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### Comments

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**“Douglarise de nation”:  
Politicized Intimacies and the Literary Dougl**

**Kaneesha Cherelle Parsard**

2010–2011 Penn Humanities Forum  
Undergraduate Mellon Research Fellowship

Kaneesha Cherelle Parsard  
English Department Honors Program  
April 15, 2011

Dey conservative, only talking race  
Yet you seeing so much dougla all round de place  
—Maestro, “Mr. Trinidadian” (1989)

## “Douglarise de nation”: Politicized Intimacies and the Literary Dougla

### Introduction

As C.L.R. James’ novel *Minty Alley* closes, a reflection speaks to the *material*, fraught relations between descendents of West African slaves and Indian coolies, or contract laborers, in Trinidad. Mrs. Rouse, remarking on the betrayal of Mr. Benoit, her kept man who has gone to live with another woman, repeats the advice of her spiritual counselor: “...when I went to him once he told me that my blood and coolie blood don’t take” (James 240). Under this model, Mr. Benoit, a “half-coolie” or *dougla*, carries out unsurprising “treachery” against Mrs. Rouse, a black woman. But, as a dougla, Mr. Benoit is also the very embodiment of these seemingly unfruitful Afro-Indo intimacies. Mr. Benoit’s racial identity remains unexplored, with a focus instead on his financial dependence on the success of Mrs. Rouse’s bakery, his infidelity, and his colorism. The dougla figure remains largely unacknowledged, obscured, and pathologized in the Caribbean literary tradition. How do we consider the impossibility of such a subject?

This corporeal insight—with its talk of “blood” and genesis—calls to mind the racist and pseudoscientific discourses of colonialism. Mixed-race Trinidadians of African and Indian parentage, or douglas, are distinctly postcolonial subjects, with roots in both the memory of the Middle Passage, the inauguration of the practice of chattel slavery, and the *kala pani*, the oceanic voyage that transported Indian men lured by the promises of recruiters to the Caribbean. The

figure of the dougla encounters marginalization equally in social reality and in textual representation, particularly through the term's nuanced etymological history. On the Indian subcontinent, the term pointed to those birthed from inter-caste relationships. Further, according to the *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, the Hindi usage of dougla or dogla was synonymous with the English "mongrel, [especially] in ref to animals" ("Dougla" 200). Later, across the *kala pani*, the term evolved through the mixings of formerly enslaved Africans and South Asian contract laborers into the idea of the "miscegenate," or the more cutting "bastard."

Curiously, not only does this naming persist as evidence of ongoing creolization in Trinidad and Tobago, but also as a deliberate positioning of these mixed-race figures at the margins. Indeed, the dougla figure threatens the distinct black and Indian pluralities in Trinidad and Tobago, even where nationalism is predicated on the celebration of syncretic cultural practices. Instead, I seek to highlight the sexual economy from which douglas arise and in which douglas participate, disturbing the discourses that deem Trinidadian hybridity a broad, national project to the exclusion of small-scale Afro-Indo intimacies.

Here, I find that literature highlights specificity in mixed-race circumstances and interracial intimacies, where political writings and broader national discourse simply appropriate these social realities as specters of forced assimilation and signals of modern, celebratory hybridity. I do not presume that the works of fiction I examine in this thesis *speaks for* Trinidadian douglas, but rather that they complicate existing, totalizing approaches to douglas. *Minty Alley* reflects a Caribbean modernist tradition of fascination with the lower-class masses and the barrack-yard: here, the hot-blooded dougla character Benoit is central. Meanwhile, Christian Campbell's "Curry Powder" has an autobiographical feel, personalizing the moment of Panday's election to the position of Prime Minister. Finally, *Coolie Pink and Green* uses fears of

douglarization, diaspora, and cultural retentions to hypothesize about Indo-Trinidadian and Trinibagonian futures, which raises similar questions for the social and psychic implications for douglas.

The dougla, more broadly, is the product of what Lisa Lowe terms "the intimacies of four continents," the convergence of African, South Asians and East Asians, Europeans, and Native peoples in the Caribbean for the purpose of fueling the plantation machine. For Africans, return was impossible, given the elision of individual connections to the Continent (to say nothing of the myriad West African influences that would shape the Caribbean). However, some Indians did return to India upon the end of their indenture and return was a hope for many. As Lowe outlines, the end of the slave trade in the early nineteenth century, which preceded by a few decades the abolition of slavery as an institution, inspired the search for an appropriate population to replace the free labor upon their impending and inevitable liberation (Lowe 194).

Defining "intimacies" as not only diasporic intersections, but also homosocial and heterosexual relationships, Lowe's project links the hybridity that emerged from slave societies with the development of bourgeois republican states in Europe and North America. Here, then, she deems hybridity significant to the development of "modernity." Otherwise, hybridity had been assumed to be a mere byproduct or, from the perspective of those who had a stake in efficient colonial labor, an unfortunate accident of colonialism (Lowe 192-3).

Focusing on the Chinese populations identified as fitting for the project, she highlights colonial-era letters advising that "[The Chinese] must be kept in the first place separate from the Negroes," in order to prevent the ideological alignment of the liberation-minded Africans with

the newly-arrived Chinese and, therefore, the end of cheap, contract labor (Lowe 194). While this thesis is not necessarily concerned with the populations of Chinese laborers or mixed-Chinese peoples, the Chinese presence marks a significant moment: until their arrival, the colonial project had been marked by a black-white binary, enforced through enslavement, which was now interrupted.

The introduction of South Asian laborers upset the European-African dialectic that dominated social relations and drove the plantation system in the colonial period. Further, the introduction of the dougla created new, localized possibilities. Rhoda Reddock notes that, in addition to racial stigma, the presence of the dougla signified the impossibility of return to ‘Mother India’, an unavoidable rootedness in the Caribbean (Reddock 571-3). The first Indians would arrive to the region in 1845, on the *Fatel Rozack*, to supplement the cheap, contract labor that sustained the sugarcane industries upon which Europe relied. Unlike the Chinese, who were an image of non-white propriety in the European imaginary, the Indians were marked by a discursive proximity to the descendants of enslaved Africans, making the tensions between the latter two groups inevitable. Likewise, in the postcolonial moment, the descendants of African slaves and Indian “coolies” established a political binary through a two-party system.

The compulsion to maintain purity is executed via discursive silences that obscure the dougla. Aisha Khan, in *Callaloo Nation*, the product of extended fieldwork conducted in St. Patrick and Victoria Counties in Southern Trinidad, speaks bluntly to the extent of Indo- and Afro-Trinidadian intimacies, which are obscured by the purist rhetoric referenced above. Indeed, she notes that the body of scholarship that attends to the multiethnic nature of Trinidad absorbs this purism by asserting that marriage between the two groups is "minimal." In response to the idea that Indians and Africans do not mix in any sphere, public or private, Khan notes that,

during her fieldwork, "many...assured me that "Indian and Negro don't mix." They meant socially, culturally, or sexually. The number of "douglas," however, belies this assumption" (Khan 9).

As the Trinidadian literary tradition begins to express the ways in which hybridity emerges among other distinctly oppositional and anti-colonial articulations of identity in distancing Caribbean peoples from colonial forms of power and categorization, it must take care not to reinscribe that marginalization, through the erasure of non-normative racial identities or gendering hybridity.

Battling this systemic erasure is another medium of discourse: the literary. Despite the impulse to minimize the numbers and experiences of douglas, they have a prominent, natural presence in depictions of hybrid Trinidad. The attention to dougla specificities in Trinidadian literature (in other words, dougla subjectivities) officiates their importance as subjects in their own rights. In particular, as Khan notes, douglas are given material importance through sex. Ultimately, the texts I examine here highlight the sexual economy from which douglas arise and in which douglas participate, disturbing the notion that hybridity is somehow only a broad, national project and that "Indian and negro don't mix"—writing alternate historiographies of douglas and Afro-Indo intimacies alike.

## **“Where so many crosses and colours meet and mingle”: The Dougla in Trinidadian Hybridities and Nationalisms**

The figure of the dougla has been deployed in Trinbagonian conversations regarding cultural hybridity resulting from the proximity of the African and Indian pluralities. These nationalist discourses are manifested both in scholarship and in popular media, some using the dougla figure to represent the exceptionality and modernity of a multiethnic nation, others as a sign of a diluted cultural presence for Indians.

C.L.R. James' *The Case for West-Indian Self Government* articulates creole nationalism in the form of an anti-colonial manifesto that approaches the question and implications of self-rule differently than would his later Marxist and Pan-Africanist ideology. In particular, James locates the tensions of West Indian colonial government, particularly that of Trinidad and Tobago, in the creolized composition of its islands. However, he focuses mainly on the spectrum, of sorts, produced from the proximity of Europeans and blacks. James notes, as others have, the interruption of the traditional racial binary in the colonial West Indies. But, rather than identify formerly indentured Indians and their possibilities as such, James points to the "brown people." Further, he notes: "Where so many crosses and colours meet and mingle, the shades are naturally difficult to determine and the resulting confusion is immense" (James 51). James then goes on to identify, through political anecdotes, the ways in which this confusion is replicated in the colonial government, particularly through the appointment of fair-skinned blacks to lower administrative positions. This process, he feels, engenders racial discontent and, in turn, demands that the British relinquish their control over the West Indies in favor of self-rule. Whereas this essay glosses over the Indian figure, James' *Minty Alley* speaks to the positioning of otherwise obscured coolie laborers and mixed-race figures in a context dominated by black-white relations. Here, the brown middle-class protagonist, Mr. Haynes, is privy to the multidimensions of

racialized Trinidad through the integration of an Indian servant, Philomen, and a dougla kept man, Mr. Benoit.

Often, the political struggle between Africans and Indians took the form of a rhetoric of exclusion, termed through culture. Produced from fieldwork in Indian communities in Trinidad, Viranjini Munasinghe's "Culture Creators and Culture Bearers? The Interface between Ethnicity and Race in Trinidad" laments that discourses of creolization in Trinidad and Tobago obscure Indians. Despite the presence of Indian and Chinese contract laborers, which disturbed the black-white binary that preceded their arrival as laborers, nationalist pride derived from hybridity designates Indians as static culture bearers, in opposition to Afro-Creole culture creators who, forcefully removed from the African continent, have adapted to displacement by producing syncretic cultural practices.

As part of her evidence, Munasinghe points to the lexical absence of mixed-race Caribbeans of Indian and white ancestry; that is, there is no term to describe a person with such an ancestry. She briefly acknowledges mixed Caribbeans of African and Indian descent, noting that, due to their African descent, douglas have access to Creole society and are often subsumed into a black or Indian social existence. Munasinghe concludes, "once again, mixing, this time between East Indian and Black, categorically disappeared" (Munasinghe 78). Nonetheless, Munasinghe does not speak to the specificities of dougla identity nor the pejorative origins or contemporary usage of the term. Indeed, this lexical presence of the dougla is a product of Indo-Caribbean fears concerning miscegenation: the danger of unwilling assimilation, or the loss of culture through mixture. This reifies or, more specifically, biologizes Indian culture in the Caribbean, rendering Indian survival a matter of purity. When, in Patricia Mohammed's recent

film “Coolie Pink and Green,” the betrothed Indian woman’s grandfather narrates, “Your children will not look like us,” he invokes these fears with the image of the dougla.

Likewise, contemporary scholarship on Trinidad functions similarly in the elision of dougla subjectivity. In cultural critic Shalini Puri's *The Caribbean Postcolonial*, she theorizes a "dougla poetics" as one aspect of a project to emphasize the many hybridities existing in the Caribbean and “analyzing the poetics and politics of cultural hybridity” (Puri 222). Citing hybrid cultural production such as the musical genre chutney-soca, which draws influences from both Afro-Creole soca and traditional Indian styles, Puri notes that a dougla poetics may be the key to mutual understanding between Afro- and Indo-Trinbagonians. Further, in *Diasporic (dis)locations: Indo-Caribbean Women Writers Negotiate the Kala Pani*, Brinda Mehta writes the possibilities of a dougla feminism, which demonstrates possibilities for the valorization of all Caribbean women: “[t]he limitations of dougla consciousness could be expanded through a model of hybridized feminist awareness that includes a sense of participatory ownership among ownership among all communities” (Mehta 15). For example, in a reading of Merle Hodge’s *For the Life of Laetitia*, Mehta examines the gynosocial bonds between an African girl and an Indian girl, schoolmates in rural Trinidad.

While Mehta and Puri posit useful tools for locating and interpreting hybrid cultural productions as well as public, quotidian interactions between Africans and Indians, they obscure the dougla figure by deploying it for cooperative, dialogic purposes when the social realities for douglas are rooted in disavowal. In this way, the dougla is carrying out representative work for Caribbean phenomena, rather being taken up as worthy of its own inquiry.

**“And when I went to him once he told me that my blood and coolie blood don’t take”:  
Douglas and alternative creole nationalisms in CLR James’ *Minty Alley***

PB: Did you have the least inkling in the 1920s that you would become *primarily* a political figure?

CLR: None, none whatever.

--C.L.R. James’s *Caribbean*

C.L.R. James’ only novel *Minty Alley*, published in 1937, is primarily concerned with quotidian lower-class Trinidad. Widely considered a departure from James’ larger body of work, which includes political writings from the moment of an emergent Trinidad and Tobago, as well as his contribution to Pan-Africanism, *Minty Alley* has been deemed emblematic of the Caribbean Modernist tradition, a movement criticized for its class-based detachment. As a self-described member of the black middle class, James began his career as an independent writer, first contributing to *Trinidad*, a literary journal he co-edited with Alfred Mendes.

James would later claim membership in the famed Beacon group, as did writers C.A. Thomasos and Alfred Mendes. Their attention to folk aesthetics and the quotidian was reflected in the use of the barrack yard setting in their pieces. In many of these short stories, also, dougla characters are featured prominently, which leads me to inquire: how do dougla characters fit into this (post)colonial ‘everyday’? As Simon Gikandi notes, “modernism...is closely related to creolization, [and] develops as a narrative strategy and counter-discourse away from outmoded and conventional modes of representation associated with colonial domination and colonizing cultural structures” (Gikandi 5). Indeed, as discussed above, the black-white binary in the colonial-era Caribbean was interrupted by the introduction of coolie labor, creating new permutations of a pan-Caribbean identity.

Set in urban landscapes and characterized by a housing feature unique to the Caribbean, the barrack yard, James’ novel explodes the distinction between public and private space as

dramas concerning color, class, and sex play out in the simultaneously open and highly proximate space of the lodging house at No. 2 Minty Alley. Moreover, James positions the Trinidad of *Minty Alley* as temporally ambivalent, with little reference to history other than brief references to “the Americans,” who occupied the dual-island nation-state and to a past in slavery.

Sylvia Wynter illustrates the ways in which James’ *Minty Alley* indicates social realities through a Marxian framework, which implicates both color and class in the conditions of black lower-class life. First, Wynter posits that hierarchy in colonial Trinidad did not function through a black-white dialectic, but rather through a gradient dependent on whiteness: “whiteness functioned—exactly as money—as the Marxian general equivalent of value” (Wynter 68). Implicit in this analysis is Lisa Lowe’s aforementioned work on the “intimacies” responsible for efficient and fruitful West Indian colonial economies, which relies on East and South Asian indentured labor (which would later function as racial intermediaries) in addition to African slave labor. In this way, though Wynter fails to directly identify Asian Caribbeans in this late colonial setting, it becomes clear how color and origins dictate the indispensability of one’s labor, free or forced, and later locate one in an ostensibly permanent economic class.

The relationship between color and class is not only at stake in the world of *Minty Alley*, but also in the wider attention of Trinidadian modernists, such as James, to the barrack yard aesthetic. Indeed, *Minty Alley* emerges as a metanarrative: for Mr. Haynes, like James, it is only through conscious participation in the drama set at No. 2 Minty Alley that he can fully comment on the social phenomena evidenced there. The barrack yard, as Sylvia Wynter notes, provides the necessary proximity for social definition and resistance: “in the Jamesian ensemble, the theoretics is the politics. The politics...is shaped by the struggle of groups and individuals to maintain or redefine the terms of their relations to bourgeois domination” (Wynter 73).

Moreover, James' literature provides a lens through which we can consider his politics: James' interest in the masses and social relations, through both his early advocacy of creole nationalism and his midcentury turn to Pan-Africanism, is reified in the literary case study (so to speak) of *No. 2 Minty Alley*: "The setting of the drama that they enact is both the global network of accumulation in which they are inserted and the interplay of color, class, and culture values in the context in which they act out their parts" (Wynter 76). Indeed, though the yard is only two streets away from the site of his black middle-class upbringing—"one on which his glance must often have rested"—Mr. Haynes had never truly noticed the building (James 24). Further, Mr. Haynes' future lodging house occupies an *alley* as opposed to George Street; this designation formalizes the invisibility of the boarding house.

The yard would serve as a foil for Mr. Haynes' mother's migratory ambitions for him: her sudden death precluded his professional training abroad. As a parallel imperative to the desire for return in the colonial Indo Caribbean experience, "going to England or America" signaled "independence"; it was a liberatory act (James 22). Considering the ways in which Mr. Benoit's "treachery" enables Mrs. Rouse's emotional and financial dependence on Mr. Haynes, we must interrogate the nature of Mr. Haynes' residence there. This upwardly mobile Creole appears to be thwarted by settling in a decidedly interracial space: the influence of Mr. Benoit's sexuality implicates the boarding house as a modernist site of douglarization.

Finally, as Wynter notes, color and class ultimately converge in a "morality of mores," which is where I believe James' Dougla character, Mr. Benoit, enters. Throughout much of the novel, Mr. Benoit's racial identity is navigated through phenotype. Indeed, his apparent race is qualified by subtle physical traits: he is "black...with curly hair" and, later, his "very dark skin and curly hair showed traces of Indian blood" (James 29–30). Other than these descriptions,

James comments little on Mr. Benoit's parentage, while Mr. Haynes meditates at length on the stock, so to speak, of others in the yard. In fact, Mr. Haynes enacts an anthropological assessment of Mrs. Rouse's appearance: "her face was a smooth light brown with a fine aquiline nose and well cut firm lips. The strain of white ancestry responsible for the nose was not recent, for her hair was coarse and essentially Negroid" (James 26). This assessment is archived as he is "startled" upon meeting a very fair skinned boy in the yard: "brownish though Mrs. Rouse might be it was inconceivable that she should be a party to any form of miscegenation which would produce offspring with hair so straight and complexion so fair" (James 29). Such a lengthy narrative betrays popular discourse on mixing between European colonials and Afro Trinidadians. This is a familiar scale, one that accommodates both near white and brown alike. The brief narrative note, however, of Mr. Benoit's phenotype reflects the clandestine nature of Afro Indo intimacies, as well as a discursive unfamiliarity with such mixing.

What is not subtle, however, in Mr. Benoit's characterization is his sexual appetite. In an initial conversation with Mr. Haynes, Mr. Benoit rejects the practice of reading, instead offering Mr. Haynes a handful of nuts: "nuts is good things for men to eat" (James 30). This gendered dietary advice suggests a preoccupation with virility and strength. Mr. Benoit continues his talk of food as he spots Ella, Mr. Haynes' lifelong domestic, approaching the house from the street. Here, his hunger is both physical and sexual, indicating a desire to consume women: "you have a nice, fat cook, man... guard your property. I am a man girls like, you know. If she fall in my garden I wouldn't have to lock the gate to keep her in" (James 31). In addition, his supplication that Mr. Haynes "guard [his] property" indicates both labor and commodities. So, while Mr. Benoit is not identified on the scale of color-based value that Wynter discusses, he feigns participation through the possession of women.

Mr. Benoit is thus marked with an uncontrollable sexuality, which appears derivative of his mixed-race identity. The illicit nature of Afro Indo intimacies engenders the likewise passion-driven dougla. Here, I invoke M. Jacqui Alexander who, in “Not Just (Any) Body Can Be a Citizen,” conducts an inquiry of citizenship through the body—in particular, the body deemed sexually deviant. Political boundaries, in particular, are circumscribed on the basis of sexual practice and identity: indeed, she claims that the state enacts “racialized legislative gestures that have naturalized heterosexuality by criminalizing lesbian and other forms of non-procreative sex” (Alexander 5). In Trinidad and Tobago, where douglas fall decidedly outside of the colonial black-white dialectic and the elite class of ‘brown’ peoples that were produced, they comprise a similar demographic in their illicit existence.

Just as Alexander posits that, amidst uncertain sovereignty in the postcolonial moment, Caribbean nation-states use “criminalization...as a technology of control,” the sexual intimacy of formerly enslaved Africans and formerly indentured South Asians in late colonial Trinidad and Tobago emerges as non-procreative, so to speak. Mr. Haynes is assured that independence is located elsewhere, outside the Caribbean, and his emotional entanglement in the goings-on of No. 2 Minty Alley signals a larger fear of the dougla as a uniquely Caribbean figure. The dougla is a specter of earlier moments of forced and nearly free labor and counters what Alexander identifies “powerful signifiers about appropriate sexuality, about the kind of sexuality that presumably imperils the nation and about the kind of sexuality that promotes citizenship” (Alexander 6). In response, the nation assumes a sexual identity as a body politic.

Here, Trinidad and Tobago has a contradictory sexuality written onto itself: even as popular discourse celebrates its hybridity, the subjects formed in-between the two pluralities are obscured. Racialized bodies were sexualized as justification for colonial and civilizing

imperatives, among them labor. Fear marked the sexualized bodies of both Indian women and black men, though the former invited fear through exotic unfamiliarity, rather than the assumed predatory impulses of black men. Conversely, Indian men and black women were both marked as “unrestrained” (Alexander 12). For this reason, pairings between Indians and blacks in the Caribbean would potentially amplify these undesirable sexual proclivities.

Mr. Haynes becomes privy to Mr. Benoit’s seduction of women at No. 2 Minty Alley through the proximity of the yard. Assuming invisibility behind “wide crack[s] of light between two of the boards” in his room, Mr. Haynes acts out the social (and, necessarily, hierarchal) distance between acceptable black middle-class bodies and inescapably deviant dougla bodies. It is, therefore, only through well-timed glimpses that Haynes may witness such alien behaviors. Below, Mr. Benoit is propositioning Wilhelmina, a servant who assists with the work of Mrs. Rouse’s bakery for sex. The invocation of temperature reinforces Mr. Benoit’s deviant sexuality:

‘Come here,’ said Benoit.  
‘Wait till I wash my face. This cold morning you so hot!’  
‘Me. I am always hot,’ said Benoit (James 37).

Here, Benoit speaks to an inherent lust, as he is unable to even wait for the woman to cross the kitchen. This lust takes myriad forms, both through impatience for sex acts and desire for multiple women, often whichever woman is available and present. Moreover, Benoit initiates physical contact in an aggressive manner: “He held her and placed her against the kitchen door. Then he leant himself against her. ‘This is what I want,’ he kissed her savagely. ‘And this,’ he kissed her again. ‘And this, too, and this’” (James 37). The use of the descriptor “savagely” indicates the uncivilized desires ascribed on colonial laboring bodies and, especially, on mixed-race bodies. In addition, the repetition of “this” as Benoit indicates his desire for Wilhelmina is performative: his desire *alone* dictates the acts.

Benoit's sexuality is also marked as irrational, emerging through his desire to control the affections of the nurse: "Once, Haynes caught Benoit looking rather savagely at the nurse indulging in one of these rhapsodies over her son" (James 41). Here, Benoit's supposed savagery is enacted through masculine competition with her son, Sonny.

Later, Haynes is surprised as he spots Benoit holding the nurse, the near-white woman identified as the mother of the fair-skinned boy earlier in the narrative, recently returned from work. Their "unmoving" embrace is followed suddenly by furtive intimacies inside the house. The nurse emerges as another example of mixed-race deviance: "The nurse came out with a hairpin in her mouth and shaking her long fair hair which had fallen loose" (James 38). The nurse's ambiguous phenotype, specifically her hair, is linked to her sexuality and subsequent betrayal of Mrs. Rouse.

Next, Benoit initiates homosocial bonds with Haynes through intimate conversations in his lodging room. Discussing the open nature of his affair with the nurse, Benoit resists any idea of consequences for his unabashed relationship while residing at No. 2 Minty Alley. He seems to take refuge in an unspecified allure, drawing on his earlier comment that "I am a man girls like." In addition, the exchange echoes Haynes' observation and interpretation of Benoit's phenotype: subtle cues, such as very dark skin and curly hair, serve as qualifiers to his blackness. Here, dougla identity carries a subtext of sexual appeal and sensuality and, above all, irresistibility:

"Let her vex if she want. She have her husband. I ain't a married man. If she bother me I leave her to-morrow...But that is all right. She love me too much. I can always bring her round.'  
He smiled for the first time, a confident almost contemptuous smile.  
'You work it by your science?' said Haynes.  
'No science, but when you see me loving a woman she never want to give me up, man, she rather die first.'" (James 64-65)

The use of the term "science" refers to Benoit's belief in metaphysics, the human ability to control one's surroundings. While Benoit eschews his "science" as a way of attracting women,

his confidence betrays another means of manipulation. In this way, Mrs. Rouse's love takes on a material quality, binding her to Benoit against her reason.

Similarly, Haynes is attracted to the melodrama of No. 2 Minty Alley, exhibiting an almost romantic preoccupation with, and investment in, the lives of the boarding-house residents. Shortly after Mrs. Rouse discovers the affair between the nurse and Benoit, Haynes is quickly named a mediator due to his status as one of Benoit's confidants. Ella, his childhood servant, encourages him to find lodging elsewhere, as he is "mixin' up with these people too much" (James 77). "Mixin'" evokes miscegenation, a suggestion that is inextricable from the obvious class difference between Haynes and the residents of the cramped boarding house at Minty Alley.

While Haynes will not initiate a romantic or physical relationship with a woman of another race, he has entered into a space where interactions across gender and race are distinctly familiar. In this way, however subtly, Haynes has breached social codes. As Haynes meditates on the precarity of his finances and career for the first time in many days or weeks, he dichotomizes his childhood and independent life: "If anything did happen there would be a terrific scandal. And he might lose his job. If he did he could no longer pay the instalments on the mortgage, and his mother's house would go. Rarely did he think of the old life now. The present life was too intense" (James 77). The concerns of black middle class life in Trinidad are foreign to Haynes now, even as he lodges just two blocks away. He regards his "present life" with the simultaneous shame and curiosity of one reading a titillating novel or hearing a rumor. Previously insulated by the walls of his mother's home, Haynes is now surrounded by deviance in the form of cohabitation, sexual aggression, and infidelity. Moreover, where his mother had delineated an

acceptable social trajectory for him—“In the West Indies, to get a profession meant going to England or America, and his mother had decided to send him to England”—Haynes was now bound by local obligations. What social and political aspirations lay beyond the barrack-yard and the colony? While tertiary institutions are mentioned specifically here, the colonial setting is a subtext for the goings-on at No. 2 Minty Alley. The dougla serves as a living reminder of not only pathology or exclusion, but also the legacies of slavery and indenture—which, at the moment of anti-colonial strivings, inspires anxiety.

In his 1932 *The Case for West Indian Self-Government*, C.L.R. James points out the relative civility of West Indian blacks in the British colonial world: “Cut off from all contact with Africa for a century and a quarter, they present today the extraordinary spectacle of a people who, in language and social customs, religion, education and outlook are essentially Western” (James 49). This Afro-Caribbean exceptionalism initiates the titular discussion, “A Case for West Indian Self-Government,” and is buttressed with examples of administrative excellence. Next, James highlights the intersections between social class and color, a legacy from slavery and the early colonial period. Delineating color-based distinctions between black West Indians, James notes that a minority of that population is of European and African descent and, consequently, enjoys relative privilege. Identifying another significant portion of the West Indian population, James speaks to the administrative and social power of white creoles, to the exclusion of discussions of Indians.

Extending his argument, F.S.J. Ledgister positions James’ politics in the creole nationalist tradition and critiques his treatment of the East Indian population as seamlessly creolized and cosmopolitan. Therefore, in an examination of emergent West Indian nation-states, James appears to ignore that in Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana, “the ethnic division between

Creoles and East Indians...indicates that neither group gets on admirably with the other” (Ledgister 11). But, in James’ attention to the masses in *Minty Alley*, the barrack-yard setting is marked by tensions between Africans and Indians and especially suffers under the pathology of Benoit, who claims both ancestries.

And, what might this betray about the place of douglas in a West Indian political imagination focused on self-government? This dilemma places the site of the barrack yard in stark opposition to sites and processes of mobility. Echoing Reddock's claim that the dougla signaled rootedness, Benoit and his pathology not only indicates the boundaries of the local, but also functions as a foil for anti-colonial Trinidadian social and political aspirations.

### **Political Bifurcation for Douglas: “Split Me in Two” and “Curry Powder”**

*Coolie Pink and Green* provides a current image of postcolonial Trinidad through the conflicting imperatives of cultural retention and syncretism. The implicit, albeit palpable, presence of douglas is enabled through the derision of Indian female independence, linking a so-called—sexually and socially—deviant Indian womanhood with the present, hybrid moment.

In *The Caribbean Postcolonial*, social theorist Shalini Puri is concerned with contemporary issues in the region, particularly through a hybridities framework. Indeed, eschewing limiting modes of hybridity, Puri argues "the umbrella term 'hybridity' enacts a dehistoricizing conflation" (Puri 3). She, therefore, attends to the specificities and multiplicities reified through such terms as "mestizaje, creolization, douglarization, jibarismo, and the like" (Puri 3). Dougla poetics, specifically, emerges as a heuristic for understanding possibilities for social equality not only in postcolonial Trinidad and Tobago, but throughout the Caribbean.

Pointing to hybrid Trinidadian cultural production such as the musical genre chutney-soca, Puri is encouraged by the opportunities to discuss racialized and gendered bodies.

A reading of calypsonian The Mighty Douglas's iconic 1961 song "Split Me in Two" betrays the bifurcation of douglas, "the displacement of the dougla from dominant discourses of race" (Puri 191). In this way, douglas experience two iterations of displacement: the diasporic processes ending in the convergence and proximity of various peoples, as well as the spiritual, social, and political splitting of the figure.

Initially, Mighty Douglas poses a dilemma: "Just suppose they pass a law,/They don't want people living here anymore/Everybody got to find their country/According to your race originally." Two compelling concepts are raised in this hypothetical: "law" and "country." In this way, belonging is figured (and legislated) through the nation-state. Should people cease to occupy this hybrid, ostensibly modern region, they must (and, according to Mighty Douglas, seamlessly) reintegrate themselves into their regions of origin. This does not account for the possibilities of cultural discontinuity that "Indians" and "Negroes" may experience upon return, instead locating belonging in purity and phenotype. Mighty Douglas also romanticizes a singular past ("Guanaguanare: the laughing gull").

The verses detail three "real" circumstances in which his in-betweenness (particularly, an ambiguous phenotype) prevents unity in Trinidad and Tobago. First, using regionally specific terminology, Mighty Douglas recalls an early memory: "From the time I small I in confusion/I couldn't play with no other lil children." Identified simultaneously as "coolie" and "Noweyrian," Mighty Douglas is excluded from the two play groups. Next, Mighty Douglas laments the violence that awaits him as he walks "peacefully" on a local street, Jogie Road: "But as I enter in Odit Trace/Ah Indian man cuff me straight in mih face/I run by the Negroes to get rescue/"Look ah

coolie!" and them start beating me too." Mighty Dougl'a notes that douglas, as members of both Trinibagonian pluralities, do not have access to national space. Lastly, he notes that amidst "some fellas having a race discussion," his bifurcation excludes him from popular racial discourse. These public exclusions distract from the private intimacies that produce him ("Guanaguanare: the laughing gull").

"Split Me in Two," then, emerges as a theoretical framework through which we can navigate Christian Campbell's poems "Curry Powder," which spotlights the dougl'a, and struggles of familial and political positioning, at the moment of the election of Trinidad and Tobago's first Indian prime minister. Indeed, the title evokes a popular spice, introduced to the Caribbean by indentured Indians and adopted across ethnic groups, and casts dougl'a identity as blackness bearing remnants of Indianness. In this way, it highlights (however subtly) obscured "intimacies" between blacks and Indians.

Here, national belonging is invoked to contextualize local iterations of difference in the Caribbean. Indeed, as the poem opens, the speaker speaks of a pronouncement from his "Trini cousins"—an Indian man has assumed the position of Prime Minister. This signals a shift in the discursive associations of Indo-Caribbeans with crude, physical labor and, contrary to Munasinghe's claim that Indians and Indian cultural and political influences are excised from Caribbean, and specifically, Trinibagonian life, ties up India in the national discourse of Trinidad and Tobago.

Indeed, anthropologist Viranjini Munasinghe's "Culture Creators and Culture Bearers" attends to *contemporary* manifestations of the "sexual, laboring, and intellectual" contacts — Lisa Lowe's third definition of intimacies — among descendants of enslaved Africans, indentured East and South Asian laborers, and Europeans in Trinidad, illustrated through

legislative and discursive gaps, tensions, and absences. Specifically, douglarization, a process, meanwhile, speaks to large-scale hybridity—its cultural convergences and sociopolitical frictions—in specific national contexts. “Douglarization” is a term for hybridity that encompasses both political and biological discourses in hybrid West Indian societies—the tensions and silences that result from a fear of Indo-Caribbean assimilation through a collective miscegenation (Puri 192). Munasinghe addresses the struggle between assimilation and cultural preservation for Indo-Trinidadians post-independence, in the face of what she regards as a creole hegemony. Munasinghe argues that this particular national discourse of hybridity—creolization—dichotomizes the positions of Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians, resulting in the "culturally naked African," who can participate in creolization, and the "culturally saturated Indian," excluded from creolization.

In particular, Munasinghe maintains that national racial discourses and discourses of miscegenation/mixing are responsible for the exclusion of Indo-Trinidadians from the collective national identity. First, Trinidadian purity or "Trinidadianness" is defined, paradoxically, through hybridity. Also, discourses of miscegenation or mixing in Trinidad render Indo-Trinidadians "unmixable." Munasinghe cites the lexical absence of Euro-Indo mixtures as evidence—though she dismisses "douglas" on the basis that the black ancestry bears non-culture and gives access to "Trinidadianness." Douglas, further, she argues are "subsequently absorbed into the Black or East Indian category...[so] mixing, this time between East Indian and Black, categorically disappeared." Ultimately, East Indians are cast as unable to participate in Caribbean creolization, since—due to their cultural retention and isolation—are culturally and 'biologically' "unmixable." Nonetheless, as aforementioned, calypso artist The Mighty Douglas's 1961 song

"Split Me in Two" insists that, rather than categorically disappear, douglas are often found at the center of racial discourses (Puri 191).

Later, in *Callaloo or Tossed Salad?* Munasinghe extends her argument, discussing the fraught political existence of Indo-Trinidadians who, purportedly excluded from processes and discourses of creolization, could ostensibly only represent in-group interests. Indeed, while Basdeo Panday would assume the office of Prime Minister in 1995, "[e]ven during the period 1989-90...the political mood of the country dictated that an Indo-Trinidadian as prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago was "unthinkable"" (Munasinghe 246-7).

"Curry Powder," then, reflects the political ambivalence of douglas at the moment of Panday's election. Indeed, Campbell's poem writes douglas into a distinctly Caribbean history, bridged by alternating tensions and affections between Africans and Indians. The ubiquity of the eponymous spice indicates that, contrary to Munasinghe's elided Indian figure, status as a "culture bearer" does not preclude participation in creolization.

Further, Campbell's poem speaks at once to choices that advance creolization as well as to the interiority of those who occupy bodies in-between. Expressing dougla identity through sexual intimacies and the institution of marriage, the poem features the speaker's great-grandmother through her deviation from "Indianness." The title, "Curry Powder," suggests that dougla identity can be imagined as the remnants of Indianness impressed onto blackness. In this way, the poem highlights the obscured sexual intimacies between Africans and Indians, also giving attention to the particularities of dougla identity and hybrid collective memory. The use of Trinidadian English and nonstandard meter is fitting, as it speaks to the alternative histories of Indian indentured labor and mixed-race peoples in the Caribbean, obscured in the narrative of the colonial project. Further, the trope of naming identifies various aspects of naming relevant to

dougl identity: surnames and given names alike mark racial difference, epithets reveal the marginalization of douglas as well as the labor-based tensions between Africans and Indians, and invocations of national loyalties and mythologies demonstrate the role of hybridities in Caribbean state-making. The gendered image of the Indian body locates Caribbean women, specifically Indians, as bearers of culture and responsible for hybridity.

In fact, archetypes are ascribed to Indians in the first stanza, which emerges as a means of navigating a new political climate with an Indian as the new face of the nation-state. First, the charge that “*they think they better than people*” speaks to the enduring status of Indians as an intermediary class in a nation-state formed under a traditional black-white binary. Engaging the banter of their “Trini cousins,” the speaker offers another: “My brother and I laugh and add, *They is smell strong like curry powder.*” A remark about Indian sartorial choices—a preference for “*Fila shoe*”—elicits laughter from the speaker and his brother. Then, an unsubstantiated claim about hygiene places distance between the two groups, echoing racist arguments for intrinsic attributes of bodies. Here, the participants depart quickly from the political announcement, devolving into stereotype-driven humor. Familial belonging is forged through racial exclusion as the stanza ends with a collective affirmation: “*Is true, we say.*” However, as will become apparent, the speaker, as a dougl, is intimately acquainted with “curry powder” himself.

Here, political tensions engender genealogical memory, connecting national milestones to small-scale intimacies. At the beginning of the second stanza, the speaker emerges as author of a hybrid Caribbean historiography, featuring both familial and national contacts and, by extension, highlighting small- and large-scale intimacies at once: “Coolies and niggers fighting these days/but great-grandmummy Nita did not fight/when she found herself facing the West/instead, touching the face of a Grenadian, Manny” (Campbell 36). This tenderness between Africans and

Indians refutes the “unthinkability” of Indian participation in an Afro-Creole society. Further, Nita’s turn to the West is a global referent for her interracial pairing, the image accompanied by intimate contact and, moreover, the use of given names betrays affections.

The verse, therefore, is framed by intimacy and birth, disturbing the simultaneous acknowledgment of national and regional hybridity and the disavowal of bodies that occupy the space in-between. Continuing the progression toward a dougla birth, the Indian female body undresses Indianness, so to speak. Instead, Nita enjoys the freedom of syncretic movement: “She did not wear saris no more./Calypso she liked and could wine down/with the best of them” (Campbell 36). Nita’s sexuality had been previously guarded by traditional dress, a sign of long-standing cultural tradition, where novelty now reigns.

Naming, too, signals connections with homeland imaginaries and the dynamism of (post)colonial contacts. Returning to the line “Coolies and niggers fighting these days,” the act of fighting is animated by the epithets, as performative “fighting words.” Further, several invocations of Hindu deities illuminate the weight of Nita’s choices:

She became deaf  
to the melody of *Krishna’s* flute.  
She chose Manny, not *Lord Rama* in her  
Hindu epic gone wrong. At her wedding  
she never once uttered *Ganesh’s* name,  
loosened the grasp of *Vishnu’s*  
four hands from round her waist.  
Her sisters disowned her in the holy  
name of Mother India.

The “Hindu epic gone wrong” indicates the marriage initiates an illicit narrative. The isolation Nita experiences “in the holy/name of Mother India” is rooted in racial antagonism. Further, the “Mother India” imaginary, here, is buttressed with the contacts of divinity and womanhood: undoing these, Nita opens herself to a new, supposedly “modern,” form of intimacy. Only

Manny, her black Grenadian husband awaits her; the absence of replacement figures suggests agency as well as the blank slate of hybrid cultural production.

The sensuality of contact is followed by hybrid figures, despite popular Trinibagonian discourse that allows such intimacies to be elided. Despite isolation, Nita “made/*dougl*a babies anyway and did not give/them the sacred names of gods: *Brahma*,/*Shiva*, *Gauri*.” Here, naming reifies both her geographical and spiritual distance from Mother India. The chosen names, too, position Nita’s children amidst the African Diaspora: “She named Granddaddy/Leon, a good European name, like all the other/ rootless Negroes” (Campbell 36). Here, rootedness for douglas and those who participate in forbidden pairings is also a kind of rootlessness, though—for douglas, the rootlessness constitutes both displacement from Mother India and Mother Africa as well as local alienation.

In the last verses, the speaker’s genealogy is wrought with phenotypic and political tension, which initiates ambivalence for the dougl speaker:

You know how people go, it took many deaths  
and many births for the Mullchansinghs to talk  
to the Brathwaites again and, finally, Mummy  
and her family were born looking Indian enough.  
But Panday in power now and Mummy warned  
me to say *Indian* not *coolie*.

In this way, phenotype enables superficial belonging, but the advice of the speaker’s “Mummy” seems inspired by the tenderness of her ancestor Nita—the rejection of the term “coolie” doubles as a rejection of the Indo-Trinidadian image of indenture and fosters linguistic harmony. The stanza ends with the mutability of racial identity and national responsibility: “One of my small/cousins told me, with a grown-up intuition, *You know*,/*in Trinidad*, *you not black*, *you dougl*a.” The uncertain positioning of douglas continues through the final stanza: “Panday in power now and my cousins still cuss/about neighbours with jhandi flags of many

colours/claiming their yards for as many gods as there are/colours.” Here, Indo-Trinidadian leadership is juxtaposed with the “foreignness” of cultural markers.

However, for the dougla speaker and his hybrid family, there is a familiarity in such foreignness: “we all go to eating pelau/with roti and curry, leaving our fingers stained/yellow like old papers so we, too stink/of curry powder.” The fingers as “old papers,” here, function as records of the speaker’s multicolored lineage, enacting an alternative historiography of participation in both Indian and Afro-Creole culture.

**“[Y]ou have to take the consequences when you mix up the race”:  
Conclusions and Trinibagonian Futures**

Filmmaker and feminist scholar Patricia Mohammed debuted an in-progress version of her film “Coolie Pink and Green” to audiences across the Caribbean in 2010. In the film, a young Indo-Trinidadian woman negotiates her relationship to ‘Mother India’, expressed through her grandfather’s narration, and her place in a cosmopolitan island nation, which manifests itself in her love for an Afro-Trinidadian despite a forthcoming arranged marriage.

The film opens with the definition of the title term, “coolie,” which has been used historically to describe the contract laborers who migrated to the Caribbean, filling the absence left by the end of chattel slavery in the region; the term was often used pejoratively to suggest *unskilled* labor. The grandfather’s rhetoric is compelling, placing douglas in opposition to Indian cultural retention, though it lacks the use of epithets. The film is visually arresting, employing the vibrant colors native to Trinidad and treasured by its Indian diasporic population, which also represents a dynamic but jeopardized Indian culture in a creolized Caribbean society. The film speaks to the implications of cultural loss to gender and sexuality: (interracial) marriage and sex

are identified vehicles of hybridity and a traditional Indian perspective is invoked to lament the relative freedoms Indian women have enjoyed since gaining wider access to education and labor.

In a particularly telling scene, the young woman's grandfather narrates over shots of contemporary, multicultural Trinidad. The subject's grandfather voices a patriarchal perspective of old India. A scene of a bustling Port of Spain street, lined with stores and street vendors, accompanies the statement, "We losing more than the art in our culture, we losing our women." Extra-diegetic, traditional Indian music plays as patrons of races frequent these urban sites of commerce; it's as if the modernity of these contemporary exchanges is divorced from, cannot hear "Mother India." At the center stands a female vendor, mediating the space; she represents unwilling assimilation through the Indian female body, placing the responsibility of bearing culture ultimately on the Indian woman.

Next, cutting to a university classroom led by an Indian female professor and attended by multiethnic students, the juxtaposition of Indian and black students amounts to a visual expression of douglarization. As the professor continues her lecture, sitting on a table with inviting body language and responding to an enthusiastic Indian female student, Grandfather continues: "Once we give you a chance for education and to take work, we open a door too wide..." The proverbial door delineating private, domestic space from the public domain has been opened for Indian women, a moment contemporaneous with independence which created the opportunity for hybridity through sexual intimacies.

Grandfather lastly warns of the disappearance of a fundamental, culture-based "Indianness": "But you have to take the consequences when you mix up the race...I am afraid that others will not understand your taste, they will not want you to pray with us. Your children will not look like us" (Mohammed). A black female student and an Indian male student interact

with one other, as the camera cuts to the aforementioned urban street, with the likewise aforementioned Indian female vendor observing the multiethnic composition of the shoppers. The clause ending "pray with us" is accompanied by a glimpse of the apex of a Hindu temple, while the earlier extra-diegetic music continues. Here, the music seems natural again; it can be "heard" here, so to speak, at a recognizable site of Indianness. The last, and most desperate, warning is imparted: "Your children will not look like us." Accompanying this declaration is a diverse group of children playing, uniformly dressed, in a schoolyard. The young students, based on phenotype, appear to be mostly Indian, with the camera momentarily resting on the face of a—likely, dougla—child.

The contemporaneity of this conversation elicits questions concerning Trinidadian political futures through the dougla. Appropriately, a year-old publication in Trinidad and Tobago, *dougla* magazine, is less concerned with the subjectivities of mixed-race Trinbagonians than with the implications of the term for postcolonial understandings of the dual-island nation. In a promotional video for the magazine, Trinbagonians of all phenotypes and racial identifications, responding to the question "Are you dougla?" assert that "I am Trini, and I am dougla." Further, the narrator, a local comedienne, comments that "[to be dougla is] not even about being a particular race" and ultimately positing that dougla identity is not a racial, but rather, a national project (*dougla* magazine).

Ultimately, this examination of the literary dougla engenders questions: What does it mean to be rooted in both chattel slavery and contract labor? How do douglas exist and self-determine amidst a dichotomized political arena, nationalist discourses of exceptional mixture and modernity, stereotypes of pathology that are alternately resisted and inherited, and the

legacies of two colonial labor systems? And, finally, what alternatives do the specificity of dougla-focused narratives offer to Trinibagonian futures?

C.L.R. James offers uncharacteristic attention to scarcely visible, laboring Indian and deviant dougla figures in *Minty Alley*, while his better-known political writings identify African-descended and white creole Caribbeans as the primary agents in late colonial politics. Here, the dougla mediates the relationship between local and global: signaling a colonial past through the lineages of slavery and indenture, as well as through pathological sexuality, this figure necessarily counters aspirations of self-governance and propriety.

Later, calypsonian Mighty Dougla's "Split Me in Two" considers his bifurcation as a dougla, who is excluded from racial discourse and spatial belonging. Christian Campbell's "Curry Powder" complicates this interpretation with the genealogical memory of Afro-Indo intimacies and syncretism, as well as mediating on what becomes dougla ambivalence in the face of contemporary and dynamic national politics.

Finally, Patricia Mohammed's film *Coolie Pink and Green* closes with a compelling image: the face of an unnamed dougla youth playing in a schoolyard. The fraught tenderness of Afro-Indo intimacies posits possibilities for a Trinidad and Tobago outside of the dougla figure, appropriated for national ambitions of modernity and harmony, outside of racially tense party politics. An alternative national future might include douglas as nascent knowledge producers in the continuing discourse on Trinibagonian, and Caribbean, hybridities, rather than as lifeless metaphors for uncomplicated proximity and hybridity.

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