that had grown between my mother and me infected my relationship with my grandmother who felt the undying obligation to protect her children from any harm, including her grandchildren’s waywardness. Before that I

was her favourite, fair-skinned and light-eyed, an anomaly in my family. I knew my place as a child and was a supposed prodigy in school, so I was a star among the grandchildren. I never recovered from my fall from grace, and found it more and more difficult to be with her surrounded by a thick silence. We could sit and watch her favourite shows, Jeopardy and Wheel of Fortune and make small talk.

My grandmother was illiterate, but my father had taught her numbers. She lived on her own, with her own friends and routine, until the last few years when she was unable to do so. I think the shame and fatigue of living, wore her away.

(Arti's Grandmother Story)

It is surprising that a woman who was illiterate would have favourite television shows that were based on literacy.

The relationship between granddaughter and grandmother is characterized by symbols of education. Their bond is expressed by a shared experience of watching the television shows. Arti highlights the socially existing classifications of superiority including physical qualities that are “lighter” and being educated. Arti recognizes her grandmother's favour because of her ability at school and her light coloured skin. The values of the first generation immigrants include their understanding of the need for education but this is only visible in their grandchildren's time. They encourage the women in the younger generations to become educated. In a personal interview Arti expands on her grandparents and their opportunities for education in Guyana:

My dad taught my maternal grandmother numbers. Both my grandmothers could understand and speak Hindi. My paternal grandmother could read and write Hindi but not English. My maternal grandmother could not read or write at all. It is not

believed that my maternal grandmother went to school and my paternal grandmother went to school briefly, if at all. My paternal grandfather died when my dad was seven. He went to Queen's College, which was the most prestigious high school in Guyana. My maternal grandfather could read, write and understand Hindi and English. [I] Don't know if she went to school. Girls at that time didn't go to school. The men did and the women got married. (Personal communication, May 5, 2013)

Arti's synopsis of her grandparents' formal education conveys a gendered bias. She notes the distinction between the expectations for men and women. Her grandfather pursued high school education contrasted with "girls at that time didn't go to school" (Arti's Grandmother Story). Arti highlights the prestige of the school that her grandfather attended. The participants display an "articulated politics of class consciousness" similar to what Carolyn Steedman (1986, p. 7) notes in her mother's stories. Arti notes that "girls" are situated outside the institutions that represent privilege. In this case, the institution of privilege was "school." In an environment where social mobility was challenging, education provided a means to gain entry into dominant society. This example suggests that men would be the ones who had the chance for social mobility.

Arti's mother was not able to pursue education beyond high school in Guyana but when she moved to Canada, she hoped to become a nurse. She describes her mother's unsuccessful attempt to follow her dreams. In our e-mail correspondence, she recalls, "She went back to school. Although she did do some courses throughout the marriage, she said my dad stopped her from going to school to become a nurse" (personal communication, November 2012). There is a reoccurring dominance by male family

members within the stories. In an interview, Arti describes her mother: “She feels like somebody who never got to realize her full potential” (personal communication, May 2013). She does not continue her education toward becoming a nurse. In a tradition that is dominated by men, she finds it difficult to attain fulfillment. She has had to relinquish her personal dream because her husband does not support her. He believed that being a nurse was not suitable for his wife who was also a mother.

Arti’s description of her mother includes the value she places on formal education: “She met my queries and fears about growing up with dismissal and impatience, but sent us to the best private school” (Arti’s Mother Story). Private schools promise “better” education and are also a symbol of privilege. The institution of privilege contrasts with the immigration history of Arti’s parents:

Like many “old school” immigrant parents, my mother taught me the value of hard work, education, and the ability to stand up for oneself. She and my dad came to Canada shortly after they were married, as she tells it, with only... fifty dollars, ushered in by sponsoring family so they could return the favour with those to follow. (Arti’s Mother Story)

Arti’s mother teaches her daughter to value struggle and sacrifice in a push to become visible and to move forward from a position of marginalisation toward one of perceived “success.”

Sacrifice, struggle and “success.” The term “punishment” comes up in Kristy’s story but within her grandmother’s dialect, it means “sacrifice.” Some of the lessons emerging from Kristy’s Grandmother Story are about sacrifice and education, “She used to say, ‘You punish now and succeed later on. The punishment is good for you.’” There is the

underlying knowledge that their grandchildren's generation needs to achieve more than the previous generations were able to do, and there is a need for sacrifice. Kristy's grandmother's advice continues, "Yual must not fight, and tekk your book more than your mother did." This is at once advice to do better and a critique of her daughter's not doing well enough. Although stories of our grandmother's lives may have been historically silenced, their messages and lessons remain clear.

Kristy recalls her relationship with her grandmother who is her caregiver when her mother gets ill. Kristy spends almost nine years in Guyana from about five years old until the age of fourteen. Kristy reminisces about her grandmother's visit to Canada when the grandmother pampered her:

She would give me Coke and cookies first thing at 5.30 a.m. at my request. As soon as my mother caught on she put a stop to such slackness. My sister and I ended up moving to Guyana at four and five to live with my granny and my uncle and his family. Moving there, being the first grandchild of five grandchildren at the time, she was no longer soft with me. I had to learn to toughen up. My mom was sick and my father was wayward. I needed to learn to take over my mother's financial affairs and businesses by nine. She was overprotective and I needed to learn to protect my younger sister. She taught me responsibility, the importance of "tekking book" as she had no education and was self-taught. She taught me not to want what I can't have, which included family structure. (Kristy's Grandmother Story)

There is a change in the grandmother's treatment of her grandchildren in the absence of their mother. She becomes stricter and insists on their education. There are lessons of

responsibility and discipline for the grandchildren. Even when dementia sets in, she remembers to advise them about school:

She had already been living ten years with dementia and didn't know who we were. We needed to take care of her, both feed and bathe her. The day we were leaving she said to my sister and me, "Yuall still taking care of mommy and Fern? Yuall must not fight, and tekk your book more than your mother did." We did!

(Kristy's Grandmother Story)

The grandchildren are expected to do better than both their mother and their grandmother. Kristy writes, "My mom was sick and my father was wayward." There is no more mention of him in the story. Because he is a man, his unacceptable behaviour does not get as much attention as a woman might.

Lessons and punishments. Arti remembers her grandmother's strictness. She writes, "I balked at the threshold of my room door knowing that initially if I yelled she would ignore me, but if I continued I would meet her quick tongue, or worse, her small but severe hand" (Arti's Grandmother Story). Here, the older woman's voice and hand are used for punishment.

Carla's grandmother's voice too is symbolic of punishment. She writes, "My grandmother had presence. She wasn't afraid to use her voice, to raise it everyday. As much as she loved her family she punished them constantly" (Carla's Grandmother Story).

In her story, Shalini describes her mother's expectations of her daughter:

I remember my mom's grace as a person, professional and mother. She was the ultimate disciplinarian and that memory is more dominant than any. She was

mostly gentle but she was always so quick to get angry and remind me of what “a good little girl” was supposed to be. “Children are to be seen and not heard,” she would say. “Nose in your books before anything else,” she would echo as she caught me on the phone more often than she would like. My mother really kept me in line but as I grew older I saw an awful dynamic brewing between her and my father. Was she the sole more dominant disciplinarian because she feared that I may be the evidence of her failure as a mother? I remember mop handles breaking on my back, bedroom slippers turning corners as she threw them. I remember wearing four pairs of pants on report card day foreshadowing the licks that were coming later. (Shalini’s Mother Story)

Shalini’s mother’s expectations for her daughter include being successful in school. There is a priority on activities related to schooling—“nose in your books before anything else.” The mother also teaches her daughter about “what a good little girl was supposed to be” and that includes learning to be quiet. The women recall their place as children, their understanding of what was expected of them, and the measures of punishment that accompanied resistance.

Shalini’s memory of her grandmother involves her roles in the family, “She was always working harvesting crops, making roti or grandchild affixed to her hip” (Shalini’s Grandmother Story). As with Carla’s grandmother, there are roles the women take up that eventually become the characteristics of their lives and place in society. Arti shares her memory of her grandmother in her story, as one who had borne “the load of many children, baskets of food, and her hands [hit with her hands] when she meant to convey how serious she was” (Arti’s Grandmother’s Story). At once, the woman’s hands are

instruments of hard work and sacrifice and also a symbol of punishment for the wavering child. The lesson about sacrifice works as consolation for suffering that is inevitable at times. If suffering is viewed as sacrifice there is at least, relief in the form of hope of survival. At most, there is a chance for social mobility for their families and greater representation within the society.

Sacrifice of schooling and sacrifice for schooling. Carla's mother was prevented from going to school. She writes:

My mother was stopped finishing school to stay inside and help her cook for the family and the various people who worked there. There were incredibly strict notions of propriety that were branded into my mother, that I am expected to adhere to now, I am supposed to be indoors before dark, to dress modestly, to not encourage men, to not consume alcohol, to know how to make roti and channa, to sew, and to never backtalk someone older than myself. If this is my grandmother's legacy, I have thoroughly rejected it. (Carla's Grandmother Story)

Implicit in her story, is a generational relationship to the dominant structures concerning women's expectations and behaviours. Carla's grandmother's legacy includes an adherence to "strict notions of propriety." Her mother is represented as not having much choice in accepting her role as a cook and caregiver for the family. Carla however, expresses her own rejection of such values. In my interview with Carla she points out the role of her mother in cooking for the family:

Carla: When my mom was nine that was when her father died. So her mother pulled her out of school to come and cook for everybody.

Prabha: Do you think that if her father were alive that she would still be pulled out of school?

Carla: Yeah. Education was not prized for them. And she just recently told a story, like when I was back home this month, about how when she came up here (Canada), like she tried to go to school here. And she didn't have high school, she didn't have anything, so she couldn't go and, she was really young. And you know, like they never thought they should have stayed in school. (Personal communication, May 2013)

Carla recognizes the challenges to formal education that her mother has faced. Historically, her mother's generation (second-generation) valued domestic work more highly. Not all of the mothers in the stories are second generation Indo-Caribbean women, but the three who are, have been affected in similar ways—education was cut short and they were forced to think about caring for their families instead. Carla's account suggests that her mother wanted to continue her education but was not able to do so.

The older women in the stories sanction education for the younger ones, but education is not as important as marriage for the first and second-generation women. The grandmothers' lack of education is apparent. I asked Carla why her mother had stopped going to school at age ten. She answered, "Education was not valued. None of the sisters were educated. Marriage was more important" (personal communication, November 2012). Kristy's grandmother needed help from her daughter so she took her out of school. "At the time my granny was sick and needed someone to care for her so my mother came out of school to care for her" (Kristy's Grandmother Story). In a hierarchy of

expectations for first and second-generation women, formal schooling was relegated to the bottom.

Amera's Grandmother Story does not contain any clues about her education but I asked her about that in a series of questions through e-mail. She responds:

She went to elementary school until about 13 or 14. Her dad wanted her to go to school. He really wanted her to know how to speak English and Hindi properly. He was committed to having his daughter educated. (Personal communication, November 2012)

Amera's grandmother's experience is different from all the other grandmothers in the study. (She is second generation and the others are first generation.)

Most of the mothers in the stories are determined to make a better life for their families by engaging in businesses or holding jobs out of the home. They accept their sacrifices but hope for better lives for their daughters. The grandmothers had more challenging lives than the mothers in the stories. With each new generation, the women progressively have more opportunity for independence and better education with the possibility to work for a higher income.

My grandmother was unable to say the letters of the English alphabet. She understood the worth of education and specifically the merits of being able to read. I write in My Grandmother Story:

Nanee²⁰ did not speak much English and whatever she attempted sounded like another language altogether. She encouraged her daughter, my mother, when she was sad or depressed saying, "Betee²¹ you are so lucky. You could read. You

²⁰ Nanee is the Hindi term for maternal grandmother

²¹ Betee is Hindi for daughter.

could never be bored. All I could do is sing my *bhajans* (religious songs).” Of course she said this in her mixed tongue of Bhojpuri and Hindi. My younger brother, my sister and I tried to teach Nanee the English alphabet but she could not get past ABC. She would mix up the words associated with the letters saying things like, “A for dog, C for apple.” We would squeal with laughter. Nanee never did learn to read or write in any language. When she collected old-age pension from the government, she used her thumbprint in the place of a signature.

(Prabha’s Grandmother Story)

She reminds her daughter that she is “better” than her mother has been. She can read. My grandmother wants to learn to read but it does not prove possible for her.

The mothers of Carla, Arti, Amara, Shalini and my mother include a philosophy of education in the upbringing of their daughters. Their struggles remind their daughters of the value of education and independence for the Indo-Caribbean woman.

The following is a story about my mother’s childhood that she related to me. It is my mother’s story and also my story.

Nanee’s Strong Back: Prabha’s Journal # 1, July 2014.

My mother was about eleven years old and about to write the Common Entrance Examination. In order to attend secondary school, it was necessary to pass that examination. My mother, her parents and two brothers lived in a house in Cemetery Road. There was a cemetery at the beginning of the road, thus the name. As the road progressed into the village however, it turned into a narrow roadway without any paving. It was made of bare earth and so became very swampy, especially during the rainy season. No cars were driven on the road.

Instead, there were carts pulled by bison and cattle and these made the roadway even swampier. In order to go to school, my mother walked towards the cemetery and then onto the main road on which the school was situated.

A few weeks ago, Mummy showed me a scar on her big toe. “Can you see that?” she asked. “Uh hmm, how yuh get that?” I ask in our Trinidadian dialect. She tells me that when she was a child of around eleven, she had a huge sore on her foot. Her father would wash it regularly and apply sulfathiazole powder. When there was no powder, he would warm a leaf of the pepper tree and cover the sore. She could not walk through the muddy road to go to school, as she could not wear shoes. My nanee, mummy’s mother would tell her to climb on her back and she would carry her to the end of the swampy road from where she could then walk the rest of the way to school. My mother’s voice was soft and emotional while telling me this. She explained that she had been a heavy child. My grandmother insisted that she find a way to school, as she was a good student. Until my mother’s foot was healed, nanee carried her daughter on her back so that she could attend school. Mummy would have been over one hundred pounds. Although nanee could not change the values of the entire society at that time, she made sure that my mother was able to get to school, even at the price of carrying her on her back. Nanee’s strength and determination ensured that her daughter received what she hadn’t had a chance to get—formal education.

When I knew my nanee, she walked with a limp—the result of a fractured foot that never healed well. I remember, “spending holidays”²² at her home in rural Monkey Town, Barrackpore. Her bathroom was outside and was made of three

²² “Spending holidays” means vacationing in Trinidadian dialect.

sheets of galvanized zinc held together by pieces of two by four laths. The fourth side opened as the door. There was a movable galvanized sheet put in front of the opening to show that it was occupied. The ground was unevenly covered with asphalt. The bathroom served a place for everyone to take baths and an enclosed area for women to urinate. It always smelled of “pee” but as a child, I couldn’t discern the smells of women that were contained in the bathroom. Men were free to roam the wider expanses of the land surrounding the homes and their excrement was scattered in random, bushy places. At that time, no one in Monkey Town and most of Barrackpore had running water or electricity. Coming from the urban area of San Fernando, my family was used to a regular water supply and indoor plumbing. I found my grandmother’s bathroom fascinating. While she took her daily bath, nanee sat on a “peerha”²³ and relished having her granddaughters around so we could scrub her back. In my memory, I can see her broad, light brown skin with many moles—some were brown and some were black. Her back seemed so broad as my small hands worked hard to cover the entire area. My scrubbing must have lasted no more than two minutes but seemed longer than my seven-year-old stamina could provide for helping my grandmother. My mother’s story invokes my wonder for the weight and work that naanee could bear.

My mother received secondary schooling but did not complete it because she was married at the age of sixteen. She recalls that her father did not want her to go to secondary school; he wanted her to get married. My mother, a second-generation Indian immigrant had limited education, a means to social mobility because of traditional beliefs that marriage was more important for women. Years later, my grandmother verbally

²³ A “peerha” is a short, narrow bench.

acknowledges the advantages of literacy and through her actions, as much as possible, helped her daughter to receive formal education. My grandfather did not see it as the woman's place in the world to be educated. The contradiction of his teaching my mother to read and write in both Hindi and English but not encouraging her to pursue formal schooling, highlights the traditional habits of the Indian population in valuing tradition over assimilation into the new society.

Education and Land—Means Towards Social Mobility

My memory of my family was that they were financially poor. Upon closer examination through research and interviews with my mother, I speculate that their poverty was affected by their displacement within Trinidadian society. The political realities of the new country, Trinidad, also affected my family's social and financial status. Although he was literate in Hindi and English, my grandfather's formal education was limited. He had only received about four years of elementary schooling. My grandparents were unable to acquire education and land, the two markers of success in Trinidad at that time. Carl C. Campbell (1996) in *The Young Colonials: A Social History of Education in Trinidad and Tobago, 1834-1939*, explains that Indians were neglected in terms of education. He discusses the relationship between education and class:

Because the Indians were late in getting even primary education, the rise of an Indian middle class through education lagged behind that of the blacks and coloureds, although the Canadian Mission was remarkably swift in starting a secondary school. For instance, the Indians missed the opportunity because of lack of secondary education, to become solicitors by local study in the last third of the nineteenth century, as blacks, coloureds and French creoles were doing. In

1919 there was only one Indian solicitor at a time when Indians already had a long tradition of purchasing Crown lands. In the later nineteenth century the ownership of land, not education was the primary mechanism for social and economic advancement by the Indians. (p. 76)

My grandparents did not have the benefit of formal education and they were not able to achieve “economic advancement” through owning land.

I recall my grandmother saying that she wanted to be a man in her next life. As Hindus, my family subscribes to the notion of reincarnation. On looking back at her life, as an old woman, *nanee* acknowledged a life of hardship but also her belief that a man’s life is easier than that of a woman. She could not read or write in any language. Her spoken English was extremely poor. She understood the value of literacy though. My *nanee* died when I was twelve years old. I barely ever understood what she was saying. Her English was very weak. I believe that she understood how poor her life was because of her gender and because she was illiterate. Both education and gender were determinants in the varying degrees of poverty that the immigrant population in the West Indies experienced. My grandmother could not enjoy the social freedoms of either her father or her husband.

The Primary Narrative for Indo-Caribbean Women

One of the questions that underlies the stories is: “From where have the ideals of womanhood come?” The standards of expectations are prevalent among the stories of the participants, especially within “The Grandmother Stories.” The prescription for being a good woman is reminiscent of one of the most popular texts that are revered by Hindus globally. The primary narrative is derived from the epic Ramayana. The Ramayana is one

of the main mythological scriptures honoured by Hindus. The better-educated people read the Ramayana in either Sanskrit, originally written by the sage Vyasa, or the Hindi version of the Ramayana that was written by Tulsidas. Both people who can and cannot read in Hindi or English, preserve stories of the Ramayana orally. This aspect of oral-story telling is an integral part of Hindu tradition, and I believe that this tradition of storytelling conveniently replaced the real life stories that were non-triumphant or difficult to tell. The major lessons of the story were told to maintain traditional values of gendered behaviours and moral expectations.

The hero of the Ramayana is Rama. He is the King of Ayodhya who is sent into exile because his stepmother invokes a promise that was made to her by her husband, Rama's father. While in exile, Rama's wife Seeta is abducted by the demon Rawana, a demon-king. Ultimately, Rama wages a war against Rawana and rescues Seeta. The story culminates in the couple's return to Ayodhya where Rama takes up his rule as King. Although Rama and Seeta return to their kingdom, Seeta must prove her chastity because there is doubt among people in the kingdom. After all, she was kidnapped by a powerful man. She offers herself to Agni, the God of Fire, in order to prove her worth. When Agni does not burn Seeta to death, her husband and the whole kingdom are satisfied that she has been faithful. There is another version to the story where it is Rama who distrusts her. She attempts to burn herself but is unharmed by the fire. Rama then begs her forgiveness.

In both versions of the story, the woman must prove her worth by extreme means. Most of the episodes of the Ramayana are about the fighting and subsequent victories by the good men within the story. Women are supporting characters that are not as mighty as the heroes or the powerful villain. The characters responsible for Rama's exile are his

stepmother and the woman-servant who encourages her. The servant, Manthara is hunchbacked and evil. Ramesh Menon (2004) describes her in his version of *The Ramayana: A Modern Retelling of the Great Indian Epic*:

She stood like an old vulture on the terrace of the king's palace. She was Kaikeyi's (Rama's stepmother) maid, born with more than just her back bent almost in two. Manthara's spirit was twisted....Her tiny eyes smoldered....She was a lone creature, and had no love for anybody. No one spoke much to Manthara. She had a foul temper, a worse tongue, and you could never tell what would set both off. (p. 71)

Manthara's unattractive qualities include an allusion to physical darkness by her description "like a vulture" (usually black) and vileness of "a worse tongue." Colour and silence are important themes in this narrative and also emerge within participants' stories. The story of the Ramayana culminates with the return of Rama as King of Ayodhya; his stepmother is repentant and evil, personified by the demon king Rawana, is destroyed. The fairy-tale ending is similar to that of many contrived stories that makeup the repertoire of the grandmothers' stories. Both my grandmother and my mother mostly told stories that were considered fairy tales. One of my objectives of this study has been to dig for family stories that contain lived experiences of the community of Indo-Caribbean women. Some of the stories include lessons that are parallel to the primary narrative—those of sanctioned, gendered behaviours of women.

Stories that Teach Lessons to Girl Children: How to be a Good Indian Woman

My mother's story...was told to me... in bits and pieces...and it wasn't delivered to entertain but rather to teach me lessons. (Steedman, 1985, p. 106)

Similar to Carolyn Steedman's analysis of the stories that her mother told her, many of the stories in my study contain lessons for life. The lessons are important aspects of the life experiences incorporated into the stories. Although there is very little on actual lived experiences of grandmothers, especially in the grandmother stories and the mother stories, there is direct and indirect advice on behaviour and social lessons contained in them. Throughout the following section, I analyse the major theme of education that incorporates lessons that have been passed down from grandmothers and mothers, the effects of an inherited tradition and the primary narrative that underlies a history, the mythical composition of an operative culture (expectations of women in the society and ways in which they survive), an examination of silences and forgettings as well as the privileging of male narratives within family stories and the history of some Indo-Caribbean families. There is an unearthing of family stories that would not have been voiced if it were not for my deliberate search through this research project.

Lessons on socially acceptable behaviours. In her story about her grandmother, Carla describes "notions of propriety" that have been transferred through her mother to her. Carla's story is explicit about some of the qualities that a young "Indian" woman should have. The code of behaviour stipulates when not to be outdoors: "Being indoors before dark," suggests that there is danger outdoors. Women are more vulnerable at this time so mothers warn their daughters about their lack of safety.²⁴ While the warning may include safety for women because of the dangers of men who may attack them in the dark, there is also a control of freedom for women. Dressing modestly and not drinking alcohol are values that restrict a woman's choices so that she conforms to what is

²⁴ Until the late 1970's and early 1980's many rural areas did not have electricity and running water. It would be more dangerous to be outdoors in areas where there was no electricity as the darkness represented physical danger.

required by dominant society, traditional religion and men. The skills of cooking and sewing equip women to take care of their families. Carla specifically writes about “roti and channa” that has been basic food for Indo-Caribbean people. It is the most common food cooked at events such as prayers and weddings. “To not encourage men,” suggests that it’s the woman’s duty to keep men away. The values are in relation to the society at the time when virginity before marriage was applauded. Women are expected to save themselves for men, but the responsibility of doing that is also theirs. Women are expected to train their daughters governing what are the acceptable behaviours in society and about women’s relationships to men. It is incumbent on each generation to successfully transmit values of the “good Indian woman” to the next generation of women.

I asked Carla questions about her maternal grandmother after initially analyzing the stories. She responds:

Only over the past summer did I get a clearer idea about the personality of my maternal grandmother. She was much more obsessed with respect, having lost her husband at a relatively young age in her life. Her position of matriarchy was much more precarious. My mother and her sisters were incredibly sheltered, from my point of view, and it especially manifested in the way they were expected to dress, and whom they were allowed to talk to in Rio Claro village. (Personal communication, November 2012)

Women who break the social codes of expectations are at risk of being ostracized by society. The fear of breaking society’s rules keeps them within the defined limits and thus protects women within the confines of conformity. For this reason, the older generations

groom their children in ways that are considered acceptable. Women encourage their daughters to conform so that life will be “easier” for their children, and they do not deal with the repercussions of rejecting dominant society’s expectations. If children are “obedient” the parents themselves will not be at risk of embarrassment or shame. Women who do not defy expectations, do not have to contend with negative tensions or feel alienation and snobbery within a society that is small enough to make such things matter.

The Mother stories contain the most intimate accounts of the participants with their mothers, and contrast with other stories. The tensions and attachments surrounding the relationships are simultaneously exposed in descriptions of the women by their daughters. The older women teach their daughters through their relationships with them. Some of these lessons are direct and others are realized through distance and contemplation. Arti’s mother expects comfort and support from her daughter. As her growing daughter senses the complexity of her mother’s relationships and becomes more critical of her, the mother is disappointed. Arti reflects on the relationship:

Those nights on the bathroom floor, I was her confidant, her comfort, her soft place that drew out her heart. She resented it profoundly when I abandoned her, when I didn’t become just like her and defend her against all those injustices. She had been grooming me, and I digressed—clearly her failure as a mother and my waywardness. I was her eldest, her daughter, and was supposed to fight all the wrongs that had been done, or so it felt. Her cries were quiet, but she wanted everyone to know. (Arti’s Mother Story)

There is an expectation from the mother with regard to her daughter. Arti does not fulfill her mother's desire of validating her struggles. Cultural and political expectations are implicit within the stories.

Education and the culture of food

Through analysis of food and eating systems one can gain information about how a culture understands some of the basic categories of its world. (Meigs, 1997, p. 100.)

My mother's mother, my nanee was very worried that her youngest daughter had no household skills, most of all, she could barely make a roti. (Prabha's Mother Story)

There are overt lessons of the place of food as being in the domain of women and, as well as, traditional skills and practices related to food. Food is a “universal medium that illuminates a wide range of other cultural practices” (Watson & Caldwell, 2005, p. 1). In “Mythologies” (1972), Roland Barthes distinguishes a “major structuralist inheritance within food-cultural studies” that exemplifies a relationship between food, national identity and imperialism (Ashley, Hollows, Jones, & Taylor, 2004, p. 5). Food practices and culture provide a site for characterizing ethnic identities and for creating a space to negotiate meaning. Certain foods enter into the privilege of being called “national” food—a sign of cultural visibility and acceptance. Although Indo-Caribbean food has become available and accepted by the mainstream population within the region, ethnic conflict has characterized the historical relationships with such foods. Stories in this study reveal some of these conflicts and accompanying social issues. Bridget Brereton (1981) highlights the “strong, cohesive, patriarchal family structure” of Indo-Caribbean people since the early nineteenth century, as a crucial aspect of the social architecture (p.

79). The family structure is also characterized by strong relationships with food practices and a close alliance to women's place in the family and society.

When my mother got married at a very young age, my grandmother was extremely concerned about her cooking ability as a wife, since one of the most important duties of an Indian woman is to prepare meals for her family. The foods that she eventually learned to cook were typically "Indian." When my siblings and I ask her to make "chips"²⁵ for our school outing, she had to find out how to make it. I write:

My mother knew that it was made from potato but she was not sure how to make anything from that vegetable other than fry *aloo*,²⁶ *aloo chokha*²⁷ or an addition to most vegetables to stretch a meal to feed us all. (Prabha's Mother Story)

She does not ask her family because they wouldn't know. My family lived in a town, which gave us the proximity to non-Indian people. My mother had to find out how to make it from other women in the community. As she is a second generation Indo-Trinidadian she began to assimilate the culture of others in the society. This is more possible because she lives in a town where there are many non-Indians.

In my Mother Story, my mother uses the skills she has to make Indian delicacies to make money for us to go to a Brownie Camp. In this instance, there is an open-ness to the food of the Indian community in Trinidad. The men who drink in a nearby bar are mostly non-Indian but they patronize my mother's entrepreneurship. There is a definite change

²⁵ Chips is the term Trinidadians use for French fries. Since Trinidad was a British colony much of the vocabulary tends to be more British than North American.

²⁶ *Aloo* is the Hindi word for potato.

²⁷ *Chokha* is a mashed up version of vegetables. Potatoes are boiled and mashed to make *aloo chokha*. Potato is a very cheap food in Trinidad and when vegetables are scarce or expensive, potato is used to make the meal more substantial.

from the relationships that dominate the lives of my grandparents, where there is not as much interaction with non-Indian people.

Amera's mother adopts her father's culture that includes cooking food from his inherited culture. Amera writes:

I remember old Jamaican men telling her that she cooked jerk chicken and oxtail better than their mothers. How openly and readily she accessed and embraced this world of the diasporic Caribbean as her family, culture and her children would hold and know (Caribbean culture), fiercely in exchange for her own. (Amera's Mother Story)

Her mother not only adopts her husband's cultural traditions, she excels at it.

Food characterizes the relationship between Carla and her mother. Cultural transfers occur from mother to daughter through food and cooking. Carla remembers:

I loved her food. She was extraordinary in the kitchen, making fry aloo and roti, ensuring I build a taste and desire for hot pepper, creamy corn soup with dumplings and fresh blue crab with *bhaji*-the Indian word for spinach, which I absolutely detested and would only touch when she cooked it with coconut milk. (Carla's Mother Story)

Arti's mother attempts to pass on the cultural heritage of cooking to her daughter. She notes:

My mother was a magician in the kitchen—curry, paratha roti, dhal, cook-up rice—like her mother before her, and her sisters. This was one of the staples that infused me with culture and life, from her hand. But she couldn't teach me this

talent, she couldn't pass on my heritage with patience, without sucking and grinding her teeth at me. (Arti's Mother Story)

Arti's mother succeeds in nurturing her daughter through food. Although one of the tensions in their relationship is her mother's lack of patience, Arti recognizes traditional food and cooking as an intrinsic component of her heritage.

Stereotypes of Indo-Caribbean People

Daniel Miller's "Coca-Cola: A black sweet-drink from Trinidad." In my research of food relationships and cultural theory, I came upon an article by anthropologist, Daniel Miller (2005), "Coca-Cola: A Black Sweet Drink from Trinidad." In his essay, he provides a commentary that includes an ethnic discussion contrasting behaviours and cultural habits of Indo and Afro-Trinidadians. He claims,

The Indian has been seen as an ethnic group with its own material culture. The red sweet drink was a relatively early example of the community being objectified in relation to a commodity as opposed to a self-produced object. The red drink is the quintessential sweet drink inasmuch as it is considered by consumers to be in fact the drink highest in sugar content. The Indian population is also generally supposed to be particularly fond of sugar and sweet products and in turn (this) is supposed to relate to their entry into Trinidad largely as indentured labourers in the sugar cane fields. They are also supposed to have a high rate of diabetes which folk wisdom claims to be a result of their overindulgence of these preferences. (p. 62)

Miller highlights some key stereotypes pertaining to Indo-Caribbean people—their affliction with diabetes; having a stronger link with "sugar" in their diets because of their

work within the industry; and having a larger appetite for unhealthy food. Miller fails to understand the traditional culture that has affected Indo-Caribbean people's relationship with food. In a period of history where the Indo-Caribbean population was mainly occupied with agriculture, their diets consisted mostly of vegetables, and carbohydrates coming from *roti* (Indian flatbread) made of flour, potato and rice that were all relatively cheap commodities. Meat protein was scarce. The availability of cheaper vegetarian options and traditional Hindu values of non-violence and vegetarianism encouraged a diet that was not balanced. For Muslims, eating pork was *haram* or unclean and therefore would not have constituted a part of their diet.

Roti: A symbol of Indo-Caribbeanism. Historically, *roti* has been a staple of Indo-Caribbean people and also a source of ridicule. Oral accounts recorded in Fung's (2013) film, *Dalpuri Diaspora*, trace the presence of *roti* in Trinidad and Tobago. One interviewee describes his experience of shame at school, when *roti* as representative of Indian-ness, was revealed as lunchtime. Some Indo-Trinidadians were demeaned and heckled because of the food they ate. Fung traces changes in national culture that have led to symbols of Indo-Caribbeanism such as *roti*, being accepted as part of mainstream culture. Changes like this suggest a parallel acceptance of Indo-Caribbean culture and in turn greater representation of the people.

Roti has become accepted as a national food in Trinidad and Tobago. Miller (2005) notes that Afro-Trinidadians "are today avid consumers of *roti*" (p. 63). Richard Fung (2012) has documented his search for the origins of *dalpuri*, a specific type of *roti* made with ground, yellow split peas as a filling. His search proved that the variety of food is not common in larger metropolitan areas such as Delhi and Mumbai however; he found

the closest resemblance in Bihar—an area from which many Indians in the Caribbean came. I am not sure from exactly where my *nanee*'s (maternal grandmother's) family came, but I felt as if I had found the place as I watched and listened to Fung's *Dalpuri Diaspora*. He begins his search with, "Ever since my mother died, when I crave a taste of home, I look for roti." Fung includes valuable historical information and lends an understanding to food culture in general in the Caribbean, "Food such as salted beef and pork would have been unfamiliar or forbidden on religious grounds"; however these were some of the foods allotted to the immigrants by the Food Ordinance of 1869. In the film, Brinsley Samaroo explains that the indentures brought foods such as mango, *bhaji* (spinach) and tamarind to the Caribbean in cloths that were tied to the end of a stick. The stick and bundle was called a *jahaji bandal*. He continues that they were able to recreate India in the Caribbean, making improvisations where they could. For example, they couldn't find *dhania* (coriander) but found something similar in flavour. They called it *bandhania*. It continues to be a part of Caribbean cuisine today.

In *Dalpuri Diaspora* (2012), Fung interviews Ruby Maharaj of *Ram's Roti* in Toronto. She describes making roti in her shop in the 1970's and reminisces about the Caribbean immigrants who came to buy roti. "I would cook it hot" she says, and they would say, "You remind me of my mother." Roti and mothers become a metaphor for home for Caribbean people. Mothers are associated with feeding the family, and the most staple version of bread, *roti*, is the food that mothers provide. Within the stories generated for this study, the Mother Stories illustrate a similar relationship between mothers and food. At times, the ties with the home and duties associated with family have prevented women from being educated, especially women in the first and second generations of Indo-

Caribbean people. The participants, all third or fourth generation Indo-Caribbean women are university educated and none of us has children at the time of writing this research.

Lessons on Tradition

Memory is a key to personal, social, and cultural history and is dependent on time and context. What we remember is articulated by the major political and social narratives of our times: they enable us to reconstruct history by identifying and filling gaps. (Agnew, 2005, p. 184)

Stories in this study, recreate a historical relationship among the characters, important cultural and social practices set in past time. The stories are remembered in a different time, nonetheless with gaps, silences and questions that are as important as what is actually recalled. The participants identify as Indo-Caribbean. At times, they distance themselves from an active engagement with Hinduism or a cultural tradition yet, their stories contain descriptions of inherited traditions and relationships that preserve them.

Arti writes about an encounter with her grandmother while she was praying. “She whispered the Hindi words with a slow deliberate and musical cadence [...] I didn’t know what they meant but I could tell she was committed to those words.” Arti contrasts her grandmother’s practice of praying with her “precarious engagement with” her “Hindu legacy.” She situates her mother’s generation as losing the opportunity to hold on to Hindi, a strong link to the culture which they desperately try to maintain. The generations straddle their relationships with Hinduism and Indian cultural traditions; and the new culture—assimilation within Caribbean and Canadian culture. Arti makes the comparison within her story—her grandmother who is bilingual in Hindi and speaks “broken English,” holds the strongest relationship with the inherited culture; her mother’s generation is estranged from it because of their loss of language; and Arti is even further

distanced. She does not even remember the direction in which her grandmother prayed²⁸ (Arti's Grandmother's Story).

Amera's story about her grandmother also describes her grandmother's practice of prayer. She writes:

My grandmother worships the sun. She will stand in the street and stop to raise her hands to the sky and thank Bhagwan²⁹ for letting the sun shine on her beautiful melanated face that day. She must be the most blessed human being I know, her altar covers an entire wall in her bedroom. (Amera's Grandmother's Story)

Amera's grandmother has influenced her granddaughter's relationship with Hinduism.

In an interview, Amera explains, "Most of my spirituality comes from her, like most of the things my mom knows about Hinduism is from my grandmother. She is the one that taught all of us" (personal communication, May 2013). The grandmother's generation in both Arti and Amera's stories is responsible for influencing their spiritual practice. Amera embraces an inherited practice of spirituality while Arti comments on her contentious engagement with it.

Kristy's story highlights the tradition of jewellery among Indian women:

A few years ago, I went to my mom's house for a visit wearing the bangles and chain that I was apparently wearing when I was four and played dress up. I was sitting in front of her TV soaking in her free cable. She looked at me extremely confused. So I thought it was my intense stare at her TV. I told her, "I don't have

²⁸ Hindus usually face the east when praying as a salutation to the sun.

²⁹ Bhagwan is the Hindi word for God.

cable and that I am catching up on Y & R.³⁰ I'll leave when I'm done." She then asked, "Where did you get that bracelet and chain from?" I responded smartly, "A guy off the street for five bucks. It's yours of course." She laughed because I took her back to when I was four. My memory was that I always wanted to indulge with everything of hers as if I knew my time with her was going to be short. And she simply said, "They look good on you as if they were yours from the start."

(Kristy's Mother Story)

Jewellery is an important element among Hindu women. Jewellery as gifts is an important aspect of Hindu weddings. The bride is showered with jewellery from her parents as well as from the bridegroom's family. Although Kristy is not Hindu, the tradition of family jewellery seems to have been passed on among Indo-Caribbean women. As a child, she models her mother in playing dress-up.

Carla describes visiting her mother in Trinidad on the occasion of Divali, the Hindu festival of lights:

My mother's religious side asserted itself more forcefully as she grew older, and her trials more severe. Her friends worshipped the same living "deity" she did—Sai Baba, whose portrait she wore on a gold necklace. They regularly made the pilgrimage to his compound in India, and my mother desperately wanted to worship in his presence, and she wanted me to be the one to make it happen.

(Carla's Photograph Story)

She at once acknowledges her mother's religious tradition without being active in that same tradition. Carla's mother wants her daughter to join her in the pilgrimage. As with

³⁰ Y & R is an abbreviation for the American soap opera, *The Young and the Restless*.

the other participants, even when they do not claim an active involvement with a religious tradition, they incorporate key memories of traditional practices in their stories.

In my own story, I recall a tradition of saying daily prayers as a family:

My father calls me to finish Sandhya (evening prayers). We stand side by side in the living room. Facing the East, there is a small box that has been nailed to the wall and many pictures of Lord Shiva and Mother Lakshmi are fixed onto it. We make arti (moving a lighted deya in a circular way to pay respect to the Gods and Goddesses) while my father sings his repertoire of mantras. He sings loudly. I am sure all the neighbours hear every syllable and since there are no other Hindus on the entire block made up of Claire, Austin, Parry and Cooper Streets, they must think it funny. As if to compensate, my brother and I merely mouth the words that we also know by heart. From time to time we push against each other and grin, looking up quickly to make sure that Daddy doesn't catch us. His eyes are closed as he bawls out the prayers. We grin a little more—without a sound. (Prabha's Home Story)

Despite our playfulness as children, my siblings and I learn the Hindu prayers “by heart.”

My memory of home includes a tradition that is representative of a bond between my father and the tradition that he inherited. It is also one that is transferred to his children. My memory of home contains the symbols of a home space—the tradition of family prayers.

Triumphant Stories—Lessons of Survival

Some of the lessons within the Grandmother Stories are indirectly related through stories that are passed on from generation to generation. An example found in Arti's Grandmother Story, reads:

My mother told me a number of times about my grandmother's stand in finally leaving her philandering husband the one time he threatened to hit her. She stood firm with a 'two by four' in her small but sturdy hands and invited him to try. She promptly left with most of the kids, as some had left home by then, and went to her mother's to live.

In searching for more information, I asked Arti whether this was the first time her grandfather had hit his wife and if it was the first time that she had left? Her written response is:

He was a womanizer; from my mom's story it seems he may have threatened her before, but I don't know if he actually ever physically harmed her. This was the first time that she had finally had enough though. (Personal communication, November 2012)

Arti's mother's decision to tell the story to her daughter suggests a model of behaviour to which she should pay attention.

The stories contain lessons that sometimes have to be dug out. The following is one of those that my grandmother shared as a family story.

Prabha's Grandmother story reads:

My grandmother's stepmother had not given her (my grandmother) anything to eat so she wandered into the bushes nearby her house looking for something to

feed herself. The guava tree had only young, very green, hard fruit but when one is hungry, any food is worth eating. The six-year-old girl (my grandmother) was eating and playing when her father showed up. “So, this is what you doing?” “Playing and eating green guavas?” He had come home earlier than usual and not finding her at home helping with housework as was required of her, came looking. Although scared, she was angry enough to retort, “Not because you does get your belly full mean that I does get mine full too.” Her confused father questioned her enough to find out that when he left for work, her stepmother had not been kind to his daughter. She was required to do much housework at her young age, but her stepmother kept the food for the men of the house. She had sons of her own for whom she cooked, and her new husband was the main man of the house.

The youngest person of the home, the girl child, would be the last to eat. Many times, there was nothing left for her, but her father was clueless as he was mostly out of the house, working.

The story continues that he was so angry that he overturned whatever utensils he could find in the house. There was hardly any furniture, probably an old wooden bench and table. He packed up his belongings, including his daughter and left. (Prabha’s Grandmother Story)

This story about my own grandmother’s ill treatment by her stepmother is intended to warn about the potential dangers of blended families, to serve as a lesson for the following generations. The initial story that my mother told me was short. I asked many questions before I wrote my story, which tells of the mistreatment of my grandmother by

her stepmother and eventually, her father's leaving his wife. I believe that my grandmother told that story because she was triumphant in that episode of her life. After suffering at the hands of her stepmother, her father saves her and takes her to safety: There is a familiar narrative here—a dominant discourse narrative, one whereby a man saves a woman. There is also the figure of the wicked stepmother who is instrumental in causing harm to the stepchild. The primary narrative, as discussed before, is derived from the epic Ramayana. The hero Rama is treated badly by his stepmother but ends up being triumphant over all his challenges. My grandmother's story conforms to this archetype and as such emerges and survives as a family story.

I employ both an analytic and a storied approach in discussing major themes of education and class, traditional stories and lessons, sacrifice and success, negotiations of stereotypes of inherited culture, and lessons of survival. In honouring the stories shared by the participants, I offer an analysis “that speaks to the human dignity, the suffering, the hopes, the dreams, the lives gained, and the lives lost” within the community of Indo-Caribbean women (Denzin, 2014, pp. 67-68).

Chapter 6

Contextualizing Silences, Secrets and Gaps

Always, lives are understood within their respective and collective contexts and it is this understanding that is theorized. Clusters of individual lives make up communities, societies, and cultures. To understand some of the complexities, complications, and confusions within the life of just one member of a community is to gain insights into the collective. (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 11)

The following chapter explores silences and gaps within the stories, women's relationships with men, and reasons for the perpetuation of some stories and a neglect of others. I search for meaning by digging further into what is stated in the stories:

It is about understanding, the relationship, the complex interaction, between life and context, self and place. It is about comprehending the complexities of a person's day-to-day decision making and the ultimate consequences that play out in that life so that insights into the broader, collective experience may be achieved. (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p.11)

Social contexts include ways in which women relate to men and the patriarchal or dominant systems that characterize these relationships. I explore possibilities that characterize temporal meanings—observing when stories emerge in terms of the subjects' location and reasons why some stories survive at specific times, rather than other stories.

Silence and Spaces

Felman and Laub (1992) discuss “denial and forgetfulness” as conditions of the experience of trauma, during the horror and also in the relief of the aftermath (p. 104). Silence is an important theme within this study. There are silences in the stories—they appear as gaps—the “not knowings” by participants and the spaces within their stories. I use the term “spaces” to describe places in the stories where an event is not fully

explained or where there seems to be missing information about a character. Grace Giorgio (2013) defines a secret as, “What is known by a few but not by all to protect knowers from shame or embarrassment” (p. 408). What may have begun as family secrets, forgotten or denied because of shame or embarrassment, gets blotted out over generations. The stories contain possibilities for understanding and contextualizing the pain and suffering that many Indo-Caribbean people have endured.

In dealing with his family’s tragic loss and grief, Poulos examines “the redemptive power of story to penetrate the shadows of collective grief and speaks to the possibility of healing from tragedy” (2006, p. 96). I hope that probing reasons for silences and gaps will contribute to healing some of the hurts while we validate ourselves and each other.

Triumphant stories and partial rememberings of violence. Arti relates a story that is perpetuated by her mother:

My grandmother’s strength was held in her frame, her tone, her body, and her volumes of lived experience crammed into her laboured grunts as she moved, that became more abundant as she aged. My mother told me a number of times about my grandmother’s stand in finally leaving her philandering husband the one time he threatened to hit her. She stood firm with a two by four in her small but sturdy hands and invited him to try. She promptly left with most of the kids, as some had left home by then, and went to her mother’s to live. Her mother was apparently saturated with the same spirit as my grandmother in a much higher dose. She and my grandfather never officially divorced or found new relationships until the day they passed on. (Arti’s Grandmother Story)

When I asked Arti about specific details regarding her grandmother leaving her grandfather, she did not know. In a personal interview, I ask if it were the first time that her grandfather had actually threatened her grandmother and, whether her grandmother had been affected by violence before. She replies:

Arti: Physical violence from, like my grandmother, my grandfather. I don't know how physically abusive it was. I think that if it happened, it was a couple of incidents. My grandma had a mouth so she wouldn't have let it happen that often, I don't think. I mean the one story that I know is when she finally left.... So I don't know how often that happened. I know that there was a lot of infidelity.

Prabha: And it's on the part of your grandfather, the infidelity?

Arti: Yes.

Prabha: Not your grandmother?

Arti: No, no my grandfather apparently had women all over the place and close to home too.

Prabha: Can I ask you one question? It was because of the violence your grandmother left but not because of the infidelity?

Arti: No, it was all of it. It was all of it. I think that was the last incident. But it was everything. My grandma was probably at a point where her kids were older and she has put up with this for how long and just had enough but it was everything. I don't have a lot of details around that stuff or how often it was when it happened. But my mum alludes to it, I just don't know. More than anything they allude to it. I have never gotten any accounts of any incidents of my grandfather hitting my grandmother. What I do have is incidents of my grandfather, like my

grandfather had some woman upstairs in their house and my grandmother would come home and really what the actual accounts were, I don't know.

Prabha: But what did your grandma do?

Arti: I don't know. I don't know what she did.

Prabha: You mean the story stops there when she comes home?

Arti: Yeah, because it wasn't about my grandma. The accounts of stories about my grandfather's behaviour, not my grandmother's. And not about her reaction. And now talking about it, it feels like it was just something that was accepted, it happened. It always happened, it happened with you know, that's what men did, women just dealt with it and put up with it so, I think I heard, what I heard was my grandfather would have a woman upstairs and my grandma downstairs. I don't know what that meant. I don't know if she came home and found it. I don't know if she just knew about it.

Prabha: Did you ever ask?

Arti: No.

Prabha: No?

Arti: No, you know those were things like how do you ask that question? You know what I mean? Like first of all, what do I say to my grandmother? She wasn't somebody, she was a very tough old lady, wasn't someone you can just sit with. She was comforting but she was tough. Like she wasn't somebody you would just sit and have certain kind of touchy, feely conversations you talk about. And those kinds of incidents being as difficult as they were, it's just not something in my family that I would think of, and I was hearing all those stories as a child and I'm

not sure but I think this is endemic to Indian culture—is, you and me not size right? You and me is not size. [We are not of the same generation or age group]

So I wouldn't as a child be asking things of my grandmother.

Prabha: And I think that is important to my question you know. At what point do we start asking questions? Or *do* we start? So part of this research is about asking questions, and I am interested as to why the questions were not asked? And I think for me too until recently, I didn't ask questions. (Personal communication, May 2013)

In my interview with Arti, I realized that she has chosen to write about a story that highlights her grandmother's strength in leaving her grandfather.

Although I have extrapolated the story of Arti's grandmother through the writing practice, in her family, the story has mainly been about her grandfather and not her grandmother. This is one example of a story telling practice that seems to have privileged men over women. Despite his deviant behaviour, Arti's grandfather and his infidelity are the main subjects of the story. Other than her grandmother's leaving her husband, there seem to be no social sanctions on infidelity by men. It is an accepted story that gets told over and over. For younger generations, possibilities for questioning are stymied by practices of "respect" that include silence of children. There is the persistence of a culture of silence that protects people from embarrassment and hurt but also venerates men despite their cruel behaviour. In acknowledging the secrets and gaps, the forgettings and silences, there is the collateral understanding of the workings of the society, the place of the women and the men.

No “talk-back.” To not “talk-back” to anyone who is older is a key expectation by elders, which shows up in the stories. Tradition mandates respect for older people. Carla’s maternal grandmother was obsessed with respect. In this case, silence is practised as a way of showing respect and also as a way of gaining respect. If the daughters are silent with certain people, they are quite possibly demonstrating respect for the family. Silence is an integral part of being a “good Indian woman.”

Where the child is taught to be quiet and “not talk back,” Carla’s grandmother uses her voice as punishment: “She wasn’t afraid to use her voice, to raise it everyday. As much as she loved her family she punished them constantly” (Carla’s Grandmother Story). To a follow up question about her grandmother’s story, Carla responds:

My grandmother had a mental/emotional breakdown after her daughter’s death. Her fourteen-year-old daughter had died from choking on some pills that she was taking. They did not talk about this. There was a lot of silence surrounding death and sadness. (Personal communication, November 2012)

Although Carla recalls a practice of silence because of sadness, she has been told the story by “others” in her family. The story lends an understanding of the ways in which her grandmother was able to cope with the aftermath of losing her daughter and it also tells of a subsequent mental breakdown.

None of the children in any of the stories objects to their mother’s abuse by their fathers. Shalini describes her grandfather’s physical abuse of his wife without mention of any intervention by the children. These are her childhood memories where she simply looked on but was unable to say or do anything. As an adult she reassesses her grandmother’s life: “I wondered later on if she was just grateful to get out of the real

country life, have a roof over her head and a husband who was popular and well liked. So many unanswered questions, too late to ask” (Shalini’s Grandmother’s Story). Shalini recognizes that her grandmother would have had some physical comforts, such as that of a home, a husband and an opportunity to leave the countryside. Her story reflects a value system within the society at that time. This highlights what was important to some women while illustrating their inability to escape domestic violence.

Stories of underlying domestic violence within the society reveal a resignation by some of the women to accept it. Some lingering questions are: Why did the women stay in situations in which they were being physically abused? Did they have a choice to leave their families? What would it mean for the children left behind? Where could the women go? Shalini’s memory of her grandmother’s silence points to an acceptance of the situation and a corresponding refusal or inability to change her situation.

Telling the Story

I too have wrestled with unsilencing some of my family stories, the pain of the memories lingers, but I hope for healing from an understanding of larger societal forces. Christopher Poulos (2006) describes the “doom” that can come out of silence even though it is meant to protect:

But there is another kind of silence we must acknowledge—a dark silence, a silence of truths unspoken and stories untold. It is a silence held in the shadow of emotions too painful to bear, too deep to speak or speak to. Perhaps at first it is a protective silence, one that allows us to escape the over-whelming grief that threatens—or seems to threaten—a very painful rending of our hearts. But as time

goes on, and the silence deepens, it becomes an inescapable silence, a silence of doom. (p. 107)

For past generations, the “doom” of silence has cloaked violence and hurts into secrecy.

The following is a story from my family’s history that incorporates the themes of silence and acceptance and a possible resistance to change for people of my mother and grandmother’s generations. I however, choose to write about this memory for the first time. As I read about other people’s silence and understood more about my pain and grief, I felt compelled to write this recollection. Especially since this memory included the practice of silencing among Indo-Caribbean women, I wrote:

My mother and father, and us—Prabha’s Journal #2, 2014

My mother and father did not get along well for many years. There were loud, lengthy fights that usually got physical. I remember when I was about twelve years old; my mother felt that she had had enough of the fighting. She packed a small bag. I don’t remember the details, but she returned to the country where most of her siblings and her mother still lived. She stayed for one night and when my father went to collect her as if he knew she had no choice, her brothers and sisters urged her to return. My aunts advised to her to be quiet and said that she should stop “talking back” when my father was quarrelsome. It was their remedy to cope with the situation. At such a young age, my younger siblings and I were distraught without our mother. We were so relieved with her return that we too, urged her to be quiet when Daddy was upset.

On examining the stories of the participants, there is a suggestion that situations similar to that of my mother and her family may have been common. There was shame in

women leaving marriages. My mother's family were less interested in her physical safety than they were in making sure that she stayed married. They felt that all would be well if only she could be silent. The message gets transferred to the children. That way, she would less likely be physically hurt and we could still have our mother. If keeping a marriage at any cost was the chief standard or value, then women didn't have much of a choice when faced with domestic violence. When the well being of the children was at stake, the women mostly chose to stay in volatile home situations. My mother did not have a job and she had nowhere to go. Women who faced similar circumstances generally learned to be quiet. Silence as a theme comes up over and over again.

Men and Their Place in Women's Lives

Amera's parents are from two different cultures. Her mother is Indo-Tanzanian and her father is Indo-Caribbean. Amera's writes about her mother: "I remember her curls bounce as she danced with me to my Whitney Houston Bodyguard tape, and I always remember how excited she was when my dad came home all dressed up in his business suit" (Amera's Mother Story). The man's culture is dominant in their relationship.

Arti's mother's pain and joy are dependent on her relationship with her husband:

I would see her innocently giggling like a child when she was being wicked tickling us, or gushing about being in love with my dad again, contrary to the tears that told us he was the reason she was stagnant and lonely. (Arti's Mother Story)

Carla's mother's "weakness" is in her relationship with Carla's father. As in Arti's story, the woman's dream and aspirations are stunted by the man in her life. Carla writes:

She was so weak where my father was concerned. They met in a grocery store, a West Indian one in Kensington Market in Toronto, in the late seventies, when my

father came into town from his welding job in the shipyards of Collingwood. Five years later, my mother was pregnant, and despite repeated interventions from her family, my father refused to marry her. She considered an abortion. Good Indian women did not have children out of wedlock. Her mother, dead at this point, nonetheless disapproved. Yet, here was her only chance for a child, who would look after her in her old age, and inextricably bound her to my father. Her shame won out in the end. I lived with her for a year after we emigrated back to Trinidad, a year I do not remember, before I was shipped off to my paternal grandparents.

(Carla's Mother Story)

Carla's mother's hope and shame come as a result of her relationship with Carla's father. She becomes a single mother, which is not acceptable in Indian families. Her link to Carla's father remains because Carla is born.

Shalini's parents get divorced. Her memories of the turmoil appear in her Mother Story, "My mother really kept me in line, but as I grew older I saw an awful dynamic brewing between her and my father." Shalini continues in correspondence:

It was a marriage of choice, but in conversations with mum now—she says that it was just the next logical step in their relationship. They were dating for years and she asked him to wait until she was finished schooling as a teacher and he did. She felt that it was just time to move to the next step. (Personal communication,

November, 2012)

When I ask for the reasons her mother may have stayed in an extremely bad marriage although she was gainfully employed she replies frankly, "She stayed for sure out of shame—what would people think?" (personal communication, November 2012).

The mothers of participants are strongly affected by the men in their lives. Patriarchal tradition—domination by men is prevalent in the stories.

Why Do Some Family Stories Survive?

As I examine the family stories I wonder: “Why do these stories survive? What is the underlying purpose of preserving these stories above others?” At times, the stories get told from generation to generation without anyone ever questioning the circumstances surrounding the story. “Why have the stories been accepted without question? Why are there few stories, recorded or told, about the early lives of the first generation Indo-Caribbean women?”

Arti writes two stories that contain events about her grandmother’s early life: the first is when her grandmother left her grandfather because he threatened to hit her. (See p. 135) The second is when Arti’s mother has to hide from being disciplined by her mother. The first story has already been discussed. The second one highlights her grandmother’s strength as a disciplinarian with her children. Both stories focus on triumphant situations for Arti’s grandmother.

Amera’s grandmother has a repertoire of stories. They include the grandmother’s use of contraceptives, which was revolutionary for her time. Her grandmother talks about her father, Amera’s great grandfather, “with so much pride and love” (Amera’s Grandmother Story). In contrast, she remembers both her husband’s and father’s alcoholism. Amera’s grandmother does share much of her own early life but focuses on stories about the men in her life.

After Carla’s grandmother’s death, her family exchanges stories and memories of her role as a mother. There are no stories of her early life. There are no family stories on the

early lives of either Kristy's or Shalini's grandmothers. The absence of stories or knowledge about the early lives of the grandmothers' generations reminds me of my own family history and why I embarked on this study in the first place. It is not just the lack of telling that is important but the fact that small amounts of information emerge after the death of the grandmothers.

Carla's family's memories and stories of her grandparents get shared with the passing of her aunt. With my own grandmother, it was long after her death that I heard a story about her childhood. I then began asking questions and prying for information about her life. The risk of waiting too long to ask questions is that the people who hold the stories are older and when they die, whatever has not been passed on will likely die with them. It is my belief that older people tend to not share stories or information with the younger generations unless there is a strong need to do so.

Digging for Stories

My own grandmother has been dead for thirty-five years. The scarcity of family stories about my grandmother's life and her generation has led me to listen carefully to conversations that my aunt and my mother have whenever they get together. I heard the following story as my aunt related it to my mother:

Women and drunk men—Prabha's Journal # 3, August 2013.

My aunt was married but lived about two hundred metres away from her parents' home. It was not unusual that my grandfather returned home drunk. One day, he was particularly angry about the meal that my grandmother had cooked so he picked up a piece of bamboo and struck her on her back. Since my aunt lived nearby, the news travelled quickly. She ran over to her mother's house and picked

up a huge piece of wood. Facing her father, she screamed that she was going to break it on his back. Looking at his daughter threatening him with a potential weapon, he briskly walked away.

My aunt told me that she chased after her father and would have surely hit him when someone shouted out to her to stop. She makes sure to stress that her father had always treated her with favour. It was his custom to stop at her house on his way home and offer her the pick of vegetables or fish that he had bought for his family. He would take what was left for his wife.

When my aunt tells this story, it is also the first time that my mother hears it.

At the time of the above event, my aunt was around eighteen years old, my mother just two. Whenever my mother speaks of her father it is mostly with admiration. When she talks about his anger it is associated with her wayward-ness: the times she wore very red lipstick or combed her hair in fashionable Western hairstyles. She does not recall the incidents where her father beat her mother. She says that she did not know of the incident related by my aunt. My aunt had never before told this story. If I had not prodded my aunt every time I saw her to tell me about my grandmother, she would not have told me about it. She has told me the same story three times. My aunt triumphed in that story because she ran after my grandfather; she was able to stand up for her mother.

To my questions about the relationship between my grandfather and my grandmother, my mother tells me that *Nanaa* (maternal grandfather) left *Nanee* (maternal grandfather) occasionally and just returned when he felt like it. I asked my mother, “Where did he go? Why did he go? For how long did he leave?” She says that he went to friends. She is not sure for how long, and she gives as a reason, “He wasn’t brought up properly. His

mother, who was pregnant with him when she arrived on the ship from India, died when he was a young child. His father stayed in India. He had no guidance.” Her explanations are meant to provide reasons for his behaviour and also to protect his image.

My grandfather was not banished from his family because of his unbecoming “ways.” I never heard any negative opinions of him while I was growing up. When I probe further, my mother confesses that, as an old woman, many years after the passing of her father, *Nanee* had described his occasional “leaves” from the family. It was not a story that was told voluntarily, and the fact that my grandfather had been dead since 1968 must have made it easier for my mother to talk about his “ways.” I listened to my mother while recognizing that the language she uses reveals her relationship with the social and cultural structures that inform her consciousness (Anderson & Jack, 1998). To say that her father “wasn’t brought up properly,” is her way of saying that he was not solely responsible for his “ways.” Although she talks about the hardship that her mother faced in her father’s absence, my mother’s language is protective of him. She understands the difference between her daughter’s generation and her mother’s generation and knows that I do not approve of my grandfather’s behaviour.

In Memoriam—Stories after Death

After the death of the older generations, some of the stories that surface pay tribute to the persons who have passed. What are the reasons for waiting till death? In my own recollection of family stories, I have wrestled with the risks of exposing family stories that are both unattractive and hurtful to the subjects of these stories. Through storytelling, I have taken on the responsibility of opening up stories about my grandparents’ generation. After death, the risk of shame remains. At times, the stories downplay

violence or shame of the subject, and instead focus on characters who are triumphant.

Unbecoming social situations are “forgotten.”

With time and with questions, secrets are sometimes unearthed, as in the case of Carla and her family. An interview with Carla reveals some of the previous silences. I ask whether she considers her grandmother to have been independent. She responds,

Carla: By necessity not necessarily by choice. And that was because her husband died.

Prabha: So she took on the business when he died?

Carla: Yeah. She had to because there were six children. And I only found this out last year, there was, they weren't actually legally married. They had both been in relationships prior to this marriage, well this relationship. But re-marrying wasn't an option for her at that point. So she had to be independent and that led her to be really strict.

Prabha: This was with your grandfather?

Carla: My maternal grandmother.

Prabha: With your maternal grandfather? They were in relationships before?

Carla: Well yes, they, he had a child outside that relationship and she had a child outside that relationship as well.

Prabha: Those children grew up with them?

Carla: No.

Prabha: What happened?

Carla: I never met them, my mom only told me about them when they passed away.

Prabha: So they would have lived with their respective other parents?

Carla: Yeah.

Prabha: And this was never spoken about until last year?

Carla: I met, um, I met her half brother's children when we went to New York when I was sixteen. That was the first time that my mom had mentioned she had a half-brother. And for some curious reason it didn't impact me at all that she had a half-brother cause he had passed away at that point.

Prabha: That was her mother's child or her father's child?

Carla: She didn't say.

Prabha: Interesting. So you don't know?

Carla: No. And then, I'm sorry not last year, okay, she did tell me her half-brother had passed away a couple of years before but I didn't connect it to being another half-brother. (Personal communication, May 2013)

As I listened to Carla, I was "in stereo," "receiving both the dominant and the muted channels clearly and tuning into them carefully [trying] to understand the relationship between them" (Anderson & Jack, 1998). I listened to the literal meaning of Carla's words and paid attention to the value system that was implicit in her telling. Marriages that had failed were silenced and in turn "forgotten." Norquay (1999) describes "forgetting" as "an effect that is produced through the gaps, silences, and omissions in the stories we tell" (p. 85). Carla's mother's stepbrothers were forgotten because of the failed relationships between their parents.

I had never heard stories of my maternal great grandmother while I was growing up. In 2010, for a paper in Life History Research Methods and Applications, I began

asking questions about her. My mother knew that her grandmother had had another family after leaving her first marriage because she knew about her mother's stepbrothers and stepsisters. No one ever spoke about my maternal grandmother. My mother went to her older sister who is almost sixteen years older than she, and I learned from their conversations that my great grandmother had left my great grandfather to be with another man. She was banished from family stories. Norquay (1999) notes,

The imperative to forget may not be one's own choice; forgetting is often socially organized. What is worth remembering and what is to be remembered can be determined and regulated by larger social forces and structured and maintained through authoritative discourses. (p. 86)

My mother asked her sisters about her grandmother, Old Nanee. She had never before questioned what was being forgotten by her family.

Painful Stories of Violence, Infidelity and Alcoholism

All of the participants include one or more of the themes of violence, infidelity and alcoholism within their Grandmother Stories. All of the grandmothers, except for Kristy's grandmother, suffered from domestic abuse—their husbands physically beat them.

In her Grandmother Story and in subsequent communication, Shalini is candid about her grandfather's philandering, violence and alcoholism. She writes:

She was treated by her husband like an obligation rather than a partner and for some reason I get the feeling as if she went through the motions of life. He cheated and had multiple women frequent his services as far as I can remember but why was this never questioned? When he would hit her when she asked for

answers behind closed doors, we would hear her begging across the street yet her beloved children never intervened. (Shalini's Grandmother's Story)

The relationship between her grandparents is characterized by violence.

When I asked Shalini to clarify what she meant by "frequent his services," she replies, "My grandfather was thought to be a bit of a stud, he had good genes, he was very statuesque, full head of hair and was very charismatic especially with women" (personal communication, November 2012). In response to whether everyone just said nothing about her grandfather's behaviour, Shalini says:

That is a question I have asked before. The response is that he was a good provider and that is the end of it. It seems that if a husband back then was doing his duty, providing for his family financially, then every other expectation of a "father" didn't really ever apply. He was solely the breadwinner and nothing else. There were never kind words or praise. He was the disciplinarian and that is it. He was scary to us grandkids, we just ran around him quietly and did whatever was asked of us. (Personal communication, November 2012)

The fact that he was providing financially for his family inhibits their power to question his behaviour. His wife was dependent on him and she did not have the support of her family in rejecting his abuse. Leaving her husband was not an accepted option, and she was unable to speak about the violence that she endured.

The Grandmother Stories by Amera and Kristy did not contain episodes of violence and unfaithfulness. Amera reveals the relationship between her grandparents in my questions about her story. I asked whether her grandmother loved her grandfather. She responds: "Not really. He beat the shit out of her. He drank as well" (personal

communication, November 2012). Amera says that her grandmother didn't remarry so that no one would beat her and her children. Amera's grandfather had come to London, Ontario to work in a gas station owned by a relative. He died of a heart attack at around age forty-five. Only then was her grandmother free from violence. She held on to marriage as an ideal but was happy to be rid of her husband (personal communication, November 2012).

Many women could not escape the violence in their lives until the death of their husbands. Any refusal to stay within acceptable social structures would have been considered deviant. Many of the marriages of first generation Indo-Caribbean people were not legally documented so there was no opportunity for legal separations or divorces. Many first generations Indo-Caribbean people had religious unions rather than legal ones. The societal expectations demanded that women remain in religiously bound marriages.

Male-Dominated Relationships—The Stories Tend to Begin after Marriage

Kristy's grandfather did not beat his wife, but she changed her previous religion to her husband's after marriage. She converted from Hinduism to Islam. Shalini's grandmother's family were Christian converts, but she practised Hinduism after her marriage. Carla's grandmother converted from Hinduism to Christianity upon marriage. These women conform to their husband's religions.

There are hardly any stories of childhood. Instead, most of the stories begin after marriage. The grandmothers in the stories are not called by their proper names. Their "calling names" are usually the relationships that they occupy. Arti's grandmother is called Samdin—the term for two women whose children are married to each other. She

was also called Didi that means “older sister.” Carla’s grandmother was also called Didi. My grandmother was called “Maharajin” because she was supposed to be a Brahmin³¹ and her husband’s surname was Maharaj. Maharaj is a name associated with Brahmins in the West Indies and Maharajin is the female version of the name.

More questions but no answers. The initial life history research that I conducted on my family’s past involved only my mother’s family. I was writing a paper for a graduate course, “Life History Research: Methods and Application.” Some of the reasons for the focus on my maternal relatives include my experience of knowing my maternal great grandfather, the initial Indian immigrant to Trinidad. I also knew my maternal grandmother. Until her death, when I was twelve years old, she spent time with my family. My mother shares a close relationship with my aunt, her eighty-year-old sister whose memory and telling of family stories is largely what I have relied on to record my own stories. I have been reliant on the women in my mother’s family from whom I have heard stories.

In my life history research paper, I asked specific questions about *Old Nanaa*, my maternal great, grandfather who was the initial immigrant in my family (on my mother’s side of the family). Why did he live with my *nanee* (maternal grandmother)? Why did he leave India? What did he think of Trinidad? Neither my mother nor her sisters could give answers to my questions. As I learnt that there were many silenced stories, I also learnt about “forgetting.” I was digging into my mother’s knowledge to figure out my own identity, in addition to other questions. I also realized that she had not asked some of what I might term “obvious questions.” For example, “Where did *Old Nanaaa* live before

³¹ A Brahmin belongs to the highest caste within the caste system of Hindus. Brahmins are usually educated and do the work of teachers and priests.

he came to Trinidad?” She just didn’t know. I particularly asked her about stories she would have heard as she was growing up, family stories. There were none. She offered to try to get answers from her sister, and my questions also became her questions. In the absence of stories, my mother and I have acquired many questions that are as essential to our history as the few stories that we do have. Three generations of my family have forgotten a past and neglected to ask the questions that I now have.

My grandmother did not possess any Trinidadian identification documents until she was due for a senior’s pension. It was then that she received an identification card. She was still very much Indian: she spoke Hindi and Bhojpuri and wore traditional Indian clothes. The dominant culture of Trinidad and Tobago was one that did not encourage Hindi or Bhojpuri. *Old Naanaa* and my grandmother were alienated from the larger society. Although they were more “Indian” than “Trinidadian” in their cultural practices, they did not talk about or tell stories about India. Norquay (1999) argues “forgettings work to make the boundaries and demarcations of the dominant culture visible” (p. 86). Did he want to fit into the new society? Did he just refuse to think of both the past and the present? Was he aware of the dominant culture and did it make him feel alienated? Old Naanaa did not pass on his history of a life in India to his family. He chose to forget and the “forgettings” have become the family’s inheritance. Norquay (1999) describes, “forgetting” as “an effect which is produced through the gaps, silences, and omissions in the stories we tell” (p. 85). The initial story that I could tell, the single story that I knew about my grandmother’s childhood, was changed when I actually spoke to my mother about it, asking specific questions. There were many gaps and omissions; we shared a history that was not grounded in a known past. She had never heard stories of

life in India. Despite being taught Hindi by her father who was literate and brought up in Hindu tradition, there were no family or community memories of the country of origin. It is obvious that my grandparents did not tell stories of life before Trinidad. In Trinidad, there were also gaps and omissions. For my grandparents, Trinidad became a refusal of somewhere else even though they didn't exactly acknowledge the new place.

Truths and Secrets in My Family's History

Life history research has been the means through which I began to question my family stories. For years, I listened to my father's version of the story of my *ajee*. I knew that it was fantastical, but I didn't think that I had any choice in knowing differently. For years it was easier for me to listen to my father's fictional sounding stories and say nothing. When I began doing life history research, I became more willing to decipher and probe my father's stories and the relevant relationships. Previously, I was embarrassed that my father would repeat the dubious sounding stories of his mother. My main objective had been to keep them as a secret. In searching out my family's history, I share Poulos' (2006) meditation on family secrets:

Engulfed in shadow, how do you discern the difference between truth and lie,
between story and secret? Even if you begin to understand and see that something
needs to be revealed that has been held close, how, after so many years of
skulking in the darkness, do you begin? (p. 104)

I begin with the story of my paternal grandmother that I wrote during the writing practice:

Her picture has been hung in our *puja* (prayer) room where she takes her place
among the gods. Her *orhni* (shawl) is fitted neatly over her head but allows her

mark of *sindoor* (vermillion powder) to show. My uncles talk about their mother always with reverence and magnificent stories of her greatness. There is one story where she performs *Durga Pooja* (prayers to the Goddess Durga) with such austerity and devotion that cloves, an essential ingredient for this kind of ceremony, miraculously stick to her forehead. For most of my childhood, she was a figure of perfection etched in the black and white portrait that stood in for my never knowing her. My *ajjee* (paternal grandmother) died of cervical cancer when my father was eight years old. (Prabha's Grandmother Story)

Although I have no real memory of my grandmother, the stories that are perpetuated within our family contain no clues about her working life or her everyday experiences. They are mythical.

Different Tellers, Different Stories

Since beginning my research, I have re-contextualized existing stories instead of wrestling with the veracity of them. In September 2014, my last surviving paternal, uncle was killed. Older than my father, before his death he had begun telling me what he had known of his family's history. These stories were told to me in casual conversations that my uncle and I had over the last few years of his life.

Before my uncle's telling of these stories, I had never heard them before. They were mostly about my paternal grandfather, my *ajaa*. Much of *ajee's* superhuman qualities had died with her sons who had also passed at that time. My uncle told me that my grandmother, his mother was an ordinary woman who was a vendor in the San Fernando market. He pointed out that she was an extremely dark skinned woman and was the eldest in her family. Her husband, my *ajaa* (paternal grandfather) was a "drunkard," an

alcoholic who left home every morning to drive his taxi-car. He was dressed neatly with ironed trousers and shirt tucked neatly inside. When he returned in the late evening, he was mostly drunk, dishevelled and reeking of alcohol. My story about her continues:

When my *ajee* became sick, whatever money my *ajaa* had inherited was spent trying to make her well. He sold most of the land he owned to find extra money to search for a cure. *Obeah* (native magic) men from everywhere were commissioned to undo whatever it was that somebody had done to her. My uncle remembers her screams of pain as she suffered during her last days. She was not special and did not possess any extra powers. She lived a life of poverty and died after cancer had eaten her womb. (Prabha's Grandmother Story)

As usual with my memory work—whenever I try to come to terms with family stories, I am confronted by questions. I have been struggling to formulate ideas about my family history through the stories I have stored in my memory. The fragments resist coming together. There are more spaces than there are stories. Some of the questions I think about are: Why did she work in the market? There are more stories about my *ajaa*'s³² wealth than there are about my *ajee*'s life. If he was so rich, why did my grandmother work in such a menial job? Why are there no stories about her work or her everyday life?

My uncle told me that my grandfather had inherited money from his father but had spent much of it on cars and alcohol. He didn't do much work but eventually started driving his car as a taxi. Being an alcoholic, he spent most of his earnings on "rum." As a result, my grandmother needed to work in order to provide food for her family and also to help fix my grandfather's run-down car.

³² *Ajaa* is the Hindi term for paternal grandfather.

Male-Centred Life Histories

From immigration documents I have been able to discover the following information about my family's history.

Prabha's Family Story, May 2014.

The original immigrants on my father's side of the family were my great grandfather and great grandmother. On 25th November 1890 twenty-year-old Jurbundon and twenty six year old Bhagwantiah arrived in Trinidad on the SS Ganges. Whether they were a couple before they initiated their journey to the West Indies, I do not know, neither does anyone else in my family. What we do know is that Bhagwantiah had a four-year-old daughter who was not Jurbundon's child—she is recorded on Bhagwantiah's landing document. The child's name is Lalhantia and her father is listed as Ori. There is no other trace of this girl in our family's history. Eleven years later, my grandfather Sookdeo Jerrybandan is born.

There is a story about Jurbundon's death—the main point of that story is that he knew when he would die. My great grandmother, Bhagwantiah appears once in this family story. In the story, he asks his wife to take him to his room. We know that she survives her husband because he alone dies in this story, but there are no other stories about her (my great grandmother).

The initial story of my paternal grandmother, my *ajee*, was the single story I knew about her. My uncle has given me more details about her life but even with this new information, there are more stories about her husband Sookdeo, than there are about his wife. I believe that the men in my family perpetuated stories about men more than stories about women.

When stories became painful or shameful, they were blotted out through silence and “forgetting.” Some of the sustained stories are repeated with gaps and spaces but they are not usually questioned. Questioning and searching do not necessarily fill spaces and reveal secrets, they can nonetheless, offer an understanding of people, their experiences and some of the relationships that required safekeeping or protection when they didn’t conform to larger societal demands.

Chapter 7

Digging Up Stories and Histories Through Artifacts:

Songs/Music and Photographs

The following chapter probes the stories generated from the prompts for writing, “earliest memory of music or a song” and “a family photograph.” Kelly Askey (2002) notes the intrinsic connection between media and social life and the “interconnections between media practices and cultural frames of reference” (p. 10). Marianne Hirsch (2012) discusses the relationship between the family-photograph’s “social function” and “the ideology of the modern family” (p. 7). Using memory in conjunction with cultural artifacts of music and photographs, the following chapter explores “connections between ‘public’ historical events, structures of feeling, family dramas, relations of class, national identity and gender and ‘personal’ memory” (Kuhn, 2002, p. 5).

Music is movement, it is mood, it is history, it is culture, it is my family. (Arti’s Music/Song Story)

The stories by participants contain some insights into complex cultural relationships of Indo-Caribbean people as illustrated through their connections with music. The Indian-ness of the initial immigrants to the Caribbean undergoes transformation. There is a resultant matrix of varying representations of music accompanied by significant social and political tensions. Music originating from India is transmitted through Hindi films, television and radio programs. As generations become more “Caribbeanized” there is a creolizing of Indian music. “Chutney” is a blend of traditional Indian music with Caribbean language and undertones. In addition to the resultant blends, the stories contain references to American popular music that has also become trendy in the Caribbean. The

participants' relationships with the various forms of music are useful for probing and understanding the social and cultural hierarchies and value systems that surface in the stories.

Relationships with Indian Music, Indo-Caribbean Music and Other Music

Indian music continues to be a part of the cultural practice of Indo-Caribbean people. Attitudes to traditional music vary. For some it is sacred, as are the *bhajans*³³ that are sung by Carla's mother. Carla feels alienated from her mother's way of worship. The following is from her story:

My mother sang bhajans at temple and in her house for prayers. It was an alien combination of language and religion that once again set me apart from her life. I pushed harder in the "opposite" direction, embracing Jamaican dancehall and constant reggae, a fleeting belief in Jah...in truth. I loved men with dreadlocks and wanted to be as close to them without completely losing my conservative family.

(Carla's Music/Song Story)

This excerpt is loaded with the complexities of cultural identity.

Carla has a personal connection to Jamaican music, typical of Afro-Caribbean culture that is not sanctioned by her family. She feels alienated from the traditional Indian culture that her mother embraces through religion. Her love of Afro-Caribbean men puts her in danger of being ostracized by her family. As an Indo-Trinidadian, she is torn by a traditional culture to which she cannot relate, the language and customs do not make sense to her. Her link to this cultural tradition is her relationship with her mother. There are racial tensions between Indo-Caribbean and Afro-Caribbean groups of people that are

³³ *Bhajans* are Hindu songs of praises or hymns

not easily articulated in cultural theory. The dominant thinking of retaining ethnic purity through not mixing with other groups has been a feature of Indo-Caribbean history (Puri, 1999a). Music in Trinidad is defined by the cultures of origin. Consequential acceptance or rejection of musical forms is sometimes dependent on the ethno-cultural group that they represent. Carla's story exposes racial tensions as they work in the lives of individuals (and the relationships they experience) within the society. Her distaste for Indian music is symbolic of her struggle with "Indian-ness." She notes in her story:

Indian music was a source of shame and derision. Sunday lunchtimes marked the start of endless Bollywood black and white movies on TTT (Trinidad and Tobago Television), where Lata Mangeshkar's high pitched warbles about the purity of love, the scandal of betrayal, and the torturous depths of separation sent me into a stupor. There was nothing I could identify with happening on a screen and I prayed that I would live in the world with multiple channels, soon. (Carla's Music/Song Story)

She feels an inability to identify with Indian music and she experiences shame as a result.

Carla's mother is a link to the world of Indian music. She writes:

I remember attending an Indian concert with my mother and her friends. I don't remember anything except feeling as though I was going to be crushed by the crowds, and I panicked. Even now, that fear hasn't left me and I have to concentrate on swallowing my tears, my fear, instead of notes and lyrics. (Carla's Music/Song Story)

Her fear and tears define her relationship with Indian music.

Carla describes her assimilation into Trinidad's national culture of Carnival:

I have never truly enjoyed Carnival, until I was old enough to drink. School, more specifically, the maxi taxis that I would travel to school in, were my personal DJ's. I learned that anyone can wine³⁴, even myself, if the beat is dark and delicious.

I danced drunk and ecstatic, at Pier I. I stumbled into a moon pit at Anchorage. I made out with a beautiful Indian boy at my first "official" concert, "Warrant," a heavy metal band from the 80's, which explains everything about Trinidad's alternative culture. (Carla's Music/Song Story)

As she becomes more mature, Carla feels more Trinidadian than Indian in her acculturation. She adapts to music other than Indian music. Her enjoyment of a Heavy Metal concert contrasts with her distaste of an Indian music concert. She enjoys being with a boy who is Indian but in the setting of non-Indian music.

Carla loves drumming that is Indian in origin:

And I loved Tassa music [Indian drumming], a group of men and boys playing percussion that could get a geriatric grandmother to wine down to the floor. I felt that the absence of words, of lyrics, of sentimentality, made it more desirable.

Everyone could dance to it. (Carla's Music/Song Story)

For Carla, the music becomes less shameful with the absence of Hindi words. The language is inescapably Indian, and drumming without Hindi makes it less Indian for her.

Bhangra, Punjabi-Indian music is different from the traditional forms that were originally transported to the Caribbean. Carla notes a changing attitude: "I remember the first time I heard Bhangra. The drums causing my grandparents and me to watch

³⁴ To "wine" is to gyrate the hips and lower torso to the beat of music.

television together, an incredibly rare occurrence.” The strangeness of the new type of Indian music especially the drums, brings her together with her grandparents for the experience.

Carla reiterates her intense dislike for Indian music and traditional Indian culture:

On Sundays, the people next door would go to their balcony, put their dial to 106.6 FM which played Classical Indian music at an irritating pitch, and blast[s] the neighbourhood. I wanted a gun to shoot the radio.

Today, Indian music remains a joke to me. It’s part of a culture that I look like

I should enjoy but I can’t. (Carla’s Music/Song Story)

The physicality of belonging to Indian culture is contentious in relation to her cultural practices of music. In defining her cultural identity, she suggests a hierarchy whereby Bhangra, Heavy Metal and Carnival music are more acceptable to her. In becoming more Caribbean, she rejects a specific, inherited Indian-ness.

Negotiating Identity Between “Chutney” and Soca

For some, Chutney music—the indigenous blend of traditional Indian folk music with Caribbean rhythms and language, has become synonymous with lewdness and partying. It is folk music—characteristic of a group of people without any claim to a dominant group—neither the classical, traditional Indian music associated with the motherland India, nor the dominant Afro-Caribbean forms that are considered as a national representation. Shalini Puri (1999a) explicates the complexities of a love-hate relationship by Indo-Caribbean people for Chutney music. She claims that conservative Indo-Caribbean people validate Chutney as a private, woman centred practice at Hindu weddings. Puri argues that “Indian cultural nationalists” resist the “crossover” to a public

stage when it becomes hybridized and “Africanized” (pp. 25-26). Traditional Chutney therefore retains its place among Indian cultural nationalists as a practice for the private sphere of life. Puri (1999b) delves into contestations of nationalism whereby Calypso as a national art form might be viewed as more African than Indian. I believe that when Chutney becomes a more public representation of Indo-Trinidadian music, similar contestations of nationalism begin. A postcolonial history of antagonistic race relations shows up in cultural transactions of musical forms that are representative of either group. For Indo-Caribbean people, there are similar negotiations that parallel issues of identity.

Both Shalini and Carla wrestle with their distaste for Indian traditional music and Chutney as public representations of Indo-Caribbean-ness. Their stories are set in Trinidad and illustrate a societal denigration of Indo-Caribbean forms of music. Shalini’s story tells:

As I took a shower before lunch, I knew that at some point Mom would switch the station off, as if to signal that “Indian” time was over since Chutney music would come on at noon and for us it was a very low class concept. Only the Indians who drank a lot and were uncivil “chamkayed”³⁵ to that music and my mom was a very “proper” lady. That was not for us. I was allowed to walk, talk and carry myself in a certain way and Chutney music was not part of that equation. (Shalini’s

Music/Song Story)

As a child, Shalini’s perspective mirrors her mother’s disapproval of Chutney. They both discriminate among forms of music as related to behaviours of propriety. Similar to

³⁵ ‘Chamkay’ is a derivative of the Hindi word “chamakhna” that means to be attractive or seductive. In Trinidad it has become synonymous with dancing in a seductive way.

Carla, her engagement with cultural forms of identification becomes more complicated as she matures.

When she moves to Toronto, Shalini is more critical of her parents:

Ah, the remnants of colonial thought permeate my entire understanding of my parents and the world that they have constructed for me so even though I was totally lost and half believed those comments, it has totally fallen on deaf ears now.

(Shalini's Music/Song Story)

Her story suggests that she has analyzed and debunked her parents' theory of propriety. She attributes colonization as the cause of her parents' thinking and value structure and recognizes that she is different from them. Distance from the home country allows her to do that.

The final lines of Shalini's story read:

Mom would usually press "play" on the cassette recorder to play "Sacrifice" to fill the lull before lunch. Sometimes I would come downstairs to both my parents dancing alone to this song in the sitting room. It reminds me of happier family times where the reality of our current situation was just a farfetched soap opera. Ironical however, since I feel that all I have ever done since I left that house is do exactly that to liberate my self—Sacrifice. (Shalini's Music/Song Story)

Leaving her home in Trinidad has been a measure of sacrifice, leaving the comforts of her physical home, but she has had to do so in order to liberate herself from the confines of a value system that she could only "half-believe." Her parents listen and dance to the song "Sacrifice" by the British Pop Singer, Elton John. They reject Chutney music but embrace the mellow rhythms of this version of westernized popular music.

Chutney and Soca in the Metropole

Chutney music appears in both Amera's and Arti's stories but the connotation is somewhat different from that of Shalini's parents. Their families validate Chutney within celebrations. Amera and Arti were born in Canada but their cultural identification includes practices containing Indo-Caribbean music.

In the following story Amera calls her grandmother "Nanny." Nanny is another spelling of Nani, Nanee or Naanee, the Hindi word for maternal grandmother. As it is transliterated, there are various spellings of the same Hindi word. In the case of Amera, everybody in her family calls her father's mother Nanny. Amera's story describes the parties that her family keeps at the New Year and at Christmas time in Canada:

As long as I can remember, we've always had New Year's and Christmas parties at my grandmother's house. Sometimes at different uncles', but usually at Nanny's. Ever since I was little I remember fully stocked bars, lots of variety of sweets, the bringing out of pone, black cake and other yummy traditional favourites that I would ask various cousins and aunts for pieces of them. There were always three kinds of chicken—stewed, curried and barbecue; and of course, curry goat with both paratha³⁶ and dhalpuri³⁷. We ate in style.

I used to be the cute three year old in an itchy dress and bowl cut hair that when "Brown Girl in the Ring" by Boney M came on, I would be put in the middle of a circle of my aunts, uncles and cousins, and made to dance and wiggle around while everyone sang along and clapped. This song would always be right before or after "Nani Wine" which would be my grandmother's cue to be pushed into the circle

³⁶ Paratha is a type of roti or that is flaky in consistency.

³⁷ Dhalpuri is a type of roti that is filled with split peas.

while everyone sang along, clapped and laughed together as Nanny indulged in her dance. I always remember those moments as feeling literally warm, fun and looking forward to the dancing that was guaranteed to happen after midnight. Good times.

(Amera's Music/Song Story)

The song "Nanee Wine" is not a Chutney song; it is Soca—a blend of Soul and Calypso³⁸ music indigenous to Trinidad and Tobago. The content of the song however, is about a grandmother (*nanee*) wining or gyrating. In Trinidadian dialect, female genitalia is referred to as "*nanee*" so, there is a double meaning within the song. The song is offensive to Indo-Caribbean women as it directly addresses an Indian woman in the context of lewd and sexual behaviour. Controversy over the content of the song has been more prevalent within Trinidad and Tobago, but from a distance, Indo-Caribbean people seem more desensitized to the political and societal tensions of the Caribbean country.

Like Arti, Amera has been liberated from the cultural conflicts and ethnic nationalism that is more common to Caribbean countries. They fit the construct of a "trans-Caribbean identity as explained by Premdas (1995). He discusses various negotiations of Caribbean identity and includes a "trans-Caribbean identity" as distinct from "the sub-state ethno-nationalist" (p. 15). He explains:

[T]he trans-Caribbean is the most imaginary but in some ways the most dire and desperate in that it tends to exist in overseas Caribbean communities cut off from the nurturing source of the motherland. Its membership typically cuts across insular citizenships, racial, religious and linguistic cleavages and encompasses all those who identify with the Caribbean region. (p.15)

³⁸ Calypso is a form of Afro-Caribbean music that originated in Trinidad and Tobago. Initially, it was used as social commentary during Carnival celebrations.

In their acceptance of music that is typically Afro-Caribbean, and sometimes contested by “ethno-nationalists” within the Caribbean country, Arti and Amera’s relationship to music does not contain such tensions regarding music. Their families embrace music that is characterized as Indo-Caribbean or Afro-Caribbean within the collective of West Indian music.

Amera’s family also plays English popular music. The singers of the group Boney M. were born in Jamaica but based in Germany. There is a mix of music that represents a hybridity of culture—Caribbean music as well as western music. Amera and her family play “There’s a Brown Girl in the Ring.” A children’s game³⁹ by the same name may account for Amera’s family’s knowledge of the song and their re-enactment of it. In her story and in her conversations, she does not talk about any cultural implications. In more recent times, “Brown” has come to mean people who are of Indian descent. In the West Indies, this term has not been traditionally used to mean this. Especially in Jamaica, the image of the “brown girl” who “looks like a sugar and a plum” is the validation of a lighter skinned woman as opposed to those who are darker skinned. Race and gender stereotypes have traditionally permeated life in the West Indies and one such example is in this song and game.

There is no mention of Indian music in Amera’s story based on a song or music. In a series of questions and answers through e-mail and phone conversations, I asked her questions to help elucidate her family’s cultural relationship with music:

Prabha: Do you remember playing Indian music?

³⁹ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brown_Girl_in_the_Ring_\(song\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brown_Girl_in_the_Ring_(song)) A Wikipedia entry describes the game as a “traditional West Indian game.” The chorus is “There’s a brown girl in the ring, Tra la la la (3) And she looks like a sugar and a plum plum plum.”

Amera: Not so much Indian music but more Calypso. They [her family] play more Indian music as they grow older. Lots of older Chutney and Soca as I was growing up. Lots of Western music, Indian remixes.

Prabha: Did any of your family members sing/listen to/play Indian music at family events?

Amera: Not really. Recently my uncle and aunt started playing the harmonium and singing religious songs. My Grandma knows the Hanuman Chalisa⁴⁰ by heart.

Prabha: How did your family and relatives talk about or feel about Western music (as opposed to Indian music)?

Amera: They embraced it. Dad was a DJ when he went to George Brown College. He embraced 60's and 70's Western music. He listened to Michael Jackson and Prince, Stevie Wonder.

Prabha: What did they think about Indo-Caribbean music and Trinidadian Soca?

Amera: They liked it totally. Dad loves Soca now. He listens to Indo-Caribbean music. I grew up around Chutney music. Dad tolerates it but it's not like a love.

Prabha: Does your grandmother dance other than at parties?

Amera: If she is pulled to dance, she does it for about five minutes.

Prabha: How does she feel about dancing?

Amera: She was never a dancer. But she loves when people are dancing and having fun. She does not frown on it. She loves to watch people dance.

Prabha: How does she feel about music?

⁴⁰ The Hanuman Chalisa is a forty-lined poem that is sung in reverence to Lord Hanuman, a representation of the son of the Wind. His representation is in the form of a monkey.

Amera: She knows mostly religious songs like chalisas⁴¹.

Prabha: Does your Mom listen to Gujarati music?

Amera: No.

Prabha: Does she listen to Indian-Hindi or Bhojpuri music?

Amera: Not really. More western, more Indo-Caribbean music. My mom and I can't stand Chutney. (Personal communication, May 2013)

There is an understanding of the stigma associated with Chutney music.

Similar to Shalini's mother, Amera and her mother have a strong distaste for Chutney although they listen to a variety of music. Amera's mother is Tanzanian and her cultural heritage is Gujarati, however she does not listen to Gujarati music. Her father listens to both Afro and Indo-Trinidadian music and there is a distinction. He loves Soca, Afro-Caribbean music but tolerates Indo-Caribbean music. In spite of being far away from the politics of Indo and Afro-Caribbean conflict, they embrace a type of music that represents Trinidadian music more than specifically Indo-Trinidadian music. There is not an absence of racial conflict in the lives of the participant's family however; there is an affinity with the music of the "home-country"—a demarcation of Trinidadian identity that is not specifically Indo-Trinidadian.

Music as Religious Practice

As noted earlier, Indo music that is representative of Trinidad suggests a less attractive form to the participants and their families. The Indian music to which they listen is mostly religious in nature. Religious music appears in Shalini's story:

I remember Sunday mornings in my house where my father would awake at dawn to throw "dhar"⁴² on our outdoor jhandi⁴³ collection. He would then venture inside

⁴¹ A chalisa is a forty lined religious poem dedicated to a particular deity.

and without fail play religious Indian songs on the oldest L.P. player you've ever seen. (Shalini's Music/Song Story)

Traditional Indian music is the basis of a practice of worship and religion for the families of Carla, Amera and Shalini.

Music, Men and Spaces for Dancing

Arti learns to dance in confined spaces—a metaphor for the Indo woman who is dependant on her husband or father; and whose behaviours are dictated by an inherited culture.

I would sit in front of the tape deck watching the spokes of the tape spin and the amplifier needle bounce to the beat of its music. On the right of the unit was the archive, that to this day I have vowed to reclaim from their abandonment, relegated to an artefact on the wall in the house where I grew up, now silenced, much like the memory of my parents' marriage. I still peruse the tapes now, passing my finger over the spines, head tilted reading the titles like books in a bookcase, remembering how they were birthed. Tape titles included "Indian, Chutney, Oldies, Country, Christmas, Party Music, West Indian" and more. I would sit beside my dad crouched on the carpet in between a 70's inspired black couch with red and green flowers and the tape deck, silent and muzzled. The music filled my body, but if I danced too vigorously, the record would skip and disrupt the process of creation. Hence, I have perfected the art of dancing in confined spaces—my car, at the table. (Arti's Music/Song Story)

⁴² A "dhar" is a liquid offering, usually of milk or water, accompanied by prayers and poured over symbols of divinity, for example, over models of deities or religious plants.

⁴³ A jhandi is a flag planted in the ground as a symbol of having completed religious rituals and ceremonies.

Her dancing is symbolically limited to small spaces.

Arti's memory of music and dance is closely related to her parents' relationship, and with her relationship with them. She describes:

My dad taught my mom how to waltz. Usually performed to some 60's tapes of American oldies...Percy Sledge, the Platters, music with perfectly harmonized rhythms and beats emanating from buttery voices and artfully manipulated instruments...far from the limited alternative art form of today. My dad's arm, like a ballroom dancer propped behind my mom's back supporting her through the dance and applying pressure in the direction she was to move. Their legs floated over the floor as one. I don't remember how long it was that they had stopped dancing together before they separated but my mom to this day credits him with teaching her to dance. (Arti's Music/Song Story)

Her father's support and guidance help to successfully teach her mother how to waltz, yet he remains the dominant one. They "float[ed]... as one" when their relationship is good but stop dancing with the demise of the relationship. The man is the creator of the family's music collection (through taping from music records):

My dad had a precise listing of the songs that made the cut, all listed in a special Hilroy notebook divided down the middle to place singer on the left, and song on the right. To this day my dad preserves little notebooks with a myriad of random notes and lists for every purpose. He would hold the record, swipe it with the velvet roll, blow on it, then flip, and place (it) carefully but expediently on the record player. At the conclusion of the song's recording, the needle was lifted and my

dad's hand marked precisely four counts of silence, and then the tape was stopped.

The process was captivating. (Arti's Music/Song Story)

Arti describes her father's making of the tapes as a work of art. He also records his creative work leaving a historical document:

One of those tapes was marked "West Indian Party" and it contained an actual party—chutney, old soca (although my parents did not use that term that later evolved, they knew it as calypso). It was the catalyst of a work of art. Aunts and uncles swaying and gyrating until 4 a.m. as I danced between their legs and heard the occasional percussion added by the raucous laughter of my family. The memory of it is a visual one, as looking on from a position by the wall seeing myself and my family as a swirling of colours and muted sounds in slow motion moved by the music and liquid rhythm from glasses of all different shapes and sizes. In my memory I'm never more than about ten, but remember the slow extinguishing of the tradition with family politics and dissent that grew up with me. The sounds are fading. (Arti's Music/Song Story)

The tape contains the two types of music that are Caribbean—Chutney and Old Soca. Arti's childhood memory of parties is that they have dissolved similarly to the various relationships among her family. She also remembers Indian music but it is in a specific setting—the day after the family parties:

After Saturday night parties, and most Sundays, Indian songs moved mops and cloths with cleaning agents, an amusing simulation of Indian starlets' signature moves of dancing around trees swooning in love. My colonial diasporic history has

made extinct the language of these Hindi love songs to my generation, but music transcends words. (Arti's Song/Music Story)

Indian music is associated with acting in Hindi movies. "Dancing around trees swooning in love" is synonymous with the Hindi films from which many of the songs came. Arti's ignorance of the Hindi language is consistent with colonization of diasporic communities and their loss of language. In spite of this phenomenon among many, Indian music survives as a crucial part of the Indo-Caribbean experience.

Similar to Arti's story where the man introduces and sustains activities surrounding music, Kristy remembers that her father and uncles were the main organizers of parties. Her childish innocence leads her to think that her uncle had sung, "Can You Show Me What Love is All About." She associates him with her father since he only shows up when her father is around:

When my dad was around we'd have these grand parties. My mother would refer to them as the Edoo affairs—drunken, loud, all-night affairs that were exciting and extremely glamorous. But when he left and sometimes (for) two years at a time, he would take the excitement with him. (Kristy's Music/Song Story)

As she grows up and realizes that her uncle didn't really sing the song, she admits to wanting to think that he really did sing it:

I told Uncle Randy last year the memory I held on to. All this time of course, he had to find the record to play it. As we were dancing it took me back to the time when I was standing on his feet as a little girl dancing and remembering the "wildness" that came with my dad. (Kristy's Music/Song Story)

In her story, music and dance for Kristy is associated with men in the family specifically her father.

Music and My Own History

I have had a different relationship with traditional Indian music from that of the women in my study. When I was doing research for my Masters Degree in Education, I tried to recall my earliest memory from my childhood. At that time, as an Indo-Trinidadian woman living in Toronto, my academic work contained important questions about my identity. As an auditory learner, and as someone with extremely poor eyesight during my childhood, it makes sense to me that my earliest memory is a song. The following is an excerpt from my writing for my Masters research.

I listened to the sound of my earliest childhood memory. It was a song from the Hindi film *Hamraaz* of 1967.⁴⁴

Ye neele gagan ke tale—From the blue sky
 Dharti ka pyaar phale—Love will flourish from the earth
 Aise hi jaga mey—Just as in this world
 Aatey hai suba hey—The morning comes
 Aise he shaan dhaley—Just like the evening sinks
 The voice of Mahendra Kapoor created a heavy feeling in my belly. My grandmother had come from his land. I had listened to her speak his language. The music must have made the immigrants feel at home in the strange new islands. I was listening to the music and language of my ancestors. I was then in a strange land and the music of another foreign place made me yearn for the

⁴⁴ *Hamraaz* (1967) was directed by B.N. Chopra. Starring S.N. Banerjee and Urmilla Bhatt. The song Ye Neele Gagan Ke Thale was sung by the playback singer, Mahendra Kapoor.

comfort I felt whenever I heard it as a child. The sounds made me feel as if I had come from two other places but yet I was trying to find home here, in another.

(Major Research Project. York University. 2009, pp. 16-17)

I am an immigrant both in the country of my birth and in the country of my residence. I feel a sense of belonging to the culture of another place—India, yet I have never been there. Who I am, is the accumulation of cultural and communal experiences. I am a daughter, a granddaughter, a sister, a niece and a cousin—a woman within my community and among the relationships I share. Although I may not have been conscious of it, I have inherited a cultural tradition that permeates my memory and my identity. In spite of not knowing exactly what the song meant when I initially yearned for its sound, I possessed a connection to the culture from which it came. The music contained meaning similar to what Blacking (2004) describes, “In music, it is not essential for listeners or performers to understand the creator’s intended syntax of even the intended meaning, as long as they can find a syntax and their own meanings in the music” (p. 14). My memories of Indian music and its connections to an inherited tradition have become symbolic of my sense of beginnings and a culture to which I feel a belonging.

Music, Family and Tradition

Memory and music provide important insights into relationships within my family and with the inherited traditions and social practices that have affected their lives. In one of the writing sessions, I wrote the following story:

Tumhi mere mandir, Tumhi mere puja. Tuhi devtaa ho.

Translation: You are my temple, you are my prayers, you are my god.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ The song was performed in the movie *Khandan* (1965) (Dir. A. Bhimsingh). It is sung by a wife to her husband, expressing her devotion to him. The music is by Ravi and the lyricist is Rajinder Kishan.

My mother has been blessed with a great singing voice in spite of her complete lack of rhythm. She sings the lines of a Hindi film song while she does the housework. We live in a small apartment in San Fernando. The cleaning, cooking and washing for three children and a husband leave my mother exhausted by the end of the day. In spite of burdensome work she always sang. My dad would sing English love songs that she eventually sang with him. Many times the songs concerned a broken heart and my brother and I instinctively knew that our parents were accusing each other. Mommy always talked about wanting to learn to dance because in her home as a child, it was not something anyone did. Daddy boasted that he could do the Waltz and Fox Trot but kept his skills for showing off without ever teaching his wife. Whenever the chance arose at parties or family get-togethers, my father would dance with other women while my mother looked on.

For my mother, I understood her dire need for my father to be her temple, her object of worship and her god. There have been times when I've said to her that he is just a man and that the romance of Hindi love songs is unattainable. For my mother though, she may have just expected faithfulness. I remember her singing in the shower and also crying so hard that it was a most frightful mix. Did my young mother take on the role of a fatalistic Indian heroine or was it that she desperately needed to cry out her pain?

On the first day of school in my second year of high school, my mother sing-cried her way to the bathroom after pouring a bottle of kerosene over herself. She also took a box of matches with her. My brother, my sister and I were already dressed for school when we realized that the regular fight between my parents had

escalated. “Mommy please, mommy please mommy!” We were crying. I thought mostly of my baby brother not yet two. I couldn’t take care of him by myself. She couldn’t go. The details are foggy in my mind but we all missed school on that first day of the new term in September. We had to stay home to make sure that she wouldn’t leave us. (Prabha’s Music/Song Story)

The context of the Hindi song is that of a woman singing to her husband.

Within the Hindu tradition, women worship their husbands as gods, primarily because of their ritualistic role in protecting them. The scriptural texts of the Ramayana and Mahabharata contain numerous examples of God-like men and the dutiful wives who support them (see p. 122). When Seeta’s chastity is questioned in the Ramayana, she offers herself to the Agni, the God of Fire. Agni subsequently refuses to harm her and the moral of the story can be that women should be willing to prove their worth to both men and god. Many of the stories are told without discussing potential lessons. For women, the implied lesson is that they should never deviate from the ideals of womanhood.

My mother inherited a tradition of female subservience and the willingness to worship her husband. As a girl-child she learned that she should not dance before men, as it is a sign of loose behaviour. Good women don’t dance in public. Entertainers belong to a lower class as dictated by the community of the time. Despite the financial poverty that pervaded life of first generation Indo-Caribbean people, some of them, like my grandparents clung to ideals of a social hierarchy. My mother tells me, “My father didn’t want me to learn to dance in school. He said that we didn’t belong to that kind of people. People danced for us. We didn’t dance” (personal communication, 2014).

In my story, mother's constant disappointment includes my father's unwillingness to treat his wife respectfully and his unfaithfulness. His choice to not teach his wife how to dance is a means of control for my father. This is also an example of how men were able to transcend cultural limitations more easily than women. He learnt to dance to Western music (non-Indian music, specifically music for ballroom dancing) and everybody admired him. My mother never learnt any kind of dancing because a woman was not permitted to use her body as she wished. The relationship between my parents is an example of how the town provided a different kind of socialization for people at that time. My father had been more exposed to Afro-Trinidadian and Western culture.

There was also my father's dominance over my mother. As a gesture of male dominance, my father's refusal to teach my mother how to dance was a means to keep her less exposed to Western influences. In keeping her more "Indian" she was more subservient and he would be more dominant. At the time of the story, my mother's depression was possibly exacerbated by post partum depression and the death of her mother, a month after the birth of her child. Wanting to die was a result of her extreme disappointment and frustration with human betrayal and hurt. The tradition from which she came did not provide reprieve for women. They are expected to uphold the fictional accounts of steadfastness as represented in Indian movies and Hindu scriptures.

My other story includes the way music was played in my family and the family politics that affect relationships and values. I write:

We are going on a family outing to Biche. My cousins from Venezuela are visiting Trinidad so my father and uncles decide it's a good opportunity to take the family back to the place they spent some boyhood days. The leatherette seat of the old,

blue Opel Record is sticky from the sweat of our skin. The windows are down and the eight-track cassette player is turned up loudly enough so that we can hear against the wind blowing in. Charley Pride's voice belts out "Kiss an angel good morning and love her like a devil till you get back home."

I know most of the words of all the songs that have been played at home on a regular cassette player and in the car on an eight track. At Christmas time, Charley Pride is also a favourite, "Silver Bells," "Jingle Bells," "Silent Night." We know all the words for those too.

My cousin Laila complains that my oldest uncle had always been a great fan of Charley Pride. It must have been after many years that he finally saw a picture of him and realized that he was black. At that time, my uncle in his role of eldest male figure in the family determined that Country music should be reserved to the likes of Jim Reeves and any other non-black singers. (Prabha's Music/Song Story)

The practice of music is closely related to inherited tensions of ethnicity and race.

As children, we listened to English music that was mainly sanctioned by our parents. In spite of living opposite to a yard, where players practised, on what later became the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago, we never played recordings of pan music; neither did we have recordings of calypso music. Trinidadian music was synonymous with Afro-Caribbean forms of music. Cultural representations, including music, were aligned with various cultural groups that fit classifications determined by race or nationalism. My father was more exposed to Western music because of his upbringing in an urban area. Urban areas were more cosmopolitan in influence. He also had more access to record players and radios.

My mother's family was mostly Indian in their cultural practices and they had no radios or means of playing recorded music since they lived in a less developed, rural area. In the 1950's to 1980's rural areas in Trinidad were mostly populated by Indo-Trinidadians. There was no electricity in most of these areas, and so there were no televisions and record players. My mother and her brothers would occasionally go to local cinemas to watch Hindi films. This was where they were exposed to Indian music through film. Their parents sang mostly folk songs and religious songs or *bhajans*.

Although both my parents are second generation Indo-Trinidadians, their socialization has been different from each other because of their upbringing in distinct environments—a difference in urban and rural areas. My father became a bit more creolized especially in his exposure to different kinds of music. He “played mas”⁴⁶ and took part in Carnival, which eventually became the national festival of Trinidad and Tobago. Although my father took part in Carnival celebrations, predominantly an Afro-Trinidadian activity, he did not play or listen to calypsos or steel-pan music other than during the parade. In his private sphere, his family did not approve of music that was more Afro-Trinidadian.

Historically in Trinidad and Tobago, the upper middle class has described the festival as a “hideous, scandalous affair, full of half-naked women, drunken masqueraders, obscenity, violence and lewdness” (Eldridge, 2005, p. 175). The main venues for Carnival celebrations and parades have been the urban centres, primarily the cities of Port of Spain and San Fernando. Nationalist politics was instrumental in further alienating the Indo-Trinidadian population.⁴⁷ The earlier generations of Indo-Trinidadians suffered

⁴⁶ To “play mas” is to wear a masquerade for the purpose of participating in a parade for Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago.

⁴⁷ Selwyn Ryan (1978) explains, “The persistent victory of the PNM since 1956 could undoubtedly be attributed in large part to the racial alignments in the society. By 1966 these alignments saw the non-Indian

from a lack of services and opportunities afforded by the government to mostly the urban population. Generally, they lived in the rural districts as they provided labour for the sugar cane plantations. The result was mistrust and animosity between the two major ethnic groups. Political tensions between the Indo-Trinidadian and Afro-Trinidadian populations were prevalent within the country between the time of National Independence in 1962 until 1986, the end of the reign of the People's National Movement, the political party that made up the government of the country up until that time.

Earlier generations of Indo-Trinidadians encouraged segregation. As did my uncle, through his decision that music by the Afro-American Charley Pride should not be played by his Indo relatives. The later generations like my cousin Laila, embraced all types of music for the art form that it is. Progressively, Trinidadian and Caribbean culture has evolved to be more inclusive of the various ethnicities within its population. Trinidadian culture has erroneously been paralleled with Afro-Trinidadian music.

I too, have become more "Trinidadian" over the years but my Indian-ness does not limit my engagement with Afro-Trinidadian forms of music. There have been many changes that parallel identity location for both Afro and Indo-Trinidadian. More recently, Soca⁴⁸ and Chutney⁴⁹ have both become representations of Trinidadian music although one is more Afro, the other more Indo. My Facebook post dated 6th April 2014 in

elements, which by then constituted nearly 60 per cent of the population, coalescing behind the PNM. This racist politics was buttressed by the politics of manipulation that saw the PNM gerrymandering the boundaries of the electoral constituencies so as to ensure an African or (at least non-Indian) vote and thus PNM majority in most of those constituencies" (p. 79).

⁴⁸ Soca music derived from a blending of "Soul" and "Calypso" forms. Soca is considered as a Trinidadian music form.

⁴⁹ Chutney music has evolved from traditional Indian music. Traditionally an upbeat form, the term "chutney" refers to spicy-ness—the cultural flavor associated with music. Chutney music has become accepted as Indo-Trinidadian music.

Toronto, reads, “Boiling a pot of callaloo⁵⁰ and listening to 90.5 FM on TriniHub⁵¹ this lovely Sunday. Enacting home spaces in a strange land.” This is a Trinidadian radio station that plays mostly Indian music. Indian music is still the music that feels like home to me although I can wine⁵² to the beat of sweet Soca music and shake my hips to Chutney renditions.

As referenced in my story above, my father’s eldest brother condoned Country Music that was sung by white people but not by black people. It was not disapproval of the music but of the people who made it. Racism in the form of anti-black reaction was prevalent among my father’s brothers. They rejected music that represented Africans whether it was based in North America or in the West Indies. Living in an urban area they dwelt among Afro-Trinidadians. In spite of their apparently harmonious public dealings with neighbours and others living in the town, privately, they did not approve of African music or culture. Indo-Caribbean people have suffered on account of race-relations but they are also responsible for racist behaviour toward Afro-Caribbeans.

Living in the country, my maternal grandmother had a fear of Afro-Trinidadian culture and people. The following is a journal entry reminiscing on a story that was told by one of my cousins:

Nanee and the Jab Molassie—Prabha’s Journal # 4, 2012.

My maternal grandmother lived in the country. Originally Cemetery Trace as there was a burial ground at the entrance of the narrow roadway, it evolved into

⁵⁰ Callaloo is a dish made with spinach, okras and coconut milk. It is accepted as one of the national foods of Trinidad and Tobago. Due to the variety of ingredients in the dish, the term ‘callaloo’ has become synonymous with a cosmopolitan mix of elements.

⁵¹ “Trini-Hub” is an Internet application that features Trinidadian radio broadcasts.

⁵² “Wine” is a verb or noun that describes dancing by shaking ones hips in a circular motion. The term is usually associated with Caribbean music, specifically Trinidadian Soca music.

Cemetery Road as more houses were built and more traffic passed through. As a young child, my cousin Muni would go to Nanee's house to spend time whenever she was off from school. As is the custom, there is no school on Carnival Monday and Tuesday so there is a long weekend of four days. Muni was spending the weekend with Nanee.

Muni was alone with Nanee when she noticed an approaching man whose body was completely covered in tar. Nanee grabbed her granddaughter's hand and ran into the tall grasses at the back of her home. She lay down flat on the soil and held Muni down with her. "Shhhhh," she commanded softly. They stayed there for a while before Nanee anticipated that the blackened man was gone. Nanee was so scared that she was trembling.

When Muni related the story, she was laughing. For the Christmas holidays, a group of the women in my family had gathered at my eldest aunt's home. None of us had ever heard the story before. We too, laughed. Muni must have been in her late forties at the time of her telling this story. She explained that it was a Jab Molassie⁵³ so he was covered in black grease and was walking through the village.

At the time of our gathering, Nanee had been dead for twenty-five years.

After hearing this story from my cousin, the women in my family began re-telling it to each other as a joke and also as a means of remembering *Nanee*. This story highlights the ignorance and fear that my grandmother and people of her generation have had with

⁵³ *Jab* is the French patois for "*Diabole*" (Devil), and *Molassie* is the French patois for *Mélasses* (Molasses) is one of several types of devil mas. The simple costume consists of short pants or pants cut off at the knee, with a wire tail, mask and horns and a pitchfork. The *jab molassie* would carry chains, and wear locks and keys around his waist, and carry a pitchfork. The whole body is smeared with grease or mud, red, green or blue paint. The *jab molassie* "wines" or gyrates to a rhythmic beat that is played on tins or pans by his imps. While some of his imps supply the music, others hold his chain, seemingly restraining him as he pulls against them in his wild dance. <http://www.tntisland.com/carnivalcharacters.html>

regard to the festival of Carnival—a festival that was mostly celebrated in the urban areas of San Fernando and Port-of-Spain at that time. At that time too, Carnival was mainly an Afro-Trinidadian festival. The jest with which we engaged in the story's telling, indicates a change in dealing with the national festival and an accompanying assimilation of later generations in becoming more Trinidadian.

Later on in her life, when my family lived in the town of San Fernando, my grandmother stayed with us during the Carnival festival. She loved to see the beautiful masqueraders that paraded the streets on these days. *Nanee* never told us about her experience with the Jab Molassie.

Women may be practitioners of music culture—they dance, sing and play music, but dominant political forces and competing cultural loyalties characterize their tastes and distastes. The memories of the participants and myself conjure stories that incorporate individual and societal tensions of identity as they appear in our relationships with music.

Photographs as Snippets of History: Representations and Realities

In seeming to capture times and places lost in the past, the photograph can disturb the present moment and the contemporary landscape with troubling or nostalgic memories and with forgotten, or all too vividly remembered histories. (Kuhn & McAllister, 2006, p. 1)

The photograph becomes a record set in time or “piece of evidence” with “culturally resonant properties” like no other medium (Kuhn & McAllister, 2006, p.1). Susan Sontag (1973) points out the differences between other forms of representations as being “interpretations” or “visual statements,” whereas the photograph is a piece of the world or “miniatures of reality” (pp. 4-5). In pursuing this research, I believed that family photographs would serve as snippets of history for the participants. By summoning their engagement with the photograph, I hoped that we would be able to open up spaces for

reflecting on a cultural past that would be both different from one another yet similar.

The stories produced by the participants offer reflexivity that in turn adds to my analysis.

Kristy did not show up for the group practice on the agreed upon day. She had mistakenly recorded another day in her diary. In order to secure her participation, I arranged to meet with her at another time and we wrote together. In the end, I had written three stories based on family photographs.

The presentation of a photograph instantly initiates questions. The family photographs uncovered silences that were at times for me, as the researcher, uncomfortable to probe. I wanted to understand the untold relationships arising from family photographs, but at the same time, I wanted to be respectful of the participants' choice to be silent.

What is Seen and not Seen in the Photograph

Marianne Hirsch (1999) highlights some of the features of the family photo and describes the response as relating closely with "dominant mythologies of family life" (p. xvi). The opening lines of Kristy's story is an example of Hirsch's "familial gaze" and illustrate one of the expectations of dominant familial structures: "My mother and her three beautiful daughters. It is obvious that there is no father, no husband" (Kristy's Family Photograph Story). The father and husband, is not mentioned in her Mother Story. In looking at the photograph, Kristy confronts her father's absence. The power of the photograph summons her judgement in relation to a dominant family structure and she writes it into her story.

Kuhn and McAllister (2006) point out that the photograph is not totally transparent in terms of what it tells us (p. 6). Kristy's family photograph is such an example. Her story fills in what we can't see: "It's only been two days since we met our new sister. Our new

sister Fern was at the time nine months old and its been over two years since we last seen our mother.” The family dynamics emerge in the story. She invokes her memory spurred by the photograph within her story:

I remember when Shani and I met Fern for the first time we both had mixed feelings. At the time Shani was nine and I was ten. Shani was excited that she had her own live human doll to play dress up with. You can see the excitement in her face in this pic. I on the other hand sensed distress and a sense of burden. At the age of ten, I somehow knew Fern would have eventually become my responsibility, my burden, my daughter. (Kristy’s Family Photograph Story)

Kristy acknowledges the burden that is thrust upon her. Just one year older than Shani, she takes on the role of mother for both her sisters. Traditionally, the first born in Indian families has the responsibility of caring for others in the family. In Kristy’s experience of an absent father and a mother with mental illness, the first child instinctively understands her duty.

Kristy’s photograph is taken in Guyana by her mother’s sister-in-law. The occasion is the arrival of the new baby. The mother is holding the baby dressed in a bonnet, a dress, socks and shoes. The two older girls are wearing similar outfits of tee shirts and shorts. Kristy tells me in conversation that all their clothes were bought in Canada. This photograph is the earliest “family photo” that she has—where for the first time, she meets her youngest sister.

Photographs, Silences, Questions and More Questions

Amera’s photograph of choice is one in which her father as a young boy, and his brothers are posing for the shot. Taken in the Marabella Market in Trinidad, the brothers

sell snow cones from a cart. Amera's story reveals some of the cultural facets of life that are not obvious with the photograph alone—there is resonance of her personal engagement with an inherited culture. She begins her story with questions:

Who took this picture? Was it a school day? Why take a picture of this? Dad why aren't you smiling? Did you know that you would be moving soon? How did you feel about selling snow cones in the market? You speak about it as a proud start to your life as a businessman, knowing that this was just a part of a long life of work, reflecting and continuing the legacy of your ancestors who hustled when they reached the shores on that beautiful island. It was so sunny and yet you didn't care that you got dark. Is that why there are no women? Did Nannie care about those things? How did you get the ice? Shave it? The syrup? How much were they? Who is that dude in the corner that obviously wasn't meant to be in the picture? How long did you do it for? (Amera's Family Photograph Story)

She invokes her father as she addresses her questions to him. Her questions illustrate her lack of knowing the details of her father's young life in spite of having the photograph as a memory piece.

Amera was born in Canada but is aware of the history of Indian indentureship. In her story she reflects on what she knows about her father's life. Hard work and struggle is an integral part of the lives of the earlier generations of Indians in the West Indies. Her father and his family are not exceptions. Later in the story she asks: "I think about the ways you and your brothers are so proud to come from a working class background, but only because you moved up out of it. Would you be proud if you didn't?" (Amera's Family Photograph Story). Her question suggests that there is a potential silencing of

stories when there is not a successful end to an experience. One of the questions that has come out of the study and is also pertinent here is, “Are there silences because there is nothing to applaud according to the expectations of dominant society?”

Colour—not just black and white. There is a wide spectrum of shades among people of Indian origin. The issue of colour is a predominant one within the society. In India, the people of the higher castes are usually lighter in complexion than those of the lower castes. It is generally considered more attractive to be “fair-skinned.” At that time in the West Indies, the women who worked in the sun were generally the ones on a lower social rung. Working outdoors meant being exposed to the harshness of the tropical sun and also becoming darker skinned. Amera sums up one such issue of skin colour within her story, “It was so sunny and yet you didn’t care that you got dark, is that why there are no women?” (Amera’s Photograph Story).

The final line in Amera’s story reads, “You never really talk about your dad much—was the cart his idea?” Although within the story she does not give reasons for silencing stories about her grandfather she points it out as an important aspect of the relationship between her father and his father. In my interview with Amera, she explains:

Yeah, my grandfather was a huge alcoholic. And he also was extremely violent. Not just with her (grandmother), with my dad and his siblings. So again, those cycles of violence through alcoholism totally come down. And I think, from what I was told, I think his father, my grandfather’s father was also an alcoholic and very abusive, so, yeah. (Personal communication, May 2013)

Amera does not relate this information to her question within her story but it could be seen as a sound reason for her father's silencing stories of his father. Silences are like secrets. Annette Kuhn (2002) explains:

To the extent that memory provides their raw material, such narratives of identity are shaped as much by what is left out of the account—whether forgotten or repressed—as by what is told. Secrets haunt our memory-stories, giving them pattern and shape. Family secrets are the other side of the family's public face, of the stories families tell themselves, and the world, about themselves. Characters and happenings that do not slot neatly into the flow of the family narrative are ruthlessly edited out. (p. 2)

Family photographs generated stories that uncovered silences in participants' personal histories, highlighted unanswered questions and also posed new ones.

Arti's Family Photograph Story is based on, "the black and white picture of his (her father's) mother and her three siblings with my dad in the middle" (Arti's Family Photograph Story). She asked her father for a family photograph for our writing practice:

My dad delivered the requested information as succinctly as possible, not his strong suit. I was running out the door with a piece of our history in my hand—a chunk of our legacy with a snippet of a caption he provided me. These snippets of information are all we have time for. My legacy is a puzzle of snippets with missing pieces I always vow to fill in the next day. He let me peruse the one photo album that has survived through his migration from Guyana in the 1970's (the age of the mass exodus), a number of moves in Canada and a separation. (Arti's Photograph Story)

The photographs in all of the stories serve as “memory texts” and they “constantly call to mind the collective nature of remembering” (Kuhn, 2000, p. 6). The photo album is a collection of photographs that Arti’s father has kept and secured over most of his life. Firstly, Arti learns about some of the details surrounding the photograph, “The 1963 photograph, the year printed small and neat at the back, he tells me is from La Jalousie where they lived in Guyana.” Later on in the story she learns, “He was twenty-one so he surmised that this was at his first wedding, as he didn’t own a suit before that” (Arti’s Family Photograph Story). The photograph and the story opened up a family silence and secret to some of its members.

In our questions and answers through e-mail I asked Arti the following:

Prabha: Who took the photograph?

Arti: Don’t know. Probably my dad’s cousin.

Prabha: Why did your dad keep this picture? Why did he bring it with him from Guyana?

Arti: It was among a number of pictures from the one family album that he had brought from Guyana. He brought all the pictures he had. He kept it with all the other family albums in my parents’ house when they were married, and he brought it with him when they separated. (Personal communication, May 2013)

The story about the photograph was a link to understanding the story about her mother:

She sat slumped over me, her cheeks wet with those old familiar tears. They lived there evaporating sometimes into the space around her, hovering around her body, but never fully departing. They simply waited patiently for the next calling. I saw

my mom cry a lot, and sometimes that small painful tremor tore open her throat when she raged against the injustices her life had dealt her. It settled in her eyes, reflected in all of us—mostly my dad, and as I got older, me. (Arti's Mother Story)

In my interview with Arti, I asked: "Other than your dad, what injustices did your mom think were dealt to her?" Arti responds:

I think mostly it was just that she got married too young, my dad didn't tell her until they were almost married that he had a child from a previous marriage, and she admits she was not mature enough to handle that. (Personal communication, May 2013)

Her dad had kept his secret until then and subsequently preserved it in his family album. Our collective work opened up layers of Arti's family history that had been silenced in various ways within their relationships.

Dominant Family Structures

In my earliest memory of home, I include as description of the family structure of my father's cousins:

Two of my father's cousins lived on the opposite side of the road. Uncle Ram and Uncle Sham lived side by side. Their father, Ratna Pundit was considered my ajaa since he was married to my father's aunt. Uncle Narine was the older brother of Ram and Sham. They all shared the same mother but Narine's father was another man. (Prabha's Home Story)

At the time of writing this story, I was not conscious of why I had incorporated the details of the family structure. As a child, I don't remember knowing the specifics that I have written. As an adult my understanding of the validation of the nuclear family

structure within Indo-Caribbean culture contributes to my construction of my memory. I had learned from family talk that Uncle Narine was financially poor and did not have the privilege of secondary education like his stepbrothers did. I recognized that there were injustices arising out of blended families. They are similar to the hurts that Shalini, Arti, Kristy and Carla record in their stories.

Within the stories, writers do not directly comment on validated structures of family but there are problematic relationships that arise from non-nuclear structures. Berger and Quinney (2005) notes, “Family is very much a social construction. For many people, family constitutes not just a presence but an absence as well” (p. 13). The participants write their memories offering versions of self-representation within the social structure of a family. The “intact” nuclear family structure is more validated than other forms, illustrated as the subject locates herself in relation to sanctioned or unsanctioned versions of family structure (Arti’s Home Story). Consciously and unconsciously, they experience tensions of belonging and not belonging, negotiated by the dominant, cultural discourse of the traditional community.

Within the family photograph stories, there are acceptable family structures as opposed to those marked by conflict. Arti’s mother cannot accept her husband’s previous relationship or the child that is a product of that marriage. Kristy recognizes the absence of a father as something that is conspicuous within the particular culture. The groupings that are unconsciously or consciously manipulated for the various photographs help to elucidate acceptable classifications of family groups. A group of young brothers who are selling snow cones is contained in Amera’s photograph. Kristy’s family of three daughters and their mother make up hers. A bridegroom, his mother and her siblings are

the characters within Arti's photograph while Shalini's show her great grandfather and all his great grandchildren in Trinidad at the time. Having refused to marry her mother even when she became pregnant, Carla's father is not in her family photograph. She and her mother make up their family unit. I produce three stories based on family photographs. They are compositions of the various member of my immediate family.

Silenced Histories, Double Standards

Shalini's Family Photograph Story reads:

The picture that I chose is the one that shows my paternal cousins and my great grandfather known simply as "Ajah"⁵⁴. I have no idea what his real name was. I only have very limited memories of this man. He lived in a small hut outside my grandfather's house—a one-room shack in the most modest of ways. He was very traditional; he wore merinos or shirt jacks and white dhotis always. He spoke Hindi and rarely spoke to us at all, only to yell at us in Hindi and have us taken inside the house. He ate roti and dhal for all meals, I remember. He upheld the Sharma name since he was a pundit and celebrated his Brahmin status (which I actually don't believe)⁵⁵ I found out later from a family member that Ajah's last name was actually Dubey but being the charmer and talker as he was in his day persuaded all the members of his village on the ship across the Kala Pani to change their names to Sharma so they could evade being separated or being victimized because of their caste.

⁵⁴ Ajah is the Hindi term for paternal grandfather.

⁵⁵ Shalini explains in a conversation with the group that she believes that her grandfather changed his name to make others believe that he was from a higher caste than he actually was. She believes that because she has heard that story before.

The picture must have been taken on his birthday or a special event that surrounded him. It is the only picture I have of him. We learnt as children never to talk to him since he was always so serious and spiritual and he wasn't really a fixture in our lives. (Shalini's Family Photograph Story)

Both the photograph and the story open up silences that are common in many Indo-Caribbean experiences. Other than the name "*Ajah*," Shalini does not know his real name. She had never been able to communicate with him because he spoke Hindi, which she does not understand.

Shalini's "*Ajah*" wears Indian clothes, a *dhoti*, a *kurta* and a *phagree*⁵⁶. The initial Indian immigrant to Trinidad shows no apparent signs of assimilating into Western culture. He is in contrast to his third generation, great grandchildren with whom he poses for the picture—they are all dressed in Western clothes. We know from Shalini's story that they were scared of the man they couldn't understand. What they do realize is, that they needed to be inside the house. This is a common thread as it is in Carla's story as well. In writing some of the lessons passed down from her grandmother, she cites "being indoors before dark" as one of them (Carla's Grandmother Story). These subtle expectations by the elders in the family point to the place of women and children as being inside the home. The same expectation does not hold for men.

Shalini doubts the veracity of her *Ajah*'s Brahmin status. She relates a story told by a relative about his change of name while travelling to Trinidad from India. The story goes that he and his fellow villagers all changed their names so that they could benefit from an upward social move among other Indians. As names denote caste, he and his

⁵⁶ A type of headwear worn by Indian men.

family continued the myth of being of the Brahmin caste. Since he was known as a pundit or priest, the respect demanded was shown by silence.

In contrast to the silence that is expected by women and children (discussed in the section “To not talk back”) Shalini’s grandfather is talkative. She writes in her story: “Ajah also had a reputation for being a charmer and talker” (Shalini’s Family Photograph Story). Charismatic qualities that may be unseemly for a woman but are signs of male power and domination, signifying manliness.

Celebrations and Clothes

Carla’s family photograph is one that represents her family structure of two—her mother and herself. In it, both mother and daughter wear Indian clothes as they are celebrating the Hindu festival of Divali.⁵⁷ In contrast to the photograph where they wear modest, traditional clothing, Carla describes her mother’s generation who “flaunted their legs in mod-style minidresses with bobbed hair that was the epitome of sixties chic” (Carla’s Family Photograph Story). She notes a change in her mother:

My mother’s religious side asserted itself more forcefully as she grew older, and her trials more severe. Her friends worshipped the same living ‘deity’ she did—Sai Baba, whose portrait she wore on a gold necklace. They regularly made the pilgrimage to his compound in India, and my mother desperately wanted to worship in his presence, and she wanted me to be the one to make it happen. (Carla’s Family Photograph Story)

⁵⁷ Divali is the Hindu festival of lights.

It is the first time in her life that Carla wears a sari.⁵⁸ She notes in her story: “I’m wearing a sari that my friend’s sister had gotten for me in India. I’m uncomfortable, although it is disguised by my smile, and my pleasure in the company of my mother.” Her discomfort in wearing Indian cultural clothes matches her disdain of the festival as one that is “more of an event in the bush, than (of) the industrial port where I grew up in Couva, near the edge of the Caribbean Sea” (Carla’s Family Photograph Story). Her conflict with Indian traditional practices including celebrations, dress and music is apparent in her stories.

Carla’s love of Indian food though is a celebration of her relationship with her mother:

I loved her food. She was extraordinary in the kitchen, making fry aloo and roti, ensuring I build a taste and desire for hot pepper, creamy corn soup with dumplings and fresh blue crab with bhaji—the Indian word of spinach, which I absolutely detested and would only touch when she cooked it with coconut milk. (Carla’s Mother Story).

In a society where Indian culture has historically been devalued, the third generation Indo-Caribbean person wrestles with a vacillating rejection and acceptance of the cultural habits of both the inherited and adopted traditions.

Who is in the picture? Groupings of people as they appear in the family photographs offer an entry point into the larger societal and cultural relationships that characterize the lives of the people within them. The photographs that inspired The Family Photograph Stories are examples of some of the groups. The earliest photograph used in my stories is one of my own family, before my sister and younger brother were born—Photograph 1.

⁵⁸ A sari is a long piece of cloth, usually five to six yards long that is wrapped around the body. This form of dressing is typical for Indian women.

My father, my mother, my brother and I pose for the picture. Less than two years old at the time, I have no recollection of the event but looking at the picture now I am moved by sadness. I write:

Our small family of four is centred in this old black and white photograph. My father is skinny and bareback, crouching beside me. I am seated on a play rocking horse that I adored as a young child. It belonged to my cousin who lived in the same house as we did. There were four families living in that house on 35 Cooper Street in San Fernando. My parents, my younger brother and I occupied one room.

My mother is holding my little brother who is less than a year old that makes me less than two. She is around eighteen; her feistiness is already beaten down and it shows on her face. Her dress is old and plain and she wears no jewellery.

Everybody is barefooted except my mom who is wearing a cheap pair of worn rubber slippers. This is the thinnest I have ever seen my mom. She has told me that there were many days that she went hungry despite having to breast-feed my brother and me. When there was nothing to give us, she lay on the bed and let the two of us suckle her breasts on either side. (Prabha's Family Photograph Story 1)

The photograph is a snapshot of my family's poverty at that time. It is a single photo that a relative must have taken as a mark of kindness or charity. My parents do not remember who took the picture or any details relating to it.

Later on as my father finds more stable work, we are able to afford pictures taken at the photo-studio. When this happens, there are multiple photos with various groupings. I write about these in my second story:

The wedding was taking place in a church and the reception held at a community centre in Pleasantville. This was the first time we attended a Christian wedding. It was also the first family portrait to be taken in a studio.

My father's face is proud. He has worked for enough money to buy new clothes for everyone in his family as well as a gift for the wedding. Apparently, cravats were in style. His throat is lifted by a patterned one.

Mommy's hair is styled back and up. She wears a chain given to her by her father on her wedding day. She does not have much jewellery. The pieces she owns were given to her either by her father or by my father and the occasion was her marriage. My sister and I have none. (Prabha's Family Photograph 3)

In another story, I describe the various groupings of the photos: "The family takes one picture together—my parents, my brother, my sister and I. Then my sister and I do our pose and finally my brother stands by himself" (Prabha's Family Photograph Story 2).

The groupings must have seemed logical to my parents and the photographer at the time but the classifications are characterized by socio-cultural practices relating to gender.

My family photograph represents the ideal structure of both parents and children within the same space. The smaller groups that make up the family photographs are representations of a set cultural thinking and practice. My sister and I stand side-by-side, similar poses, similar dresses, similar hairstyles and similar ribbons. I am the oldest and she is the youngest, but our place among the children is not the reason for the grouping. We are the girls in the family so we are put together in a picture:

My sister and I are wearing replicas of the same dress. Our hair is combed the same way, in a ponytail of curls held by white polka dotted ribbons. The ribbons

don't really match the dresses but they must have been what we had and so my mother used them. (Prabha's Family Photograph Story 2)

In proving her equal treatment of two daughters, my mother made sure that we both had the same style of dress made out of the same patterned fabric. On this instance of our family attending a wedding, my mother makes sure that we are dressed identically. For me, there was no chance of personal choice in terms of dressing at this age. Individual identity was not factored into my mother's grooming of her daughters.

My brother is the only son at the time of this particular photograph shoot. He stands alone for his portrait. Gender is the most outstanding factor for classification in most of the smaller groups of family pictures. Amera's photograph of her father and his brothers is another example of a grouping by gender. The boys are selling snow cones in the market—their activity is also a gendered one. While the girls were encouraged to stay at home to work, the boys venture into the public sphere as young entrepreneurs.

Music and photographs are viable forms of representation for situating identity negotiations within spaces of contested cultural claims such as in the Caribbean. Identity is fluid depending on geographic locality. Ethno-nationalist tensions dissipate with immigration to Canada, however within the specific homelands of the Caribbean, there are tensions that parallel the specific social and political climate of the time. There is a historical dominance by men within Indo-Caribbean family structures. Even in their physical absence, their influence permeates the stories. This chapter gives insights into the evolution of various generations of Indo-Caribbean people, some values and practices that survive as well as some, changing relationships within social structures and cultural representations of music.

Chapter 8

Home and the Indo-Caribbean Woman:

Ambivalences of Belonging

Ideas of home are closely related to feelings of belonging. Indian immigrants to the Caribbean settled in a new place but they did not automatically discard their cultural connections to their former home. India signifies the “home” of an inherited tradition for diasporic Indians. When Indo-Caribbean people migrate to other countries, they include yet another home space and the notions of belonging are further complicated. The diaspora can indicate a “transnational sense of self and community” and “an understanding of ethnicity and ethnic bonds that transcends the borders and boundaries of nation states” (Agnew, 2005, p. 4). Within such a construct there are ambivalences of home and belonging that oscillate between “living ‘here’ and remembering ‘there,’ between memories of places of origin and entanglements with places of residence, and between the metaphorical and the physical home” (Agnew, 2005, p. 4).

The former British Caribbean islands evolved politically during independence in the 1960’s however, there was not a correlated “cultural revolution of identity” (Hall, 2001, p. 31). Hall refers to the people of the English speaking Caribbean in relation to the ways that they cling to traditional cultures and homelands of origin to forge a sense of belonging—since one of the effects of colonization can be “a profound misrecognition of one’s own identity” (Hall, 2001, p. 31). There is an accompanying matrix of belonging that has continued to evolve since independence and with further migrations. Within the stories there are examples of ambivalences of belonging and not belonging for diasporic, Indo-Caribbean women and the community from which they come.

Leaving India: Initial Immigrants Making a New Home

Brij Lall (1998) comments on the initial move by East Indian immigrants to the British colonies including Fiji, Mauritius and the Caribbean. He discusses some conditions of the contract and in his description he employs terms such as “residence,” “settled,” “homeland” and “home.” There were varying conditions of indentureship for the immigrants to the different countries over time and some chose to return to their homeland after the end of their contract. He notes:

However, the majority, enticed by the prospect of better opportunities in the colonies, official discouragement of repatriation, inertia and the dread of undertaking a long sea voyage again, settled permanently in the colonies. The life and struggle of these labourers and their descendants have bequeathed a legacy whose resolution still remains elusive. (Lall, 1998, pp. 216-217)

After residing in the colonies of indentureship, some eventually settled in the new place. For initial immigrants, as I discuss in the following chapter, “home” and the ideas of “home” were probably aligned with India. For first, second and the following generations of East Indians in the Caribbean, “home” has become both a place and space that oscillate between India and the Caribbean.

For the participants and myself, identity is triangulated. We live in one country but two other home countries characterize our cultural practices. Hua (2005) acknowledges that displacement may also be one facet of experience for diasporic people (pp. 194-195). I explore relationships of identity and home that include psychic spaces of belonging to various homes at the same time, as well as the emotional and intellectual struggles that accompany the mosaic of home places. Home spaces that appear within the stories are

physical spaces of a house, nation-countries, countries of birth and a country to which we have all immigrated.

Cultural Identity and Location

Given that all the participants including myself call ourselves Indo-Caribbean women, does such a statement imply that home is also in the Caribbean? Herein lies one of the dilemmas concerning identity and home. In addressing questions of Caribbean culture and identity, Stuart Hall (2001) suggests that the issue of Caribbean identity is an ongoing problem. He notes that it is always tied up with “problems of political mobilization, of cultural development, of economic development.” A common experience to all people of the Caribbean is “a stamp of historical violence and rupture” (p. 28). Hall continues:

No cultural identity is produced out of thin air. It is produced out of those historical experiences, those cultural traditions, those lost and marginal languages, those marginalized experiences, those people and histories which remain unwritten.

Those are the specific roots of identity. On the other hand, identity itself is not the rediscovery of them, but what they as cultural resources allow a people to produce.

Identity is not in the past to be found, but in the future to be constructed. (2001, p. 37)

Hall (2001) suggests that “[I]dentity is not only “story,” it is a narrative which we tell ourselves about ourselves, it is with the way in which we think and hear and experience them (p. 30). Our experiences as participants of a shared writing practice created spaces where we were able to think, hear, write and tell our stories. As we wrestle with our

histories, we also construct our identities by naming the places from which we negotiate our selves.

Contradictions of the Home-Space

Longing to leave and longing to return. There is a “transnational sense of self and community” for the women, having home spaces in Toronto and experiencing “entanglements” that occur within metaphorical and physical home spaces (Agnew, 2005 p.8). The participants including myself, have two inherited cultures and metaphorical homes. Although some of us do not claim a belonging to India, many of the traditions embedded in our cultural and social practices contain an obvious Indian tradition. Longing to leave and longing to return are recurring themes in the stories. Whether it’s a physical home space, a house or a home country, Shalini, Carla, Kristy and I uncover longing and yearning for home in our stories. Being born in Canada and not having lived in the Caribbean, Arti and Amera do not write about a longing to return. However, they struggle to maintain symbols of the Caribbean within their home spaces. M. Jacqui Alexander notes that “one of feminism’s earliest lessons is that the personal is political; some of our lives’ most infinitesimal details are shaped by ideological and political forces much larger than our individual selves” (2005, p. 283). Details within the stories mirror socio-political locations among real and imagined home-spaces that we claim for ourselves.

For the participant Carla, the struggle between Canada and the Caribbean seems more intense because she has spent almost equal amounts of time in her life so far, in both countries. Carla’s feeling of “home” is particularly conflicted. Born in Canadian and having moved to Trinidad as a young child, her instinctive “home” is Trinidad. Carla

experiences a contradictory desire to return home but also an intense need to leave. She writes:

Casa-

Home is rainy season.

Home is thunderstorms. Grey oceans. Wooden houses filled with English children's books.

Home is a mango tree dying in sunlight.

Home is my grandmother holding a wooden spoon. Stirring pumpkin and dhal in a cast iron pot. Threatening to beat me with it, but never following through.

Home is the silver gates to the brown and cream house. I would wait for my uncle to show up in his silver car, and I would run to open them, and stand by the hibiscus hedge to guide him in.

Home is the drive through the forest to see my mother in Rio Claro. Home is the odd feeling of living in the space behind your business, of fried potato and curried crab, of the cases of Carib and Stag⁵⁹ that filled her storeroom, of endless sewing and a wall of thread.

Home is the ocean. Now, I live near a lake, and it is like sleeping with the younger, weaker brother of your true love.

Home is where my grandfather lounges, watching cricket⁶⁰, drink in hand, not talking, possibly dreaming of Guyana. When he left for a year, he sent letters in his crooked handwriting complaining about tomato prices. I wonder who my

⁵⁹ Carib and Stag are two brands of beer from Trinidad and Tobago.

⁶⁰ An English sport that is mostly played in countries that have been influenced by the British, especially those countries that have formerly been colonized by them.

grandfather was, aside from us. The stories I read now about Guyana seem set in another universe, untouched by him.

Home is red steps, green walls, purple curtains and patterned bed spreads.

Home is brown paper covering books, colonial English, my grandfather holding my hand as he walks me to school.

Home is where I stopped sleeping, where music finally became important, where pictures of Jesus and Mother Lakshmi hang side by side.

Home is where I was afraid to bring my friends, chastised by my grandmother's wrath and spite. Home, in daylight and night, is where good Indian women belonged, so they could not bring shame upon the family.

Home is where my unknown aunt died, in my father's arms.

Home is where my grandfather died, in my father's arms.

Home is where my grandmother should have died. Instead, she was in a hospital bed, her body gasping through a ventilator, her mind locked away forever.

My father was the last one to say goodbye.

Home is where I raged to leave, and long to step foot in again.

Home is my first taste of alcohol, my first taste of a cigarette, my first taste of marijuana.

Home was built by my father and grandfather. A German submarine in World War II destroyed the boat that supposed to take him back to Berbice (Guyana). Instead, he stayed and starved, met my grandmother, eventually found work in the sugar cane factory in Brechin Castle, and built a house for his family.

Home is landing, by plane or by boat. Home is where my heart breaks when I arrive and when I leave, and I cannot tell which one is worse. (Carla's Home Story)

Carla's story captures elements of the landscape that is indigenous to the Caribbean.

Although Carla presently lives in Toronto, home is synonymous with memories of Trinidad. In answer to the question, "Why does your heart break when you leave home and why does it also break when you arrive?" Carla explains her feelings about Trinidad as home:

I want to say—I feel like myself—limited and crude and unhappy. There is the simplicity of having friends and family; relief in understanding that there are boundaries; without the pressure of opportunities that are ignored in Canada.

(Carla, personal communication, November 2012)

Boundaries represent physical confines and also the relationships from which she cannot escape, but in turn they nourish her. The limitedness of Trinidad feels better than the opportunities in Canada that push her to strive for different things. One of the opportunities that she refers to is higher education, which we all (the participants) have had. I ask her: "Why does it (her heart) also break when you arrive (in Trinidad)?" Her response is, "I know what I am leaving behind is what I really need to move forward" (personal communication, November 2012). On returning to Trinidad, she knows that what she is leaving behind in Canada are the opportunities for advancing educationally and economically. The contradictions within her experience are not peculiar to her alone but appear in the stories and experiences of all the participants.

Comparisons are made between the landscape of Trinidad and that of Toronto. Carla writes, “Home is the ocean. Now, I live near a lake, and it is like sleeping with the younger, weaker brother of your true love” (Carla’s Home Story). She considers Trinidad to be stronger in terms of her feelings of home. In a personal interview she explains, “Every time I go back home, I feel at peace because I miss home. But I’ve internalized too much of Canada to ever feel at peace in Trinidad. Like completely at peace” (personal communication, May 2013). Her contradictory feelings illustrate displacement as a collateral product of immigration. Through questioning, I probe for more information on her dislocation:

Prabha: What aspects of being in Canada prevent you from fitting into Trinidad.

Carla: It’s pure selfishness. I like being in the city. I like seeing, not white people but different people. And I have a degree of independence and anonymity here that I don’t get in Trinidad. (Personal communication, May 2013)

She suggests that in Trinidad, there are constraints to being independent and anonymous.

Trinidad and Tobago⁶¹ is relatively small if compared to Canada. Especially in smaller communities within the island, families and individuals are easily recognizable. Strong family ties that Carla describes within her work also give reasons for her lack of independence. In other stories, Carla writes about ways in which she defies her family, for example in her story based on her earliest memory of music she highlights her deviance from family expectations. Her mother sings *bhajans* or religious Hindu songs, a contrast to her love of Afro-Caribbean music and men. Afro-Caribbean music and culture

2 According to *Wikipedia*, Trinidad and Tobago is approximately 5128 square Km with a population of 1.4 million.

are not acceptable by her family. She recognizes that losing her family is one of the risks of her independent inclinations. Although being in Trinidad represents inhibitive spaces for Carla, she longs to return to the place she still calls home.

Stories of belonging and not belonging. The subjects within the stories at once describe their memories and thoughts of “not belonging” and “belonging.” There is the duality of belonging and not belonging that accompanies the place of the girl, the woman and/or the diasporic Indo-Caribbean within the home space of a physical house, country or the psychic location that vacillates among all the preceding sites of belonging. Each girl or woman’s experiences determine her place within the various spaces—the result is sometimes a longing to leave. There is movement within each story: from one house to another; from one country to another; from one culture to other cultures; from one set of relationships to others and there are consequent implications from such changes. From the new place, memories transport the participants back to former setting/s in another place or space. At times, there is the yearning to return to the previous home, at other times there is a realization or maturity that more firmly locates each person in the new one.

Arti’s story on her earliest memory of home begins, “I remember only one room. It’s always the same room, and not my room, and my place in that house.” Her home has been a place of belonging and not belonging. Arti’s memory focuses on the relationships and feelings that dominate her home space as well as her “place” among them.

I remember comfort and fear. I was reminded of the house’s stature each time I sat on the couch backward with my bottom on the back of the couch, my feet tapping on the wall.

That first house was where I lived as the smallest member of my family, and owned all the small spaces until my brother came along. The only scene I recollect to this day is that wall, harbouring the kitchen behind it and holding the television in front. The long rectangular coffee table in front of it was crippled with a couple wobbly legs from the constant pounding it received. My dad would sit on the floor, back against the couch; legs outstretched and sheltered by that faithful dark wood table, and punctuate every score with a spirited blow. He would similarly emphasize every one of his armchair coaching instructions of every tennis or boxing match he watched from way out of the ring loud enough for them to hear and I suppose to follow. He was a part of each of those audiences. He would generally occupy smaller open spaces of all our houses than my mom, and flick his feet and legs back and forth shadow boxing. This stopped in his most recent house where only I live with him, both of us with too much age and experience weighing us down to be that light on our feet. My mom was often out of sight but not earshot. (Arti's Home Story)

She highlights the connections among her parents, her brother and herself within her physical home.

Arti instinctively “owns” the “small spaces” until her younger brother is born. Ownership and belonging are two themes that co-exist in her story. Her story inspires the following questions: How does belonging and ownership contribute to identity? Are belonging and not belonging contradictory features of a single place because of the interactions of people within? The people within Arti's physical home represent her primary relationships that in turn are markers of who she is—a daughter and a sister. The

tension between Arti's parents is expressed in the "smaller spaces" that her father sometimes occupies while her mother, although unseen at times, continues to wield power within the home space through her constant proximity to what is going on.

Consistent with Indian cultural expectations, the woman's domain is synonymous with the home space. The image of the scene where Arti recalls a "wall, harboring the kitchen behind it and holding the television in front" is a clear divide between mother and father—the different worlds of the woman and man. Her mother's realm of belonging is within the kitchen and her father is in front of the television—commentating and being a part of the sports that he enjoys. The duality of "comfort and fear" that Arti experiences within her home space is similar to that which Shalini writes about in her story. The emotions are a result of conflict between their parents and the resultant "broken" home.

Home is kept alive with symbols from the Caribbean, "We always had a pink or red hibiscus tree in our house by a large window, a constant reminder of the "home," Guyana, that had become a figment of my imagination until it became once again affixed on my being in a tattoo" (Arti's Home Story). The family keeps a tropical plant in their Canadian home. In order for it to survive it must be carefully tended indoors since it is not suitable to the new climate. Canadian born Arti consistently talks about "home" as Guyana. As a means of making it a permanent mark of her identity, she has the Caribbean symbol of a hibiscus tattooed on her person. She continues the struggle of her parents to keep the memory of their former home present in the new one. Both generations of Indo-Caribbean immigrants do not relinquish cultural ties and symbolic acts of belonging to the former home country.

Kristy's homelessness shows up in both Canada and Guyana. Alienation in both countries occurs because she does not belong to a secure family unit—her father is absent and her mother is mentally ill. She writes:

Home for me became a suitcase and nothing more. Living in Canada my home was clear and well lit. I had running water and electricity but it was no more stable than the million[s] of places I called home in Guyana.

In Guyana, I was a rich girl that had fancy things and a big superstar name. A name that settled scores at school where kids secretly called me and my sister “rolling stones.” I am grateful for the rich life because when the spotlight dimmed we were nothing but strangers, intruders, the poor orphans, who in a matter of six months had almost always over stayed their welcome. (Kristy's Home Story)

Kristy cites the image of the “suitcase” as home. It represents moving among numerous homes in Canada and Guyana. As a child, she moved from Canada to Guyana. Absent parents parallel a lack of stability for her and this is what lasts in her memory. Despite the amenities of electricity and water in Canada, she does not feel a belonging there. Her peers at school in Guyana make fun of her—she and her sister feel alienated in home spaces as well as at school. For Kristy, the society does not contain a welcoming space for two children whose parents are not caring for them. In the Caribbean, there is the familiarity of a small community that also exposes unsanctioned relationships, leaving individuals at the mercy of societal values. Kristy and her sister feel like “strangers,” “intruders” and “poor orphans”—all are descriptors of not belonging.

Shalini, similar to Arti in her story above, highlights the paradox of “security” and “fear” associated with her former home. The duality of emotions can probably be

paralleled to the “longing to leave” and the “yearning to return” that Carla has noted in her story. Shalini remembers:

The earliest concept of home for me at this moment in time is such an abstract thing—I feel that it offered me so much security in the past but has now become a very fearful entity for me. My home used to be a place where I felt I could always be, hide, and live without fear of ever being homeless - a place where I could deny my insecurities and my fears.

Now however as I have been disowned, it is a place that I yearn to see once more and a place that seems that it too has turned its back on me. My thoughts of home haunt me to be honest - I yearn for the security I felt as a child, the love that once was between its doors, the memories of treasured family and first loves. Its funny how a place can attest to so many things and dredge up so many feelings - it holds so many secrets - those of love, deceit and infidelity. It hosted so many awful nights of intolerable fighting, hiding under my bed, running away and staring at the window wondering how to leave this place. Ironical though, that I would really like to reclaim this place and be there now with my mom without the tyranny of my father who was the source of so much unhappiness for us both.

(Shalini’s Home Story)

As a child, being in the family’s home space has prevented Shalini from thinking of “homelessness.” It is a place that keeps her safe even from her own fears and insecurities. Although she longs to leave because of the turmoil between her parents, at the time she writes the story she expresses a longing to return. One of the consequences of marrying an Afro-Caribbean man is being disowned by her family. Shalini no longer belongs to

their sanctioned social space. She explains the repercussions of her choice and the relationship to home: “Now however as I have been disowned, it is a place that I yearn to see once more and a place that seems that it too, has turned it’s back on me” (Shalini’s Home Story). Having defied the cultural expectations that accompany her place in the home, she now feels rejected by it. Traditional values of Indo-Caribbean people include a denial of mixing with other races, specifically Afro-Caribbean people. She yearns to see her home again and reclaim it.

Despite being rejected by her family, Shalini identifies as Trinidadian—Trinidad remains the place she calls home. When I asked her to talk about identity in relation to place with reference to both the Caribbean and Trinidad, she responds:

I don’t want to say that I’m not Caribbean because I feel that I am Caribbean. I just don’t feel that I’m the quintessential Afro-Caribbean. Which is what we understand Caribbean-ness to be. I do feel Caribbean and I don’t want to mix that up.... if I just had to define myself, it’s easier to explain to people that I’m Trinidadian.... Cause they don’t know what Indo-Caribbean means. That’s a new concept and a new term that’s coming to be. But if I had to lay claim to something, it would be that I am Trindiadian first and I’m part of the Indo-Caribbean identity and that’s part of me but I’m Trinidadian first.” (Shalini, personal communication, April 2013)

Shalini has immigrated to Canada to escape her former home but doesn’t call Canada home. The relationships that characterized the home space are intricately woven into her memory and the resulting emotions of longing and yearning.

In her earliest memory of home, Amera writes:

I remember playing in the sun-room (only in Canada would they have rooms just for the sun) and Riri and I would play, listen to tapes and create elaborate stories to act out. I remember a red hand me down kids sized jeep that never worked, and the shed in the backyard that was home to a raccoon family. I remember always thinking that the backyard was my own secret garden, and that one day, John (my neighbour) would express his undying love for me and take me away.

I remember only being allowed to ride my bike up and down the driveway and drawing in chalk on the sidewalk. I remember when I didn't need to watch TV, I actually preferred talking to myself and my babbling two year old sister, creating alternate universes where I was a goddess warrior that saved all the people from the dinosaurs. I remember spending hours recording music off the radio onto tapes and thinking that meant I was a DJ, putting up posters of white boy celebrities, because at that time, celebrities didn't look like my people. All these and more make up my earliest memories of home, remembering who I was so that I can become who I want to be. Creative, imaginative, excited and full of life. (Amera's Home Story)

Amera identifies as Indo-Caribbean and constructs her identity in relation to two home spaces in this story—North American cultural symbols such as the television series, “The Warrior Princess⁶²” and the West Indian “DJ,” her father. As an adult, she acknowledges complicity in reconciling her history—“my past” with identity—in order to “become who I want to be.” Amera recognizes the dominant culture of her physical home and the foreign-ness of who she is. She cites “white boy posters” that do not reflect “my people.”

⁶² “Xena: Warrior Princess” was aired on North American television networks from 1995 to 2001. The show is set in Ancient Greece and the heroine fights for good against evil.

Amera discusses the influences of various cultures within her home space that contribute to aspects of identity—some of which she chooses to accept and others that she rejects.

Canadian born Amera emphasizes that “only in Canada would they have rooms just for the sun.” Contrasted with Trinidad, the country from which her father has immigrated, the weather in Canada is drastically colder with much less sunshine. Her inherited Caribbean identity offers a place for contrast with the one in which she now resides. American television and popular music are influences that show up in her childhood surroundings and as an adult, in her memories. She writes, “putting up posters of white boy celebrities because at that time, celebrities didn’t look like my people” (Amera’s Home Story). As a child, she does not escape the dominant ideology that shapes her experiences but as an adult, she is able to contextualize them within the immigrant minority group to which she belongs.

In Amera’s story about her mother, she writes:

My earliest memory of my mother—who is East Indian but has contributed greatly to my identity as an Indo-Caribbean woman is her beautiful curly hair.... She used to take us to pick strawberries from farms up North, and explain the way/reasons why people that looked like me were waiting on yellow school buses hidden in the shade of the trees in the field for us to finish our fun little pastime of pretend manual labour so they could be exploited by the same farms we just supported.

We never went back there again.

Amera identifies her mother as East Indian but also acknowledges her own identity as Indo-Caribbean. The mother sensitises her children to the issues of immigration. Both of Amera’s parents are immigrants to Canada. Amera’s mother takes her children on

outings to orchards where there are labouring immigrants. “People who looked like me” refers to brown people or immigrants. Although the story does not expand on why they “never went back” it does highlight the issue of immigrant labour in Canada and infer Amera’s family’s refusal to support the exploitation of immigrants. Amera and her family also choose to share identifications of colour and “immigrant” with the labourers.

Men and the Construction of Houses and the Deconstruction of Homes

Men play a striking role in the physical and symbolic structures of houses within the stories. Carla identifies house building by the men in her family as an expectation within the family structure. She writes: “Home (physical structure of the house) was built by my father and grandfather” (Carla’s Home Story). (See page 211.) I ask Carla to elaborate on her story. She further describes her grandfather and father’s responsibility in building the family’s house:

He [grandfather] came from Guyana to work on the American Base in Trinidad. He was supposed to leave to go back to Guyana after the work was done but a German submarine torpedoed the boat that was supposed to take him back. He almost starved but got a job at Caroni (Sugar cane factory)—as a pan boiler. He met my grandmother, fell in love and got married. My grandmother had about eight to ten siblings and was very poor. It was only when my father got a job at Caroni that they eventually got enough money to build their house. My dad had come to Toronto, went to George Brown, studied to be a welder. (Carla, personal communication, November 2012)

Carla's grandfather and his son are responsible for building the house in which the family resided.

Carla's father refuses to marry her mother even when she becomes pregnant. She describes the story that has been passed down to her:

When mom found out that she was pregnant, her uncle had a meeting with my father to find out his intentions. My dad laughed it out. Mom was forty when she got pregnant. They weren't too keen on their marriage when they learnt about him being a flirt, crass, and treated my mom with contempt. He (father) venerated my grandmother (his mother). (Personal communication, November 2012)

Her father never gives in to her mother's wishes to be married and thereby did not create her coveted home space for a family.

Shalini's luxurious childhood home in Trinidad was built by both of her parents.

In her stories, the physical home is synonymous with her "upper middle class" status that her parents had worked towards. Carla's reference to "wooden homes" in her story sets up a contrast to houses that were bigger and better. The lower classes in Trinidad usually live in houses that are starkly different from the upper classes. Shalini describes her home as a "large eighties themed home, from the shag carpet to the terrazzo marble flooring to the fantastical backyard spread with our lime green lawn chairs sitting under our majestic mango tree" (Shalini's Home Story). The physical comfort and security of her childhood home is what Shalini longs for as an adult living in Toronto. With the demise of her parents' relationship she loses access to her former home. For this, she blames her father, his infidelity and alcoholism.

Arti's childhood home space begins to deconstruct with her parents' divorce.

In her story she writes:

He [her dad] would generally occupy smaller open spaces of all our houses than my mom.... This stopped in his most recent house where only I live with him, both of us with too much age and experience weighing us down to be that light on our feet.... After the separation that ended a thirty-year marriage, my mother settled into her dream home, the one (the physical house) where I spent the last of my years with my intact nuclear family. (Arti's Home Story)

Both parents permeate her childhood environment and she mourns the loss of that time because of their divorce. For Arti, a home space that is complete contains both parents.

Kristy begins her story with a question to emphasize that her experience of home does not coincide with her expectations of what might be a home space:

What is home? Home is said to be a safe place, the heaven you read about in bedtime stories, two parents who kiss their kids goodnight before bed. Home is an imaginary place that offers refuge from the cold, lonely world, outside of its doors. I wish I can say that my home was once safe, a place that I can return and find my sweet childhood memories hidden in a shoebox. (Kristy's Home Story)

Kristy expresses a strong wish that her home had once been safe, a place she could now return to reminisce on childhood memories. She offers the stereotypical "home spaces" that she has acknowledged within dominant discourse—her education and life in Canada. None of these options are available to her. Kristy's lack of a secure home is related to her absent father:

Home for me started out in a small apartment building called Westlodge in Parkdale. I remember it being a place decorated with nothing but the best. Things

that compensated for loneliness felt. My home had really fancy lights added for layered lighting that hide the fact that my mom was an illegal immigrant because my dad left when I was two. Yes, home was supposed to be safe. (Kristy's Home Story)

Kristy's idea of home is derived from books, literature and stories that aid in promoting a dominant culture. Her father abandons his family and leaves them at the mercy of Canadian society—her mother is an illegal immigrant.

When Kristy moves back to Guyana because her mother is unable to care for her and her sister, the close-knit nature of the community on which Carla remarks, similarly affects Kristy and her sister. As in Carla's experience there are contradictory feelings of belonging and not belonging in a small Caribbean society; for Kristy, on one hand, she enjoys being respected because her father's surname is well known in Guyana, conversely children make fun of her because they know she is separated from her parents. The makeup of her family structure is a source of instability and unhappiness for Kristy. She notes that in Canada there is running water and electricity but it is not different from Guyana in terms of providing her with a stable home. The lack of a nuclear family structure exposes Kristy and her sister to the society's cruelty. As discussed in the previous chapter, feelings of not belonging accompany the socially unsanctioned family structure.

Caribbean Experience and the Necessity to Leave

Some of the early novels written by Caribbean women suggest an imperative to leave the region in order for the woman subject to receive further education and gain independence. But there is also an emptiness of leaving home that continues to affect the new lives of the female protagonists in these novels. Within the early literature by women of the region, examples of female protagonists leaving the Caribbean for education and better lives in metropolitan centres are: Cynthia (Tee) in Merle Hodges's (1970) *Crick Crack Monkey*; Annie in Jamaica Kincaid's (1983) *Annie John*; Kamla in Lakshmi Persaud's (1990) *Butterfly in the Wind*. Merle Hodge is Afro-Trinidadian, Jamaica Kincaid is Antiguan but considered Afro-American because of her immigration to the United States of America; and Lakshmi Persaud is Indo-Trinidadian. The authors work in the form of the *bildungsroman*⁶³ at the end of which the girl protagonists reach maturity. Their lives are on the verge of new beginnings, as the young women get ready to leave their home country for a new life. The most important venture for the three protagonists is the opportunity for education. They are young girls growing up in a neo-colonial environment and the struggles of childhood in the Caribbean are set in relation to the strict demands and violence within a surviving colonial education system. In leaving their home countries, the women have hope that they can escape the strictures of a society that limits them. The experience of one protagonist is somewhat different. Kamla wrestles with an inherited Hindu tradition and she suffers discrimination within the denominational school system in Trinidad. She is encouraged to leave her home country for further education.

⁶³ The *bildungsroman* is a specific form of the literary novel where the plot concerns education or maturation during the formative years of the protagonist's life.

All the participants, including myself have been more formally educated than our mothers and grandmothers. Canada has been our home and the space in which we have been able to pursue higher education. Both the literature and our experiences suggest the opportunity for education that comes with the new home country. The yearning for the former home comes up in the stories of the participants. This is also the case for protagonists in novels by women of the region. Jamaica Kincaid's (1990) *Lucy* and Joy Mahabir's (2006) *Jouvert* take up life in the new country where there is always a "looking back" in conjunction with the efforts required to make a new life.

In this study, we have recovered some of the experiences of the first generation Indo-Caribbean women who were quite alienated in countries where the dominant culture was not their traditional culture. The first generations of Indian immigrants in the Caribbean spoke a language that was not the official one and so they were always in the place of "other" and in the minority. Language is one of the tools that illustrate a "modality of being-in-the world, such that language not only represents or refers, but 'discloses' our being-in-the world" (Low & Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003, p. 6). Much of the experience of the Indo-Caribbean woman subject has been influenced by an initial struggle to enter a dominant society through language and education. Traditional roles and expectations did not generally support the first generations of Indian women in the Caribbean to pursue formal education. We possess language skills that allow us to bridge our Caribbean homes as well as our new ones in Canada. We have all been educated in ways that encourage us to become writers of our experiences. We have the parallel loss of the traditional language of our fore-parents, the initial immigrants to the Caribbean notwithstanding our continued use of it through music, prayers and culture. Our use of

different languages signifies our belonging to many places and also our not belonging to them. Such is the paradox of identifying our home spaces. Being able to repeat songs and prayers in Hindi and Bhojpuri with gusto and devotion is an example of inheriting and accepting a tradition but there is an acceptance of the language with a limited knowledge of it. We belong to the tradition as much as the tradition belongs to us.

Language, Class and Practices Within the Home Space

Language in old and new homes. Indian diasporic communities in Canada are homogenous. Amera's parents belong to distinct diasporic groups. Her father is Indo-Caribbean and her mother is Indo and Kenyan, her native language being Gujarati.

Amera writes:

I remember crying and being so scared when she used to try and take me to Gujarati language classes on Saturday mornings. How desperate she was to share something of her life with us—that we constantly rejected it, not because we wanted to, but because it was so hard to be Indo-Caribbean in those classes, with East Indian native Guju speakers making fun of my sister and I for being so slow at learning and not originally knowing the language. My mom has always been a cornerstone and foundation of my identity and politics, and has shaped all parts, good and bad. (Amera's Mother Story)

Amera identifies herself as “Indo-Caribbean in those classes.” Although her mother tries to introduce her own inherited culture to her daughters, learning the language as non-native speakers of Gujarati makes in frustrating and painful for the girls. In this case, language is a marker of difference among groups of diasporic Indians.

As a young child, one of my own memories surrounds learning to identify myself by saying my name.

I remember crossing the street with a tin cup in my hand. It was a used condensed milk tin and the top was smoothly cut off. My naanee used these cups for tea. My little hands always got burnt if I tried to hold the cup with tea in it. This day, my quest was to ask for a cup full of green plums from the laden tree at the back of Uncle Ram's house. Before I could get any plums, I was required to answer their questions (the adults). I would mechanically reply, "My name is Prabha Jerrybandan" to their usual question of "What is your name?" It must have been much later on that I figured out that it wasn't that they didn't really know my name but that they wanted to hear me speak. My mother had been training her two young children to speak in sentences. (Prabha's Home Story)

My memory of home includes my learning to identify myself verbally in a complete sentence, "My name is Prabha Jerrybandan." My mother was also teaching me to speak in complete Standard English sentences. Understanding the value of education and the need to speak using the official language of the Country, my mother employed methods to teach her children how to speak in English as distinguished from the Trinidadian dialect. "My name is Prabha Jerrybandan," presents who I am. This is the first sentence I remember speaking or learning to say. My mother felt that her children's chances at being well educated depended on their socialization into the formal system of schooling. She was intent on pushing us to succeed as students so that we would be more equipped for a better life. Education was the means towards a better life for common people in

Trinidad and Tobago. In the 1970's and 1980's, being well educated meant getting a better job away from the sugar cane fields or other labouring jobs.

I continue my story:

My parents have been renting an old “board” house at 4 Hickling Street in San Fernando. The steps to the front are where my younger brother and I play. There was a time when he rode his tricycle down the steps. Of course he got bruised and scolded at the same time. Recently, he told me that he remembers thinking about the act before doing it. He really wanted to see what would happen if he rode down the stairs.

Another time, my parents went out. I believe that my Dad was at work and my Mom needed to go to her pre-natal clinic. She was pregnant with my little sister. There was no other adult at home with us. My little brother sat on the front steps and refused to budge until my Mom returned.

Thinking about it now, I feel that it sounds risky to leave two young children aged three and two on their own at home. My mother did not have a choice. It would have been difficult to take us with her to the clinic. The neighbours to the left were the Gosines—about nine children who became part of our everyday lives. Maybe one of them looked after us on that day. (Prabha's Home Story)

The physical home space is representative of the social class of its inhabitants. My family and I live in “an old board house.” In Trinidad, wooden houses are usually occupied by poorer people. Living in an “old board” house is a marker of poverty and when used in Trinidadian dialect, it is a signification of a low social class. In spite of living in the town, there is no electricity in the house—another indicator of poverty.

The structure and workings of an extended family among traditional Indian people show up in my story. My father's two cousins live next door to each other and their father lives in one of their houses. Indo-Caribbean families have traditionally kept close family ties by living in close proximity to each other. Of my mother's six siblings, five of them lived on the same road that is about one mile long. Family groups that live close together have a chance to foster a sense of group belonging. In a society where there are ethnic tensions among different groups of people, Indo-Trinidadian families promote a sense of belonging within their specific family collectives.

The society is close-knit and there are freedoms implicit within the narrative that could be unlawful in present day society. My brother and I aged two and three, are left home alone. My mother trusts our neighbours who are Indo-Trinidadian and Hindu to look after us. I believe that those factors were important for people within that group to feel a sense of belonging with each other. The microsphere represented within my story examines the lives of working class people in Trinidad around 1970. Ethnicity, religion and family are features that foster bonds of caring and support among this group of people.

In my second story, I write:

The smell of the roti being sakayed (held over a flame to swell) on the tawa (baking stone) drifts throughout the small, one bedroom apartment. As she prepares dinner for our family of five, my mother goes over my vocabulary homework for tomorrow. She reaches to the table-top stove on the one kitchen table and turns slightly to check for another word from my copy book which is lying to the side. My father calls to me to perform Sandhya (evening prayers).

We stand side by side in the living room. Facing the east, there is a small box that has been nailed to the wall and many pictures of Lord Shiva and Mother Lakshmi are fixed onto it. We make arti (moving a lighted deya or earthenware lamp in a circular way to pay respect to the Gods and Goddesses) while my father sings his repertoire of mantras. He sings loudly. I am sure all the neighbours hear every syllable and since there are no other Hindus on the entire block made up of Claire, Austin, Parry and Cooper Streets, they must think it funny. As if to compensate, my brother and I merely mouth the words that we also know by heart. From time to time we push against each other and grin, looking up quickly to make sure that Daddy doesn't catch us. His eyes are closed as he bawls out the prayers. We grin a little more—without a sound.

Mummy sits with us for dinner. This is where our parents both try to teach us how to close our mouths while we chew keep our elbows off the table and say “Excuse me please,” before we get up.

My younger brother, my sister and I always go to brush our teeth at the same time. We have to climb up on a box by the face-sink because we are too short to reach the tap and spit inside the basin. We also need help to flush the toilet because we are all too short to reach the chain that hangs down from the water tank. The three of us sleep together on one bed and my parents on the other bed. Since Shobha is the youngest, she gets to sleep with Mummy and Daddy sometimes.

Fonclaire Steel Band players are practicing and we listen to the ping-ping-pong-pong as we get more and more tired. (Prabha's Home Story)

Education is a major theme within the stories and has been discussed more fully in Chapter 4. Within the home space, I remember the routines of everyday life as a child of about seven years old. An essential aspect of growing up included my parents' teaching their children the importance of formal education, traditional practices and social skills. My mother completes her household duties of cooking while making sure that I know my vocabulary lessons for school. She did not have the same opportunity as I have had. In order to make sure that I succeed in academics she engages in daily drills with me.

My father sees to it that we say our Hindu prayers at sunset. He makes sure that he sets a good example by singing them as loudly as he can. Our small apartment is located in the town of San Fernando. We live opposite to a steel pan⁶⁴ yard, a place where Fonclaire Steelband practice their music. The demographic of the area is mostly Afro-Trinidadian. My father is proud of his traditional practice, but we understand that we are different from the children with whom we play. Our friends do not understand our religion. None of the prayers we say in school coincide with the ones my parents make us learn. My brother and I merely mouth the prayers because we are being naughty and playing. We are also aware of our traditional practice as one that is not practised by our neighbours so we do not sound out the prayers. As children, while we do not consciously talk about our behaviours in this instance, we are aware of the overriding values of the community. There is a dominant culture to which we conform while maintaining a traditional practice that is not validated by the institutions of authority.

Home is a place where we practice a mix of tradition and the more conventional social skills of a dominant society. Both parents try to foster good social skills by encouraging

⁶⁴ The steel pan is the instrument that was invented in Trinidad and Tobago. Initially made from oil drums, they are tuned for playing music.

us to sit at a table to eat, recognizing and practising good table manners. My mother grew up in a rural area where there was no electricity or running water. There was no modern furniture in her home so they never sat at a table to eat. My grandparents ate with their hands instead of cutlery. Their different social skills contrast with the English social construct that dominates the colonized Caribbean.

My father grew up in the town and as a teenager worked as a waiter at a restaurant and club. Here he learnt the socially accepted dining conventions that he later passed on to his children. For my parents, being successful incorporated a good academic education and proper socialization skills together with a sound traditional practice based on Hinduism. Their parents had not employed the same measures, as life was different then. Their parents' struggle was for basic survival, for food and shelter. It was not that my parents did not have to worry about food and shelter, but they also realized that our success depended on having basic needs of life while incorporating the skills needed to flourish within the dominant society of Trinidad and Tobago.

Is Home the Country in which We Live or is it Somewhere Else?

Differences between first- and second-generation Indo-Caribbean women. My grandmothers both had extremely difficult lives. They worked hard but lived in poverty. Their generation did not have an experience of living in India because they were born on the Caribbean island. Culturally they were Indian. The next generation, the one of my mothers and mothers of participants, is the one that makes stronger ties with the country.

Identification documents such as National Identification Cards and passports, were not necessary for most first-generation immigrants like my grandmothers. During their lifetimes, they hardly left the areas in which they lived. When my maternal grandmother

was supposedly old enough to receive old age pension, for the first time, she acquired a National Identification Card. She did not have a birth certificate. People living in rural areas and with less proximity to government services were less likely to register births and deaths until it became legally necessary to do so. As a result, they were not formally required to identify as Trinidadian.

Second generation Indo-Trinidadians became more Trinidadian than their parents had been—they began to negotiate a relationship between both cultures, Indian and the more dominant, Creole Trinidadian culture. Their dress, food and language became, more Westernized, their culture more hybrid than their mothers'. Although my mother recognizes that her first language as a child was Hindi and her upbringing was more Indian, her schooling in Trinidad and her living in the town of San Fernando after marriage, have affected her cultural identity. She identifies as Trinidadian.

In my interview with participants, I specifically asked them about ways in which they believe their mothers identify themselves. As the generations progress they become more assimilated into the new country's culture and identity is also transformed to some degree. The second-generation women identify with country instead of the region. Shalini's and Carla's identify their mothers as Trinidadian, Kristy and Arti identify their mothers as Guyanese.

Made-up and real: stories of belonging. The song with which I begin the introduction to this study is a Hindi song, sung by a child as a request to her mother. Some people in my family are ignorant in Hindi and think that the song is a *bhajan* or religious song. Beginning with the repeated word "Maa," a person who does not understand Hindi, but knows traditional prayers can think that it is dedicated to the

Spiritual Mother or Goddess. There are other Hindi songs, including romantic songs that are treated with similar religious fervour. For some, the Hindi language represents a culture that has become synonymous with the sacred.

The inherited tradition is a hallowed one. The land of India is also thought of as a sacred land. It is the land on which all the scriptural stories are set and the land of our ancestors. For Indo-Caribbean people, East Indian cultural tradition may be associated with a distant land, but that tradition is negotiated as integral, unique and essential in the construction of our identity.

When I was in Standard Two (Grade Four), I made up a fantastic story and told it to the girl who sat beside me. I was in the minority at San Fernando Girls' Government School where the population was mostly Afro-Trinidadian. At that time, the urban areas were dominated by Afro-Trinidadians while the Indo-Trinidadians were mostly engaged in agriculture, specifically in the sugar-cane industry that was located in rural areas of the country. In my story, I had come from India where my family and I would ride on elephants. I had read about elephants in India in one of our school reading books and now, I am surprised that the girl beside me didn't figure out my lie. For many months I endured a deep fear that she would say something to the teachers and I would be found out.

As an eight-year-old girl, I had no idea why I was making up such a story. What I did understand at that time was that my friends didn't know much about my heritage, and I could make my life as exotic as I wanted in that lie, especially as I didn't have any other history that I could talk about. I had no idea where my grandparents had come from, and as no one spoke about them we knew little of their lives. India was a far away place, but

the prayers we said every day were offered to Gods and Goddesses who lived in that place. I too, wanted to belong there.

Sacred Acts of Belonging: Home in Life and Death

In the following section, I look at the symbolism of “home” for two of my relatives, my aunt who suffers from dementia and my uncle who died in June 2014. My aunt clings to her memories of her original home; they are the most consistent ones that she has even when she does not recognize her family members. My uncle migrated from Trinidad as a young adult, visited India many times as he felt that it was important to his identity as Indian, but insisted that when he died, his body should be taken to Trinidad and cremated according to Hindu rites on the traditional site where his relatives have also been cremated.

I wrote the following story after reading through the stories written by the practice groups. This study has given me a framework in which to categorize the experiences of my family and myself. Snippets of stories that have resisted becoming traditional family stories can be strung together with a different understanding.

Loss of memory and home: Sona Tantie—Prabha’s Journal # 5, 2014

Sona Tantie is now seventy-eight years old and is in the advanced stages of dementia. For some time, she seemed to inhabit a life when she was much younger. All of my mother’s surviving siblings⁶⁵ live on a single road, Cemetery Road. The entire length of the road is about one mile long. Two of my mother’s sisters—Big Tantie and Sona Tantie, and three of her brothers live short distances away from each other. My grandparents had lived in a house, which is now

⁶⁵ For all of their adult lives, five of my mother’s six siblings have lived on the same road. One of her sisters lived farther away. She died in 1991.

occupied by one of my uncles. Within the past two years, she would visit that house and look for her mother. My naanee, her mother has been dead since 1979.

Last December, while I was visiting my relatives in Cemetery Road, I saw Sona Tantie walking toward the house in which my grandmother had lived. “Ah going by Ma,” she said staring straight ahead while not making eye contact with me. She was going to her mother’s home, the one that was also hers as a child. Since then, she has been confined to a room in her daughter’s house. Whenever anyone speaks to her during the day Sonay Tantie has only one wish. She always wants to go home. Even after all her memories seem to have disappeared, she retains an instinct to return to her home. Home is all that she is left with and all that she longs for.

The ideal of “home” for my aunt is the physical abode where she has spent the majority of her life. She had also retained some of her longest lasting memories, her mother and her mother’s home. The home space can be an intricate blend of the physical place together with an “enacted space” that includes “a web of personal relationships and the weave of experience, memory, and the process of remembering” (Mezei, 2005 p. 83). Sona Tantie’s yearning for home is symbolic of a return to comfort and safety. Even when she may not consciously understand why she remembers certain people, places and times, she clings to the relationships within the home spaces in which she has lived.

A desire to return home, even after death. In many cultures, there are symbolic events and ceremonies that honour the lives of individuals who have passed. In traditional Hindu practice, the physical body is usually cremated. When my uncle died, “home”

became an important place of return. The following is a journal entry written in memory of him.

Uncle Chin—Prabha's Journal # 6, July 21st 2014

When he was eighteen years old, Uncle Chin left Trinidad through the “back door.” Since Venezuela is a mere eight miles off the coast of Cedros, the southeastern tip of Trinidad, people could travel by pirogue⁶⁶ from one country to the other. This was not legal travel as that by airplane from Piarco International Airport to the then, Maiquetia Airport in Caracas. He worked his way to a good life in Venezuela and my earliest memory of him is about the time I was eight years old. By then, he was a Venezuelan citizen. He became a citizen by marrying a Venezuelan woman, Tia Matilde (Aunt Matilde).

By the time he died at the age of seventy-nine, my uncle had dual citizenship for Venezuela and the United States of America. When the Venezuelan government became socialist, Uncle Chin left. He spent more than twenty years of his life in the USA and eventually died there. Even though he no longer held citizenship to Trinidad and Tobago, it was his wish for his body to be cremated there. His ashes were to be put into the Ganges River in India, a sacred place for Hindus.

Uncle Chin's physical body was both born and burnt in Trinidad. His request included a return to the sacred river in India, home to Mother Ganga⁶⁷, a symbol of the goddess representation and home to his ancestors and their cultural practice.

⁶⁶ A pirogue is a small canoe like boat used for short distance travel on water.

⁶⁷ Ganga is the name of the goddess, sister of Mother Parvati, consort of Lord Shiva. Mythology tells that she was changed into the river as a consequence of disturbing Lord Shiva while he meditated. Hindus believe that bathing or immersing oneself into the Ganges River will cleanse oneself, physically and spiritually.

A staunch believer in Hindu traditions, my uncle worshipped the earth or Dharti Maataa⁶⁸, another female manifestation of the Supreme Being or God. The country in which he was born remained sacred to him. Although he had moved in life, whether it was for love or political freedom, his wish was that after death, his body should be returned “home.”

My uncle had lived less than one-quarter of his life in Trinidad, but it remained “home” to him. He had never lived in India although he did spend time there and tried to become more educated in Hindu traditional scriptures. For some people of East-Indian descent and especially for some Hindus, India is a land that denotes a home space even if only in the imagination.

Reflections of Home-Places

Part of my experience as an Indo-Caribbean woman has been the ambivalent feelings of home that I experience. Within Trinidad and Canada at times, I feel both a sense of belonging and not belonging. There are also feelings of belonging and not belonging associated within Indian cultural spaces. I believe that my grandmother would have experienced similar feelings of home in relation to Trinidad and India. My mother has never travelled to India but she talks about her desire to visit there. She speaks Hindi and feels a sense of belonging to that country and culture although she also feels that Trinidad is home.

There are times when I long to return to Trinidad and, it is not only because I miss my family. I long for the landscape that I remember from my childhood—an area in the country where my grandmother lived for most of her life. It is where my mother grew up.

⁶⁸ *Dharti* literally means earth. Hindus worship the earth as a manifestation of the spiritual mother. *Maataa* literally means mother. Also known as *Prithvi Maataa*, Mother Earth is both the planet to which we belong and from which we are sustained.

As a child, I too spent time there even though it was never for very long. In Trinidad, at the time when I was growing up, living in the town meant being farther away from the sugar-cane fields and so the chances of working on the estates were also lessened. My mother instinctively felt that it would not be good for her children if we grew up in the countryside. Education and life in an urban area were advantages to Indo-Trinidadians. My parents grasped those chances for us.

Now, living in a new home in Toronto, where there is no year-round sunshine and greenery, I have longed to return to the land on which my mother and grandmother lived. I have not yearned for the city where I grew up as much as I have wanted to reclaim a relationship with the earth on which my fore-parents made their lives in the New World. bell hooks (2009) refers to Carol Lee Flinders (2000) *Rebalancing the World*, as they both subscribe to a feminist culture of belonging whereby, there “is an intimate connection with the land to which one belongs” (p. 13). As with my fellow participants, we retain a belonging to the lands in the Caribbean even though the land may not belong to us. It is the same, taking up a home here in Canada—we struggle to belong to a land knowing too well that the land is never ours.

Chapter 9

Reflections, Considerations and Conclusions

We are born and have our being in a place of memory. We chart our lives by everything we remember from the mundane moment to the majestic. We know ourselves through the art and act of remembering. Memories offer us a world where there is not death, where we are sustained by rituals of regard and recollection. ...I pay tribute to the past as a resource that can serve as a foundation for us to revision and renew our commitment to the present, to making a world where all people can live fully and well, where everyone can belong. (bell hooks, 2009, p. 5)

I invoke the words and meaning of bell hooks as I have used the “art and act of remembering” throughout this work (hooks, 2009, p. 5). As one of the initial objectives of this study was to recover stories through memory work, I sought to fill in huge spaces of not knowing with understanding. While there is no doubt that I have learnt more about the lives of people in the Caribbean, there is still much that I don’t know and much more that I will never know. However, this project has shown me that when I ask, there is a chance to know. The people who have been my main sources of retrieval through memory and stories have been six participants in a writing-practice. In addition, family stories told by my mother, her sister—my aunt, and my father’s brother—my uncle, have contributed to my collection.

Memory is elusive and age complicates it more. One of my aunts suffers with dementia, two of my uncles died in 2014—their memories and stories are inaccessible. I have come to realize over the course of this study that my mother has continued to tell me stories because she knows I am interested in knowing more. This project represents just that—an opening up of questions and a desire to search the past “as a resource,” as a “commitment to the present,” and a hope that the understandings gained can offer

meaning and “belonging” for Indo-Caribbean people and for readers of this work (hooks, 2009, p. 5).

Women as a Community for Sharing and Learning

When I asked my mother about my *nanee*’s (maternal grandmother) knowledge of Hindi songs that she sang, my mother sought information from my aunt. This process is a usual sequence of events—my asking, my mother’s asking, my aunt’s responses. My aunt talked about her mother’s learning songs from other women in the village. Groups of women were able to bond through specific practices, in the case of my grandmother—they sang songs in Hindi, acquiring and sharing cultural literacy associated with the practice. They knew different types of songs and learnt the appropriateness of singing them. In Indian culture there are certain types of songs to be sung at specific occasions of births, weddings, funerals, for praise and even just for fun. In an environment where some people were straddling two languages, the women engaged in a tradition of singing together and thereby transmitted among themselves knowledge of this cultural practice. My mother learnt from her mother—the songs, the meanings and the relevance. She continues to complain that I am not learning the language of Hindi well enough, that I don’t have a good enough knowledge of the various cultural songs. I have had another cultural practice though, writing with another group of women.

Women participants as a community of writers. The writing groups that came together for this research project worked as a cultural group, learning and sharing with each other. We practised writing and telling among ourselves, sharing a language and history. Our experiences were the currency we used to build and sustain our relationships. We became a community of women through a shared interest and practice, and we also

identified ourselves as belonging to the same cultural community of Indo-Caribbean women.

Theoretical Considerations

Dynamic theories of knowing. Although I have situated my research within a framework of accepted Western theoretical classifications, I wish to focus on the importance and necessity of claiming the forms of narrative and storytelling as foundational structures of theory. I draw on Barbara Christian's premise:

People of colour have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking.

(Christian, 1989, p. 226)

Stories have become the means through which the participants and I have shared and learned. As Christian notes, the stories are not meant to present “fixed ideas” but a “dynamic” through which learning and sharing can and probably will continue.

The Story: Theory and Practice

Merle Hodge (1996) asserts the necessity of the story as a form of activism. She warns, “the power of the creative word to change the world is not to be underestimated” (p. 494). She traces her journey of finding a space within a world of “their” storybook since her world was “nothingness.” Hodge references “their” storybook as that of the colonizer and British education at that time. She continues, “The genesis of modern Caribbean writing lies, I think, in such a reaction, conscious or unconscious, against the enterprise of negating our world and offering us somebody else's world as salvation” (p.

494). I have sought to predicate my study on the subjectivity and inter-subjectivity of a group of women writing their own stories and sharing them both in group work, and in contributing to my project that will further be shared with others. The result is a work of self-representation by Indo-Caribbean women.

Hodge (1996) explains the power of storytelling to liberate formerly subjugated people by arguing that one of the weapons used to subjugate us has been colonial fiction. She writes:

The proper role of fiction in human societies includes allowing a people to “read” itself—to decipher its own reality. The storyteller offers a vision of the world which is more coherent, more “readable,” also the mass of unconnected detail of everyday experience. (pp. 495-496)

I believe that my work offers such a “read.”

Writing—A Means to Voice and Healing as Individuals and as a Community

In a press release from the White House, dated May 28th 2014, United States President, Barack Obama spoke about Maya Angelou on her passing:

Above all she was a storyteller—and her greatest stories were true. A childhood of suffering and abuse actually drove her to stop speaking—but the voice she found helped generations of Americans find their rainbow amidst the clouds, and inspired the rest of us to be our best selves.

As I read the statement celebrating one of the most prolific African-American women writers, I contemplated Angelou’s loss of voice as a result of trauma. Likewise, the trauma and intense pain of Indo-Caribbean people work toward silencing their stories and experiences. As with the stories of Maya Angelou, there is the possibility for others to

find their voice and for healing within the stories of other people. The impact of such work on the larger society suggests the potential for storytelling and story writing to inspire communities of people to find self-worth and meaning in sometimes challenging lives.

Writing as transformational. Luce-Kapler (2004) asserts that there are features of writing, offering many more possibilities than an essential skill in everyday life. She suggests that writing enriches lives, works toward self-understanding, allows for varied perspectives of the world in ways that can possibly even change it (p. xii). Through her work, *Writing With, Through, and Beyond the Text: An Ecology of Language*, Luce-Kapler explores the transformative value of writing with women writers; “how writing and other aesthetic practices” have the power to make meaningful connections with our lives; how writing engages the individual in “a variety of socially constructed and interactive systems”; how the analysis of writing contributes to learning and “coming to know”; how writing through shared cultural contexts can offer new spaces for real and imagined possibilities; and she views writing as a collective rather than an individual process (pp. xi-xix). I have subscribed to a similar practice in my research project, and I have suggested similar connections within my analysis chapters..

Creative Forms of Representation

Within my research, I have been exploring creative (ways of representing my work) forms to represent my work. Some of my fears have included how other Caribbean scholars might receive my work. I had the chance to present a paper at the Caribbean Studies Association Conference in May 2014. The following is one of my journal entries from that experience:

Reflections on the 39th Caribbean Studies Association Conference, Merida,
Yucatan, Mexico—Prabha's Journal #9 May 26, 2014

I presented a paper entitled “My Two Grandmothers: Two First Generation Indo-Caribbean Women.” My methodology included using photographs, autoethnography and memory work to offer a re-writing—an alternative to the historical linearity and objectification that have previously been prevalent in male dominated and Euro-centric accounts. To my disappointment, one male, Indo-Caribbean scholar dominated the discussion. Eventually however, other Caribbean participants began to tell of their own experiences whereby family stories had been silenced. One person noted that on asking about family stories he was told, “Let the dead remain dead.” The most talkative man, whose discussion had been focused on race issues in response to another panellist's paper, offered his contribution that Indian people did not tell about shameful or less than attractive experiences because they wanted to be “better than” their Afro-Caribbean counterparts. Despite the race relations that form an important aspect of analysis, I accepted his comments as a possibility, although I could not know. I accepted these suggestions as an integral part of the dialogue that I still wish to open with my work. A woman of mixed race raised her hand and commented about not knowing about her “Ajie.” She used the Hindi term for paternal grandmother and I smiled because people who are not visibly Indo-Caribbean could also join in the conversation. Two more people talked about the secrecy and silence that have historically cloaked the experiences of Caribbean people. A fellow panellist, an Afro-Caribbean scholar based in Toronto turned to me and said, “Your work is

important.” I was happy that other Caribbean people met my work with encouragement and appreciation.

Representation by Silence

Trinidadian writer and teacher, Merle Hodge (1996) remarks: “Indeed, Caribbean people are capable of a kind of ‘mental desertion’ of their own environment, which is not matched, I think, by any other people on earth” (p. 496). In this dissertation, I have discussed alienation and hardship as core aspects of experience for Indo-Caribbean women. I have also cited the scarcity of published work by the same group of women. Can “mental desertion” of one’s environment be a form of silencing that also emerges as characteristic of a formerly subjugated people? I consider the possibility of silence when there is nothing to applaud (see p. 194). Silence by women can also be a form of resistance. The stories, and analysis of them create spaces for further conversations and while they may not be definitive as Barbara Christian (1989, p. 226) reminds us, it is one means by which women of colour represent themselves.

The following is a journal entry that I wrote in 2012. Later on when I began wondering about silences within our storytelling practices, I thought about this episode and considered further meaning.

Cooking Curries—Prabha’s Journal #9, September 2012.

Living in Toronto for the past seven years, I have felt isolated from my family and community in Trinidad. Recently, I have been making the effort to connect with people here in Toronto. By talking regularly and meeting with people from my writing practice group, both because of my ongoing research and also because we have established bonds as a community of women, I have been more socially

engaged. Outside of my group members, I sometimes get together with two of my cousins; both women were born in Trinidad, in the same year as myself. When we meet, we mostly cook and talk. This past weekend when we met, I demonstrated how to make Shaahi Paneer, an Indian dish of cottage cheese in a tomato cream sauce. None of us had ever known about some of the commercially popular East Indian food until we moved to Canada. In the Caribbean, our curry is completely different.

Some time during the evening, while tasting and talking I began remembering how much my cousin Kassie's father loved my experiments with non-traditional foods. Once, I had made coleslaw and he told me how much he liked it—he had never had it before. Cally started giggling hysterically when I mentioned how unwilling my mother is to embrace some of the new foods I make. She loves Thai food which is similar to Caribbean food because of the spices and coconut milk but she does not enjoy traditional Indian dishes that are creamy or bitter. It was then that Cally related the following anecdote:

Some time ago on a visit to Toronto, Mamoo—Kassie's father had spent a day with Cally and her family. Although Cally didn't eat pork while she was growing up in Trinidad, when she and her husband moved to Canada, they did. At her home, Mamoo ate pork, and remarked that it tasted "real good." When she went home to Trinidad for a holiday, she told her mother (Mamoo's sister) that at her home, Mamoo had eaten pork. On hearing this, Tantie rebuked her daughter, "You hush your mouth! You hear me? Ah never want to hear you say that again! Doh leh me hear yuh say that again eh!" Cally was giggling hard but both Kassie and I

instinctively knew that there were certain spaces where the story should not be told.

Secrets Within a Community of Women

You hush your mouth! You hear me? Doh leh meh hear you say that again! (My Aunt's Warning to Her Daughter)

The secretive aspect of storytelling among Indo-Caribbean women is a culturally astute means of protection. Passed on from mother to daughter, Tantie warns Cally not to repeat stories that have the capacity for tainting the “cultural imaginary” of Indian people. I call the concept an imaginary because it is a theoretical understanding that is upheld within the specific cultural group—that of Indo-Caribbean women. The secretive nature of women's lives is not one that is forced on them; it is one that they manipulate for their personal and communal protection

For religious reasons, many Hindus do not eat meat. There are some who do eat meat and fast from it for religious occasions. In my family, *Old Nanaa*, my maternal great grandfather was a strict vegetarian and never ate meat during his lifetime. My *Nanee* and *Nanaa*—maternal grandparents, rarely ate any form of meat. Beef and pork are forbidden for cultural reasons. As Hindus, we worship the cow as a mother figure. She is the giver of milk that is essential for the upbringing of babies. As adults, we also use the milk for food. Pork is considered unclean. In my family, there are people who have converted to Christianity and some who have remained Hindu. Although my mother's eldest sister is a Christian, she does not eat beef or pork. There are others, both Hindu and Christian who eat any kind of meat however; it is not a change that is accepted by the older women.

At the time of writing the journal, I thought about treating the story as secretive, accessible by only certain individuals. By inserting the journal into this study, I have

disregarded my original intention. I do not believe that my exposing this story will hurt anyone. All the names used are pseudonyms, as well, my aunt's upholding of cultural values is not necessarily shared by everyone. I believe that the importance of sharing the journal is to illustrate one of the ways in which women in my community have instinctively included practices of silence into their lives.

Representation by Fragments

In his Nobel Lecture, "Fragments of Epic Memory," Derek Walcott (2007)⁶⁹ comments on the fragmentation that is characteristic of Caribbean experience and expression: "Antillean art is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent" (p. 195). He frames his discussion on an Indo-Caribbean folk presentation called "Ramleela."⁷⁰ Walcott (2007) describes what he saw:

Here in Trinidad I had discovered that one of the greatest epics of the world was seasonally performed, not with that desperate resignation of preserving a culture, but with an openness of belief that was as steady as the wind bending the cane lances of the Caroni plain. (p. 194)

He goes on to highlight history and language, not as debilitating forces but as emergent and triumphant:

Deprived of their original language, the captured and indentured tribes create their own, accreting and secreting fragments of an old, an epic vocabulary, from Asia and from Africa, but to an ancestral, an ecstatic rhythm in the blood that cannot be

⁶⁹ Derek Walcott was awarded Nobel Laureate in Literature in 1992, but the publication from which this quote comes is dated 2007.

⁷⁰ "Ramleela" is the enactment of a story of Rama (an incarnation of God), where he rescues his wife Seeta from the Ravan, (the representation of evil). It is the culminating story in the Ramayana which, is one of the two scriptural texts that is read and recited by Hindus around the world.

subdued by slavery or indenture, while nouns are renamed and the given names of places accepted like Felicity village or Choiseul. The original language dissolves from the exhaustion of distance like fog trying to cross an ocean, but this process of renaming, of finding new metaphors, is the same process that the poet faces every morning of his working day, making his own tools like Crusoe, assembling nouns from necessity, from Felicity, even renaming himself. The stripped man is driven back to that self-astonishing, elemental force, his mind. That is the basis of the Antillean experience, this shipwreck of fragments, these echoes, these shards of a huge tribal vocabulary, these partially remembered customs, and they are not decayed but strong. (p. 196)

Walcott identifies language practices as “shards of a huge tribal vocabulary.” Its usage and uniqueness of form create at once, a forged space of belonging within the region but also prevents an ease of sharing with non-Caribbean people. There is an absence of understanding both in the use of language that has been formed to accommodate a culture of “broken pieces” and in bearing the violence and hurts that can be an intrinsic component of the language structures. One example of this is where I discuss the use of the term “Negro” that is still acceptable in Trinidad and Tobago (see p. 50). In North America, the term is not considered “correct,” it is racist. I wonder, “When there are social limitations on the usage of forms of language, will there be a corresponding silence if there is not knowledge of an alternative vocabulary?”

Promises of Such a Project

This is not a conclusive work but a beginning. Gaps remain, and I will work on patching pieces together, recognizing that the spaces are integral to meaning—there are

gaps in the way the community has been formed and in the practices that have been accepted. I acknowledge that the literature is growing and Indo-Caribbean culture is simultaneously becoming more visible. In a society where Indian culture has historically been devalued, as third or fourth generation Indo-Caribbean women, each of us wrestles with a vacillating rejection and acceptance of the cultural habits of both the inherited and adopted traditions. Increasingly, our people are being educated in metropolitan centres and we are gaining the confidence to write about ourselves without shame or constrictions imposed by the immediate society. There will continue to be gaps and silences within stories and histories. At times, women consciously keep secrets for resistance and protection. While I want to know more, I also want to be respectful of those who do not want to speak or write.

I hope that this project will encourage writing and sharing among Indo-Caribbean women because of the richness of our history, which may be painful but is also a story of our resilience. Despite being a minority group within a dominant Afro-Caribbean region, I believe that Indo-Caribbean women will continue to create spaces and work toward self-representation.

Glossary

Ajaa – Paternal grandfather

Ajee or *Ajie* – Paternal grandmother

Aloo – the Hindi word for potato

Aloo Chokha – Potatoes are boiled and mashed to make *aloo chokha*. Potato is a very cheap food in Trinidad and when vegetables are scarce or expensive, it is used to make the meal more substantial.

Arti – the process of moving a lighted lamp in a circular motion as a form of worship.

Bhajans – Hindu religious songs

Calypso – A form of Afro-Caribbean music that originated in Trinidad and Tobago.

Traditionally, it has been used as social commentary during Carnival celebrations.

Caste system – In Hinduism, there is a caste system that has historically defined the social structure of society. At the top are the *Brahmins*—the priests and teachers, then there are the *Kshatriyas* of soldiers/military group, then there are the *Vaishnavas* or agriculturalists, and the lowest of the groupings is the *Shudras* or service workers.

Chamkay – *Chamkay* is a derivative of the Hindi word “*chamakhna*” that means to be attractive or seductive. In Trinidad it has become synonymous with dancing in a seductive way.

Chokha – a mashed up version of vegetables.

Chutney – Indo-Caribbean music that has evolved from traditional Indian music.

Traditionally an upbeat form, the term “chutney” refers to spicy-ness—the flavor associated with music. Chutney music has become accepted as Indo-Trinidadian

music

Dalpurie – specific type of roti made with ground, yellow split peas as a filling.

Deya – an earthenware lamp used for worship

Dhal – made with split-peas, it is soup-like and a common accompaniment to rice for Indo-Caribbean people, especially when other food items were scarce.

Dhar – a liquid offering, usually of milk or water, accompanied by prayers and poured over symbols of divinity, for example, over models of deities or religious plants.

Dharti – Hindi word that literally means earth. Hindus worship the earth as a manifestation of the spiritual mother. *Maataa* literally means mother. Also known as *Prithvi Maataa*, Mother Earth is both the planet to which we belong and from which we are sustained.

Dhoti – traditional Indian wear for men. A piece of cloth of about two metres long that is wrapped around the lower body as pants.

Divali – Hindu festival of lights.

Dulahin – Hindi for bride. Older people called many women “*dulahin*” when they were married. The name highlights the fact that they are married women.

Flambeau – a *flambeau* is a lamp made from a glass bottle, rolled cloth is immersed in kerosene and rise above the rim. The kerosene acts as fuel when the cloth is lit. In rural Trinidad when there was no electrical power available, these makeshift lamps were used as lights.

Ganga – the name of the goddess, sister of Mother Parvati, consort of Lord Shiva. Mythology tells that she was changed into the river as a consequence of disturbing Lord Shiva while he meditated. Hindus believe that bathing or

immersing oneself into the Ganges River will cleanse oneself, physically and spiritually.

Jhandi – a flag planted in the ground as a symbol of having completed religious rituals and ceremonies.

Kurta – Hindi word for shirt. It has become synonymous with Indian styled shirts

Lord Shiva – Hindu God of Destruction

Mantra – a special set of words used as prayer

Mother Lakshmi – Hindu Goddess of light, wealth and happiness

Nanaa – maternal grandfather

Nanee, Nani, Naanee – maternal grandmother.

Paratha – a type of roti or that is flaky in consistency.

Patra – astrological readings called readings are supposed to give many particulars about a person's life including when he/she will die

peerha – a short, narrow bench. It can range from about six inches to about twelve inches in height and about one foot to two feet in length. Although these are common sizes, they may vary much longer or higher. The width is usually about one foot.

Phagree – type of headwear worn by Indian men

Puja – prayers and offerings done by Hindus.

Ramleela – the enactment of a story of Rama (an incarnation of God), where he rescues his wife Seeta from the Ravan, (the representation of evil). It is the culminating story in the Ramayana which is one of the two scriptural texts that is read and recited by Hindus around the world.

Roti – Indian flatbread

Sakay – the act of cooking a roti over an open flame until it swells

Samdin – two people related through the marriage of their children

Sandhya – evening prayer

Sangha – Hindi word that means association

Sari – a long piece of cloth, usually five to six yards long that is wrapped around the body. This type of clothing is traditionally Indian.

Seva – Hindi word that means service

Soca – music derived from a blending of “Soul” and “Calypso” forms. Soca is considered as a Trinidadian music form.

Swami – a Hindu religious teacher or master

Tawa – a baking stone usually made out of iron and used for cooking roti

Wine – Trinidadian dialect meaning to gyrate the hips and lower torso to the beat of music.

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