

“MUSIC AND A STORY”:
SOUND WRITING IN RAMABAI ESPINET’S *THE SWINGING BRIDGE*.

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WITH essays entitled “The Absent Voice: Unearthing the Female Epistemology of Cane,” and “The Invisible Woman in West Indian Fiction,” Ramabai Espinet, Indo-Trinidadian Canadian poet, scholar and novelist, has made clear her longstanding concerns with the erasure of Indo-Caribbean women in the literature, culture, and politics of the region.¹ Her 2003 novel *The Swinging Bridge* is a clear contestation of that erasure, in its almost manifesto-like voicing of the Indo-Trinidadian female experience. Perhaps because of this, scholars have almost exclusively been interested in the novel’s depiction of gender, sexuality and ethnicity, focusing in particular on the exilic experience of the first-person narrator, Mona Singh, and the indenture experience of her great-grandmother, Gainer, a chutney singer.²

Although music constitutes a major part of the novel and plays a significant role in Mona’s self-conceptualization, scant scholarly attention has been paid to the range of music forms in the novel, aside from brief mentions of Gainer’s chutney music, and Mona’s invented

1. See also her short stories “Barred: Trinidad 1987,” in *Green Cane and Juicy Flotsam: Short Stories By Caribbean Women*, ed. Carmen Esteves and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991); and “Indian Cuisine,” *The Massachusetts Review* 35 no. 3/4, (1994): 563-73; as well as her poetry collection *Nuclear Seasons* (Toronto: Sister Vision Press, 1991).

2. See readings of the novel by Joel Kuorrti, “Over the Black Water: The Silenced Narratives of Diaspora in Espinet’s *The Swinging Bridge*” in *Seeking the Self, Encountering the Other: Diasporic Narrative and the Ethics of Representation*, ed. Tuomas Huttunen, Kaisa Ilmonen, Janne Korkka, Elina Valovirta, (London: Cambridge Press, 2008), 311-32; Brinda Mehta, “Engendering History: A Poetics of the *Kala Pani* in Espinet’s *Swinging Bridge*,” *Small Axe* 21 (2005): 19-36; Paula Morgan, “With a Tassa Blending: Calypso and Cultural Identity in Indo-Caribbean Fiction,” *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* 3 no. 2, Art.10 (2005); Raquel Puig, “Deserving Destitutes in *House for Mr Biswas* and *Swinging Bridge*,” *La Torre* 12 no. 46 (2005): 707-13.; and Shalini Puri, “Race and Rape in Indo-Caribbean Women Writing,” in *Matikor: The Politics of Identity for Indo-Caribbean Women*, ed. Roseanne Kanhai, St. Augustine: UWI Press (1999), 238-82.

Caroni Dub, in relation to Espinet's project of reinserting the Indo-Trinidadian woman into the Caribbean imaginary. Indeed, music in the novel is deeply imbricated with the project of writing the Indo-Trinidadian self into visibility, and with Mona's struggle to find her place in the world. Because of her gender and ethnicity, Mona suffers from a profound sense of placelessness, symbolized by the 'nowarian' identity she adopts from an invented childhood game. In this game, "a road-weary wanderer" with no abiding city finds temporary shelter in the home of a kind old woman before inexorably moving on (*TSB* 52).

In the pages that follow, I examine the extent to which Mona's nowarian placelessness, symbolic of the alienation of Indo-Trinidadians, is signaled by her relationship to the sounds, rhythms and cultural influences that form both the novel's soundscape, and the soundtrack of her life: Canadian Presbyterian hymns, calypso (kaiso) music, and Indo-Trinidadian folk songs. The novel critiques the politics of these musical genres that operate as repositories of problematic colonial, national and patriarchal ideologies, and contrasts them with the chutney songs that Mona finds recorded in her grandmother's journal. By intertwining music and writing, both the journal and the novel which it mirrors are examples of what Alexander G. Weheliye calls phonography, or sound writing, a type of reading or writing practice that "neither . . . abandons the *graph* for the *phono* or vice versa."³ Expanding on Weheliye's primarily sonic usage, I argue that, in its quest to create sound, as opposed to *unsound*, writing — not one that silences, but one that gives voice to or sounds out the unspoken — the novel is invested in recuperating and validating alternate types of records, both musical and written. In so doing, Espinet sounds out the previously silenced testimonies of Indo-Trinidadian women.

3. Alexander G. Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 38.

I. PHONOGRAPHY: WRITING SOUND

As historiographies of the late nineteenth century invention of the phonograph indicate, both Leon Scott (1857) and Thomas Edison (1877), in their separate attempts to mechanically reproduce the ear, envisioned a mechanism by which sound could be *written*, for this is the metaphor undergirding their attempts at *recording* sound.⁴ The recording process saw the *writing* of sound waves onto a tin foil mechanism (later wax and other more malleable materials), using a *stylus* or needle. All information contained in the sound event was thus inscribed in the grooves created by the stylus, which would then allow for its reproduction, ideally with the highest fidelity possible. Interestingly, the later technology of the vinyl record inverted this process in the playing of that recorded sound event: the record is placed on a turntable, and the needle of the record player ‘reads’ the sonic information inscribed in the grooves.

I detail the mechanics of the phonograph to make two central points that will inform my analysis of Espinet’s novel. The first is the inextricable relationship between sound (*phono*) and writing (*graph*) inherent both in the technology of the record, and the word itself (Weheliye 25). The second, is the temporal disruption enabled by recording technology: arresting a time-bound sound event — a spoken word or a musical performance — and inscribing it unto a physical object, that, when played or ‘read,’ brings the past very viscerally into the present. This points to the important mnemonic impetus behind both print and sonic technologies. Recording, or *sound writing*, then is analogous to both writing and memory. Consequently, in *The Swinging Bridge*, various types of recordings function as important tools for the Indo-Trinidadian subject to recuperate and articulate suppressed identity through the process of memory.

4. David L. Morton Jr., *Sound Recording: The Life Story of a Technology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 2.

The Swinging Bridge stages the tension between music and writing, between *phono* and *graph*. On the one hand, the novel exemplifies sound writing in the primary sense: its prose text is often interrupted by italicized song lyrics that signal a sonic memory for Mona, in flashbacks prompted by learning of the terminal illness of her older brother, Kello. However, while for Mona, they bloom memories textured with emotions and sound, for the reader unfamiliar with the particular song, the lyrics remain *unsound* text. No music leaps off the page; the only sounds that the transcribed lyrics retain are their verbal cues.⁵ Italicized lyrics in the prose text foreground the simultaneous sound and unsound nature of the written word. They remind us that written “words are ghosts” of sounds (*TSB* 5). While they gesture to music, they remain mute.

Unsound Records

The novel also highlights the unsound nature of documents that silence women and Indo-Trinidadians. Indeed, both musical and written records participate in unsound recordings by the kinds of experiences and voices they exclude. This is precisely Espinet’s critique of canonical Caribbean writing. In her essay, “The Invisible Woman in West Indian Fiction,” she criticizes the flat, stereotypical literary depictions of Indo-Caribbean women in novels by Samuel Selvon and V.S. Naipaul, among others. Existing only to fulfill a gendered or narrative function in relation to men, characters such as Selvon’s Urmilla reinforce false perceptions of the “real” and complex Indo-Caribbean woman, who becomes “a fleeting, unseen creature, functioning unambiguously

5. See Weheliye’s discussion of the problem of writing or graphing music, including using Western annotation methods, brilliantly illustrated in the juxtaposition of lyrics and musical notations in W.E.B. Dubois’ *The Souls of Black Folk*. (*Phonographies*, 82-105.)

within the constraints of the tight familial structure.”⁶ In *The Swinging Bridge*, Mona likewise denounces written documents that give unsound accounts of the Indo-Trinidadian experience, from history books to canonical Caribbean writing (71-2). Mona’s project in this novel, then, is to critique unsound records, both musical and written, and to recuperate the “untold story” of Indo-Trinidadian women (3), stories of pervasive sexual victimization and erasure.

Mona’s occupation as a documentary researcher offers unique insight into the novelist’s critique of unsound records, and her proffered model for a more sound alternative. At the beginning of the novel, Mona is working on a film about Haitian women’s experiences in Montreal, Canada, framed in the context of Haitian women in history. Mona’s research uncovers the pivotal role played by a *manbo* (a *vodou* priestess) Cecile Fatiman, in the Haitian revolution, although all the history books “had [only] mentioned heroes such as Toussaint L’Ouverture, Dessalines, and Henri Christophe” (10). Here we see History as his/story, a male-authored, male-centered record that elides the contributions of women, contributions that can only be recuperated through stories such as those orally transmitted to Mona by the migrant Haitian women. Mona, merely the researcher for the filmmaker Carene, also a Caribbean-Canadian migrant, is unable to assert agency in what gets included in the film. In what Mona sees as an act of textual and historical violence, Carene edits out Cecile Fatiman’s role in the film. At several points in the novel — the repetition underscoring her trauma at the excision — Mona bemoans: “And so even in a liberating film about the lives of contemporary Haitian women, ... a film made by a woman of the Caribbean, researched by another Caribbean woman, the only woman’s name connected with the Haitian Revolution had no place. Toussaint, Christophe, Dessalines,

6. Ramabai Espinet, “The Invisible Woman in West Indian Fiction,” *World Literature Written in English* 29, no. 2 (1998): 117.

Boukman. No mention of Fatiman” (61). Thus, Carene’s documentary is a model of the unsound record: it leaves women on the cutting room floor of history.

The documentary on Haitian women contrasts with Mona’s dream film about her great-grandmother Gainer, who came to Trinidad as an indentured laborer in 1879. While we have no audio-visual record of the documentary, I contend that the three italicized “Kala Pani” passages that open each of the three sections of the novel, *Borrowed Time*, *Manahambre Road*, and *Caroni Dub*, are novelistic representations of the Gainer documentary. This is suggested by both the cinematic style of the narrative — external, visual descriptions, moving from general to specific — and the third-person fly-on-the-wall narrative perspective adopted by Mona in these sections. This narrative perspective extends to the documentary-like point of view of the rest of the novel, in which Mona, although the first-person narrator, takes an external, camera-like positioning to her own life story, particularly in scenes when she is threatened with sexual violence.⁷ In contrast, Mona is profoundly stirred by the discovery of her grandmother Lil’s shop-keeping ledger, at the back of which is a secret journal and a record of their ancestress Gainer’s songs. Gainer’s voice, a symbol of itinerant, Indo-Trinidadian female agency, is thrice-suppressed: her raunchy singing is forbidden by her husband, and she is edited out of the family history by her son-in-law, who also rips her songs out of the family record.

Mona hopes to rectify this sexual and textual violence by her recursions into music-mediated memories, and recreating a sound record of Gainer’s story in documentary form. As models for the novel, then, Mona’s documentary about Gainer’s life and the song-filled journal that inspires it, illustrate sound writing in its two iterations. Firstly, they exemplify phonography

7. See also her description of almost being raped and murdered (41-6), and her invocation of a pair of field-glasses as a model for her own role as family archivist (33-4).

in their imbrication of music and writing. Secondly, they sound out the unspoken and unspeakable experiences of the historically silenced. Consequently, they allow Mona to recover a personal, gendered, and ethnic history through “music and a story” (113).

II. SOUND WRITING: “MUSIC AND A STORY”

While the novel constantly underscores the tension between sound and writing on the formal level, a close analysis of the included song lyrics and their politics reveal this tension thematically: music, though sonic, can be unsound if it does not articulate the voices of the silent and silenced. Mona is cold and passive due to the trauma of witnessing and recording, as if she were a camera, the abuse Indo-Trinidadian women have experienced. Her passivity is also a result of the combination of agents that work to suppress Mona’s true self. These agents are signaled by music genres that not only function as a kind of soundtrack to Mona’s life, but are loaded with particular memories of the songs themselves, and their attendant politics with respect to Indo-Trinidadians.

Presbyterian Hymns: “At the Edge of That Circling Sphere”

Mona migrates to Canada with her parents and siblings in 1970. Although Canada, under Pierre Trudeau’s drive toward nationalism and cultural pluralism, opened up its borders to middle-class Caribbean people, the new arrivants were coldly received by their neighbors.⁸ Mona recalls, “When I arrived in the early seventies, Canada was a white country. If multiculturalism was an idea, it never touched me. For Da-Da, the moment of truth came when he saw a wall covered

8. Arun Mukherjee, “Canadian Nationalism, Canadian Literature and Racial Minority Women,” in *The Other Woman: Women of Colour in Contemporary Canadian Literature*, ed. Makeda Silvera (Toronto: Sister Vision Press, 1995), 423.

with graffiti that read Keep Canada White. As if it ever was” (243). While Mona’s younger brother, Johnnie, becomes thoroughly Canadianized, satirized by Mona’s constant reference to his chilly respectability and his blonde wife’s prairie whiteness (214), the rest of the family hasn’t fared as well. Her sister, Babs, has adopted a butterfly personality, filling her life with men and materialism in an attempt to hide her lack of ease with her identity (26). Mona, now in her forties, still struggles to find herself and place in her new home of Montreal. Mona’s Caribbeanness has been scrubbed to a bland indefinability as she clings insistently to her ‘nowarian’ identity based on the role-playing game she and a cousin invented as children (152).

Her present alienation in Canada has its roots in the role of its Presbyterian missions in Trinidad in forming an Indian middle-class estranged from their indentured background and culture. John Morton, the first Canadian Presbyterian missionary in Trinidad, established missions and a system of Western-style primary education rooted in Presbyterianism upon his arrival in 1868. This included a Girls’ training home “for the protection and training of Indian girls” to become good wives for the converted Christian missionaries.⁹ Morton kept a written record of his dealings with and impressions of Indo-Trinidadian women, representing them as wanton, morally depraved and incapable of being elevated to Euro-American standards of femininity and civility. Morton’s diary also reveals the close relationship not only of religion and education, but also of music and Christianization in the Indo-Trinidadian communities overseen by the missions.¹⁰

In the novel, the Presbyterian hymns of Mona’s childhood form the soundtrack to happy

9. Tejaswini Niranjana, *Mobilizing India: Women, Music, and Migration Between India and Trinidad* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 64.

10. Helen Myers, *Music of Hindu Trinidad: Songs From the India Diaspora* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 112.

memories of family unity in the late 1950s before the “big row” that shook the “pilotries” of her childhood home on Manahambre Road in Princes Town, an Indian community in central Trinidad (17-25). Reminiscing on going to church on a Sunday with her family, the Mona who is disaffected in the novel’s present tense recalls feeling “so happy! Happy, happy, happy!”(33). Yet, Mona later recognizes the irony of the representations in both the hymns’ lyrics and the subliminal messages of church-seating dynamics, noting that something about this order of things kept her “at the edge of that circling sphere” (30). Her parents

lifted themselves into a space free as air through the hymns they sang at church on Sundays, those old hymns wrought out of the stoicism required for life in a frozen land, peopled by hymn writers with eyes of cold blue steel. Inside the armour of those hymns they found repose: *O God, our help in ages past/ our hope for years to come/ our shelter from the stormy blast/ and our eternal home.* The Canadian missionaries and their wives sat in special pews at the front of the beautiful Savana Grande church, one of the first buildings of their mission. ... Our hearts flew up to heaven, and all the soot and flying dust of burning cane vanished into the smoke fires of hell while we ascended skywards, washed in the blood of the lamb. (29-30)

In this passage, we see not only the process by which hymns and church teach Indo-Trinidadians their racial place (“the smoke fires of hell”), but also the source of a false-consciousness where the white Canadian landscape, a “home” in the land of “stormy blast[s],” and its attendant attributes (stoicism, blue eyes) are internalized, while Indo-Trinidadian experience (“the soot . . . of burning cane”) is devalued.

Mona’s family, emblematic of others that have imbibed Presbyterian religion, education and values, is ashamed of Indo-Trinidadian culture. Mona remembers how “newly educated people would throw out almost everything Indian at first, and would slowly gather back into their lives only those relics that were essential for survival” (29). We later learn that Mona’s grandparents’ marriage comes about by fiat from the Presbyterian mission, rupturing Papa’s prior

marriage to his “bamboo wife,” a term disdaining the traditional Hindu wedding ceremony ‘under bamboo’ and suggesting the primitive and unChristian nature of Hindu marital rites (64-66). Christianization for both branches of Mona’s family meant entrance into the middle class and its attitudes of respectability; it meant education and scholarships for her maternal great-grandfather Joshua, as well as her uncle Baddall, who was sent abroad to study theology (35). This consequently meant access to middle class, mostly civil servant, positions.

Espinete also shows the deleterious effects of Presbyterian education and religious values on the Indo-Trinidadian psyche. While she limits the negative effects of Presbyterianism on men to dissolution of ethnic marriages and erasure of their Hindu names for Christian ones, women face even more detrimental erasure of their sexual identities. It is in the name of Presbyterian respectability that Joshua forbids Gainder’s singing chutney music (249). This same respectability means that Lily’s prior love for a mixed raced boy, Davy, is forbidden by her father, and the fruit of their union has to be secretly aborted before Lily is forced into a sham marriage with Jamesie.

Lily’s experience anticipates Mona’s own. Showing the collusion of religion, colonialism, patriarchy and education, Mona recalls the policing of her sexuality by various agents of control: at the mission-run La Pastora Girls’ School, where her female teachers exert influence over young Indo-Trinidadian girls’ sexuality by indoctrinating them to think of themselves as sexually wanton, “hot hot from small” (144), in line with the stereotypes about Indo-Trinidadian women’s sexuality, partially derived from the geographic and economic freedom enjoyed by *rands* — widows rewritten into the male-authored records of history as prostitutes. As Brinda Mehta (2004) has shown, the coerced migration to Trinidad not only disrupted traditional gender roles

and enabled new reconstitutions of families, it also allowed indentured women to renegotiate labor, gender and sexual economies on the sugar plantations. Consequently, Indo-Trinidadian male orthodoxy disparaged the presumed sexual freedoms of itinerant Indo-Trinidadian womanhood.¹¹ Indo-Trinidadian women were caught between two competing readings of their sexuality: on the one hand, the chaste Indian woman in the guise of the *Ramayana*'s Sita; on the other hand, the suspicion that they were innately sexually loose and must be kept in check.

Not only do Mona's fond memories of Presbyterian hymns point ironically to the function of Canadian neocolonialism in estranging the Indo-Trinidadian community from their values and culture, they also result in making women like Mona strangers to their bodies. Rebelling against the politics of respectability and the rigid policing of their bodies, Mona and her childhood schoolmates engage in a futile warfare against their school uniforms in what they call "The Dirty Skirts Club," and keep a secret journal of "hot things" including secret sexual desires and experiences, a foreshadowing of Grandma Lil's journal (141-2). In both journals we witness the subversive potential of writing in asserting an Indo-Trinidadian female subjectivity that refuses the constraints placed on her nature. Journal-keeping also marks Mona's stirrings of subject-formation when her mission-educated father forces her to crawl on gravel as punishment for her suspected "wantonness," the only evidence of which is a dress that her father considers too sexually-enticing for his daughter to wear in public: "'What the hell you doing again in that ho dress? You ain't find you attracting enough man already?'" (178). The consequence of his drunken rage at his daughter's burgeoning and troubling sexuality is her public shaming and the burning of the dress (180), and Mona's heavily visual, camera-like journal entry of the incident

11. Brinda Mehta, *Diasporic (Dis)Locations: Indo-Caribbean Women Writers Negotiate the Kala Pani* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2004), 31.

reflects her subsequent burying of her rage, rebellion and subjectivity. Thus, the adult Mona who disdains marriage and domesticity is partly a rebellion against her childhood internalization of values espoused by both Indo-Trinidadian orthodoxy and Presbyterianism.

These hymn-mediated memories also reveal another crucial factor by which Mona and her family were not truly at home in Trinidad, despite the associations of hymn-singing with the house in Manahambre Road. Mona's sense of home was already tenuous, revealed in the close textual connection between the lyrics of hymns and the memories of the 'big row.' Mona recalls this argument, in which the young Kello contested his father's authority, as threatening to everything she holds dear: "I always found the word *moggage* [mortgage] enticing and imagined it wrapping the house tightly with strong threads that would keep it safe even through earthquake and hurricane. . . . The shaking that day burst the moggage threads" (24). Her father succeeds in dismantling the binding threads of family and "moggage," — the stranglehold of Indo-Trinidadian and Presbyterian respectability — and moves toward the lure of the modern city, the space of the emergent Afro-Creole independent nation state symbolized by calypso music. In so doing, he uproots Mona and the family from where their navel strings (umbilical cords), symbolic of anchoring and belonging, are buried. This first uprooting becomes the root of their ceaseless unbelonging in the world, and is Mona's answer when Kello asks her why she is unable, at forty-odd years old, to find her place in the world: "It was our pitching about from place to place, Kello. I never put down roots again after Manahambre Road" (204).

"All Ah We [Ain't] One": Calypso and the House Divided

While Mona's grandfather, Pappy, fought for the land and house on Manahambre Road as a

buffer against white racism (57-8), her father sold the land to pursue his Creole dream in San Fernando. The failure of this national dream, where all races and cultures of Trinidad live as one, is shown through calypso (or 'kaiso') music. The big row is a trope for the collapse of the vision of Trinidad's first Prime Minister Dr. Eric Williams, throughout his 1959-1981 leadership, of a Trinidad in which 'all o' we is one' — as goes the unofficial motto about the nation's cultural and racial unity.¹² It is this collapse that propels the Singh family to an unwelcoming Canada. Unlike her male literary predecessors, Naipaul, Selvon and Lovelace, who have made Trinidadian writing synonymous with calypso music and its aesthetic, Espinet's novel questions the viability of calypso and its politics as feasible expressions of Indo-Caribbean experience, allowing us to consider how gender and ethnicity interrogate the hegemony of Afro-Caribbean popular music.

Gordon Rohlehr and Maureen Warner-Lewis have established calypso's origins firmly in the West-African tradition, while Shalini Puri and Tejaswini Niranjana in their separate analyses of calypso and its politics reveal that one of the main critiques of calypso is its racist and masculinist practices, particularly its essentializing of women and Indo-Trinidadians.¹³ Having

12. In his famous "Massa Day Done" address at the so-called University of Woodford Square, the re-baptized public square in Port of Spain, Trinidad, Eric Williams declared: "Massa believed in the inequality of races. Today, as never before, the PNM has held out to the population of Trinidad and Tobago and the West Indies and the world the vision and the practice of interracial solidarity which, whatever its limitations, whatever the efforts still needed to make it an ordinary convention of our society, stands out in sharp contrast as an open challenge to Massa's barbarous ideas and practices of racial domination.... We ... have been able to incorporate into our People's National Movement people of all races and colours and from all walks of life, with the common bond of a national community dedicated to the pursuit of national ends without any special privilege being granted to race, colour, class, creed, national origin or previous condition of servitude." "Massa Day Done: Public Lecture at Woodford Square, 22 March 1961," *Callaloo* 20.4 (1997) 730.

13. Gordon Rohlehr, *Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad* (Port of Spain: Gordon Rohlehr, 1990); Maureen Warner-Lewis, "The Influence of Yoruba Music on the Minor-Key in Calypso," *Seminar on the Calypso* (St. Augustine, Trinidad: ISER/UWI Calypso Research Project, January 6-10, 1986); Niranjana, *Mobilizing India*; Shalini Puri, "Canonized Hybridities, Resistant Hybridities: Chutney Soca, Carnival, and the Politics of Nationalism," in *Caribbean Romances: The Politics of Regional Representation*, ed. Belinda Edmonson, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 12-38.

fermented for centuries in the plantation system as a counter-hegemonic form of black folk expression, a source of masked but piquant social and political commentary, calypso is necessarily associated with Afro-Trinidadian culture. While not exclusionary by this virtue, three main factors led to Indo-Trinidadians' sense of exclusion from calypso and Carnival, the rowdy subversive annual rituals during which and for which calypsoes are created and performed. The first is the deployment of colonial stereotypes of Afro-Trinidadians as lazy, loud and lascivious, and the association of calypso with bawdy lyrics and carnival's licentious public displays, which would be anathema to respectable and conservative Indo-Trinidadians (Puri 1999a: 240). This was exacerbated by the lyrics of calypsoes, in which Indo-Trinidadians were portrayed as outsiders to the Afro-Creole nation (Puri 241-5; Niranjana 131). Furthermore, the rising Afro-Trinidadian élite imbricated black culture with Trinidadian culture, promoting calypso and Carnival as symbols of the nation (Puri 240). Like many Afro-Caribbean music forms, then, calypso problematically signals a romanticized national essence that renders nearly half of the population invisible, when it is not busy representing it in monolithic and derogatory terms.

The novel chronicles Mona and her father's growing unease with the portrayal of Indo-Trinidadians in calypso, and the sexual threat that the Carnival space represents. At first, the seven year-old Mona and her father are enamored with calypso, which he calls 'our poetry.' She has fond memories of the calypso competitions leading up to Carnival, and evokes J'ouvert morning, the opening day of Carnival, in romanticized tones: "Everything was reversed: man turning into woman with rude-looking false bottom and breast, and woman turning into man in waistcoat and mustache and high high voice. . . . [E]verybody on the road jumping up in bands to calypso music beaten by steel bands. There was parody, burlesque, satire, and placards with

lewd messages, punning on politics and dirty tricks” (98-99). This subversive musical idyll is ruptured, however, with a series of unsettling incidents. In a pair of Carnival tableaux, the usual social commentary in the guise of parodic reversal is turned on Indo-Trinidadians. The winning calypso road march song one year records a murder committed by two Indo-Trinidadian men: “People danced all day to the music’s incantatory beat, but Da-Da came home sickened by the revelry. The dancing crowds were urging the hanging of the two men because they were Indians, of that he was convinced. ... It ain’t have no place here for Indians... I have to get out a here” (100-101). Although Mona does not process what her father’s referendum on representations of their ethnicity in calypso means — his desire that its defining license be selective — his reaction reflects the Indo-Trinidadian establishment’s critique of calypso and Carnival as unsound, rendering their people either invisible or hyper-visible.

Da-Da’s final renouncing of his beloved J’ouvert results from an encounter that reflects Indo-Trinidadian fears about the polluting lasciviousness of Afro-Trinidadian culture symbolized by calypso music. With that year’s road march, Lord Kitchener’s punning “My Pussin,” as the soundtrack, “a stunning black woman, her eyes glazed with the night’s rum, danced out of the band and up to Da-Da singing, *Is my pussin / . . . Man take way yuh hand from she/Don’t touch my pussin at all*. ... She sang before Da-Da in a trance, her closed fists positioned at crotch level, both thumbs making scooping movements, while he stared straight ahead, not a flicker crossing his face” (101). Da-Da’s feigned stoicism at this sonico-sexual assault suggests that his affront is both a sublimation of ‘illegal’ attraction based in fears of douglarization — diluting Indianness by sexual interactions between black men and Indian women — and the threat of the raucous, unruly black (woman’s) body to Indo-Trinidadian male respectability.

The racialist and nationalist politics of calypso is mirrored in the politics during the Independence period (1956-1962), when, despite Prime Minister Eric Williams' rhetoric of multiethnic unity, two things began to happen: on the one hand, Indo-Trinidadians understood the call for a Creole nation — where the old nations, India and Africa, are left behind in favor of the new unified Trinidadian identity — as a call for black men to have sexual access to Indian women, which would not only rob Indian men of viable partners, but would dilute and sully the race. A vocal Indo-Trinidadian (male) population rejected the premise of creolization as an attempt at douglarization, the bastard result of sexual mixing between the two races.¹⁴ As a result, the Indo-Trinidadian woman became the site of angst over nationhood, and the two main ethnic groups, locked in a stalemate over sexual politics, found themselves in a stalemate over national and cultural politics as well. Mona recalls, “Indian men were enraged at what they perceived to be a coercive drive to intermarriage between Indians and Africans in the Trinidad of the fifties and sixties. That deep-rooted fear had never gone away. I had heard only recently about protests from the Indian community in Trinidad about forced douglarization” (75).

A second deterrent to national unity came in the form of political corruption, the passing over of Indo-Trinidadians for civil positions once the government of the newly independent nation was formed. Now that ‘massa day done’ — the colonial rule of white Europeans had passed — Afro-Trinidadians, who had been oppressed and marginalized for centuries, could now determine the direction of the new nation. While discursively the Prime Minister, fictionalized in the novel as Dr. Hector James, conceived of this new nation as multi-ethnic, in practice, the overthrow of racial injustice meant that Afro-Trinidadians were giddy with newfound power, and

14. Rhoda Reddock, “Jahaji Bhai: The Emergence of a Dougla Poetics in Contemporary Trinidad and Tobago,” in *Identity, Ethnicity and Culture in the Caribbean*, ed. Ralph R. Premdas (St. Augustine: UWI, 1998) 191-2.

hadn't conceptualized a place for the Indian and Chinese 'newcomers.'

Mona's memory of calypso and Carnival introduces her father's discovery that the national house under construction is at odds with Indo-Trinidadian culture, as shown in one of his many letters to the editor of various newspapers during the period:

Sept 22, 1964. I write this letter as a citizen and a son of the soil. My navel string is buried in the south of this island. The south of this island, sir, is the Indian heartland. I write to say that the leadership on both sides is dividing this country by race . . . I have been passed over recently for my fourth promotion, while a less qualified, less experienced person of another racial group received the promotion in each instance . . . I cannot in all conscience join a party that is bent on keeping my people in second-class positions. . . . I believe in equal rights for all. Is it unusual to think that these equal rights also include me? I firmly believe that I have a right to the patrimony of this country. My ancestors toiled here. They put their blood, sweat, and tears into building this place. (76)

While on the surface Mona attributes her psychic disconnect to the loss of home, the trauma of the perpetually exiled or 'nowarian,' the calypso references in the novel reveal very powerfully that Indo-Trinidadians are not even at home in their own nation. Buffeted on one side by a self-denigrating Presbyterian respectability, and on the other by a discursive and effective erasure in national discourse — and the possible threat of extinction by sexual dilution — the novel indexes a profound alienation experienced by this population that has no recourse but to "pitch... about from place to place" (204). Kello's fixation, then, on reclaiming the lost land on Manahambre Road, and staking a claim to a piece of Trinidadian territory, is thrown into relief. Mona misreads Kello's obsession to repurchase their land as his "manifesting a powerful masculine drive to possess, to control, even in the face of a terminal illness" (56), her feminist rage blinding her to the importance of land for her people in the face of their exclusion from the larger nation-building project. Mona's return to Trinidad as Kello's proxy to repurchase the land their father sold, a return which allows her to reconnect with the land, discover her ethnic history, and dig beyond the layers of suppressed culture, language and identity, mediated through the

unsound musical records of her childhood, and to reconcile herself with her past, particularly the erased histories of her ancestresses.

Herstory, Her Songs: Singing Ramayana, Matikor and Chutney

In her book-length study entitled *The Music of Hindu Trinidad*, Helen Myers documents the musical traditions of the inhabitants of Felicity Village in the Caroni region of Trinidad, the same area of which Espinet writes. The most important songs to this community are classical Indian songs, derived from Hindu religious texts such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* (98). *Bhajans*, which are learned by heart from radio, records and temple singing (105), are religious songs that depict the idealized relationship between Ram and Sita, the model for heterosexual relationships and for gender roles in Hindu communities in Trinidad. These hymns romanticize Ram's mobility and masculine prowess, while idealizing Sita's demure fidelity as she waits for Ram to rescue her from the threat of sexual victimization. 'Singing Ramayana' in the novel then, refers to a romantic song of love and fidelity, drawn from classical Hindu religious texts. Contrasted to classical songs are 'composed songs,' such as calypso music by Afro-Trinidadians, and wedding songs such as *lachari* and chutney, the latter term referring to a spicy or 'hot' song full of sexual suggestiveness (108). While wedding songs and *bhajans* both have the same epic source, the former are 'composed' secular songs, while the latter are 'classical,' religious songs. Wedding songs are performed in a ceremony called the Matikor, described in Myers' work as well as in Espinet's research.¹⁵

Espinet's fascination with Matikor comes from the unusual dynamic of this ceremony

15. Espinet's conference paper on Matikor, 'Singing Ramayana: The Text of Sita's Fidelity,' is cited in Brinda Mehta, "Engendering History," 33.

within the conservative sexual dynamics of the Indo-Trinidadian community. The ceremony takes place in an exclusive female space, where women are both performers and audience in the Hindu pre-nuptial celebration. Yet what is conceptually subversive for Espinet is not merely the sex of the participants, but what this gender exclusivity allows. During the Matikor ceremony, Hindu women prepare the bride for her wedding night and the roles of marriage by enacting sexual relations: parodying and satirizing men by forming phallic shapes with their clothes and dancing to the sexually suggestive *lachari* songs (Myers 155). In Mona's account of her first experience of the Matikor, she is electrified by the ritual through which, with "bawdy songs and lewd dances, love songs and open talk, the bride was instructed into the mysteries that awaited her in marriage" (277). Not only does Mona find the ceremony an eye-opening introduction to the subversive potential within her own culture, she connects to the music in a profound way. "The songs were wonderful, varied in rhythm . . . The wedding night songs were held fast by their own beat, and underbeat it seemed to me, nasal and piercing at times, yet whispering, as if secrets were being passed from woman to woman" (277). What Mona has discovered in the Matikor ceremony is the spirit of chutney: celebrating and articulating unorthodox sexuality through language and performance.

The Matikor underscores the revolutionary nature of the singing that Baboonie and Gainer perform. It also points to how their songs contribute not only to Mona's recuperation of the erased histories of Indo-Trinidadian women, but also the novel's sound writing aesthetic. Baboonie, a woman so downtrodden that her very 'name' (little girl) signals her rejection from normal human relationships, provides Mona with a key link to her past. All Mona knew about this woman was the twice-told, male-authored tale of Baboonie as a loose woman —

“Everybody around here does beat that” (111). Then, just before returning to Trinidad for the first time since her migration twenty-five years before, Mona remembers hearing Baboonie singing at night. She then reconstructs Baboonie’s tale from the eavesdropped fragments of memory and song:

I heard a sound above the rain. . . . a voice, singing with the rain . . . the notes discordant but clear, beating out a rhythm that I recognized. It was the rise and fall of women singing Ramayana at *kathas*. The words were in Hindi . . . Baboonie fought off intruders upon her body with curses and threats and words sung from the holy books . . . I listened to music and a story, till then unknown to me, coming through the wailing voice of a beggar woman, crying through the rain, breaking up the classical words of the Ramayana with her own tale of exile and banishments, and in broken chords and unexpected riffs telling the story of a race. Of racial and tribal grief, of banishment, of the test of purity. (112-113)

Baboonie’s singing, the imbrication of “music and a story,” is not only a formal model for Mona’s own sound writing; it speaks very powerfully of female agency as well. It is of central importance that Baboonie is “singing Ramayana,” that is, she is sounding the very patriarchal narrative that empowers the men who abuse her with impunity, indeed, who rise in the morning, coddled by their wives, and “walk upright, wielding their cutlasses” on their way to work (112). Within the uprightness of their posture and their cutlasses is the echo of the phallic needle of record, yet if the *Ramayana* is the unassailable record of Indian gender norms, then Baboonie’s “broken chords” and discordant voice scratches this record. She inserts herself in the grooves of the rigid epic of “purity” and chastity, “break[s] up the classical words of the *Ramayana* with her own tale” and forces it to sound out her victimization. This powerless woman is able to force the unsound record of the epic to give voice to her experience. Singing *Ramayana*, or at least a remixed version of it, is this Indo-Trinidadian woman’s antidote to sexual violence and trauma. It is her transmutation of pain into song and narrative. It is creative work, like the novel, like

Mona's filmmaking, like Gainder's chutney songs.

As Mona recognizes, Baboonie's creative, transformative work of singing is similar to the type of creative work performed by Mona's great-grandmother. Baboonie's songs prefigure the chutney model of transforming the ethnic and religious classical songs — the songs celebrating Ram's male authority and monogamy — to bear witness to female experience, including the sexual violence of men visited upon women, and the sexual or romantic longings of Indo-Trinidadian women. Brinda Mehta, in her reading of the novel, similarly sees the reworking of epic texts by women such as Baboonie and Gainder as their "inscribing resistance to cultural dictates over domestic virtue. . . . Through orality and creative reimaginings, these women subverted the importance of mandatory behavioral prescriptions for women in order to elaborate their own subjectivities" (Mehta 33). I read Gainder and Baboonie as linked, not only by their songs, but by their exclusion from even the mouths of middle-class women like Mona's mother, who sounds out male-authored versions of both women's stories. Her mother dismisses Gainder as "a low-class kind of person, you know, something like [Baboonie] the old beggar woman in Ramgoolie Trace . . . She used to sing Ramayana before they married—not the real Ramayana you know. She used to sing the kind that village women would sing" (251).

Joshua, anxious to police Gainder's sexuality, suspects her of looseness because she earns a living from singing unorthodox chutney music. The sexual and economic freedom Gainder enjoyed as a *kala-pani*-crossing rand would be anathema to the Indo-Trinidadian and Presbyterian respectability Joshua is then embracing. He forbids her from singing and dancing ever again, "[h]er songs [were] banned from the house when the children were growing up, rude songs sung in Hindi" (262), and later, her songs are unceremoniously ripped from the male-

authored family history, rendering the latter an unsound record (271). It is the women of the family who record Gainder's chutney songs — Grandma Lil, keeping in the back of her shopkeeping ledger a secret journal of her own developing subjectivity, and Aunt Alice, who has drawn up her own, more sound, family history (262). Yet Alice's record also suffers from elisions: Mona's grandfather Jamesie has seemingly intervened to redact the family history:

And at the end of the final page was a three-sentence history of Gainder: *Lily's mother was named Gainder. She came from India in the nineteenth century. She died in childbirth.* That was all. I looked underneath the metal holders and saw the telltale marks of pages torn out. Were they the pages with the songs? Perhaps Grandpa Jamesie had taken his private revenge. This copy was the only one that I could find and he had ripped out the songs. I found myself overcome by anger that felt like a personal violation. (271)

Mona only resolves this injustice when she finds Lil's shop books which have recorded Gainder's songs in written form, and which also satiates her quest for a sound family record.

Gainder's songs are interesting models of subversive female expression. They are recorded in the journal as written text, an instance of unsound writing, since Mona is unable to sound them out until she finds and records on tape a village *rand* pronouncing the Hindi words, and singing the one that has become a popular chutney song. The first song speaks of the nowarian freedom that Mona has celebrated throughout her life: "*Free as the world that is my home/ Free anywhere that I might roam/ . . . Free in this land, free from stain*" (295). Here Gainder celebrates the freedom of *randhood* and of the mobility afforded by the *kala pani* crossing from India to Trinidad. Instead of prohibition and the "stain" of an irrevocable crossing, she sees possibility. For its part, song number three, the popular chutney song, speaks of fidelity in the classic tradition of *Ramayana*: "*Faithful like Sita/ Virtuous like Lakshmi/... I will be your household light/ . . . I will kiss your feet, offer water*" (296). The song's tantalizing duality lies in

the fact that, as a chutney song, it is sung in a subversive female space of the Matikor ceremony, but it is also a space of preparation for marriage and conventional roles. The songs thus simultaneously speak to subversive themes such as longing and desire, as well as fidelity according to Hindu traditions and masculinist ideals of the faithful servile wife in the guise of Sita and Lakshmi.

For scholars such as Mehta, Niranjana and Rawidda Baksh-Soodeen, chutney provides “a positive sign of affirmation for and by Indian women and their fight for political and cultural inclusion in the national imaginary . . . situating women as agents of social change” (Mehta 2006: 34). This is what makes chutney singers like Drupatee Ramgoonai, who take spicy Indo-Trinidadian sexuality into the Afro-Creole and male-dominated calypso tent, so subversive and so interesting to Indo-Caribbean feminist scholars (Reddock 198-9). However, in the novel, chutney songs for all their hot spiciness do not dismantle the gender dynamics that oppress and silence Indo-Trinidadian women. Gainder’s female descendants from Lil to Mona do not enjoy the freedom Gainder dreams of in song. Indeed, Gainder herself loses that freedom once she marries Joshua, suggesting that the type of freedom afforded by chutney and the Matikor space in which it is performed is only temporary. Once married, the spicy, empowered Indo-Trinidadian woman gets tamed into submission.

More poignant than the realization of the temporary nature of chutney agency is what becomes of Mona’s preliminary attempts to restore Gainder and indentured women’s place in Trinidadian history. Having visited a contemporary rand and tape-recorded Gainder’s popular chutney song, Mona edits Lil’s written record and mounts Gainder’s songs for her cousin Bess’s Diwali display on the 150th anniversary of the arrival in Trinidad of the first indentures. Mona’s

choices are curious, but significant: rather than a sonic record (a cassette tape or CD of the *rand* singing the song — this is 1995 after all), she mounts a *written* and graphic display — a silent and unsound, rather than a sound document. She “finished the translation of Gainder’s songs into English and printed the words side by side with the Hindi versions found in the shop books. [Her] first act was to replace the pages torn out from the family history” (294-5). What results, is ironically, a mummified version of a work that was so vibrant, and the further silencing of the full history of Gainder and the *rands* in history: “I had suggested a short history of Gainder’s life to accompany the display, but Bess decided against it . . . ‘You see, Mona, the grand picture is still what everybody wants. The righteous Indian family, intact, coming across the *kala pani* together. Like the way the migration is presented today. Not this story’” (297). In the end, the real historical record is still censored to serve the interests of the unsound revisionist narrative created by Indians upon their arrival in Trinidad and deployed as their myth of origins.

If not in 1995 at the 150-year celebration of indenture, if not at Diwali, then when and where can this story be told? The novel seems not to answer this question, ending with another important story of women edited out of official history. The fate of the Diwali display suggests that writing sound is not enough; such records, like their vinyl namesakes, remain silent until played or read, until transmuted from silent writing back to sound. They must be sounded so that they can challenge national, ethnic and historical orthodoxies since silent, written records can be erased, palimpsested, or ripped out of official versions.

I want to suggest, then, that it is not Gainder’s songs themselves that are powerful; relegated to a female space, and erased from male-authored history, it is their transformation into sound writing, into music and a story, that allows them the most potential to interrogate

orthodoxies and articulate Indo-Trinidadian women's burgeoning subjectivity. Indeed, as Weheliye contends, "more than recording itself, it seems that sound necessitates transposition into writing to even register as technology" (25). While in the male-authored official story of the family certain women and certain types of creative expression are elided, these, however, are recuperated in a woman-authored personal document, Grandma Lil's journal-ledger, which is seemingly more sound than the historical and political documents in print.

This personal document is particularly interesting for its mask-like form; behind the shopkeeping minutiae lurks a journal, a secret space of female agency and interiority: "I smiled again at some of these rough sentences, obviously made for [Lil's] own private consumption. *Went by Alice to spend the day. Nice time. . . . Sweetie is so wild . . . He was owing money again and I had to give him 20 dollars. I can't tell Jamesie*" (272). Like Baboonie's insertion of her narrative in the grooves of the *Ramayana*, Lil has not only inserted her subjectivity into a record of public interactions, but has reinstated familial and ethnic history, enabling Mona's own later project: "Some of the shop books had whole passages about Gainer Beharry. Facts about her. . . . All of it was there. Everything about us, where we came from, our connection to despised women like Gainer Beharry, like Baboonie, the journey on those ships of indenture in the nineteenth century" (272; 274).

Lil transforms Gainer's songs into an alternate type of recorded music, but not in the sense of the needle-centric phonograph. Instead, they are written 'recordings' of sung songs, tucked away in a shopkeeping ledger, itself another form of recording. The private journal and personal recording of these chutney songs recuperate the female voice and history in ways that the other music forms that constitute Mona's soundscape do not. Contrary to the assumption that

most women's narratives are only orally transmitted, or that Indo-Caribbean women's silence in historical and literary documents means a lack of voice, here we have generations of writing women in Mona's family, leaving behind written records of their lives and selves. Lil has left behind an especially powerful record, defying the stereotypes of oral female narratives, yet eschewing the traditional male-dominated avenues of musical recording.

Both Monique Wittig and Hélène Cixous conceive of the female text as a type of war machine or Trojan horse that will "pulverize the old forms and formal conventions."¹⁶ Silenced both as pure song, and as pure writing, what Gainger's music and story need is a different form. *Sound writing* is this new form that explodes truths and orthodoxies. Although recording, whether written or musical, is considered disembodied and male (phallic needle, phallic pen), recording holds the most potential for moving the sound of transgressive, female chutney singing from the wedding tent into the male-dominated public sphere of historical records and the calypso tent. This is the gesture that Mona makes by first presenting Gainger's songs in a written form. What the Diwali display lacks, however, is the story half of the "music and a story" model: while the *songs* have been recuperated, the *story* of indenture remains silenced. The novel on the other hand, brings both music and story into relief. While music and writing by themselves can be unsound, brought together as music and a story, as sound writing, they stand a greater chance of sounding out important counter-hegemonic narratives.

Sound writing finally allows Mona to be more feeling and active than anywhere else in the novel's present. Prior to this, Mona's research, like her narrative point of view, was external to her. Now this personal record stirs her in a way even the story of Fatiman had not. She finally

16. Monique Wittig, "The Trojan Horse," *Feminist Issues* 4, no. 2 (1984): 45.

has a place in the universe, and a plan of action: to make her own documentary film about indenture and her great-grandmother's place in it, "A story waiting to be told — my own story" (275). Discovering ethnic and familial history makes personal historiography and subject-formation possible. Thus, it is only through the songs of a woman, recorded in a woman's journal, that Mona not only learns about her past but is able to find her place and voice.

Caroni Dub — The Sounds of Self-Discovery

Mona's discovery of her voice, place and identity is symbolized by the 'Caroni Dub' that she hears undergirding the sounds of Montreal when she returns at the end of the novel, renewed by her discovery of ethnic and gendered music and story:

I am part of this city I live in [Montreal], and right now I want no other place. Like any other migrant navigating new terrain, I bring my own beat to the land around me. . . . Any new beat is like that: parts of it at war with itself until the separate parts recognize the point of fusion and merge seamlessly. When the rhythm becomes right, everyone forgets the time when cacophony threatened to drown the whole enterprise. . . . A dub rhythm, the Caroni Dub. (305)

This passage that ends the novel illuminates the way in which the entire project of narrating personal and ethnic history through music and a story gives rise to the hybrid rhythm that Mona calls 'Caroni Dub,' forged from the various musical forms that have made up her soundscape. Mona's Caroni Dub represents a mastery of what Weheliye calls 'the mix,' as she 'samples' different music styles for her soundtrack, using them as "raw sonic matter" (Weheliye 90), and equalizing them "until the separate parts recognize the point of fusion and merge seamlessly" (*TSB* 305). Caroni Dub then symbolizes an identity forged from warring components, with a tentative resolution of the discrepancies simply by being held together in a single auditor's soundscape. Mona has not only reconciled her sense of place, finally feeling "a

part of this city . . . and . . . want[ing] no other place,” she has also carved out her own subjectivity into a fusion from these warring sounds — the “cacophony” of “the separate parts . . . at war with itself.” She has done this through the practice of dub, borrowed from the Jamaican studio and sound system practice of mechanically “fragmenting [of] the song surface” to create a new song composition from an old one, but leaving fragments of the ‘original’ intact.¹⁷

Although in Trinidadian parlance dub refers to dancehall reggae, Espinet uses it in the sound technology sense, as a type of musical and compositional intervention in the guise of both the dub engineer or ‘mixer,’ and the sound system selector. Mona’s dub aesthetic is modeled for her by Baboonie dubbing her own voice and story into the unsound tales of the *Ramayana*, and Lil reinserting Gainer’s songs and story into the unsound family history. Baboonie’s sounding of broken chords and fragments of the *Ramayana* is reminiscent of what Michael Veal calls the “interruptive performance logic” of Jamaican deejays (2), whose atonal toasting over popular songs and rhythms not only fragment the sonic wholeness of the song, but also forces the deejay’s voice, lyric and subjectivity onto the listener, and more often than not, completely changes the meaning of the remaining song and lyrics. While Baboonie herself does not succeed in creating a permanent and public record of her dub version of the *Ramayana*, what Mona finds productive is the potential of women’s creative work to dismantle and disrupt unsound male records to create more sound textualities. It is through this process of “fragmenting . . . the song surface” (Veal 2), that characters like Baboonie, Lily and Mona are able to recreate selves that

17. Michael E. Veal, *Dub: Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), 2. See also Mehta’s discussion of the *kala pani* poetics of Caroni Dub in the novel (“Engendering History”), and Puri’s reading of the Caroni Dub as evidence of Espinet’s *dougl*a poetics (“Race and Rape”).

have been damaged either by migration or by the colonialism, patriarchy, and ethnocentric nationalism represented by the music forms I have been discussing.

Weheliye describes the moment of creating a dub mix as a kind of ‘schizophonia,’ or “a sonorous double consciousness” in which the deejay exists on the border between the private sonic space enabled by his headphones, and the social space he is creating for his audience (91). This dub/double consciousness not only helps us to conceptualize the textured sense of self that Mona embodies as she walks the streets of Montreal with her chutney-influenced dub beat. It also helps us to rethink the *sonic* focus of the dub aesthetic to include the kind of hybrid textuality that sound *writing* represents, the juxtaposition of “historically and formally (supposedly) disparate artifacts and methodological approaches to yield new meanings, intensities, and textures” (Weheliye 8). What the aesthetics of dub reveal is that not only is the novel dubbing together different musical genres, it is also creating a dub version out of different and seemingly irreconcilable media as well, in its attempt to find the most sound articulation of Indo-Trinidadian female subjectivity. What Espinet has created from the fragments of songs, documentary excerpts, journal entries, scraps of poems and novelistic text, is a sonico-textual identity that accentuates the mix, the synchronization of different elements. As such, writing takes over the role of recording technology and moves recording from the purely sonic realm to the written realm.

While hymns, calypso and *bhajans* allow Espinet to articulate a model of unsound records — those that reinforce particular values, clichés and mores about Indo-Trinidadian women’s behavior and sexuality — she counteracts that with a sound text. Her novel celebrates counter-hegemonic female resistance by articulating the ‘secret sexual desires of women. Espinet

also accomplishes textual soundness by borrowing the aesthetics of the dub, taking advantage of fragmentation to recreate a tapestry of fused sounds, texts and identities. If history has been mutilated, with women and certain other constituencies left on its cutting room floor, then the job of the revisionist or *sound writer* is to pick up those pieces and dub them back into the soundtrack of history. Consequently, through combining music and a story, sonic texts and sound textualities, Espinet has managed to create a text that interrogates the unsound musical and written records that have historically silenced Indo-Trinidadian women's stories.

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