Voices from home and abroad
New York City's Indo-Caribbean media

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A B S T R A C T ● This article examines how New York City's Indo-Caribbean media represents and constructs diasporic and transnational identities. Analyzing weekly newspapers, radio programs and websites, it argues that as media producers negotiate content and programing with their audiences they produce a varied and multiple 'Indo-Caribbean voice'. Indo-Caribbean communities are linking up with home and with India in specific geographic locations in New York City and in locally produced mediated forums. In this article, these connections are mapped locally and transnationally to understand the role of other racialized communities in the development of an Indo-Caribbean presence in the public sphere. The media examined here represent Indo-Caribbean communities as they negotiate belonging in the US that is mediated through relationships with their home countries as well as the Indian migrant community from South Asia. ●

K E Y W O R D S ● Indo-Caribbean communities ● migrant media ● racial identities ● South Asian diaspora ● transnationalism

In the midst of Hosay, an Indo-Caribbean Islamic ritual event, in the St James neighborhood of Port of Spain, Trinidad, I interviewed an Indo-Trinidadian New Yorker who travels to Trinidad annually to participate in Hosay. As we sat down in his family home in St James, he handed me an article detailing the history of Hosay on plantation estates in British Guiana (Kandasammy, 2005).[1] The article was pulled from the online version of a major Guyanese daily newspaper and printed in *Caribbean Daylight Global News*, a free weekly newspaper produced and printed in New York and widely distributed in the

Indo-Caribbean neighborhood of Richmond Hill, Queens. The paper had traveled with this Indo-Trinidadian from New York to Trinidad, where he shared it as a source of information about an Islamic commemoration that indexes Indianness in the Caribbean – an event that has itself traveled from Karbala to Iran to India to the Caribbean to the US (Korom, 2003). This transfer of information is significant because, beyond these complex transnational flows of people, objects and practices, it demonstrates the utility of Indo-Caribbean migrant media in New York as a source for representing diasporic cultures and identities in transnational public spheres. It suggests that multifaceted notions of Caribbeanness and Indianness are constructed in the media of 'twice migrant' (Bhachu, 1985) Caribbean East Indian communities in New York City.

This article examines specific forms of Indo-Caribbean media production in New York City as a location for community development that demonstrate belonging and identity in transnational public spheres.[2] Indo-Caribbean migrants in New York City are primarily from Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago, and a significant number of them live in neighborhoods in Queens that are home to a growing population of Indians from South Asia.[3] In this context, Indo-Caribbean identity may be defined in relation to Indian identities (Khandelwal, 2002), while in Guyana or Trinidad it is often defined in relation to 'creolized' Afro-Caribbean identities.[4] While Indo-Caribbean migrants in the US live within state structures, they also perceive themselves as part of Caribbean South Asian diasporas and maintain transnational relationships. The production of Indo-Caribbean print, broadcast, and electronic media, creates tangible sources for these diasporic and transnational communities in the public sphere.

This 'diasporic nationalism' (Shukla, 2003) among the Indo-Caribbean population is multiply situated and addresses nationalist politics in India and in the Caribbean, particularly Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago, thus it also suggests a commitment to community formations that span national borders (e.g. Indian diasporic and Indo-Caribbean communities). These multiple transnational and national identities affect the ways that Indo-Caribbean migrants engage with and maneuver in US and Caribbean state formations of race and citizenship. Within this framework of 'diasporic nationalism', Indo-Caribbean production of print, broadcast and electronic media creates 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1991) in the public sphere. The constitution of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989) has been debated, including its gendered and racialized constructions (e.g. Black Public Sphere Collective, 1995; Robbins, 1993), but it is important to note that Indo-Caribbean media producers wish to assert a cultural and political presence in the public sphere.

The ways in which transnational Indo-Caribbean communities represent themselves in the public sphere provides insight into 'the uneasy relationship between thinking diaspora and thinking transnationalism' (Thomas, 2004) as media producers mobilize intersecting concepts of the Indo-Caribbean identity. Diaspora theorists have engaged the overlapping conceptual categories of migration, transnationalism and diaspora, calling for clear analytical distinction among the terms, yet acknowledging the shared theoretical terrain and

at times suggesting that diaspora and transnationalism are nested within one another (Braziel and Mannur, 2003; Das Gupta et al., 2007; Thomas, 2004; Vertovec, 2004). Transnationalism has been described as the process of forging and maintaining relationships across borders (Basch et al., 1994), including the movement of people, goods, capital and information. The term 'diaspora' derives from a Greek term meaning 'to scatter', and early historical references to Jewish and African diasporas suggest an emphasis on peoples dispersed from a homeland. Jacqueline Nassy Brown provided an important critique of the exclusive focus on origins and displacement in some diaspora literature, instead 'examining how historically-positioned subjects identify both the relevant events in transnational community formation and the geographies implicated in that process' (1998: 293). Recent theorizations similarly move away from origins to emphasize diaspora as process and relationship (Das Gupta et al., 2007; Khan, 2007; Thomas and Clarke, 2006).

Engaging the concept of an *Indo*-Caribbean diaspora and its transnational movements elucidates the specific definitional difficulties of a *Caribbean* diaspora because '[n]ot only is the Caribbean a diverse region with people moving around within it but, significantly, it is the region in which its peoples are linked to other recognized major diasporas' (Goulbourne and Solomos, 2004: 536). Indeed, ethnographic engagement with Indo-Caribbean populations has led to definitional challenges for South Asian diaspora theory. In a review article, Sandhya Shukla defines the *South Asian* diaspora as 'peoples who have at some time in the past come from all the countries that comprise the Indian subcontinent yet without the emphasis on the forced expulsion that Jewish or black diasporas have conveyed' (2001: 553). Aisha Khan directly challenges the qualifier in Shukla's definition, arguing that *Indo-Caribbean* diaspora narratives concretize the concept of diaspora and 'suggest a more nuanced view of voluntary versus coerced, calling into question the notions of free labor and free choice' (2004: 125). This modification to the concept of South Asian diaspora is based on Khan's distinction between diaspora and migration, which is about 'interpreting one's culture as indelibly marked for all time by the experience of being uprooted' (2004: 125).

This reference to Indian indentured labor in the Caribbean, 'the coolie odyssey' (Carter and Torabully, 2002), foregrounds class-, migration- and nation-based distinctions in contemporary South Asian diasporas. It suggests a focus on marginalized diasporas; that is, 'those in the global South that the homeland has long disavowed because of their association with coolie pasts' (Das Gupta et al., 2007). As Indian and Indo-Caribbean diasporas meet up in the transnational and racialized space of New York City, issues of identity, authenticity and subject-position are raised. V.S. Naipaul pointedly comments that '[t]o be an Indian or East Indian from the West Indies is to be a perpetual surprise to people outside the region' (1973 [1972]: 33), including the majority population as well as other diasporic populations. The presence of Indo-Caribbean populations in New York and other areas calls into question the equation of race, nation and citizenship.

I turn, then, to an examination of Indo-Caribbean media to analyze contemporary diasporic identifications in the transnational setting of Queens, New York. I argue that the multi-vocality of Indo-Caribbean media not only links up with 'home' and builds bridges to India, but negotiates, interprets and presents contemporary understandings of Indian and Indo-Caribbean identity, politics and culture in relation to the majority population and other diasporic communities in this complex historical political-economic context. Ethnographic explorations of race and space in New York City have focused on ethnic enclaves and the development of a voice in the public sphere (Gregory 1998; Kasinitz 1992; Khandelwal, 2002; Sanjek, 1998; Shukla, 2003). Examining media, as Vibert Cambridge has noted, 'at the intersection of immigration and diversity in the United States permits observation of the nature and practices of diasporas' and the role media 'is playing in the construction of transnational identities' (2005: 6). Media producers are important agents in the production of diasporic communities because they respond to the needs and demands of their audiences (or 'markets') and reflect locally constructed identities back to the target communities and also represent these identities in the public sphere. The media examined here engage racialized political and cultural situations in the 'home' countries of Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago, and the position of various Caribbean communities 'abroad' in the US as well as the relationship of Indo-Caribbean migrant communities to South Asian Indian and Afro-Caribbean migrant communities; in doing so they develop 'an Indo-Caribbean voice' in diaspora that is varied and multiple. By examining media as a 'social practice,' that is, in the political, cultural, and social context in which it is produced and consumed, I seek to understand 'the impact of technologies on the production of individual and collective identities' (Ginsberg et al., 2002: 3).

Mapping Indo-Caribbean media

The production and distribution of Indo-Caribbean print and broadcast media in New York City follows residential patterns. Trinidadian or Guyanese migrants in Queens, particularly the neighborhoods of Richmond Hill, Ozone Park, and South Ozone Park, are primarily East Indian, while those in Brooklyn are primarily of African descent.[5] Much of the Indo-Caribbean media production occurs in these Queens neighborhoods and the advertisers are drawn primarily from the Richmond Hill area, particularly Liberty Avenue, a major commercial center for Indo-Caribbean communities in New York. These media are largely Guyanese-produced, reflecting the demographics of the Indo-Caribbean population in New York City, but they are marketed to and used by both Guyanese and Trinidadians. The notion of markets is crucial to Indo-Caribbean media content, in part because the radio programs and free weeklies analyzed in this article are subsidized entirely by advertising. Radio hosts and print publishers and editors mobilize concepts of

(Indo-) Caribbean and Indian diasporic community to appeal to their markets and their sponsors, but also to create spaces for representation in the public sphere. These print, broadcast and electronic spaces of entertainment, opinion and even commercialization provide diverse locations from which Indo-Caribbean communities claim belonging and representation in several transnational and diasporic spaces, including home (variably understood as the US, Guyana or Trinidad and Tobago) or within Indian, Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean diasporas.

Several radio programs serve this community through Caribbean programing, which primarily airs on weekends. WWRL 1600AM is a major presence with a block of programing dubbed 'Caribbean Saturdays', which is targeted to an Afro-Caribbean audience; however, it also airs an Indo-Caribbean (Guyanese) program, the *Bhawanie Singh Sunday Night Show* (also called *The Greatest Indian Music Show*), on Sunday nights. WPAT 930AM has a day-long block of Indo-Caribbean programing on Sundays, which includes the *Haji Zakir Show*, *Best by Request*, the *Indo-American Show*, *JMC Music Mix* and the *Farook Juman Show*. WGBB 1240AM airs *Indo-Caribbean Night Ride* on Saturday nights and *Suhani Geet* on Saturday mornings, both hosted by Bhawanie Singh. The racial division of listeners is significant; an Indo-Trinidadian radio producer made it a point to tell me that he has two programs, one of which caters to a 'Jamaican and other black Caribbean' market and one to 'the Indian' market, and that these markets are distinct.[6]

The content of these programs may include music, such as chutney (popular Indo-Caribbean music), soca (Trinidadian popular dance music), filmi (popular Indian cinema music), and Hindu and Muslim devotional music, interviews with local Indo-Caribbean politicians and community leaders, listener call-ins to send greetings, and extensive advertising segments for sponsors (often mortgage bankers, travel agencies or real estate agencies). There may also be short lectures from Hindu or Islamic religious teachers or leaders from local temples and mosques, particularly during religious seasons such as the Hindu festival of Diwali or the Islamic month of Ramadan, that address aspects of religious practice. Even the least religiously identified of these Indo-Caribbean radio programs addresses religion during religious holidays; just before Diwali the host talked about and played some bhajans (Hindu devotional songs) from an upcoming album by chutney singer, Adesh Samaroo.

The newspapers that serve the Indo-Caribbean community in New York City are primarily free weeklies that can be found in vestibules of businesses in Richmond Hill and in other areas that have a significant population of Indo-Guyanese and Indo-Trinidadians (Figure 1). Those that widely circulate in neighborhoods in southern Queens and serve the Indo-Caribbean population include the *Carib Sun*, *Caribbean Daylight*, *Caribbean Daylight Global News*, the *Caribbean New Yorker*, *Indo-Caribbean Review* and the *West Indian*. Other smaller, new or recently defunct papers that have been marketed to these communities include the *Guyana Times*, *Hindu Xpress*, *Cricket International* and the *Guyana Monitor* among others. These media include weeklies that

Figure 1   Free Indo-Caribbean weekly newspapers at the entrance of a restaurant on Liberty Avenue in Richmond Hill, Queens, New York. Photograph by author.

primarily cover news related to 'home' (which is often all-Guyana news), those that focus on 'home' and 'abroad' (often Guyana and New York City), those that focus on Indo-Caribbean news (including Trinidad), those with local Queens and Caribbean news, and those used as a tool to disseminate Hindu teachings. Most carry at least one page of Bollywood news, as well as extensive coverage of Hindu, Muslim and also Christian religious holidays, as they are observed in the US and the Caribbean.

Again, the notion of markets plays an important role in print media; while the target markets for ethnic print media overlap, categories based on race and country of origin can be delineated. Several weeklies produced for Indian migrant audiences that do not specifically reference Indo-Caribbean communities in New York are occasionally distributed along with Indo-Caribbean papers. These include *Desi Talk in New York*, *India in New York (*A Guide to Events and Entertainment from *Indian Abroad*)*, India Post* and the *Indian Express* (North American edition). In addition, weekly or bi-weekly newspapers produced primarily for Caribbean and African American readers, such as the *New York Liberty Star*, *Caribbean Impact* and *Caribbean Life*, which rely on advertisers from Brooklyn and other areas of New York, can often be found alongside the Indian and Indo-Caribbean migrant newspapers mentioned above. These categories are based on content and advertising, but they are variable. Additionally, while the main readership within these categories may be distinct at times, the papers are circulated in many geographic areas.

Noticeable in the names and slogans of many Indo-Caribbean print and broadcast media is the relative lack of overt claims to Indo-Caribbeanness; rather, the names of these media make claims to a Caribbean diaspora or (trans)nationality. Slogans such as *Caribbean Daylight*'s 'Fifteenth year serving the Caribbean community', the *West Indian*'s 'Caribbean-Americans' Weekly Community Newspaper', the *Guyana Monitor*'s 'Keeping an Eye on Guyana's Development and Democracy' and the *Guyana Times*' 'At home and abroad' emphasize this. The slogans provide an insight into the papers' contents and political focus and suggest an emphasis on transnational attachments to home or Caribbean regional diasporic connections, though the tenor of these papers is Indo-Caribbean. Along similar lines, the radio program *JMC Music Mix* had a weekly live link-up with a station in Trinidad, which allowed Trinidadians in the New York area to send greetings to people in Trinidad and vice versa. According to the host, this allowed listeners to 'make that connection' to home and abroad, and to get 'the Trinidad flavor of everything'.[7] By providing information from the Caribbean, these media help transmigrants retain the connection to and feel of home while living abroad, and also provide a space to represent the transnational Caribbean American community in the public sphere.

However, there are media whose names and slogans proclaim a distinctly Indo-Caribbean or Indian diaspora identity, such as the radio programs *Indo-Caribbean Night Ride* and the *Indo-American Show*. And there are those that promote a specifically Indo-Caribbean and Indian diaspora political agenda, particularly the *Caribbean New Yorker*, which recently added the following slogan to its front page: 'The Voice of Indo-Caribbeans – The Only Weekly Serving the Interests of Indo-Caribbeans'. Another is the *Indo-Caribbean Review*, a periodic publication of the Indo-Caribbean Federation, a not-for-profit organization that promotes the political and cultural representation of Indo-Caribbean communities in New York, particularly through an annual commemoration of Indian Arrival Day in Richmond Hill, Queens. One of the goals of the Indo-Caribbean Federation is 'mobilizing [New York City's] Indo-Caribbean political power' (Cambridge, 2005: 69). These media outlets provide interesting counterpoints to, and intersections with, other media produced by and for this community, because of their commitment to *Indo-Caribbean* political identity as an important focus of their publications.

Indo-Caribbean media follow a complex path in representing communities in the public sphere. While producers and consumers use Indo-Caribbean media to maintain identities in transnational and diasporic spaces, these media also highlight and create fractures, multiplicities and differences in what might be seen as a unified category of identity, 'the Indo-Caribbean'. It is through these diverse means of understanding and representing community that the producers of media, culture, and identity variably suggest a diasporic Indian or Indo-Caribbean community or a Caribbean transnation. While recognizing the different markets based on race and country of origin, as well as the residential separation among the Caribbean communities in New York

City, few media producers create programs and papers that make explicit political claims to racial identities in print or on air, and although their content tends to focus on Indo-Caribbean cultural forms, they emphasize national and regional commitments. This aversion derives in part from a desire to distance themselves from the racially divisive cultural politics in Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana. How this is mediated in the transnational and diasporic space of New York City is addressed through explicit connections to the Caribbean, Indianness, and Indo-Caribbeanness.

Link-ups to home

Economic conditions in Trinidad and Guyana during the 1980s led to increased Indo-Caribbean migration abroad, in particular to the US, and added to an already significant Caribbean population, the majority of whom resided in New York. The Richmond Hill neighborhood, in particular, saw a large portion of this Indo-Caribbean migration, and the Indian population grew vastly between 1980 and 2000 (Khandelwal, 2002: 230). Because of this extensive Caribbean migration, contact between 'home' and 'away' using various means of communication has long been an issue in the Caribbean (Miller and Slater, 2000). It can be argued that personal communication methods, including cell phones, email, and online chats, made up the majority of those personal communicative links, but an important means of communication and community production in the Indo-Caribbean transnational public sphere in New York was the *JMC Music Mix* radio program's live link-up with Masala radio in Trinidad.

JMC Music Mix is a two-hour radio broadcast on WPAT 930AM and is part of JMC Entertainment, an Indo-Trinidadian owned company that promotes chutney artists, produces chutney and chutney/soca crossover music, and has retail music stores in Trinidad and a nightclub in Richmond Hill. The program has been on the air since 1992; it reaches audiences in parts of New Jersey and New York, but, according to Shantel Jaikaran, the program's host (and the daughter of the former host, Mohan Jaikaran, head of JMC Entertainment), the audience is primarily made up of Indo-Trinidadians or Guyanese in Queens. The five- to ten-minute link-up with Trinidad during each hour of the two-hour Sunday show allowed listeners to call in and send greetings between Trinidad and New York, providing a direct outlet for transnational communication, although because of cost (lack of profitability) and technical difficulties *JMC Music Mix* stopped the link-ups to Trinidad in mid-2005.

As a form of transnational media, the link-up provided a space for the performance of primarily transnational Indo-*Trinidadian* identities, with callers following general tacit formats when delivering brief messages or greetings and making a personal connection to Trinidad in a very public space. In their research on cell phone use in Jamaica, Heather Horst and Daniel Miller have theorized the 'link-up' as a use of a media technology in which 'the most important element is not the content of conversations but their use to maintain

connections over time' (2005: 760). This is also the case with on-air link-ups between callers in New York and Trinidad (as well as with listener call-ins to send greetings locally within the New York broadcast area), as the content of listener comments during link-ups or call-ins most often had basic content, following the form of this example: 'Sending birthday wishes to Shirley from your two daughters, three sons, sons-in-law, and grandkids.' A major difference between cell phone and radio link-ups is the public nature of the radio link-ups, which allows such connections to be enacted in the public sphere.

The producer and host of *JMC Music Mix* felt that they were providing a service to the community through the link-ups to Trinidad, which made the program unique and valuable to a certain market audience, and thus valuable to sponsors. The link-up provided by the program also could be said to have produced a type of transnational identity best described by a migrant narrative of sacrifice and hard work, as suggested by the host:

> It was the first station to ever do it, the first time it's ever been done – link to Trinidad. And I think it was great because some people can't even afford to call their loved ones, you know, in Trinidad and speak to them. Or ever even get to make a request on the radio to someone to tell them happy birthday. And they live so far away or their mom lives far away. You know, people come out here for a better life. Sometimes it's really hard for them to call home or whatever it is. And it's just to put them together in that way.[8]

The service provided by the radio program is to create the space for these transnational connections to be enacted on air, which has the result of representing certain forms of Indo-Trinidadianness in the public sphere. Yet with the termination of the link-up resulting in less on-air emphasis on Trinidad, the host believes that Guyanese listeners have increased. In her one-year tenure as host, she has shifted the format to include more soca music (which draws an Afro-Caribbean audience) in addition to chutney music (which is targeted to an Indo-Caribbean market).

Indo-Caribbean migrant newspapers have also provided link-ups to home, and some Indo-Guyanese, in particular, feel that the Indo-Caribbean migrant newspapers in New York were developed because the publishers recognized an absence of news from home. Because many of the papers are weeklies published on Fridays, the news they present is not often current, particularly compared to the availability of daily news in online versions of the major national papers from both Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana. Yet the local weeklies have a readership and sponsorships even with the availability of the online daily papers from home. Beyond the issue of access to electronic media, it may be the 'link-up' rather than a daily engagement with the news from home that is relevant here. As the host of *JMC Music Mix* talked about the live link-up to Trinidad she explained that the host in Trinidad would inform the New York audience about 'what's going on in Trinidad that people might not know about here [in New York]. Or unless they've read the papers here [in New York] they really wouldn't know what's going on down in Trinidad.'[9]

Bhawanie Singh, the host of three radio programs (the *Bhawanie Singh Sunday Night Show*, *Suhani Geet* and the *Indo-Caribbean Night Ride*), reads the headlines and some text from these Indo-Caribbean migrant papers, particularly the *Caribbean New Yorker* and the *West Indian*, during his shows, and often includes his own comments on the story. Like the host and producer of *JMC Music Mix*, he thinks of his shows as providing a community service:

> All the shows are just like playing requests and so on and then I said, 'You know, what are we doing really for this community?' Radio should be a resource material to help people. And I started thinking of using the radio like my classroom.[10]

On his programs, he reads excerpts from various sections of the papers, including the local and entertainment sections, and Caribbean and international news. During one of his shows, he emphasized US national news, saying 'It's important for us to know what's going on in this country [the US].'[11] While providing a 'link-up' to home, Indo-Caribbean migrant radio programs and newspapers represent communities in the public sphere, but they also attempt to produce Indo-Caribbean communities by providing specific types of information and services to the community, and constructing and representing a transnational Indo-Caribbean public that negotiates identity and belonging at 'home' and in the US.

Building bridges to India in New York

As Indo-Caribbean migrant media produces a public through transnational 'link-ups' to home, it also represents Indo-Caribbean communities as they negotiate belonging in the US that is mediated through relationships with other Caribbean communities as well as the Indian migrant community from South Asia. These relationships locate the global scope of Indian and Caribbean diasporas in very specific ways: in the local space of Queens and through the class- and race-based experiences of migration. The way these relationships are examined in mainstream mass media, and the ways responses to these media develop in an online Indo-Caribbean space, provide the framework for an examination of 'building bridges to India in New York'.

Two articles in the *New York Times*, published within weeks of one another, address the relationship between Indians from South Asia and those from the Caribbean (primarily Trinidad and Guyana) in Queens, New York. The first article, optimistically entitled 'For Indians Born Far Apart, Bridges of Song and Sugar Cane' (Chan, 2004), suggests that the exchange of culture between the two groups is 'blossoming' due to 'a desire to understand one another' and their 'simple proximity' to one another in the neighborhood of Richmond Hill, Queens. According to the article, the relationship between the two groups once resembled that of 'stepchildren' marked by an 'awkward tension' based on differences in language and religion and the feeling on the part

of West Indians that Indians from South Asia viewed them as 'inauthentic', but now they have been brought closer together by their 'shared Indian roots'.

The second article, more cautiously titled, 'Indian, Twice Removed' (Berger, 2004), suggests that there is a 'chasm' between these 'two kindred communities' and that Indo-Caribbeans in Richmond Hill have not been 'embraced' by the 'more flourishing Indian communities' in Queens (Flushing and Elmhurst), 'nor have they made many overtures to the Indians'. The author suggests that both groups are 'steeped in British and Hindu culture. But they pray in separate temples and play for different cricket teams.' The article reports that some West Indians feel that they are 'not quite being accepted as Indian', while others are traveling to India to 'search for their roots'.

The articles are notable because although the articles *share* a language of concern about authenticity and belonging they arrive at very *different* conclusions about the relationships among Indians from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent. I want to suggest that these articles gesture to the difficulties of examining the Indian diaspora in a place like Queens, New York, as well as a rethinking of the parameters of the South Asian diaspora. The articles provide a view of ethnic immigrant groups in Queens, positing the US as a multicultural site in which bridges are built or differences are reified. Importantly, Indians from the Caribbean and those from South Asia are understood as ethnic immigrant groups and defined in relation to one another, not as they operate in the larger landscape of the US.

These articles, printed in a mainstream media outlet, the *New York Times*, are reframed and reinterpreted when they enter Indo-Caribbean-produced media worlds. Both articles were posted on the message boards of Caribbean websites – one on a West Indies cricket website (www.windiescricket.com), the other on an international Caribbean forum website (www.cariweb.com). The location of Liberty Avenue in Richmond Hill becomes a space to examine the intersections of Indo-Caribbeanness and Indianness in the online medium. One response to the posted article reads, 'was driving through this same spot yesterday and was amazed at the number of new business that have sprouted up…. I've seen a few new Sari shops as well to complement the existing roti shops and grocery shops … yep … it's certainly a case of East meeting West …'[12] This online response emphasizes both overlap and distinction between these communities. As new sari shops that indicate Indianness join the roti shops (restaurants featuring curried stews wrapped in Indian bread), which are cultural markers of Indo-Caribbeanness, the different points of departure, East and West, are amplified in imagination, but the location of contact in Queens allows for mutuality.

From the specificities of the Richmond Hill location, the online discussions quickly became focused on the broader distinctions, as well as the overlap of identity categories, within the Indian diaspora. In response to the article and the online conversation that followed, one member asked:

So who are we? Our unique historical and cultural experience of being Indo-Caribbean separates us from the many Indians in India. We belong to

different circles of classification. These circles intersect, with other circles. Your identity is changing with the company you are in. I feel that one has to be comfortable with his/her own identity. It really doesn't matter where is it that you need to 'belong'. Your culture runs in your blood … you can take yourself out of the culture, but you cannot take the culture out of you. My Indian friends acknowledge that the Hindi language has some claims on me, and have told me that IndoCaribbean culture is more traditionally 'Indian' than that of modern India. Is one group identity more important than another, or more ethnically authentic than another?[13]

Recognizing that there are cultural and historical differences between Indian and Indo-Caribbean cultural identities, this post simultaneously reifies Indianness and Indian cultural identity through references to 'blood' and 'culture' which lay claims to authenticity and belonging.

Another member of the forum suggests that there are three responses to the question 'Who are you?' or 'What are you?' A 'country-based' response is: 'I'm Trini/guyanese/indian.' The 'ethnicity-based' response is: 'I'm east indian/from pakistan/bangladesh/guyanese/trini or I can say desi.' But there is also a 'religion-based' response that follows from and is collapsed into the categories of ethnicity and nationality: 'if you say pakistani or banglashi, you will be presumed muslim, even if you are not. if you say east indian you will be hindu. i'm hindu/muslim/sikh/others etc.'[14] The online message board post enumerates three descriptive categories for identity, distinguishing between nation, ethnicity and religion; however, each category refers back to nationality and suggests that the descriptive content needed cannot be contained in the categories of description, each overflowing into the other and reinforcing assumptions about South Asian identity in the process.

These articles in the mainstream mass media and their attendant online commentary illustrate that the claims of these groups challenge the boundaries and make-up of the South Asian diaspora, simultaneously emphasizing differences and similarities. The discussions are located in the specific space of Richmond Hill in Queens, but also in mainstream media and online communities. These mediated forums variably represent Indo-Caribbean communities negotiating belonging and identity in the US, as Indians from the Caribbean and South Asia meet up in Queens. Indo-Caribbean communities are 'building bridges with India' in specific locations and in mediated forums, gesturing to the importance of structures of cohesion within racial groups in diaspora and the role of other minoritized communities in developing an Indo-Caribbean presence in the public sphere.

The voice of the Indo-Caribbean

The *Caribbean New Yorker* is one example of New York City's Indo-Caribbean media that openly promotes an Indo-Caribbean and Indian diasporic political agenda. Because the editor is Malaysian and markets his paper under the slogan, 'The Voice of Indo-Caribbeans – The Only Weekly Serving

the Interests of Indo-Caribbeans', this publication provides an interesting insight into the role of authorship; that is, who controls the representations of Indo-Caribbean communities in New York? I have discussed the role of media producers as agents in the construction and representation of migrant and diasporic communities. Importantly, other minoritized groups play a crucial role in the development of Indo-Caribbean publics. While many of the Indo-Caribbean media outlets in New York avoid making overt claims to Indian identity, preferring instead to embrace a national or regional identity, the *Caribbean New Yorker* promotes Indianness as a main factor in its publication.

Nala Singham, the editor and publisher of the *Caribbean New Yorker*, identifies his paper as a bridge between India and the Caribbean. Regarding the content of his paper he said, 'What I found is … the Indians in the Caribbean were not represented. So I said, "This paper will represent that Indian."'[15] The development and printing of the 'voice of Indo-Caribbeans' slogan for the paper marked a shift in marketing and content that occurred in June 2005, after he participated in an ethnic media exhibition. Here he realized that many newspapers market to an ethnic, rather than a national, audience so he shifted the focus of the paper to address Indo-Caribbean interest in Indian diaspora news. The shift to this new content seems to be successful, his paper increased in length from 56 pages in April 2005 to 72 pages in August 2005 based on increased advertising revenue. With this shift in content, the paper now becomes a tool to let people know about the Indo-Caribbean population because, as he said, 'They only know Indians of Jackson Heights, they don't know about Indians of Richmond Hill',[16] drawing a distinction between the prominent South Asian commercial area of Jackson Heights and the lesser-known Indo-Caribbean neighborhood of Richmond Hill.

The *Caribbean New Yorker* often reports on and provides opinion pieces about connections between Indo-Caribbean communities and other South Asian communities in New York. For example, an opinion piece about the Indian Independence Day parade in Manhattan addressed Indo-Caribbean participation in the parade: 'Indo-Caribbeans partook in the parade … because they feel it is helping Indians of various nationalities to maintain their roots with mother India' (Bisram, 2005: 16). This article also emphasized Indo-Caribbean influence on the parade:

> Indo-Caribbean inclusion in … the organization of the parade shows how that [sic] Indo-Caribbean are increasingly being accepted by Indian nationals in their events and have seen the importance of building unity with Indians in the diaspora regardless of country of origin. (Bisram, 2005: 16)

Here the concept of an Indian diaspora becomes the crucial point of identification, while country of origin becomes secondary. However, 'mother India' remains an important focus of the article, and the parade itself, which is the topic of the article, celebrates *Indian* Independence Day. Yet there is an unequivocal emphasis on Indian unity in the diaspora and this perspective features in many of the pieces published in the *Caribbean New Yorker*.

During an animated discussion with some Indo-Guyanese community members about the role of Indo-Caribbean media in New York, one man noted:

> Indian stories are covered more in the *Caribbean New Yorker* than the other newspapers. The other newspapers are not peddling a particular race group agenda. But the *Caribbean New Yorker* to my mind is not peddling the Indian race group agenda, but giving more information about the Indian story than any other newspaper.

His friend replied, 'Right! And the publisher of that is a Malaysian.'[17] This exchange is telling in several ways. There is a valuation of this newspaper as an important voice in positioning Indo-Caribbean communities *within* the Indian diaspora and the paper is judged to assert this perspective more regularly than other Indo-Caribbean newspapers. There is also a critique of other papers for not promoting a 'race group agenda', but a reluctance to assert that the *Caribbean New Yorker* is promoting the Indian perspective over the Afro-Caribbean perspective, referencing the divisive race-based cultural politics in Trinidad and Guyana. Finally, while a second individual agrees with the comments, he also points out that the publisher is not Indo-Caribbean and thus brings into question the initial assertion of the role of the newspaper as such a voice. The publisher of the *Caribbean New Yorker* mobilizes the concept of an Indian diaspora that includes the Indo-Caribbean population, and then successfully markets this concept to an Indo-Caribbean audience. He asserts the right of Indo-Caribbean communities to be represented in the public sphere *as Indians in diaspora*, yet the authority of that 'voice' is questioned.

Conclusion

Indo-Caribbean communities enact commitments to home and commitments to India, a varied attachment that reflects both diasporic and transnational ties. As Indo-Caribbean migrant media produce some of the text of these commitments, they become sites through which to examine the relationship among transnationalism, migration and diaspora. Media producers attempt to construct and represent a public in the various spaces of New York City among communities that are divided geographically and as markets. The division between these markets results in media produced for separate audiences – Afro-Caribbean, Indo-Caribbean, and Indian – though these categories intersect and overlap. As the residential areas of these communities and their media come into contact, media representation of Indo-Caribbean communities in New York provides link-ups to home and bridges to India. Thus, while media is a tool to create markets and attract sponsors, it also reflects in the public sphere the Indo-Caribbean communities living in New York.

I have argued that Indo-Caribbean media in New York City indicate the importance of structures of cohesion within racial groups in diaspora. As

media producers negotiate the landscape of sponsors and audiences and stake a political and cultural position in that landscape, they also negotiate claims to diasporic and transnational identities. These media provide narratives of belonging and identity at home, in the US, and within Indian and Caribbean diasporas, and actively insert the Indo-Caribbean into the concept of the Indian diaspora. I return to the account with which I opened this piece to reflect on the actions of an Indo-Trinidadian New Yorker who finds a newspaper article about Hosay important enough to clip from a local weekly in New York and carry with him when he returns to Trinidad. The interplay of audience reception and demands, and market-based production decisions, as well as the desire for representation in the public sphere, results in the production of media that has cultural currency in the lives of migrants and is capable of traveling transnationally as one of the many voices that reflect Indo-Caribbean diasporic identities in the public sphere.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1 Interview with an Indo-Trinidadian New Yorker, 9 February 2006, St James, Port of Spain, Trinidad.
2 This article is based on dissertation research among Indo-Caribbean communities in New York City and Trinidad from September 2004 through June 2006. In both locations I analyzed media content and conducted interviews and participant-observation research with Indo-Caribbean cultural producers, including performers, writers, media producers and religious festival producers, as well as with a community-based cultural and arts organization and religious organizations.
3 Khandelwal notes that this residential proximity is 'an intersection of two streams of Indian diaspora immigrants' (2002: 21) in which:

> … [o]ne stream of this diaspora – the descendants of nineteenth-century migrants to Guyana and Trinidad – met up in Queens with the direct flow of immigrants from India, compounding the issues of who bore 'Indian' identity, and what Indian ethnic culture might be. (2002: 5)

4 Early discussions of creolization, such as Braithwaite's work on 'creole society' (1971), suggested the creation of a unitary Caribbean culture from existing aspects of that culture. Munasinghe (1997, 2001) has critiqued popular and scholarly understandings of creolization that posit Indo-Trinidadian creolization as the assimilation of East Indian identity to Afro-Trinidadian norms.

5 Researchers have noted the difficulties in determining the size and make-up of the Indo-Caribbean population in the US and in New York based on census figures (Gosine, 1990, 2002; Khandelwal, 2002; Warikoo, 2005). New York City Census data gives a general sense of residency patterns of the population in New York, based on foreign-born population and reported ancestry data. For example, a New York City Department of City Planning brief using decennial census data from 2000 reported that over 50 percent of the 130,600 foreign-born Guyanese in New York City and 30 percent of the 88,800 foreign-born Trinidadians and Tobagonians in New York City lived in Queens (Lobo and Salvo, 2004: 25). The southwest Queens neighborhoods of Richmond Hill, South Ozone Park, and Woodhaven-Ozone Park were home to about 25 percent of the Guyanese and about 10 percent of the Trinidadian foreign-born populations. In these neighborhoods, the Guyanese and Trinidadians were primarily of Asian Indian decent. Thirty-six percent of the Guyanese and 59 percent of the Trinidadian foreign-born populations lived in Brooklyn, primarily in the Flatbush, East Flatbush and Crown Heights neighborhoods, where the Guyanese population was primarily of African descent.

6 Interview with radio producer, 25 June 2005, Queens, New York.

7 Interview with Shantel Jaikaran, host of *JMC Music Mix*, 14 December 2005, Queens, New York.

8 Interview with Shantel Jaikaran, 14 December 2005, Queens, New York.

9 Interview with Shantel Jaikaran, 14 December 2005, Queens, New York.

10 Interview with Bhawanie Singh, host of the *Bhawanie Singh Sunday Night Show*, *Suhani Geet* and *Indo-Caribbean Night Ride*, 23 June 2005, Queens, New York.

11 *Suhani Geet*, WWRL 1240AM, 25 June 2005.

12 Posted on 6 December 2004, 01:24 p.m., on West Indies Cricket Fever Web site, Cricket Message Board, 'For Indians Born Far Apart, Bridges of Song and Sugar Cane', http://windiescricketfever.mywowbb.com/forum1/3384.html (accessed 8 November 2005).

13 Posted on 23 December 2004, 11:06 p.m. on Cariweb Web site, Intellectual Forum, 'Topic: Indian, Twice Removed', http://www.cariweb.com/cgi-bin/ultimatebb.cgi?ubb=get_topic;f=12;t=000323 (accessed 8 November 2005).

14 Posted on 22 December 2004, 02:35 p.m. on Cariweb Web site, Intellectual Forum, 'Topic: Indian, Twice Removed', http://www.cariweb.com/cgi-bin/ultimatebb.cgi?ubb=get_topic;f=12;t=000323 (accessed 8 November 2005).

15 Interview with Nala Singham, editor and publisher of the *Caribbean New Yorker*, 1 September 2005, Queens, New York.

16 Interview with Nala Singham, 1 September 2005, Queens, New York.

17 Interview with Indo-Guyanese community members, 30 June 2006, Queens, New York.

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