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Douglá, Half-douglá, Travesao, and the Limits of Hybridity

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Discourses on Caribbean culture and identity have been, if anything, prolific and energetic in their manufacture and circulation of a virtual plethora of signs, an entire vocabulary of terms recruited to articulate the concept of the hybrid, whether biological or cultural, as a corrective, if not redemptive possibility for the region and beyond. Indeed, cultural discourses throughout the Americas have at one time or the other looked to hybridity like a raised standard to heal Empire's poisonous legacy of Manichean systems of value applied to race and ethnic difference. Without a doubt, these discourses have been deployed in sometimes naïve, sometimes cunningly politicized ways. If anything, they have been most productive in providing an instructive archive of narratives that reveal the far from idyllic and democratic histories of forced and consensual interracial mixings and cross-cultural aesthetic practices that characterize the region's evolution.

Whatever the names with which the ever expanding family of hybrid identities have been baptized — Mulatto, Mestizaje, Creole, Spanish, Cocoa Payol, callaloo, Travesao, Dougla, and so on — all share the following features: their origination in the diasporic multiracial, multiethnic make up of Caribbean societies; their particular histories and politics of application in contexts of privilege associated with colour, class, gender, and physical appearance; their role in the promotion of a rhetoric of nationalist accommodation to salve tensions among diverse race and ethnic groups; their elevation as signifiers of a regional and/or planetary destination that will be the radical reconstitution of demeaning stereotypes instituted under colonialism; and finally, their shared histories of failure to convincingly realize the very possibilities for which they have been embraced given the uneven weighting of differences that comprise the “mix.”

It is admittedly counterproductive to disregard the benefits of appealing to hybrid paradigms in their various manifestations as a means of (re)reading race and ethnic politics in which, as we know, the trajectories of gender and sexuality are always implicated. These paradigms are useful interpretative tools that supply a critical language and methodology for mapping the often turbulent lived and discursive histories that characterize the dialectic between culture and identity. Be that as it may, one cannot turn a blind eye to the fact that apart from their liberatory poetics, hybrid paradigms display the tendency to re-inscribe their own codes of privilege, most times ironically following the same logic of hierarchical difference that they sought to challenge in the first place. Mulattitude, like the mestizo and mestizaje paradigms, for instance, has demonstrated an ambivalent relationship to Africa. The creolization model has been accused of blurring differences in a callaloo melting pot, while at the same time favoring selected combinations. It is for this very reason that sections of the Indo-Caribbean community have expressed reservations about creolization, seeing it as an accommodation that privileges the Afro-Creole influence.¹ As a result, even douglarization has emerged as an embattled paradigm of affiliation and method of inquiry.

The study of Indian/African contact, popularly called dougla poetics, is without a doubt a relatively “new” member to the Caribbean's hybrid community of discourses, surpassing in terms of contemporary post-independence relevance the historical privilege enjoyed by the

African/European norm initiated under colonialism. One of its strongest advocates has been Shalini Puri to whom we owe the coinage “dougla poetics.” She has brought considerable insight to the current shift in interest to lateral creolization processes. According to Puri, a dougla poetics draws attention to already existent “interracial contact,” and so provides a “rich symbolic resource for interracial unity” (221). While Puri is careful to say that her intention is not to set up dougla identity or a dougla poetics as some kind of ideal hybridity, she invests in its transformative possibilities. What distinguishes it from “liberal multiculturalist tropes of hybridity such as callaloo, ‘Spanish,’ and arguably, Creole,” she argues, “is the ability of the term to place cultural hybridity in relation to equality” and the potential of a dougla poetics to “unmask power and symbolically redraw lines” (221).

Indeed, a great deal has already been said about the resistance or reservation expressed by the Indo-Trinidadian community to any notion of accommodation in a Creole or Dougla framework. It is therefore not my intention to pursue that line of interrogation. I propose to shift the lens a little from the Indian to the African dilemma to consider the value given to the African component in responses to the Dougla as a new identity space in which both the biological and cultural are implicated, with the former proving to be the site of most contention, depending on which side of the race divide one is located. To do so, I will examine a sample of literary texts, some of which ideologically invest in the dougla as a curative metaphor of national integration beyond the suspicions and prejudices that strain relations between the groups. These texts include Merle Hodge’s *For the Life of Laetitia* (1993), Michael Anthony’s *Green Days by the River* (1967), and Alfred Mendes’s *Black Fauns* (1935). I will also return to the heated debate surrounding Brother Marvin’s controversial calypso hit, “Jahaji Bhai,” primarily because Puri draws support from the song in her argument that dougla poetics’ signification on interracial contact makes it a potential unifier of differences.

The well-documented contexts of Indo-Trinidadian uneasiness about consorting with the Afro-Trinidadian community seems to imply that, for the latter, receptivity and integration have been far less problematic, at least at the level of biological and cultural mixing, if not in the arena of governance. If this is so, one needs to discover why or how those benefits have been articulated? I believe that drawing these texts into conversation will shed some light on the role of race as an agent of valuation within the dougla paradigm which may serve to trouble its myth of equal weighting. This slant situates the corporeal as a critical category in determining the re-constitutive power granted to the “symbolic” to radically transform negative perceptions associated with race difference. Interestingly, the biological and its role in racial typing is the element that Puri initially appears to sidestep when she states that a dougla poetics “offers a vocabulary for a political identity, not a primarily biological one” (221). Of course, Puri well knows that political and genetically derived identity categories are always in some way co-dependent in the assessment of how attitudes to the mix have been expressed and represented. However, it is also true that even in the desire to arrive at the horizon of change, in which the

symbolic can play a powerful role as its enunciator, identity politics is never absolutely free of its antecedents.

Afro/Indo-Trinidadian tensions, as we know, are not reducible to a single source. If anything, a number of intersecting streams of contention can be identified. These may include ethnic taboos about mixing, imbibed colonial racism, unevenness in the treatment of the indentured and enslaved persons, real and/or perceived conditions of disadvantage in the Afro-centric postcolonial dispensation, the policing of mating practices between the groups, struggles over governance, and so on. Further, it is well-worth taking cognizance of George Lamming's caution against mistaking "Race" for "Power," particularly in addressing contemporary manifestations of Indian/African relations in a society like Trinidad.² Yet, there also continues to be value in remembering Frantz Fanon's early insight that race is always, in the first instance, located on the body whose corporality is where identification practices are pre-scripted and therefore must be re-read.³

Race then remains one of those visible signs, not just bodily located, but also assigned to cultural practices, which cannot easily escape its pasts, even in the Caribbean's much celebrated "melting pot." Of course, it is not my intention to conflate African-Indian relations with the extremities of the white-black scenario that preoccupied Fanon in a text like *Black Skin, White Masks*. For one thing, persons of Indian descent were also included in colonialism's politics of exclusion and denigration. They therefore found themselves on the same side as New World Africans in the struggle against its oppressive regime. However, Fanon's point about the corporality of racism provides a useful vantage point for approaching what can be called the horizontal practices of prejudice among the subjects of colonialism and its aftermath. There is no denying that histories of suspicion and habits of exclusion mark both groups even though a wealth of intellectual discussion has gone into the problems of Indian to African contact. Further, there is also no denying that the complex dynamics of relations have certainly changed over time.

Writers like Michael Anthony and Merle Hodge are clearly committed to imaging more welcoming outcomes from Indo- and Afro-Trinidadian contact. These narratives, of course, raise their own questions. At their best, they invite changes in attitude to race differences and representations of nationhood by appealing to existing interracial alliances that establish hybridity as a core feature of the cultural process. Further, in a recent novel like Joy Mahabir's *Jouvert*, one encounters more daring efforts by the Indo-Trinidadian community to leave behind the old relational pathologies evidenced, for instance, in V.S. Naipaul's work.⁴ Mahabir overly invests in the Creole paradigm, but recognizes the need for its expansion to include the Indian presence. The novel's heterogeneous logic establishes any race, ethnic, and even national allegiances based on purity as mythological folly or prelapsarian delusion for Caribbean peoples. In this regard, the central character, black Maharajin, is crucial to the author's ideological agenda to affirm the region's transnational and intercultural ethos.

What is more important is that this small sample of works confirms the value of historicizing the dougla matrix as perhaps Gordon Rohlehr has done for the mulatto paradigm in his essay, “Drum and Minuet: Music, Masquerade, and the Mulatto of Style.”⁵ But, even as one speaks of evolutions, as Rohlehr does, towards greater comfort with the various streams of cultural influences, which includes race, a worthy point of caution is Fredric Jameson’s warning against approaching the present as an “energetic separation” that essentially “seals off its past from itself and expels and ejects it” in an effort to “name it and characterise its originality” (25). In other words, approaching history as a linear progression in attitude is appropriately tempered by an awareness of the persistent presence of the past. The twin influences of colonial race discourses and Indian to African interracial prejudices are enmeshed in the struggle for power and remain sometimes invisible informants of attitude and behaviour on both sides of the divide. These interlocking issues can help to illuminate either the seemingly less antagonistic history of the Afro-Creole world’s response to the Dougla, or conversely, they could unveil reasons for either expressions of discomfort with the representational practices and/or the welcome extended to the outcomes pertaining to that encounter. Indeed, when it comes to the issue of race, old attitudes and even beliefs around genetic makeup and the cultural qualities they imply often lurk just beneath the surface of deceptive change and celebrations of mixing. The Dougla is the site of such a deception, indeed so are other hybrid identity categories.

In this regard, I cannot help but place myself at the centre of these sometimes tortuous identity games by adding my own narrative of experience with the identity, being nebulously positioned as the product of a mixed race union, not quite Dougla as perhaps “half-dougla,” to borrow an identity formulation from Merle Hodge’s novel, *For the Life of Laetitia* to which I will return — my paternal grandfather being of Indian descent and my grandmother of African descent. Yet this is not the whole truth. My maternal grandfather was of mixed ancestry (African and European) from one of the Portuguese Azores, and I have not included the strains from my mother’s people who came from St. Vincent and Barbados. So if I follow this rather unproductive and fractured genealogical map, perhaps a truer label for myself is not “half-dougla” but “travesaou,” that is, unidentifiably mixed. I deliberately evoke travesaou because it is one of those now dead or near-dead Plantation terms that, like its contemporary relatives, once enjoyed its own period of relevance. One can therefore expect that even those that preoccupy us at the moment will also suffer the same fate — either socio-historical irrelevance or genetic cancellation based on future alliances.

Be that as it may, I want to draw attention to this curious term, “half-dougla,” which seems to be a new addition to the already overloaded identity vocabulary the Caribbean restlessly (mis-)juggles. It appears in Hodge’s *For the Life of Laetitia* where interracial conflict between Afro and Indo-Trinidadians is one of the novel’s core themes and so is central to her formula for race harmony (96), that is, the elevation of the Dougla as a biological and symbolic bridge across the race divide. Its coinage occurs in a carefully orchestrated classroom scenario where the form teacher, Miss Hafeez, leads an impromptu educational exercise targeted to re-sensitize the

children's already distorted race perceptions inherited from the adults around them. The father of Marlon Peters, for instance, thinks that "a good coolie is a dead coolie," and Anand Persad's uncle wants to help South Africans "kill-out nigger" (94-95). During the exercise of having all the "dougla" in the class identify themselves by standing up, Marlon Peters makes a case, perhaps mischievously so, for his inclusion in the group as a "half-dougla" given that his grandfather was Indian.

If, for argument's sake, one follows through on the equation he sets in motion, his own children are likely to be quarter-Douglas and so on until the whole thing is cancelled out in one way or the other. Further, a source of even greater interest is the teacher's invitation for him to join the self-identified Douglas but with the proviso, "if that is true" (96), prompted perhaps by two possibilities. Firstly, there is her knowledge that Marlon is a prankster/performer, calypsonian, and comedian cross-dresser who caricatures Mrs. Lopez, the Circus Horse, at the Christmas class-party (131-32). Secondly, she is possibly sceptical because he did not "look" his claim to an association with Indianness. Of course, this is mere speculation as Hodge's plot does not facilitate an exploration of the fact or fiction of Marlon's narrative. Whether, the Indian link is with his paternal or maternal grandfather, that side of his story which figures his Indian grandfather, his Dougla father or mother remains present in the plot as an absent text, the anterior of the current race tensions the class struggles to confront. Marlon therefore stands in the gap of an untold history that complicates the line of reasoning for racial unity posed by Miss Hafeez question: "So you think it would be a big joke if one side of your family were to kill off the other side, eh?" (96).

The question's logic, like Puri's dougla poetics, relies on "a contact that already exists" between the groups which the teacher confidently demonstrates by having the Dougla children in class show themselves. However, that sign of unity, placed as it is in the text's present, is interrupted from two points: the past of Marlon's half-told family tale of "contact," that is, the histories of friction voiced by his father and Anand Persad's uncle, and the play gunfight staged between himself and Anand that pre-figures the likelihood of future conflict. The students' exposure to the anti-racist lesson, which invests in shared "blood" as the basis for unity between the groups, therefore remains open-ended, suspended between an irresolvable stalemate and a requirement for change. The deadlock is instructive because it points to the often skipped over gap in all our hybrid formulas, that is, they offer no guarantees even if as Puri argues, they symbolically gesture to the possibility of renewal.

Marlon's unaccommodated condition in the dougla framework, in which he suspiciously seeks inclusion and is allowed in the controlled conditions of the classroom, exposes what is ultimately left unresolved in this hybrid matrix, as with others — the problem of difference and its attendant exclusory politics which mixing has often camouflaged or suppressed rather than transformed. At the same time, however, Marlon's apparent displacement simultaneously unveils the contradictions in the old social order that generated the race divide as well as those inherent in its counter or "anti-structural" inventions that seek to mend those divisions.⁶ Poised as it is for

an inevitable cancellation, his identity-position as a “half-doo gla,” which is marked simultaneously by ironic jest and a claim for inclusion, is where my own narrative is located. With him I share a tenuous outsider and insider position in the very corrective identity-frame Hodge’s novel elevates. The only difference is that I happen to be further removed as one who is not so much a “half-doo gla” as maybe quarter a “doo gla,” or maybe mixed or maybe “black” as opposed to Afro-Trinidadian (when I am allowed that space).

Years ago, while I was as an undergraduate at the University of the West Indies, a law student, a man from “up the islands” (I can’t remember now which one) asked my name, I suppose as a way of making conversation while we stood in the loan line at the Main Library, literally waiting to borrow, for a short time only, items that were not ours. I did the polite thing and responded, at which point something like disbelief surfaced on his face. At the time, I was satisfied to think that it was simply the old difficulty, if that is the correct word, or curiosity, that comes with meeting people bearing Indian names who don’t really “look” Indian, even in a place like Trinidad. I ran into this man only one time after our initial meeting. I was in line again in the library, this time waiting to use one of the photocopying machines, inventions that facilitate, for a small fee, the miracle of multiplying originals, or copies of originals. On that occasion he said, “Hello.” I responded with some like greeting, after which he told me in a strange conspiratorial tone that I didn’t sound Trinidadian. It was my turn to look puzzled. I remember he paused long enough to note my bewilderment, then departed. It took me sometime to figure out that the comment was his way of letting me know that he had caught onto me, that he believed I had offered him a bogus name at our first meeting. To him my name was a decoy intended as a brush-off.

I did not grow up in a particularly Indian or Moslem environment, although where ever we lived there were always Indian neighbours. My father had encouraged us to think of ourselves as “Trinidadian.” It was perhaps the result of the political rhetoric of nationalism in which my parents began their lives together in 1961. Trinidadian was the only identity to which he would subscribe — not Indian or African or Dou gla — and he claimed it with the kind of fervour that suggested a desperate compensation for some deep, unspoken suffering. A nationality, not a race or an ethnicity, offered accommodation, a liveable identity space that allowed him the comfort of distancing himself from what he would refer to as *those* Africans and *those* Indians. He would claim neither category. I was sixteen years old when I met, for the first time, the woman who was introduced to me as my grandfather’s mother. She was very old and I met her a few months before she died. We had one brief conversation. I had no idea that it would be our last. She had entered our lives at a time when it was apparently comfortable for her to do so. I knew nothing of her until that day. We were distanced from my father’s Indian relatives by some measure of ill-feeling that, in part, had something to do with my grandmother being an African woman and loving an Indian man.

Much later, when that library encounter came back to me, I considered the possibility that I had misinterpreted the man’s “look.” I considered another reading. I had projected other

experiences of disbelief, or curiosity, and sometimes rejection that my name, the one I have legally carried, evoked. Like the time an Indo-Trinidadian newsletter ceased sending me free copies of its publications when the editors discovered, by way of a photograph, that I was not really “Indian.” Or more fundamentally, that day long ago when as a child, I sat between the knees of my paternal grandmother, with the Gulf-of-Paria at our backs, and she, while combing through my sea-tangled hair, intimated to me, spoke into my head a line that meant this: *You are not your father’s daughter*. It was a lie I lived with into adulthood. Something, maybe the battle she waged with my hair, often choosing to cut out its middle portions to make it more “manageable,” had made it necessary for her to deny me then; something had made it necessary to create a great gulf between herself and me. I suspect had I looked “Indian” enough, I would have continued to receive free copies of those newsletters; and ironically, had I looked Indian enough to my paternal grandmother, I would have never had to carry the question my other siblings were spared. But this is my story. It may have been different for others.

Yet these, for me, are serious markers of experience that implicate both sides of the race divide: this thing about not being “Indian” enough. Those experiences caution against approaching dougla identity, as we have done with creolization and other hybridities, as sure pegs on which we can hang our desire for equality and for dismantling old colonial or ethnic-based prejudices as we seek to articulate the common “we” of our Trinidadian-ness, Caribbean-ness, and more fundamentally, of our humanity. Apart from its noted function as a pariah for unresolved scripts of negative African/Indian stereotyping, dougla identity has been consistently constructed as a privileged outcome, specifically in relation to female attractiveness and desirability as has been the case with Mendes’ Estelle from *Black Fauns* and Anthony’s Rosalie from *Green Days by the River*. Mendes’ Estelle, for instance, recruits the racist logic inscribed in mulatto identity to articulate her own sense of superiority from the other yard-dwellers. In conversation with the mixed woman, Mamitz, she claims: “They jealous, yes, because you pretty. You half-white and you pretty. They jealous of me too. I’s half-Indian, and black people is always jealous of those who ain’t pure nigger like themselves” (*Black Fauns* 200). Mamitz reinforces her thinking by responding, “Yes you’s pretty.”

In other words, the Indianization of the outcome, the migration away from “pure” blackness is not only considered favorable, but the visible sign of that progression is the criterion for inclusion—the identifiable “curly hair,” for example, that qualifies Estelle as “pretty.” This Indian foregrounding is also captured in the conversation between Shell Lammy, Michael Anthony’s character from *Green Days by the River*, and his father about the meaning of the word, dougla. In their conversation it is defined as “Indian-Negro” even “Indian-Creole” (10), although the men wrangle a little over the aptness of the word *Creole*. Also interesting in the exchange is the father’s laugh that punctuates the discussion of the term to which Shell reacts, “It ain’t no insult” (10). In calling Rosalie a dougla, thereby hinting at her recovery from the old derogatory stigmas associated with Afro/Indian mixed race identity noted by Puri as well as Rhoda Reddock in her essay, “Jahaji Bhai: The Emergence of a Dougla Poetics in Contemporary

Trinidad and Tobago.” Reddock argues that identification with dougla identity has been historically problematic for both sides. She notes that on the one hand, the term “reflected revulsion felt by many Indians at sexual relations with persons of African descent,” and on the other, the reluctance of urban douglas to identify with the term because Indians were associated with the rural and therefore with “backwardness” (190).

For the sake of counterpoint, however, it useful to revisit the heated debate that arose over Brother Marvin’s popular 1996 song, “Jahaji Bhai,” particularly Eintou Springer’s objection that it lacked “balance” in dealing with the African component. Springer charged that, “Nowhere in that calypso is there any credit, glory, any reference to anything significant and African” (qtd. in Reddock 199). There is obviously some need for temperance in her argument which, as Reddock points out, has as its backdrop the aftershock of the People’s National Movement’s loss to the largely Indian-based United National Congress/National Alliance for Reconstruction coalition, a period, according to Reddock that was “perceived by many Africans as one of Indian ascendancy” (199). Yet Springer’s position that Brother Marvin’s representation of douglarization, both visually and linguistically, foregrounds the Indian presence and suppresses the African is not without merit. Notwithstanding the Afro-Creole rhythms and Swahili opening chant and back chant as pointed out by other commentators, the opening two verses are devoted to tracing the singer’s paternal Indian lineage back to Calcutta. Further, Africa is apparently displaced as the origin of civilization since to return to the past is to discover an African wearing a dhoti and praying before a Jhandi, and this is perhaps the site of her greatest difficulty with the “logic” of the song.

Apart from the problem with the suppression of the African presence in “Jahaji Bhai,” the celebratory attitude to the Indian bloodline points back to the triumph expressed by the character, Estelle, at the toning down of the African physiological component as opposed to being “pure nigger.” I think therefore that Springer’s position has been too easily reduced to a case of political disgruntlement or over zealous African activism. It may well be that her objections pointed towards a too uncomfortable revelation that may be described as internalized black racism. Michael Anthony’s representation of the Shell/Rosalie romance in *Green Days by the River* provides an interesting point of comparison with Springer’s complaint in its conscious or unconscious articulation of privilege with respect to the Indian component in the dougla mix. This time, however, the agent of enforcement is the Indian character, Mr. Gidharee, who is to be Shell’s future father-in-law. He also functions as the author’s ideological mouthpiece on the theme of race relations in contrast to the waning presence of Shell’s terminally ill father. Mr. Gidharee displays a curious, noncommittal attitude to dougla identity with which his daughter is tagged. For instance, there is the cryptic, “amused” laugh when Shell calls Rosalie a dougla, suggesting some measure of ironic distance from “the slang,” which according to Shell, “everyone used for people who were half Indian and half Negro” (8).

This distancing, as unaffected as his amusement seems, possibly plays between two axes. First: his knowledge of the term’s negative baggage given the taboo of interracial mixing

between Indians and Africans. Second: his awareness of the Afro-male rivalry over his daughter, confirmed by Lennard's revelation to Shell that Joe "wouldn't leave the little *dougla* in peace" (17), as well as his own admission that Rosalie was the "sweetest thing in the *whole* of Mayaro," that is reinforced by his confession that he "like dougla people," more precisely women, "bad" (18). Taken together, these two possibilities, Mr. Gidharee's history of transgressing the Indian/African divide and his consciousness of his daughter's desirability because she is racially mixed is played out in his over-protective parenting. The subtext here is an unresolved distrust of the Afro-Trinidadian Other to whom he is attracted by virtue of his own alliance with Rosalie's mother and also suspicious of, that is suggested by his rigorous, even brutal testing of Shell's worthiness. After being violently "de-creolised" in the dog-attack scene intended to cure his future Afro-Trinidadian son-in-law of the tendency of his group to skirt marriage, Mr. Gidharee reveals his plans to organize a "Hindu engagement", and one would expect, a like marriage ceremony for the couple. Shell's incorporation into the family is therefore orchestrated, ironically, on the basis of his assimilation into things Indian.

Although Anthony's novel is set in an earlier historical period than Hodge's, Mr. Gidharee demonstrates far greater openness to interracial unions than, Maharajin, the maternal grandmother of the dougla child, Charlene. Maharajin, however, only manages to arrive at some measure of compromise after the initial interracial "commotion" surrounding the reality that Tara, her daughter, was having a "Creole or kilwal" child (*For the Life of Laetitia* 41-42). Granted that her resistance wanes after Charlene is born, from her perspective dogularization is equated with blackening, that is, becoming "Creole." Notably, Hodge's text suggests a conscious discursive turn from the sexualization of the female dougla by not drawing attention to any of the preferred stereotypical physical features that earlier texts foreground and focussing simply on the love that both groups have for the child.

Areas of irresolution about interracial contact are suggested in both texts. Mr. Gidharee's response is a defensive absorption of Shell into Indian ways, suggesting that the reservation he holds in relation to his self-confession that he likes "Creole people" has to do less with the biological appearance of race than with his internalization of its cultural stereotyping. Therefore his qualification, "One thing with *Creole*, they like to play round but they don't like to get married. Never! Never!" (*Green Days* 175), is an oblique warning to Shell that overlooks the fact that Shell's mother and father are in a stable married union. In the case of Hodge, in spite of the jealous rivalry that evolves between the two families over the guardianship of Charlene, the centre of governance over the child is Maharajin's household and perhaps this is understandable given that it is her mother's (146). However, both families largely remain in their own camps with the bridge of connection, in keeping with the text's vision, being Charlene. In both cases, however, what appears to be a protectionist stand-off against Afro-Creole absorption seems futile as all these already douglarized identities are repositioned on the vanishing line of a privileged Indian difference that lies latent in the "half-dougla" off-spring that Shell and Rosalie will produce, and the further insertion of Charlene into the life of her Afro-Trinidadian relatives.

Conclusion

No doubt, the nebulous laws of attraction, whether biological or cultural, will continue to “trick” us into uncomfortable alliances only to reaffirm the folly of polarizing the otherness that we either claim or disclaim. However, Marlon’s case is of seminal interest here since his “half doogla” identity is dogged by the possibility of an impending cancellation, that is, a movement away from looking Indian, depending on his choice of a mate. If this possibility is fulfilled, then, we return to square one and the very ambivalence regarding the African component that has featured in the discursive representations of the dougla resurfaces. Of course, Marlon’s offspring can also migrate towards greater Indianness or some other unidentifiable combination for which we will no doubt find a name. This possibility of a return to an apparent original difference, though not quite the same, is what I find most fascinating since it forces a confrontation, at least physically, with the very problem of difference that Miss Hafeez tries to solve with her dougla exercise. Hybridity does not guarantee a cure for the prejudices we inherit and reproduce either as agents or targets. Caribbean discourses on identity stand in need of supplementing their cultural findings with a rigorously articulated philosophy of the Other.

Paul Gilroy offers a noteworthy caution that may benefit Caribbean identity discourses. He writes that while the “problematic of origins appeared at an important point in the story of modernist racial and cultural typologies,” and such considerations have become “irrelevant where the old dead skins of ethnic and racial purity have been shed, it cannot be repeated too often that deconstructing ‘races’ is not the same as doing away with racisms” (*Against Race* 251). This applies to even their most deceptively benign formulations of the biological hybrid, or in the situations when their signifiers elude us as in the children’s misuse of the word “racial” for “racist” in Hodge’s novel in their effort to complain about Mr. Tewarie’s discriminatory behavior (*For the Life of Laetitia* 94-95). Whatever the scenario, the real challenge be how to live humanly on the restless terrain of identity, a country in which the only law is the presence of the Other who will continue to reveal to you and I, the “we” that lies between us, to echo Paul-Luc Nancy succinct translation Hegel’s intersubjective model of consciousness.⁷ For this project, Caribbean discourse needs a closer alliance with a philosophy of the Other which is actually the foundation of Fanon’s reformulated Hegelian Self/Other dialectic, articulated at the end of *Black Skin White Masks* as an on-going inquiry that seeks to respond to the question: “Was my freedom not given me then in order to build the world of the *You*?” (232).

The question points to nothing less than the fundamental installation of the Other in relation to the Self. His call is interestingly, but not surprisingly, re-echoed in Earl Lovelace’s artistic mission/vision: “to shorten the distance between the sides, between self and what is perceived as ‘Other.’ Indeed, to help remove the category of the other and to help us see ourselves and each other as human” (231). There is no doubt that the investment in socio-historical or constructionist paradigms of identity will continue to be extremely fruitful in tracing the politics that impact on race and ethnic differences. Indeed, the problems associated with efforts to frame Caribbean cultural identity, their very limits and betrayals, reconfirm what Stuart

Hall defines as identity's inherently "problematic" nature, which he argues is not merely because of "difference" and "disjuncture," but also because "identity is irredeemably a historical question" (5). Certainly devising names for what seems to be an ever-widening field of hybridities as the region searches for ways to explain its cultural selves is perhaps necessary in a world where identity politics is, if anything, never quite equal. They are however indicators that a differently oriented discourse on identity and the human is also needed.

The j'ouvert band of names that now parade on the cultural field are but the mascots of a much more radical requirement that faces the Caribbean as it does the entire planet. The vital work of cross-cultural contact in the education of sensibilities to relinquish inherited prejudices and suspicions surrounding difference cannot be underestimated, but this process can be deepened by pushing debates on Caribbean culture beyond the boundary of present concentrations on the historical and political construction of identity towards a partnership with the disciplines of philosophy, psychology, and even theology. The heterogeneity of the Creole, Dougla, or whatever mix has enjoyed some currency as a grounding for articulating common belonging in Caribbean discourse, particularly because such paradigms can work towards de-linking race from its damaging associations with "nature" and deconstructing the territorialism of absolutist thinking. However, the well-known contentions within those very mixes by which the region defines itself demonstrates, in part, that so called liberatory formula have not entirely escaped their histories, and the Dougla is no exception.

Further, the Caribbean is clearly not ensconced from producing in its hybrid field what Gilroy insightfully posits as the larger problems involved in "producing a worldly vision that is not simply one more imperialistic particularism dressed up in seductive universal garb" (*After Empire* 4), from which even the most liberal formulations that purport to be in the service of more democratic human relations are not exempt. The best we can hope for in our carnival of hybridities, cultural or biological, is the facility they provide for working through their perhaps unavoidable surfaces, as attractive as they may appear, towards the real validation of every Self they mask, which is the basis, as Fanon sees it, for "creating the ideal conditions for a human world" (*Black Skins* 231). Anything else is a crude detour, and it may be high time we cease our identity manoeuvres and simply face each other — the I in the You, where the hybridity that eternally matters resides.

Notes

¹See my essay, “‘A Quartet of Daffodils’ Only: Negotiating the Specific and the Relational in the Context of Multiculturalism and Globalization,” 35-38.

²George Lamming, “Language and the Politics of Ethnicity.”

³See Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, where Fanon theorizes prejudice as being circumscribed by a condition of belatedness activated by the “look,” or gaze that is educated by a trans-historical anteriority of negative difference in which the black body is inscribed and is thereby predestined to always being “too late” in the context of its encounter with the other: “You come too late, much too late ...” (122).

⁴Walcott notices with much vehemence, the author’s display of a disturbing level of “revulsion,” for peoples of African descent in “The Garden Path” (132).

⁵Gordon Rohlehr, in his “Coda” to “Drum and Minuet,” notes a movement towards a deployment of rhythms that suggest “stylistic equality” and “interconnectedness,” in the work of artists like Geraldine Connor, Andre Tanka, and David Rudder (297-99).

⁶Quoting from Asmaron Legesse’s *Gada: Three Approaches to the Stud of African Society* in “Notes on the Current Status of Liminal Categories and the Search for a New Humanism,” Nelson Maldonado-Torres links Sylvia Wynter’s poetics with his notion that a liminal person is an agent of change who exposes, “all the injustices inherent in structure, by creating real contradictions between structure and anti-structure, social order and man made anarchy” (190).

⁷Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative* (76-79).

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