

# Unity in Diversity, Volume 1



Unity in Diversity, Volume 1:  
Cultural Paradigm and Personal Identity

Edited by

Julitta Rydlewska and Barbara Braid

**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

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# INTRODUCTION

JULITTA RYDLEWSKA

## **“Who is it that can tell me who I am?”**

*(King Lear, 1.4.221)*

“Who am I?” The answer to this question, either verbalized or sensed only, is one of the most important issues a human being has to address in life. This is a question about possessing the continuous self, about the internal concept of oneself as an individual. How do we learn who we are? Margaret Mahler, a Hungarian-born psychoanalyst and psychiatrist, focused in her research on the question of how children attain their sense of individuality. She proved that the process of the formation of individual identity begins at about the age of six months. At this time the toddler enters the phase of separation-individuation which is marked by the development of ego, cognitive abilities and mastering communication with others (Mahler 1975). The child becomes aware of and interested in the surroundings and as it learns to walk and talk it becomes increasingly curious and anxious to explore the surroundings. Though it differentiates itself from its mother and gets more independent of her, it uses its mother as the point of reference. Then comes the stage of first crisis when the child is torn between staying connected with its mother and venturing forth into the unknown. The next major identity crisis comes, according to Erik Erikson, with the age of puberty (1968). Erikson conceived 8 stages of psychosocial development, the fifth one, beginning with puberty and ending with adolescence, is marked by polar attitudes creating a conflict of identity vs. identity confusion. Young people are confused about the roles they play; ponder on who they are or whom they are going to be; quite often they ask the question ‘where do I come from?’ They wonder if their parents are their biological parents or maybe they were adopted or mistakenly exchanged in the maternity ward. Many psychologists, Erikson included, believe that personality development takes place through a series of crises that must be resolved and internalized. The holistic personality theory oxymoronically called Theory of Positive Disintegration authored by Polish psychologist and psychiatrist Kazimierz Dąbrowski implies that

personality development is possible thanks to disintegration of primary structures in preparation for the next developmental stage. After the initial spontaneous and chaotic phase of the process we arrive at a stage of conscious auto-creation in which internal conflicts and identity crises trigger personal growth. The theory was conceived and developed in the 1960s and 1970s, however interest in it has been revived and practical implications of the proposed solutions are being sought for in the fields of psychology and education, particularly in Canada and the USA. In today's rapidly changing world, due to the pace of life and the increasing sense of instability, identity crises seem even more common than before.

### **“Simply the thing I am / shall make me live”**

*(All's Well That Ends Well, 4.3.327-8)*

Total congruence of personality, behaviour and identity can be desirable but are not attainable. The image of the self undergoes changes with time and the individual's experience. Carl Rogers, an American counselling psychologist, postulates that, paradoxically, we can change only when we fully accept ourselves as we are (1989). A practical implication of this postulation can be found in the modern media: the (unconditional) positive regard for oneself is the starting point of the metamorphoses presented in the life-style TV shows of Trinny Woodall and Susannah Constantine, and Gok Wan. The participants are women who disapprove of their outer appearance and desperately want a transformation from the ugly duckling into the beautiful swan. Before they are advised on what to wear and how to wear it they are told and taught to love their bodies and be proud of themselves. What the presenters try to do is to instil in the participants the knowledge that the perception they have of themselves is not genuinely their own, but it is only a reflection of a culturally and socially constructed image of the woman; that their guiding thoughts are about what they *should* and not what they *want* to be. At the end of the show we can see a new, attractive and self-confident woman, presumably a person who has just constructed her new self. Surely we can suspect that for the sake of the show, to some degree at least, the whole situation and the metamorphosis are directed. However, it is the therapeutic message which is passed on to the audience that matters.

Inner consistency, when treated instrumentally, can be seen as a mere tool which helps the individual go through life, make decisions or perform actions. What happens if the knowledge (cognition) about oneself or the environment, the set of values and beliefs, is not consistent with the knowledge of the person's performance, feelings or thoughts? How to deal



with such a psychological discomfort? One of the ways to get away from this trap is to rationalize the inconsistencies:

[...] the person who continues to smoke, knowing that it is bad for his health, may also feel (a) he enjoys smoking so much it is worth it; (b) the chances of his health suffering are not as serious as some would make out; (c) he can't always avoid every possible dangerous contingency and still live; and (d) perhaps even if he stopped smoking he would put on weight which is equally bad for his health. So, continuing to smoke is, after all, consistent with his ideas about smoking (Festinger 1985, 2).

However, such attempts to rationalize the inconsistencies are not always successful – the “nonfitting relations among cognitions” (Festinger 1985, 3) remain, to produce what Leon Festinger calls cognitive dissonance.

Let us imagine a person who has some cognition which is both highly important to him and also highly resistant to change. This might be a belief system which pervades an appreciable part of his life and which is so consonant with many other cognitions that changing the belief system would introduce enormous dissonance. [...] Let us further imagine that an event occurs and impinges on this person's cognition creating strong dissonance with the existing cognition (1985, 198-199).

George Talbot, a leading character from Philippa Gregory's historical novel *The Other Queen*, experiences a crisis of confidence in his own powers, a crisis of his self-identification as the Earl of Shrewsbury, an independent, honourable, loyal and dutiful peer of England. He is chosen as the host and jailor of Mary Queen of Scots, whom Elizabeth I orders to be beheaded after 16 years of keeping her in custody at the expense of the Talbots. The assignment, initially seen by George Talbot and his businesswoman/developer wife Bess as honour and privilege turns into a burden which ruins their fortune.

I am nobody's agent. I am no bought opinion. I am no hired blade. I am neither Cecil's spy nor executioner. I wish to God that I were not here in London, on this bad business, but home at Chatsworth House with my darling innocent wife Bess, in the simple country and far away from the conspiracies and perils of court. I can't say that I am happy. I can't say that I like this. But I will do my duty—God knows that I always do my duty (Gregory 2011, 4).

The man who used to be his own master realizes that he does not have any control over the events which happen in his environment, the information that reaches him, the political plans of the queen and the pivotal role she has designed for him. The official custodian of Queen

Mary becomes her secret friend and admirer, ruining his marriage and his inner consistency. Grounded in his own sense of identity, he feels at loss when confronted with his own emotions and new expectations created by the politics of the state and the plotting of the Scots Queen.

I am not myself. The thought checks me as I go down the creaking stairs and let myself out of the front door. A sentry in the doorway gives an awkward salute as he sees me and lets me go by. I am not myself. I am not the husband that I was, not the servant of the queen. I am not longer a Talbot, famed for loyalty and steadiness of purpose. I no longer sit well in my clothes, in my place, in my dignity. I feel blown all about, I feel tumbled over by these great gales of history. I feel like a powerless boy (Gregory 2011, 227).

Experiencing cognitive dissonance is part and parcel of human existence. "In place of 'dissonance' one can substitute other notions similar in nature, such as 'hunger', 'frustration', or 'disequilibrium'" writes Festinger (1985, 3). The emotional discomfort triggered by holding inconsistent attitudes (cognitions) or the inner conflict resulting from the inconsistency between beliefs and overt behaviour leads to attitude modification so to make the belief pattern congruent with own behaviour or new cognitions, thus to re-defining of the self. The frequency of occurrence, direction, success or failure of this process depends on many factors. Such an act of disintegration/re-integration has been a recurrent motif in culture and literature from *King Oedipus*, to *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* to *The Star Wars* trilogy.

**“Thus I play in one person many people /  
And none contented”**

(*Richard II*, 5.5.31-32)

The self-defining process, the discovery of the self takes place in the context of culture and society. The impact of social experience is felt across the whole lifespan. Socialization exerted by parents, family and friends, acculturation to stereotypes and limited and limiting roles, inheritance of local identity and cultural myths, acknowledgment of the legacy of history contribute to the formation of poly-identity comprised of personal, racial, national, group or gender identities. The formation of identity is an ongoing process in which the knowledge of the self stands in relation to the society. One of the proposed distinctions concerned with identity that can be found in modern psychology is the distinction between personal identity and social identity. On the one hand an individual has

knowledge about his/her own feelings and needs, on the other hand perceives himself/herself in the social context, and is aware of social requirements in the form of 'social laws' and practices, expectations and desires of close community.

The name which is given to us on the day of birth is emblematic of our identity. Numerology, an ancient based method of fortune-telling attaches a series of digits to a person's name to reveal the person's true nature or predict the future. The act of changing one's name into a new one for some people maybe a manifestation of breaking with their previous life and identity they do not accept, for others, like artists, assuming a pen or stage name may stand for acquiring a new public image, their artistic identity. One of the elements of marital rites of passage the bride is supposed to go through in patriarchal society is to give up her family name and assume the name of her husband—her tribal affiliation, her sense of belonging to a particular social group and her erstwhile identity have to change. However, today's growth of gender awareness and its legal recognition allow women to retain their maiden names on marriage as an overt manifestation of their personal identity.

Social pressure or stimulation may lead to mental transformations resulting in dissolution of the previous identity and a new self-definition. Torture used in witch trials in pre-modern Europe led not only to false confessions and accusations, but it could also make the victim believe to be a witch. Several young girls of Salem, stimulated by voodoo tales, claimed to be possessed by the devil. Their subsequent and indiscriminate accusations resulted in the execution of innocent people. The community of Salem responded to the psychosocial situation with general public panic. The fear sprang from the system of beliefs held at those times—witchcraft worked because the persons involved believed in it. Surely, public executions of witches were used by the authorities as a means to threaten and intimidate the local people, but they could also give them a sense of belonging to a particular community, the community of rule-abiding non-witches. Past and present, mass events create and sustain social identity. Sports and culture shows, fundraisers and even house parties all help in understanding of the self as a social being.

National identity is inseparable from history—it has its roots in religion and politics of the past. The relationship between the individual and the community is embedded in historical moments, myths and rituals which resonate with other societies. Being an "ideological construction by which [a nation] defines its difference from its neighbours and from the rest of the international community" (Howells 2005, 11), a nation's identity is construed in relation to some unifying symbols specific of the national

heritage, though it is “an increasingly difficult thing to do in the late modern world of global communications and transnational economic relations” (Howells 2005, 11). The central symbol for Canadian culture is wilderness and the myth of survival, a multi-faceted and adaptable idea, a survival of the early settlers in the face of hostile elements but also survival of a crisis or disaster; for the Americans this is the symbol of the frontier, a flexible idea that suggests a place which is new and where the old order can be discarded and life is expanding; the English culture is unified by the island, a self-contained body politic, evolving organically, with a hierarchical structure (Atwood 1972, 31-32). Polish culture and national identity would evolve around partitions, wars and uprisings, the Romantic heritage, and more recently around the Solidarity movement and the person of John Paul II.

Will people continue making historical sense of their lives out of material and symbolic aspects of national heritage? Will pan-European identity or global consumer culture replace the national ones? Maybe we shall witness a resurgence of nationalisms in the years to come. Or maybe we shall simply learn how to peaceably and comfortably function simultaneously in more than one culture, just as we learn how to perform different roles in life. Formation of identity, either personal or social, is a cumulative and inexorable process.

### **“What is your substance, whereof are you made?”**

(William Shakespeare, *Sonnet 53.1*)

The essays in this collection explore the issues of multiple social and ethnic identities. The contributors are scholars of multicultural experience who employ different interpretative strategies indicative of different backgrounds and interests. Offering literary, cultural, social, and historical perspectives the essays discuss issues related to the fields of contemporary literature, (popular) culture, gender studies, sociology, and history.

The first group of essays by Ferne Louanne Regis, Simon Bacon, Karen Sanderson Cole, Joanna Witkowska and Hui-Lien Yeh examine the topics of ethnic and national identity. Simon Bacon bases his discussion of difference and otherness in the film *The Breed* directed by Michael Oblowitz. In this vampire narrative set in a dystopian future vampirism metaphorically conflates with Jewish Diaspora. The newly emergent vampire community, excluded from the human, normalized society, is exiled into the otherness. Considering the category of otherness in relation to diasporic identity the author concludes that collective identity is constructed by forms of experience that interrelate memory, history and

belonging. Ferne Louanne Regis's essay explores (from historical and modern perspectives) the marginalization of the *Douglas* in the society, literature and popular culture of today's Trinidad. This ethnic group of mixed African and Indian descent, though present in Trinidad from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is not seen as a collective identity. The ambiguous position they have in the society limits their impact on their environment. Though the *Douglas* are no longer totally omitted in the public discourse, their position still remains ambivalent. Maintaining the sense of national identity in the times of a crisis is the concern of the essay by Joanna Witkowska. Examining the accounts of those involved, the author describes the experience of Polish pilots who found their temporal home in Britain during World War II. Though plunged into a different and unknown culture and facing the threat of death in combat, they managed to retain their identity of Polish fighter pilots, which they manifested in their behaviour, thus preserving their personal and professional integrity and fighting with the misconceptions about Poles. Karen Sanderson Cole and Hui-Lien Yeh in their studies of two novels investigate the issue of ethnic identity. Gloria Naylor's novel *Mama Day* (Karen Sanderson Cole) combining African oral tradition with elements of European romance shows how these traditions can be creolized in the context of a new World. The central romance of two Black characters serves as a vehicle for fashioning a new identity of African Diaspora out of cultural patterns and stereotypes. The ghost in Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (Hui-Lien Yeah) is not a mere superstition but an intermediary in the process of retrieving ethnic identity: it represents the protagonist's otherness and, metaphorically, Chinese American ethnicity.

The three final essays by Barbara Kijek, Barbara Braid and Diana Ismail address the question of gender identity in literature. Representing feminist disability studies, in her reading of Michael Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* Barbara Braid talks about "pathologisation of the female identity" in (Neo-)Victorian society resulting from the society's exorbitant demands, norms of femininity, and stifled lifestyles which lead to "madness"—cases of eccentric or unfeminine behaviours. In the textual analysis of Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* Barbara Kijek presents the woman as a consumable commodity in patriarchal society which traditionally constructs the man as a carnivore and the hunter and the woman as the game and prey. But eventually the female protagonist manages to reintegrate her mind and body to become a "subject and consumer herself." Successive editions of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* are the concern of Diana Ismail, who investigates how female and male attributes are characterized by the poet. The analysis of the text from

the point of view of the use of vocabulary, figures of speech and images brings about the conclusion that gender in *The Leaves of Grass* appears to be a flexible concept as no strict boundaries between the male and female are found.

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**PART ONE:**

**ETHNIC AND NATIONAL IDENTITY**





## CHAPTER ONE

### THE DOUGLA IN TRINIDAD: OMITTED OR DENIED?

FERNE LOUANNE REGIS

The development of modern Trinidad dates to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century when the then Spanish administration invited French Antillean planters to settle in the island. Since then, development has been accompanied by continual contestation for power and access to resources between Spaniards, French, and the British who captured the island in 1797, groups of West Africans who came as slaves and as free men, Indians who came as indentured labourers between 1845 and 1917, and members of other smaller racial/ethnic groups. The Indians and the Africans, the two largest groups, have been involved in direct contestation for several decades and this has marginalized the *Douglas*, the offspring of Indo-African unions.

The comparatively recent academic preoccupation with ethnicity and the corollary preoccupation with establishing right to presence have generated a considerable corpus of texts in social history. Professional and amateur historians have published biographies, autobiographies, family studies and histories of the clan and of the tribe. Celebrations of anniversaries of arrival have generated copious documents. Social scientists have also tested their numerous hypotheses about the multiple complex processes of Creolisation. In the press of ethnic concerns, however, the *Douglas* have been almost completely overlooked in some cases and deliberately marginalized in others.

The chapter establishes the historical antecedents for the marginalization of the *Douglas* and their ambiguous position in today's society. It begins by mapping the entry of East Indians into Trinidad as the background to establishing the position of *Douglas* in the social pyramid which perpetuates to some extent the classical race-ethnicity-class divisions inherited from slavery, indentureship and colonialism.

## The Dougla

The term *Dougla* derives from the Indic *dogla* which is defined by Platts (1884, 534) as a person of impure breed, a hybrid, a mongrel; a two-faced or deceitful person and a hypocrite. In its transplanted usage by the Indians in Trinidad and Guyana, however, the term *Dougla* is employed to designate the offspring of an Indian and an African (Creole) and previously meant “outcaste” (Malik 1971, 20).

Our ignorance of the fine details of social life among the indentured Indians who migrated to Trinidad between 1845 and 1917 denies us knowledge of the period during which the term *Dougla* was applied to the first generation Indo-Africans but by 1933, the term appeared in mainstream creative writing as the descriptor for such children. Through continued processes of semantic expansion and later amelioration, however, the term now denotes “all persons of mixed African and Indian descent” (Alleyne 2002, 236). A *Dougla* is, therefore, the offspring of any of the following combinations:

African mother/ Indian father;  
 African father/ Indian mother;  
 African mother/*Dougla* father;  
 African father/ *Dougla* mother;  
 Indian mother/ *Dougla* father;  
 Indian father/ *Dougla* mother;  
*Dougla* mother/ *Dougla* father.

While genotype and phenotype dictate that a *Dougla* is the offspring of African and Indian lineage, the degree of this mixture is always a cause for contention and raises a major problem in the business of establishing a distinct *Dougla* identity. Rahim (2007) asserts that it is the degree of Indianness that is the major element in the ascription of *Dougla* identity but perception and self-perception similarly play critical roles in assessing the *Dougla* identity. Age, class, education, gender, regional location and sex also figure prominently in perception and self-perception and it is not certain how many of those categorising themselves in the official censuses as “Mixed,” “Other” or “Not stated” may be counted as *Douglas* by others including *Douglas*. Trinidad’s hypersensitivity to colour is another determinant. Light-skinned *Douglas* may well escape the designation but their darker skinned counterparts—who in some cases may be their relatives—may be unable to do so. *Douglas*’s perception of themselves also creates the problem of identity and linkage. At any point in time *Douglas* can align themselves to one ancestor group or the other without claiming a

separate identity. On the other hand, because of personal circumstances and experiences, *Douglas* may disavow either community and declare themselves Trinidadian, thus claiming a national identity as an ethnic identity, as happens in Belize for reasons of affirming allegiance to national sovereignty (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985, 232-243). *Dougla* identity is therefore polymorphous and adds another layered dimension to a society described by some as plural and by others as stratified.

## **The Coming of the Indians**

The early 19th-century Trinidad was a plantation economy based on the labour of enslaved Africans. Emancipation in 1838 precipitated fears among British planters that they would be forced out of sugar production. Instead of rationalizing their methods of production they chose to persist with the time-tested practice of deploying cheap reliable labour especially during the period of harvest. China, Madeira, Africa, Venezuela and the British West Indies were tapped as labour sources. Between 1853 and 1866, 2048 Chinese labourers arrived to work on the estates mainly in Central Trinidad, while between 1846-1859 some 1300 Portuguese labourers were recruited from the archipelago of Madeira off the Atlantic coast of North Africa (Ferreira 1994, 17). Between 1841 and 1867, over 10,000 freed and re-captive Africans from Sierra Leone, St Helena and the Kru coast near Liberia added to the ethnic complexity of the island (Warner-Lewis 1991, 14). Wood (1968) reports that from the end of 1839 to the end of 1849, 10,278 British West Indians immigrated to Trinidad. India, however, proved to be the most suitable source for plantation labour and some 145,000 East Indians were introduced into Trinidad between 1845 and 1917.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century increasing numbers of indentured Indians opted to make Trinidad their new home by accepting the government's grant of land in lieu of a return passage to India. Like foreigners to any country, the Indians who lived in Trinidad in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century initially formed a closed community. This enabled them to preserve and maintain their languages, culture and religious rites and rituals. Their spatial and occupational segregation ensured the retention, reinterpretation and in some cases fossilisation of major cultural practices. Their intercourse with other ethnic groups, however, added to the population of mixed individuals and their intercourse with Africans birthed the *Douglas* with whom they had shared an ambivalent relationship throughout the years.

Most conventional scholarship follows Donald Wood's (1968) lead in denying Indo-African sexual unions until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Wood reproduces a 19<sup>th</sup> century document which is often cited as the major evidence of Indian attitudes towards the Africans during indentureship:

Some [Indians] who had returned to Calcutta from British Guiana were asked by the protector of Immigrants there what they thought of Africans. "They spoke of them with the greatest disgust, saying they are a coarse woolly headed race, more like monkeys than human beings and that they never associated with them in any way" (138).

To this Wood adds, "There seems no reason to believe that the Indians who went to Trinidad thought any more favourably of their neighbours" (1968, 138). Wood also notes that as late as in 1871, 26 years after their arrival, "Dr. Henry Mitchell [Protector of the Immigrants] believed that no single instance of co-habitation with a Negro existed among the 9,000 male and female indentured labourers" (1968, 138). The information supplied by Wood functions as the basis for the denial of the *Douglas* presence in the 19th-century Trinidad.

The historical accounts and commentaries, which testify to Indian sexual self-restraint where Africans are concerned, are countered inadvertently by John Morton, the Presbyterian missionary who proselytized the Indian immigrants of South and Central Trinidad particularly. In 1876 he recorded that "A few children are to be met with born of Madras and Creole parents and some also of Madras and Chinese parents – the Madrassee being the mother" (qtd. in Moore 1995, 238). Morton surmises that the dark-skinned Madrassee women who cohabited with Creoles and Chinese were enticed by the creature comforts which could be provided by African drivers and stock-keepers and Chinese shopkeepers.

It is not outside the realm of possibility that some of those "dark-skinned Madrassee women" who cohabited with Africans may themselves have been *Douglas*. Fitz Baptiste, reporting on his study tour of India, testifies to evidence of an ancient *Douglas* tradition inside India and concludes that from the geographical location of this tradition, "We may well have to consider that indentures who came here would have some kind of mixture" (Duke-Westfield 1997, 10). There are, however, no historical reports or accounts that suggest there were any persons who were dougloid. One wonders if those recording the arrival and settlement of the Indians wrote off the *Douglas* as madrassee because of their dark skins and curly hair. One wonders even more at the status of these *Douglas* who would have formed part of the group of Indian indentured labourers: what was life like for them given the ambivalence of their

ethnic make-up and the negative and pejorative connotations signalled by this make-up?

### **The Comparative Invisibility of the *Dougla***

In Trinidad where being of mixed ancestry is sometimes looked upon as the characteristic of the true indigene, *Douglas* in general still wear the stigma associated with the mutual aversion shared by some Africans and Indians. Indo-Trinidadian historians studiously ignore the *Dougla* presence and we are indebted to foreign Trinidadianists like Niehoff (1960) and Malik (1971) for their illumination of Indo-Trinidadian perspectives on this seemingly taboo group.

Ramesar, who married into the Indo-Trinidadian community, accepts the reality of inter-racial sexual relations in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century although she seems reluctant to acknowledge the Africans as sexual partners for the Indians and does not ever mention the word *Dougla* in her detailed study of the Indians in Trinidad between 1880 and 1946 (1994). In her study, the *Dougla* presence is hidden in the generic term "Indian Creoles", a term which, as Kuczynski points out, was used in the 1946 census to refer to "persons of mixed East Indian origin, on the whole people who had an East Indian father or an East Indian mother only" (339).

Examining the statistics which testify to Indian-African sexual liaisons in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Ramesar is quick to point out that the percentages were less for the Indians than for the Chinese. Subscribing to the traditional myths of Indian purity and perhaps of anti-African bias, she points out that inter-racial sexual relationships happened more readily in the city of Port of Spain and on estates in places like Cedros on the south-western promontory than on the sugar estates in Central Trinidad where the majority of Indian communities were located. Contrary to Ramesar's opinion, however, the demographic evidence indicates African-Indian unions even in areas dominated by the Indians, a fact confirmed in Harewood's assertion that "[t]he pattern for the Mixed ethnic group is generally similar to that of the population of African descent" (1994, 105).

Although Ramesar offers the explanation that the Indian fathers of mixed race children in urban areas were "probably westernized individuals who sought educated spouses", she concedes, "changed social relationships had also affected the lower levels in society" (1994, 146). This too is countered by other evidence. Thomasos' short story "The Dougla" (1933), C.L.R. James' "Triumph" (1929) and his novel *Minty Alley* (1936) as well as Alfred Mendes' novel *Black Fauns* (1935) demonstrate that inter-racial mixing was not necessarily inspired by social climbing. In their works

*Douglas* formed part of Black lower class urban society where their presence occasioned no particular comment about their ethnicity. In point of fact, they are presented as deracinated individuals engaged in the amoral struggle for survival which was the lot of the lower class Africans in Port of Spain.

The 19th-century attitudes to *Douglas* still inform the thinking of some Indians. In 2005 while delivering the feature address at the official launch of the Indian Arrival Day Heritage Village set up by the El Dorado Shiv Mandir, Elizabeth Rosabelle Sieusarran, a lecturer at the then School of Continuing Studies at the University of West Indies, said:

In our quest for establishing unity among our people it is imperative for us to note a rapidly increasing phenomenon from the rise of a western system of education and the consequential westernisation of the Indian community. This has resulted in the prevalence of inter-caste, inter religious and inter-racial marriages. The Indian community has to decide how to handle the offspring of this significant group locally referred to as *douglas*. Do we accept them or ostracise them? Whatever course is adopted, the fragmentation of the Indian community must be avoided. Above all, [...] Our ancestors gave their blood and we have laboured to enrich our country. We live in a multi-cultural society and co-existence is a necessary ingredient for our success in the future (Bowman 2005, 5).

Although Sieusarran invites her audience to reflect upon the problems caused by westernisation, she reduces all of these to the fragmentation caused by “the prevalence of inter-caste, inter-religious and inter-racial marriages”. She then ignores the progeny of the many Indian-non-Indian relationships who are visible on the social landscape, and targets the *Douglas* as the source of the problem of fragmentation within the Indian community. While this acknowledgement of the existence of the *Douglas* and of their organic connection to the Indian communities goes beyond the traditional Indian perception of their community, Sieusarran’s statement is rooted in the 19th-century prejudice against Indian cohabitation with Africans. According to the report, at one point during her address she stopped and looked around the mandir allegedly to see if there were any *Douglas* present. This action and the general tone of her address indicate that the *Douglas* is still perceived as a problem by some Indians even while they advocate co-existence in a multi-cultural society.

### **Mixed, Other or Not Stated?**

What is perceived impressionistically as a growth in the population of *Douglas* is not represented in the official censuses which mystify the

situation of the growing *Dougla* population. Kuczynski points out that the 1931 census noted that 1713 persons were born to Indian fathers only while 805 were born to Indian mothers only: a total of 2518. Clearly much had changed since the days of John Morton, or conversely Morton may have misrepresented the complicity of Indian males in miscegenation. While Kuczynski's statistics implicate both males and females in the business of miscegenation, with males twice as likely to co-habit with non-Indians than females, they do not inform us of the race of the other parent.

Kuczynski also points out that in the 1946 census East Indian Creoles were explained as "persons of mixed East Indian origin, on the whole people who had an East Indian father or an East Indian mother only" (1953, 339). For this category he gives the number of 8406 without providing the information about the sex of the parents as he had done for the 1931 census; he also does not inform about the race or ethnicity of the other parent. Harewood (1975, 96) informs us that these 8406 souls were included in the category "Mixed" where they joined a total of 70,369 mulattoes and other people of mixed racial ancestry. The ill-defined categories "Other" and "Not Stated" read suspiciously as attitudes to enumeration by ethnicity rather than a declaration of belonging to any of the categories recognizable by phenotype and "identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order" (Barth 1969, 10-11) hold sway. The *Douglas* were lost in all of this.

The national population census of 2011, however, includes under the umbrella category "mixed" a separate sub-category which recognises this particular mixture. Although it fails to employ the term *Dougla* perhaps because of a taboo against its usage in formal documents and situations, the fact that the authorities have acknowledged *Douglas* as a group is a welcome step.

## **The *Dougla* in the Social Structure**

Although Morton confirmed a *Dougla* presence in Trinidad as early as 1876, *Douglas* were and still are never truly seen as a collective identity. This is so because of the absence of identifiable locations and of distinguishing cultural features. Despite what seems to be a relaxation of hostility to mixed marriages (St Bernard 2000) and despite the declaration by Alleyne (2002) about the potential benefits of hybrid groups, *Douglas* are not specifically designated in the most recent official census as constituting a marginal ethnic community or even a biracial minority group. They are denied that corporate identity because of what Schilling-

Estes (2004) describes as the dominant culture's belief that "'authentic' tribal groups must be of homogenous rather than multi-tribal origin" (167). It is quite possible that the failure on the part of officialdom to register the *Douglas* as a group may have resulted in the failure of the *Douglas* to recognize themselves as such. Lacking official recognition and sharing the categories "Mixed" and "Other" with individuals of any of the numerous permutations possible may have been a factor in their failure to declare themselves an ethnic group or a biracial minority.

*Douglas* are a relatively new addition to the social landscape and their ambiguous positioning has denied them the chance to impact their social environment in the way other late arriving immigrant groups have done. Trinidad has been described as a plantation economy and society in the sense that the hierarchy which governed the plantation during the period of colonialism is still in evidence today (Best and Levitt 2009). Socio-economic status is no longer dependent solely upon race, ethnicity and colour but these are still important determinants of social position. Most of Trinidad's recent social history is characterized by a continuous contestation for power and access to resources on the part of the groups that make up the society. *Douglas*, who did not form a group, were marginal to the contestations of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries when tensions centred around the attempts by the white plantocracy to constrain the emerging black and brown meritocracy (Brereton 1979).

As individuals, *Douglas* too were granted the vote when the granting of universal adult suffrage in 1946 elevated the African-Indian contestation to the national stage but the subsequent ethnicisation of politics removed them even further from the centre of national affairs. This marginalisation is adequately captured in calypsonian Dougl'a's "Split Me in Two" (1961) which highlights the predicament of the *Dougl'a* in a situation in which ethnicity was becoming more assertive and aggressive as the two major groups sought to position themselves advantageously in the soon-to-be-independent Trinidad and Tobago.

Despite the promises of constitutional independence the social and economic inequalities of colonialism persisted. The Black Power Revolution of 1970 symbolized the ethnic and also class-based contestation between Black and White but the Indians read in Black Power's acceptance of African identity markers, a summons for the reinvigoration of their Hindu selves (Vertovec 1992). Regis (2002, 40) notes that in the post-1970 revitalization of Hinduism, "'Indian' became synonymous with 'Hindu', an exclusionary identification which marginalized the urban pro-PNM Muslims and Christians." It also further marginalized the *Douglas* whose part African heritage renders them suspect to many Indians.



In the post-1970 period the “seasonal rhetoric of race relations was replaced by a metadiscourse of race” (Harney 1996, 37) as African-Indian contestation dominated social and even cultural life. This was dramatised in the late 1980s when a heated debate arose after the National Alliance for Reconstruction, the government of the day, proposed a plan for compulsory national service. This proposal foundered because purists, actuated by their own fears, anxieties and insecurities, represented it as a reprehensible scheme for enforced miscegenation. The term *douglarisation*, the process by which *Douglas* are birthed, was bandied about as potentially the most unwelcome outcome of the plan as spokespersons claiming to represent silent masses of Indians and Africans engaged in a protracted debate (Regis 2002, 49-69). This debate ignored the sensitivities of *Dougla* individuals: no collective *Dougla* voice emerged to participate in the prolonged national debate; also, *Douglas* were not invited qua *Douglas* to publicly pronounce on the issue.

In Trinidad despite the presence of numerous individuals of mixed ‘race(s)’, group theory based on race and latterly on ethnicity still holds sway (Best 1991). Mixed individuals have always been free to choose the group to which they belong or the group which accommodates them. The absence of an ancestral, or better, of one ancestral homeland which functions as a symbolic homeland and source of inspiration and consolation may have also militated against the formation of a *Dougla* community. Unlike other recognised ethnic groups *Douglas* lack an organization and a headquarters, and this further contributes to the absence of a recognised community.

It is still too early to gauge the impact of official recognition in the 2010 census and in other sociological and political polls.

## Portrayals in Literature and Popular Culture

Although *Douglas* are present in the creative writing of the 1930s, *Dougla* identity as a social construct was not the central issue in those works even when major characters were *Douglas*.

*Douglas* are marginal even in the Calypso, the popular song-dance art form which originated in Trinidad. Although the Calypso claims justifiably to be “an editorial in song of the life that we undergo” (Duke 1967, “What is a Calypso”), the *Dougla* as a theme or subject is largely absent despite the fact that several competent *Dougla* singers such as King Iere, Dougla, Young Killer, Kenny J and Skatie have graced the calypso stage from the 1920s to the present. The neglect of the *Dougla* is even more remarkable when one considers Louis Regis’ affirmation that “Calypso fictions and

narratives venture into vitally important areas of social discourse which because of unspoken protocol of civil discourse remain sensitive areas of darkness" (1998, 31). The national debate on douglarisation in the late 1980s generated only a few calypsos which is a surprising development given the intensity of the debate and the number of individuals making public statements.

A measure of the society's general indifference to the *Dougla* question is the general lack of public response even when calypsos on the *Dougla* are popular or controversial. In 1961, calypsonian Dougla, whose sobriquet reflects his acceptance and affirmation of his identity, composed and performed "Split Me in Two" in which the narrator represents the situation of the Dougla as one of isolation from or of dangerous neutrality between the warring Africans and Indians intent upon positioning their group strategically in the soon-to-become independent state. Dougla's protagonist recounts situations which may be characteristic calypso fictions or exaggerations, and may not have been the life experiences of Dougla himself who was a native of Belmont, a tolerant district of Port of Spain. The narrator/protagonist of "Split Me in Two" describes his childhood as one of loneliness: "always by myself like a lil monkey/ Not one single child wouldn't play with me". He narrates a traumatic and perhaps fictional incident in adulthood when warring Africans and Indians equally but separately beat him as a member of the rival group. In the final stanza, however, he redeems *Dougla* identity in terms of its ability to boast not one heritage but two. This well-composed calypso elevated him to national Calypso King, the most prestigious award in calypsodom. This public recognition and acclaim, however, did not promote any sustained national interest in the predicament of the *Douglas*; neither did they promote the emergence of a collective *Dougla* voice.

Neither did a voice emerge when the debate on douglarisation claimed the attention of the national community in the 1980s. Instead, calypsonian The Mighty Composer, a member of the African Advancement, an organization opposed to racial inter-marriage, wrote "Douglarisation" which argues for "peaceful co-existence" and "mutual respect and cooperation" but insists, "Douglarisation is bending nature's laws". Like Morton and Ramesar, Composer cannot countenance the possibility of disinterested love across ethnic boundaries and barriers. The ambivalence towards *Douglas* is evident in all quarters.

A decade later, Brother Marvin projects *Dougla* identity in his "Jahaaji Bhai" (1996) but, perhaps conscious that a party with its centre of gravity in the Indian communities had ascended to government, subsumes this *Dougla* identity in Indo-Trinidadian identity and his privileging of the

latter at the expense of African identity embroiled his beautiful calypso in a mega-controversy. Marvin intended the extremely popular “Jahaaji Bhai” to unite the ethnic groups based on the shared experience of immigration, but his third stanza sparked controversy:

For those who playing ignorant  
 Talking ‘bout true African descendant  
 If yuh want to know the truth  
 Take a trip back to yuh roots  
 And somewhere on that journey  
 Yuh go see a man in a **dhoti**  
 Saying he prayers in front a **jhandi**

Some Pan African activists repudiated this stanza and by extension the entire calypso while the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha, which claims to represent Hindu Trinidad, invited Marvin to their annual Phagwa (Holi) celebrations and crowned him their Monarch in a political ploy perhaps meant to compensate for his not winning the Calypso Monarch title. The Africans and Indians, caught up in the heat of their personal argument, ignored the fact that the calypso began as Marvin’s affirmation of his *Dougla* identity. As happened in the late 1980s, the *Dougla* voice was not invited to mediate the dispute between the Africans and Indians or even to speak for the *Douglas* as a group. The *Dougla* dilemma, as some term it, is not seen as a national issue. In spite of its intent, “Jahaaji Bhai” exemplifies the peculiar situation that the inevitable mixing of the African and Indian has not made circumstances any less rigid but in fact has conjured up even more complex issues of ethnic loyalty.

### Emergent *Dougla* Identity

Reddock’s (1994) essay is the first academic study on the *Douglas*. The paper highlights the concerns of the people of mixed African and Indian descent in the face of inter-ethnic conflict which underlies many social relations in the country and which escalates during periods of political or economic crisis. It also purports to “give expression to a reality which for too long has existed in the shadows of our being” (1994, 99). Reddock concludes that *Dougla* and douglarisation connote different things for each donor group. For some Indians douglarisation represents “increasing domination for Indians by an inferior cultural group, the Africans in a (sic) Afro-Creole dominant society. While for some Africans it represents one solution to the present problem of racial tension” (1994,

123). Additionally, some see douglarisation as a reality while others treat it as a metaphor.

Reddock confirms that, for most of their existence, *Douglas* did not make their voice heard as *Douglas* about the issues in the country that were affecting them. Even when they were the subjects of discussion they were generally objectified and treated dismissively and negatively. In fact, *Douglas* generally fail to speak up as individuals or as representatives of a silent unnumbered minority. This noticeable silence is a phenomenon contrary to standard practice in Trinidad where self-declared spokespersons aggressively claim to represent sections of the masses on all issues and especially the pervasive ethnicisation of same. Although Trinidad is a society where “ethnicity permeates all of society’s social, cultural, political and economic institutions and practices” (Yelvington 1993, 1) concerns about *Douglas* identity do not play a central role in the daily corporate life of the nation. In all fairness, however, it can be pointed out that mixed race individuals operate as individuals, making their separate peace with the system and negotiating their separate paths to success or survival through the entanglements of ethnic contestation.

Revising the essay in 2000 Reddock voices the opinion that the ascension of a largely Indo-Trinidadian administration could bring about “an entirely new range of responses to Douglarisation as some of the concerns of Indo-Trinidadians are recontextualized” (332). Unfortunately, her projected response to Douglarisation did not materialise. In point of fact, the controversy centring on Bro Marvin’s 1996 calypso “Jahaaji Bhai” highlighted the continuance of the African-Indian contestation and the continuing marginalization of the *Douglas*.

Reddock is overly optimistic about the prospects of *Douglas* identity and its future positive role in the society. She argues that prior to the historic Indian ascension to office in 1995:

tentative emergences of the long-silenced ‘Douglas’ voice were beginning to emerge. Much of this was more implicit than explicit. Over the decade a well-developed genre of what could be termed ‘Douglas music’ had developed, sung by persons of different ethnicities (193).

To her way of thinking this “Douglas voice” manifested in the calypsos and soca-songs which incorporated Indian words, rhythms and topics and Indian instruments. She declares that the emergence of this “Douglas voice” was fulfilled in soca chutney. In support of her claim she examines the careers of *Douglas* calypsonians Chris Garcia and Brother Marvin and credits their successes to their transgressive lyrics and music which appealed equally to members of the two rival ethnic communities.

Given her definition of *Dougla* music, however, Reddock should have dated the emergence of this phenomenon at least to some calypsos of the 1930s and 1950s, to the more complex fusions emerging from neighbouring British Guiana in the 1950s, and more directly to Lord Shorty's rhythmic transgressivity of the early 1970s in Trinidad which resulted in *sokah*, as Shorty terms the fusion between Calypso and Indic music. He thus differentiates Sokah from soca, originally the fusion of Soul and Calypso, which he also developed.

Reddock's optimistic response towards Marvin and Garcia fails to take into consideration the whimsicality and fickleness of Carnival audiences and inexcusably neglects to note their precipitous decline. She also does not engage chutney soca, which is touted as fusion music but which is perceived as an Indian appropriation of soca beats designed to establish an Indian presence in Carnival.

Though researchers and laypersons alike have offered different conclusions about *Dougla* identity and the role of *Douglas* in their host societies (Ferne Regis 2010) *Douglas* too hold various and at times opposing positions about their role and identity. Reddock's (1994) essay cites a range of negative responses regarding the experience of being a *Dougla* while my own research conducted in 2001-2010 has unearthed neutral and even positive sentiments. It is possible that time may be the critical factor affecting this outcome. Many older *Douglas* who are conscious of the word's etymology and who may have experienced first hand the consequences of being caught in the middle of opposing groups seem to resist the designation. The generation birthed after 1970, however, who are further removed from that reality appear to accept the title with relative ease. Perhaps this acceptance also relates to a global paradigm shift where mixed-race groups are now asserting themselves into their social landscapes.

The convenient appropriation of *Dougla* identity by people who do not seem to be *Douglas* attests to the metaphorical qualities the term has assumed in some circles. Puri (2004) uses it as a "rich symbolic resource for interracial unity" (221) capable of "unmask[ing] power and symbolically redraw[ing] lines" while the producers of a magazine entitled '*dougla*' accept it as a mentality rather than an ethnicity.

Taken together these statements plus official recognition in the most recent census testify to the extent to which the *Dougla* is assuming a place on the social landscape but even with this progression there still lurks a general sense of ambivalence towards the group. While they are no longer totally omitted many still choose to deny *Douglas* a place within the

society. As Alleyne (2002, 252) and Reddock (1994, 124) posit only time will tell exactly how these emergences will unfold.

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