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In the United States today, 'new immigrants' are incorporated into American society differently than immigrants of previous migrant waves. These new immigrants are 'transnationals' and they are increasingly migrating from the global South, especially from the Caribbean. Shaped by a history of colonialism and globalization that engenders a culture of constant migration, Caribbean identity is fluid, contextual, hybrid and hyphenated. For twice-migrant groups such as Indo-Guyanese--a group that migrated from East India to Guyana, then to the United States--identity must be further redefined. This study explores how the transnational experience shapes the culture and identity (the attitudes, roles, values and beliefs, as well as ethnic identification) for first generation Indo-Guyanese immigrants in Queens, New York. This study utilizes ethnography and in-depth interviews of English-speaking first generation Indo-Guyanese immigrants in Little Guyana, an Indo-Guyanese transnational community in Queens. Findings focus on the experiences of migration and adjustment, community issues in Little Guyana, and the liminal identity of Indo-Guyanese.

CHANGING PLACES AND QUESTIONS OF IDENTITY:  
THE FLUID LIVES OF FIRST-GENERATION  
INDO-GUYANESE

by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

From the street, an unusual commotion stirs at the building front on the corner of 138th and 101 Avenue. The melody of a high-pitched harmonium and rhythmic tassa drums, the lingering aroma of tumeric and gheera, and the hum and bustle distinctive of a crowd emerges from beneath a tented arena amidst this usually quiet New York City neighborhood. This stirring festivity signals Phagwah, a Hindu celebration of Holi, the coming of spring. At this time and place each year, Indo-Guyanese immigrants, neighboring residents, and relatives from Canada and the Caribbean congregate in the way that American families come together at Christmastime.

Inside the tent, a large audience is gathered. Their faces bear the red-powder that marks the traditional Phagwah celebration. Plates of Guyanese-styled Chinese food rest on their laps. Between eating and watching the dance and musical performances on the stage before them, they greet friends and family with similarly powdered faces and hair. Vivid red and orange colored streamers stretch across the high-vaulted ceiling. Just outside the main performance area, a buffet table awaits hungry newcomers, and a group of teenagers bang large drums in a West-Indian-meets-Indian style rhythm. Several older men join in dance, laughing and motioning for others to join.

Tourists and visitors to this scene find a religious and cultural celebration, dance performances, food, music, saris, costumes, flying red powder. The onlooker is

momentarily set into an exotic experience of Indo-Guyanese culture, which is a blending of disparate and diverse cultural elements from East India, the Caribbean, Europe and even China. For a moment underneath this tented arena the people bring together the pieces that make up the culture of Indo-Guyanese: a transnational population that migrated from India to Guyana, a culturally-Caribbean, English-speaking South American country, to New York City. These Indians twice removed have made this community their new home-away-from-home. This community known as Little Guyana is situated near the heart of Queens, home to the many ethnic neighborhoods in New York City. Little Guyana provides the services, resources and institutions, the networks, family, familiar food, music, and outlets for local and international news. It has become the largest Indo-Guyanese receiving transnational community in the United States.

Victor, a writer whose office sits between the various shops that line the main avenue that forms the backbone of Little Guyana, migrated from Guyana over twenty years ago. From Victor's office window, one can witness all of the activity on the street. He reflects on the changes he has seen in the community.

Every summer I sit on the stoop out there and I would see, I would count, at random, 100 people and 80% of those are new faces. So where they come from, I don't know but they have been coming, constantly, whether you have local migration from Brooklyn or Manhattan coming to Queens, or from Guyana or Trinidad or wherever. So this society is in real flux.

A few blocks down, a neighboring business owner, Paul, is enjoying the company of his co-workers. Paul agrees with Victor. "I see this particular area here as a transient

point. Nobody stays here.” Paul and Victor are among the first-generation of Indo-Guyanese who migrated in the early 1970’s, having settled and helped to create the businesses and institutions that have allowed Little Guyana to flourish. They see themselves as being rooted in Little Guyana, and feel that recent migrants and the second generation treat the community as being a transient point. According to Paul, newcomers still think of themselves as Guyanese, and in their mind, Little Guyana is not their home and they will eventually go back or move someplace else.

Victor and Paul both agree that Little Guyana is a step in the migration process; it is a nexus in the network that connects Indo-Guyanese to India, the Caribbean and the United States. Indo-Guyanese are among the wave of ‘new immigrants’ that have been migrating since the 1960s, fashioning transnational ties unlike those of previous migrant groups. This transnational relationship is not the binary home-and-host country relationship, but one of multiple linkages that lacks direct connections and is defined in the midst of transition, between nations and cultures. These multiple linkages create an experience of being ‘betwixt and in-between,’ a part of and in the midst of transnational flows. The way Paul see it, uprootedness, flux, and transition become part of everyday life.

A street over, not far from the location of the tented Phagwah celebration, Trevor is closing up his office for the evening. Trevor owns a successful mortgage business and has offices in New York and Guyana. The nearness of Phagwah stirs memories of Trevor’s very first day of coming to the United States:

I remember it like it was yesterday. It was a very cold day in March. It was Phagwah, which I know is the Hindu festival. And I remember I got to my mom's place and the sun, the sun's bright like hell outside, and yet I was freezing. It was frigid. I couldn't understand it then. One of the other things too, I'd never seen so many different types of people in one place, I was so confused, so for example, I had no clue who or what Jews were, or who or what Puerto Ricans were... And even us as Indian or East Indian, we see ourselves distinct, we're not necessarily Black, and that's one thing I really had a hard time to cope with because from the United States, if you're not white, you're Black, and I'm like saying, 'No' and a lot of time like for example, like when I was filling out college forms, I always [had problems with the race question]. Where it says 'Native Indian' and I'm like, ok the only word that seems close to me is Indian! ... It was just that there was not identity for us at that point right now, you know...

The process of redefining identity might start with the experience of having to choose a box on a college application. It may also involve introspective soul-searching in order to make sense of one's place in the world. In the midst of flux and the flurry of city life, Indo-Guyanese create and redefine what it means to be Indo-Guyanese, or not. Indo-Guyanese may use multiple terms to describe their ethnic identity in a way that does not fit with current classification systems. Moreover, ethnic identification is but a facet to identity. Constant movement forces Indo-Guyanese to reassess who they are, their role in society, and their attitudes, beliefs and values.

Scholars on Caribbean society describe West Indian identity as being postmodern (Trotz 2005; Waters 1990). It is the transnational way of life in which West Indians are grounded that engenders such an identity. Transnationalism is a process of movement and interconnectivity that deconstructs and transcends national boundaries. It is also a unique way of being in the world. I am interested in exploring how the transnational experience

shapes culture and identity (the attitudes, roles, values and beliefs, as well as ethnic identification) for first generation Indo-Guyanese immigrants in Queens, New York.

Using interviews and ethnographic field work, I explored the attitudes, roles, values, beliefs and experiences of first generation Indo-Guyanese immigrants in Queens. I am interested in the stories and points of view of this first wave of immigrants who migrated over twenty years ago and helped to establish the services and institutions that built Little Guyana. The goal is to expand the scholarly body of knowledge since the current academic (and popular) knowledge of Indo-Guyanese people and culture is scarce. By providing a window into this little-known but expanding community, I hope to generate questions that will stimulate further research.

## CHAPTER II

### BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Journeys of exploration into distant and foreign lands, territorial expansion and intercontinental movement paints a picture of what, in a European History class, may be characterized as the Age of Discovery. Today, the term 'globalization' is used to understand such movement and interconnections between places, nations, economies and societies that create a complex global web. The world thus has become like a large stage on which various international players act. These actions have implications for other players. Although the word 'globalization' has recently found its way into common academic jargon and into popular culture, the process itself is not a new phenomenon. The accelerating ease by which globalization is unfolding is a recent trend, embodied by the concept of transnationalism (Steger 2003).

Transnationalism, which literally means 'a way of being across nations,' involves a process in which international migration becomes more efficient, more rapid and more complex. Links between multiple places are created and sustained. Transnational individuals are connected to multiple societies and cultures. For centuries in the Caribbean, people have been moving (and people have been moving people) to and from the islands, between islands, to the United States and to other countries in the world (Roopnarine 2005). The path of Indo-Guyanese migration illustrates such a complex pattern. The course of migration begins in India, the first step of migration, where East

Indian immigrants boarded British ships destined for the Caribbean to work as indentured laborers.

### Historical Background

#### *East Indian Indenture-ship: the first tier of migration*

The ethnic composition of Guyana has shifted over time, resulting in an ethnically plural society. According to Guyana's 2002 Census, the two largest ethnic groups in Guyana are East Indians, or Indo-Guyanese, and Guyanese of African descent, or Afro-Guyanese. Indo-Guyanese make up about 43.5 percent of the population and Afro-Guyanese make up about 30 percent. About 9 percent of the population is Amerindian. Europeans and Chinese comprise less than 1 percent, and about 17 percent of the remaining population is individuals of mixed heritage. Guyana's ethnic diversity can be traced back to Dutch colonization and importation of human labor beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Federal Research Division 1992). Because land was an economic and agricultural asset for Dutch colonizers, the Dutch utilized the local Amerindian population. Enslavement at this time was legitimated by European belief in the savageness of Amerindian people (Moore 1995; Premdas 1995). Historical records also show that the Amerindian population suffered genocide and mass epidemics that wiped out large populations (Federal Research Division 1992; Premdas 1995). Consequently, to maintain a strong labor force, the Dutch imported African laborers into Guyana in the 1690s (Roopnarine 2005). At this time however Dutch economic and colonial power

began to wane, and the British soon seized control of an economically unstable Guyana in the late 1700s (Abraham 2007; Federal Research Division 1992). In the midst of transition between two colonial powers and amongst a growing worldwide consciousness for emancipation, African slaves rioted and revolted on the plantations. International pressure led to the abolition of slavery in 1838.

The continued prosperity of the agricultural sector needed to be ensured, so British colonial elites sought workers from India, which was politically weak and under British influence at the time. Indian workers were a cheap labor source that would fill the labor vacuum (Moore 1995; Premdas 1995; Roopnarine 2003, 2005). About half a million East Indians were recruited. 85% of them from the Northern provinces of Bihar and Uttar-Pradesh to work under five-year contracts after which they would return to India (Moore 1995, Roopnarine 2001, 2003).

To secure this new labor force and bind Indians to the sugar estates, laws restricted travel and required residence on the plantation under poor living conditions (Roopnarine 2001, 2003). It was common for colonial elites and estate owners to separate racial groups and play groups against one another to spark animosity and competition (Abraham 2007; Roopnarine 2001). Estate owners exploited ethnic and cultural differences to undercut solidarity ties between workers (Abraham 2007). An example of these 'divide and conquer' tactics was colonial policies towards land ownership. Estate owners drew up sub-contracts that offered land grants to Indian indentured servants whose labor contracts would soon expire in exchange for their return passages to India

(Roopnarine 2001). Therefore, rather than completing their contract and returning to India, many Indians remained in Guyana alongside other ethnic groups (Premdas 1995).

These land grants turned out to be problematic. After emancipation, estate owners wanted to limit African economic power. Colonial elites created policies that restricted Africans from purchasing land (Abraham 2007). In light of the tension between colonial elites and African ex-slaves and policies that restricted the purchase of land, many Africans deserted the plantations and established autonomous villages (Abraham 2007). However, the maintenance, infrastructure and vital services for these villages were not provided by colonial elites, so the burden of autonomy rested on African villagers who fell into poverty (Abraham 2007). East Indians were relative newcomers to Guyana, and their ownership of land sparked Afro-Guyanese resentment. Africans had been connected to Guyana for over two centuries, and they felt that Guyana could more readily be claimed as theirs (Federal Research Division 1992).

Despite the land arrangement and even amongst clear ethnic and class divisions in Guyana, overt inter-racial violence was relatively non-existent (Federal Research Division 1992). Moore (1995) argues that Indians were perhaps the slowest ethnic group to assimilate into the larger society. Limited assimilation and shared daily struggle may have stemmed overt inter-ethnic violence. It was not until Guyana's independence that ethnic sentiments were exploited by politicians; ethnicity became a tool of manipulation for party division, dominance and power that later fashioned race-based political conflict.

### *Political Manipulation of Race*

In spite of these sites for ethnic tension, 20<sup>th</sup> century class-consciousness and group solidarity grew among workers who united against poor working conditions, low wages and inferior standards of living. Sara Abraham (2007) explored how the Guyanese middle class banded together to form multiracial political coalitions that represented Guyanese people across ethnic lines. This emerging class elected officials to legislative bodies to represent Guyana's ethnic diversity. However, colonial elites amended the Guyanese constitution to dismantle multiracial Guyanese political power. The voice and power shifted back to Europeans. This apparent "hijacking" of the constitution engendered frustration and protest. Worker's unions led riots on the sugar industry (Abraham 2007; Federal Research Division 1995). Radically opposed to colonialism and imperialism, Cheddi Jagan, an Indo-Guyanese leader of a newly established political party, the People's Progressive Party (PPP), was successfully elected to political office in 1953 (Abraham 2007; Mars 2001).

The United States and Europe viewed the PPP as a communist party because of its radical nationalism and leftist policies (Abraham 2007; Chandisingh 1983; Mars 2001). Colonial elites and other coalitions sought to dissolve the party internally in favor of a more conservative base (Abraham 2007; Chandisingh 1983; Mars 2001). The PPP attempted to consolidate control over labor unions, a move that incited British intervention. The British suspended the constitution, declared a state of emergency and instated an interim government composed of racial electorates (Abraham 2007; Chandisingh 1983; Mars 2001). In addition, the PPP began to break up internally. Forbes

Burnham was an Afro-Guyanese and active leader in the PPP whose politics clashed with Jagan's (Abraham 2007; Chandisingh 1983; Mars 2001). Burnham split with the PPP and formed the People's National Congress (PNC). International powers better favored the PNC over the PPP since the PNC's political stance was more moderate and anti-Communist. According to Abraham (2007) and Rabe (2005), United States and British interventionism motivated by imperial interests encouraged the split.

Burnham saw that working class Afro-Guyanese were more likely supporters of the PNC. He began to appeal to ethnicity to consolidate Afro-Guyanese votes, which tended to be divided along class lines (Abraham 2007; Federal Research Division 1992). Similarly, the PPP began to appeal to the Indian population. The political focus thus shifted from labor-based politics to ethnicity-based politics (Abraham 2007).

The 1960's saw the most violent racial conflict that polarized around the 1964 elections. Ralph Premdas (1995) noted that almost all ethnicity-related violence burgeoned around the elections. PNC supporters looted Indian businesses, rioted in the streets and led strikes against PPP-supported unions. The interethnic violence forced groups to self-separate into segregated communities (Abraham 2007; Premdas 1995). Europeans emigrated from Guyana, resulting in a substantial white flight (Abraham 2007). In 1964, Burnham was elected to office after winning the majority of votes by forming a coalition with another independent, minority party (Federal Research Division 1992). Many PPP supporters viewed the election as being fraudulent.

Guyana received its independence in 1966 and the country saw momentary stability, peace and economic growth. However, Burnham's moderate politics turned

sharply leftist as Burnham converted the state into an instrument of the PNC (Abraham 2007; Chandisingh 1983; Federal Research Division 1995; Mars 2001). Gerrymandering, manipulation of the elections, coercion and intimidation characterized Burnham's authoritarian rule over Guyana for the next twenty years. The PNC directly targeted Indian interests by beating and killing PPP supporters, hijacking ballot boxes, and intimidating ordinary citizens. Some members of the Afro-Guyanese community felt that "the PNC had betrayed the wishes of the African people to live in a multiracial society" (Abraham 2007). The PNC, like its European predecessor, pitted racial groups against one another to weaken opposition and group solidarity.

In the 1970s, a new party, the Working People's Alliance (WPA) formed (Misir 2006). The party was headed by political leaders and intellectuals who drew on interethnic solidarity. These alliances permeated ethnic and class boundaries (Abraham 2007; Misir 2006). Burnham saw multicultural politics and solidarity as a threat to its authoritarian power, and thus tightened control over Guyana. The PNC declared Guyana a "Cooperative Republic", cut international ties with Europe and rigged ballot boxes (Abraham 2007; Federal Research Division 1992). The party's negative reputation grew domestically and abroad, especially after the Jonestown project that led to a mass murder-suicide. The PNC was also implicated in the assassination of Walter Rodney, WPA leader and multiracial activist who worked to bring Guyana together across racial divisions (Abraham 2007; Federal Research Division 1992; Misir 2006; Rabe 2005).

In the 1980s, public disapproval of the PNC continued to increase. The party's mismanagement of the economic sector drew Guyana into heavy debt. The government

resorted to loans from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank to implement structural adjustment programs (Canterbury 1997; Edwards 2005). These programs only further depreciated public services and the quality of life in Guyana, and resulted in privatization, financial deregulation, currency devaluation, and the removal of funding for essential services such as health and education (Canterbury 1997; Edwards 2005).

Following Burnham's death in 1985, vice president Desmond Hoyte (PNC) entered office (Mars 2001). In an attempt to rectify the corruption and equalize relations between the PPP and PNC, Hoyte ensured fair elections and implemented an economic restructuring program (Canterbury 1997; Mars 2001). However, the structural adjustment program negatively affected the economy and increased poverty (Canterbury 1997). In 1992, the first fair election in decades, Hoyte was voted out and replaced by Cheddi Jagan, whose return to office was seen as a victory for Indo-Guyanese (Mars 2001). Throughout Jagan's term and through the ascendancy of Bharrat Jagdeo (PPP), there has been continued struggle towards democracy (Mars 2001).

In returning to the concept of globalization, which not only makes migration more flexible and fluid, but it involves the actions of international players which impact other players on different stages. Core nations' relationships with those of the periphery may indirectly or explicitly sway fledgling nations' futures, whether it becomes one of democracy and multiculturalism or instability and conflict. Colonialism violently imposed Eurocentric hegemony and left the social and political structure of Guyana in disarray. Added to that, decolonization further disorganized the economy and

infrastructure. The violence, poverty and disorientation of an authoritarian-ruled Guyana made multiethnic unity and national solidarity a far-fetched aspiration for Guyanese citizens. Therefore, early European colonialism and Western interventionism helped to shape not only the ethnic composition of Guyana, but its economic, political and social condition. The social context in Guyana undoubtedly shaped a specific social identity for Indo-Guyanese.

### Indo-Guyanese Social Identity

‘Indo-Guyanese’ is not only an ethnic category, but a social identity. A social identity is a person’s or group’s knowledge of belonging to a distinct social group (Burke and Stets 2000). Social identity consists of categories such as ethnicity or gender that carry meaning to which members of society refer (Goffman 1963). This meaning defines the group and accentuates inter-group differences, and draws group boundaries that distinguish out-groups from in-groups (Sanders 2002). Strong social boundaries have the effect of isolating out-groups into ethnic enclaves, and when interaction between groups is limited, inter-group differences intensify (Ng 2005).

In Guyana, group boundaries were clearly socially defined along the lines of ethnicity. A social identity existed for each ethnic group—to belong to a certain group had meaning. For example, during the period immediately following independence, to be Indo-Guyanese meant being a supporter of the PPP. However, the strength of group boundaries shifted through time (Abraham 2001). Abraham (2001) conceptualized social

identity in Guyana as being based in time and historic processes. In colonial Guyana, during slavery and indentured servitude, capital was the primary source of racial defining. Clear boundaries separated Europeans, the owners of capital and human labor, from non-European laborers (Abraham 2001). Thus, ethnicity and class were inexorably intertwined, the owners of capital corresponded to a particular race. After the abolition of slavery and indentured servitude, local communities began to distinguish racial boundaries (Abraham 2001).

Lommarsh Roopnarine (2006) also explored the social identity of Indo-Guyanese. Roopnarine (2006) sees social identity as being influenced by place and explores four stages of identity. First, an ethno-local identity is a local, particularized, East Indian identity. An ethno-national identity combines Caribbean cultural characteristics, Guyanese nationality and ethnic ancestry. Thirdly, an ethno-trans-Caribbean identity is a rare identity that draws on the regional, Caribbean identity. Finally, an ethno-universal identity is a transnational identity that refers to the larger Indian Diaspora around the world. The following discussion follows the perspective that Indo-Guyanese social identity shifts through time and by place, and is shaped by prevailing social processes. Social identity is defined along lines of ethnicity, is gendered and varies by social status.

### *Status and Social Identity*

Status, as defined by Guyanese residents in Brackette Williams' (1991) study of a rural town on Guyana's Eastern coast, was recognized as the ease to which people were able to gain and enjoy material and social benefits. Individuals of high status could use

their advantage to help others. Members of society would attribute honor to their name. The individual's social geography--or location in society, village of residence, family name, and social networks--also influenced status (Williams 1991).

Williams (1991) observed five levels of status in the Guyanese village: big man status, small-big man status, the big-small man, small man, and the bottom-class man. An individual's ultimate goal was to achieve big man status by honorable means. The big man had many lines or social networks that consisted of an international upper-middle class (Williams 1991). The big man's social circle facilitated mobility and endowed the individual with power that could be exercised beyond family and kin networks (Williams 1991). The big man did more than make a living—he 'made life'. On the social tier just below that of the big man were small-big men. Small-big men sought big-man status. They stood in lines instead of having their own lines. Below small-big men were big-small men. These men were small men who lacked the material wealth, educational achievements and the social connections of bigger men, yet were able to engage in social activities and obtain certain goods unavailable or unattainable by small men (Williams 1991). Ordinary small men worked just to make a living. They survived day to day and did not work for themselves (Williams 1991). At the lowest stratum, bottom-class men were barely able to meet basic needs and were positioned outside of mainstream society (Williams 1991). The social status arrangement that Williams (1991) observes is similar to that in the United States; big man status corresponds to the American upper class, small-big men are like the upper-middle, and big-small men resemble the middle class.

Small men are comparable to the American working class, and the bottom-class in Guyana resembles the American underclass.

Family members and relatives in William's (1991) town reflexively worked to maintain the family name from 'stains' or a besmirched reputation (Williams 1991). Because family name was one means of self-identification, family members actively protected their family name to preserve the family's 'face'. They adhered to social norms and morals, were loyal to their families and took responsibility in the larger community (Williams 1991). In this way, the individual's actions reflected on the family name. Persons who abandoned the community, withdrew from social interaction or 'dropped out of society' consequently stained their family's name (Williams 1991). Peake and Trotz (1999) also noted that in addition to family and kinship groups, gender was a facet upon which social identity was shaped.

### *Gender*

Social positions in Guyana were gendered. Women did not share the same experiences as men. In a study of women and identities in Guyana, Linda Peake and Alissa Trotz (1999) explored how Guyanese female identities were constituted out of experiences of subordination and struggle. Indo-Guyanese women were tied to the family structure, achieved lower levels of educational attainment and faced marginalization in the workforce (Peake and Trotz 1999). Indo-Guyanese women held power only in the household realm and managed household expenditures and housework (Peake and Trotz 1999). The gendered division of the public and private spheres segregated women to the

home and allowed men free access in the professional and educational realm. Housework was also divided between 'masculine' and 'feminine' tasks. Women cooked, cleaned and cared for children while men completed household repairs (Peake and Trotz 1999). Women also maintained external social networks between family, friends and extended kin; these social networks made up women's social capital (Peake and Trotz 1999). Women held close relationships with other women in the community and viewed marriage and motherhood with high regard. Non-mothers were viewed as being inferior, barren, or homosexual (Peake and Trotz 1999).

Researchers on Guyanese society attributed gendered experiences for Indo-Guyanese men and women to East Indian indenture-ship history (Clement 2006; Nettles 1995; Peake and Trotz 1999; Plaza 2006; Warikoo 2005). Europeans imported more East Indian men to Guyana than women. The overabundance of men provided women the variety and choice among partners. To bind women to the family and restrict social mobility, men asserted power upon women via physical violence. Women were victims of wife-beating, sexual abuse, infidelity, as well as men's alcoholism (Peake and Trotz 1999). Men dictated the details of a woman's life, including the decision to work outside the home or attain an education (Peake and Trotz 1999). Women remained in physically and emotionally abusive marriages because of religious beliefs and the social stigma of divorce (Peake and Trotz 1999).

Because of different relations to power and resources, social identity is stratified by gender and varies by social status. The different social identities in Guyanese society may be conceptualized as a grid of intersecting social categories. For example, an Afro-

Guyanese “big man” would be attributed a different social identity than an Indo-Guyanese working class woman.

*Ethnicity and Social Identity: Creolization in Colonial Guyana*

Social identity in Guyana is also defined by ethnicity. The meaning of these social identities has changed through time. Historical and social processes have shaped the shifts in meaning. Creolization is a process of assimilation in which different cultures melt together to form a culture and way of life distinct of that of the ethnic groups’ homelands (Misir 2006; Moore 1995; Roopnarine 2006). Williams (1991) uses Benjamin Azkins’ analogy of a homogenous brew that blends different flavors to create a stew with “distinct flavor and taste” describes this assimilatory process. Colonial elites sought to creolize Guyana so that ethnic groups would ‘civilize’ according to Eurocentric standards. In order for Caribbean societies to creolize, ethnic groups had to shed their ascriptive, primordial qualities and adopt the culture of the core group (Alexander 2006; Misir 2006).

East Indians arrived in Guyana among a milieu of ethnic groups with distinct cultures, structures and values (Misir 2006). Differences in symbolic structures, such as language and culture: Hindi versus Portuguese, Chinese, or English Creole, delayed adoption of the dominant culture. The caste system dictated the structure of social life for East Indians, thus closing group boundaries (Moore 1995; Ng 2005; Sanders 2002). East Indians also maintained transnational links to India through emissaries sent by Gandhi, Indian cultural performance troupes that traveled to Guyana, and Hindu and Islamic

missionaries that helped to strengthen religious ties to the homeland (Samaroo 2006). Brian Moore (1995) argued that East Indian groups were able to successfully resist the cultural imposition by the European colonial structure due to rigid group boundaries. These boundaries allowed a preservation of culture, a strong sense of the 'motherland' in India. Therefore, counter to the arguments of the dominant creolization processes in the Caribbean, an all-inclusive, universally shared system of values had not emerged in Guyana (Moore 1995). The only major attribute that East Indians, Africans and other Guyanese adopted was language, a Creole variant of English. Hence, ethnic groups in Guyana did not creolized in the ideal sense (Moore 1995).

#### *Reactive ethnicity during Post-Colonial Guyana*

When group boundaries are rigid, they isolate and alienate groups. Reactive ethnicity emerges, a strong sense of ethnic identity. For East Indians in Guyana, a strong sense of Indian-ness emerged. Roopnarine (2006) called this strong, local ethnic identity an "ethno-local" identity. Ethno-local identity emerged in insular rural communities, or ethnic enclaves. In Williams' (1991) ethnographic study, East Indians and Africans stereotyped one another (Williams 1991). East Indians claimed that young Africans were lazy and did not know how to make a life, and Africans claimed that Indians lived to work and behaved like 'coolies' (Williams 1991).

The term 'coolie' underwent redefinition in Guyana. According to Shepherd (2006), Indians were uneasy with the Creole label imparted by creolization. It became clear that after Guyana's independence, the ideal of a multicultural, Creole society was

unachievable. In response, East Indians redefined the image of the Indian coolie (Shepherd 2006). 'Coolitude' refers to "a process of identity construction among post-slavery migrants who underwent processes of shipment, indentureship, exile and marginalization in Guyana" (Shepherd 2006). Indians established communal organizations to promote Indian culture (Shepherd 2006). Transnational influences from India, such as inspiration from Gandhi, bolstered an Indian identity (Samaroo 2006). Although connections between India and the Indian Diaspora waned in part due to internal struggles within India, overseas Indians continue to look to India for cultural guidance, and were an eager market for India's products, especially Bollywood films (Samaroo 2006). Although the caste structure disappeared, Hinduism continued to play a central role in organizing Indian culture in Guyana (Van der Veer 1991). Coolitude was thus a resurgence of ethnic identity.

Resurgent ethnic identity especially emerged during times of racial politicization during the latter half of the twentieth century. Political parties appealed to race by manufacturing a sense of 'we-ness' by differentiating 'us' from 'them' (Misir 2006). In this way, group boundaries strengthened and group social identity increased (Misir 2006).

### *Multiculturalism*

Multiculturalism also briefly emerged in post-colonial Guyana. Out-group identities were publicly displayed rather than pushed to the peripheries of society (Alexander 2006). Diversity was celebrated and different groups united towards a project of national unity. Guyana momentarily saw multicultural projects geared towards

national solidarity through the Working People's Alliance (WPA). As a consciously multiracial political organization, the WPA pulled together multiethnic politicians and intellectuals to advocate racial harmony, free elections, and democratic socialism (Federal Research Division 1995). "The struggle that the WPA urged was to build a new nationalist spirit, a spirit of resistance, and one within which working people could define their own futures" (Abraham 2007). Through the party, resistance and activism crossed ethnic lines.

The party suffered crackdowns by the People's National Congress, however. Violence and terrorism towards WPA (and PPP members who supported the WPA) and the assassination of Walter Rodney, WPA activist and leader, reverberated as a direct attack against unity and multiracialism (Abraham 2007). Multiculturalism might have served as a foundation for national unity. Indo-Guyanese, Afro-Guyanese, Amerindians, Portuguese and Chinese may have been able to refer to themselves as simply 'Guyanese', drawing on a multicultural national identity. This kind of identity had its greatest opportunity in the time of post-independence; however, threats to the multicultural project--ethnic dominance imposed by creolization, class division, and cultural imperialism, suffocated such a solidifying effort.

### *Hyphenation*

Today, rather than a creolized identity, a strong reactive ethnic identity or a multicultural identity, what has emerged in Guyana is a hyphenated identity. Jeffery Alexander (2006) conceptualizes hyphenation as a common collective identity that is

neither core nor peripheral. A hyphenated identity is fluid, hybrid, and more tolerable in social life because they are not strong ethnic identities. The term 'Indo-Guyanese' points to a hyphenated identity in which the individual or group understands their self as both Indian and Guyanese. These hyphenated identities are defined within local communities (Abraham 2001). 'Indo-Guyanese' and 'Afro-Guyanese' identifications include ethnic ancestry and refer to a shared Guyanese or Caribbean culture (Roopnarine 2006).

Roopnarine (2006) distinguishes this type of identity as an ethno-national identity in which ethnicity and nationality are put together, hyphenated, and a dual identity is assumed that recognizes cultural heritage alongside nationality. Although Indo-Guyanese may retain a degree of indian-ness, other non-Indian cultural aspects are integrated into their identity as well. For example, chutney music is popular in Guyana and Guyanese communities in the United States. Chutney soca music blends West Indian calypso with Indian folk songs (Warikoo 2005). Indo-Guyanese foods are a combination of Indian and West Indian ingredients.

Hyphenated identity is an ambiguous and unstable social form, however (Alexander 2006). The group hovers in a state of transition. In Guyana, the interethnic conflict over political dominance loomed between different groups (Roopnarine 2006). Hyphenation, therefore, is a state of transition between creolization and multiculturalism.

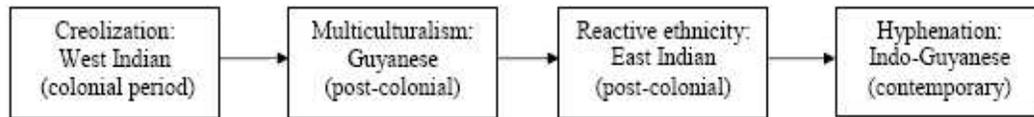


Figure 1. Social Processes in Guyana

The shifts between creolization, nationalism, multiculturalism and hyphenation are illustrated in figure two. During the colonial period, colonial elites insisted that a common culture would emerge and all groups would assimilate into the Caribbean melting pot. Assimilation however, implies marginality, inferiority, and the shedding of cultural characteristics. Out-groups were marginalized and strong group boundaries emerged, producing the reactive ethnicity that fed nationalism, as exemplified by the racialized politics of post-independent Guyana. Nationalist politics stimulated ethnic conflict that surged during the Burnham era. Today, since the dissolution of the authoritarian regime, hyphenated identities have become more common. Because Guyana may not yet be a multicultural society nor is one that is creolized, and because more and more Guyanese are prompted to emigrate, Guyanese relate to an identity that is fluid, non-ethnocentric and hyphenated.

Since the 1970's Indo-Guyanese began "voting with their feet," leaving a country in which they felt unsafe, unprotected, and underrepresented (Roopnarine 2001). Flight from plight became a more comfortable route for many disheartened Guyanese of both

Indian and African descent, who left a country rich of heritage and culture yet was unaccommodating. The overwhelming push factors, coupled with international pull factors caused migration and created what Roopnarine (2005) called a “propensity to move”. Indo-Guyanese have a history of migration and continue to move. In this culture of migration, movement is inevitably part of the future. Indo-Guyanese move to different regions, between Caribbean islands, and to different continents (Roopnarine 2001). The Guyana ‘mass exodus’ will place more Indo-Guyanese outside of Guyana and to North America by 2010 (Roopnarine 2001; Trotz 2006). Guyanese are among ‘new immigrants’ in the United States whose migration experience differs from that of previous migrant groups. This experience is one of transnationalism.

### Transnationalism

#### *Immigration to the United States*

Immigrants in the United States today enter a receiving context that vastly differs from that during the European waves of migration during the early 1900’s. European immigrants entered a society that offered the conditions that encouraged assimilation: an economic boom and stagnant immigration until 1965 (Massey 1995; Pedraza-Bailey 1995). This period of time allowed European immigrants the ‘breathing space’ to socially and economically assimilate (Massey 1995). The assimilation achieved by early European immigrants thus helped to foster the immigrant myths of the great American

melting pot. Immigrants and Americans alike believed that with hard work one could pull oneself up by one's bootstraps and achieve the American dream (Massey 1995).

Immigrants of more recent migrant waves enter a society very different from those of the first phase (Massey 1995; Reitz 2002). The United States economy faced a recession and there was no 'breathing space' for assimilation (Massey 1995). In 1965, the U.S. lifted immigration restrictions and expanded them to the global 'south', which included Latin Americans and West Indians (Massey 1995; Pedraza-Bailey 1995; Waters 1999). The amendments to immigration legislation abolished the national origins quota system that in turn eliminated national origin, race, or ancestry as a basis for immigration. Immigrant visas were allocated on a first come, first served basis and allowed preference to relatives of U.S. citizens and persons with special occupational skills, abilities, or training. As a result of the liberalized policy and to escape the authoritarian regime of Forbes Burnham and discouraging conditions in Guyana, Indo-Guyanese and other Guyanese migrants began to look to the US as a destination country (Roopnarine 2001).

Intellectuals, medical professionals and members of the Guyanese upper-middle class emigrated due to lack of opportunity in Guyana. Students moved abroad for educational opportunities. Guyana experienced a 'brain drain' or emigration of the middle class, professionals and intellectuals to core nations (Roopnarine 2001; Trotz 2005). After establishing residency, typically in the gateway cities of New York and Toronto, Guyanese immigrants then sent for their family members (Trotz 2005; Roopnarine 2001). According to Roopnarine (2001), there were between five to seven thousand people per year emigrating from Guyana. Between the 1970s and late 1980s,

about 10,000 Guyanese migrated per year. Currently, Indo-Guyanese migration is no longer restricted to upper and middle classes, since established networks abroad allow multiple channels migration (Roopnarine 2001).

### *Theories of Migration*

In response to the changing immigrant composition in the United States, theories of migration and academic discourse over migration has evolved over time. The theory of neoclassical economics proposes that wage differentials and employment conditions between countries cause workers from low-wage countries to migrate to high-wage countries (Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Pellegrino, and Taylor 1993). Therefore, international migration is an investment in human capital and a result of a decision-making process that calculates the costs and the benefits (Massey et. al. 1993). According to neoclassical economic theory, individuals move because of differences in wages (Massey et. al. 1993). The theory of new economics challenges the assumptions of neoclassical theory; migration is not solely an individual decision, but influenced by units of people, families, and communities (Massey et. al. 1993). Migration is thus a household decision to minimize risks and maximize the family income (Massey et. al. 1993).

Neither theory takes into account circumstances like that of Indo-Guyanese. The theory of neoclassical economics ignore the collective decision-making process of families and communities, and the new economics of migration assume that migrants will earn enough abroad to improve the family income and eventually return home. Indo-

Guyanese rarely return to Guyana, so remittances sent, while improving the family income, help the family to emigrate from Guyana (Trotz 2005).

Another migration theory, the dual-labor market theory, situates migration beyond the micro level by linking immigration to structural, pull factors such as intrinsic labor demands of modern industrial societies (Massey et. al. 1993). Structural inflation repels workers of high-wage countries, but attracts foreign workers who fill the jobs the local population will not do. Such occupations are labeled as “immigrant jobs”, positions of dirty, dangerous or difficult work (Massey et. al. 1993) However, this theory does not explain brain drain of Indo-Guyanese intellectuals and professionals who may not be attracted by these “immigrant jobs”. World systems theory, however, moves beyond relations between national economies and expands to the world market (Massey et. al. 1993). As a result of globalization that deterritorializes and liberalizes markets, allowing capital to penetrate peripheral nations, world systems create a mobile population prone to immigrate (Steger 2003; Massey et. al. 1993).

It is in this way that the relationship between the United States and Guyana is one of constant migration due to cumulative causation, networks, and institutionalization. Cumulative causation implies that migration alters the receiving context, making additional movement more likely and resistant to regulation (Massey et. al. 1993; Massey 1995). Networks and institutions facilitate and encourage migration. As discussed by Massey et. al (1993), family members, relatives and associations abroad make migration easier because existing networks lower the costs and risks to migrate (Massey et. al. 1993). Once migration has begun, private institutions and organization satisfy the needs

created by large numbers of migrants by adapting and providing services for migrants (Massey et. al. 1993). Therefore, cumulative causation stimulates a momentum that makes immigration more resistant to government regulation (Massey 1995). In this way, instead of the 'waves' of migration that characterized the United States before 1965, the United States since has become a nation of perpetual immigration (Massey 1995). Transnational communities form, connecting different geographical places and perpetuating social relations (Gowricharn 2006). According to Portes (2001):

Once migrant colonies become established abroad, a flow of transnational economic and information resources starts...The cumulative effects of these dynamics come to the attention of national governments who reorient their international activities through embassies, consulates [etc]...The increased volume of demand created by migrant remittances and investment in their home countries...encourage local firms to go abroad themselves.

Indo-Guyanese migration happens in this way, and the blooming transnational communities in New York City and Toronto reflect such a trend. These communities are comprised of other Indo-Caribbeans (people of East Indian origin from Trinidad, Guyana, Surinam, and other Caribbean islands) (Roopnarine 2001; Trotz 2005). Indo-Guyanese family members rejoin relatives, settling within a network of family and relatives that have established life in the North (Roopnarine 2001; Trotz 2005). Dense Guyanese transnational communities thrive in these cities, with the largest concentration of Indo-Caribbeans in United States in the Richmond Hill community in Queens, NY (Warikoo 2005). Here Guyanese businesses and organizations flourish, and cultural events such as the Phagwah Parade and Guyana Independence Day celebrations help shape transnational

identity (Trotz 2005; Warikoo 2005). Local institutions assist in receiving Guyanese immigrants, reflecting the institutionalization and cumulative causation of a migration system (Massey 1993; Roopnarine 2001). Such transnational systems allow intense exchange of goods, capital, and people between countries (Massey et. al. 1993).

The concept of transnationalism captures this way of being and migrating. Glick Schiller (1997) conceptualized transnationalism a process in which immigrants bring together two different societies into a single field, allowing migrants to develop and maintain relations that simultaneously connect them to two or more societies (Schiller 1997). However, this association does not accurately reflect Indo-Guyanese transnationalism. Trotz (2005) argued against this binary, here-and-home definition of transnationalism. Transnationalism implies direct connection between host and sending country through return visits, remittances, and dual citizenship (Schiller 1997). Today, Indo-Guyanese immigrants in the United States may not see their move as a step towards returning to Guyana, since they have made the US and other regions beyond Guyana home (Gowricharn 2006). As pointed out by Trotz (2005), Guyanese may not return to Guyana because of the comparatively inferior quality of life and instability.

Instead, imaginary geographies are created in the process of Guyanese transnationalism (Trotz 2005). These imaginary geographies are places and spaces in which culture and identity is constructed and enacted. Alissa Trotz (2006) observed the Last Lap Lime, a cultural event held annually in Toronto that attracts thousands of Guyanese from Canada and New York City. This Guyanese event is held outside of Guyana, collapsing the boundary between nation and culture. It is the border between the

two North American diasporic communities, New York City and Toronto, not the border between Guyana and North America, that is crossed as part of the work in reproducing Indo-Guyanese transnational identity (Trotz 2005).

In addition, communication technologies allow Indo-Guyanese to maintain virtual transnational ties (Plaza 2006; Warikoo 2005). Youtube posts, facebook groups, personal blogs and webpages are constantly updated and accessed. On Youtube, young Indo-Guyanese can be seen wearing the latest American fashions and dancing to hip-hop music. By simply “googling” the term “Indo-Guyanese” or “Little Guyana”, the cyber surfer can find numerous web sites geared towards the Guyanese online community. Relatives and old high school friends can reunite through these online communities. The cyber surfer may also join the intense online dialogue concerning Guyanese culture and social issues.

In addition to crossing and transcending geographical space, Indo-Guyanese also deconstruct dominant ideas about race in America. Dwaine Plaza (2006) explored identity of one-and-a-half-generation and second-generation Indo-Caribbean and African Caribbean Canadians in transnational communities. Participants used fluid ethnic labels to describe themselves. Some Indo-Caribbeans interchangeably used their East Indian origin or referred to their national origin as the basis on which they would link other characteristics (Plaza 2006). They found themselves in the “marginal man” position while growing up--they felt pulled in the direction of the mainstream culture but drawn back by cultures of their own (Plaza 2006).

Kasinitz, Mollenkopf and Waters (2002) explored how diverse interactions in gateway cities such as New York City, in which immigration has drastically changed the ethnic composition, fostered hybridity and fluid exchanges across group boundaries (Kasinitz et.al. 2002). A new culture was being created by these second-generation youth that was neither “immigrant” nor “middle American” (Kasinitz et. al. 2002). Natasha Warikoo (2005) also noted that second-generation Indo-Caribbeans drew on mainstream images, such as hip-hop style clothing and music and aspects of both Caribbean and Indian culture. Solid race and ethnic definitions were replaced by more cosmopolitan identities that increasingly became the norm for second-generation Indo-Caribbeans (Warikoo 2005).

This fluid, hybrid, cosmopolitan identity that permeates national and imagined boundaries can be thought of as being post-modern (Peake & Trotz 1999). Mass immigration and transnational communities reconfigure the terms on which Guyanese identities are understood. To be Guyanese today is to be a transnational, to be located within terms of movement (Peake & Trotz 1999). Flexibility is required when one must locate Indian ancestry, refer to a Guyanese past and establish life in the Western world (Peake & Trotz 1999).

Transnationalism may be thought of as a way of being that forces immigrants, and the rest of society, to rethink current conceptions of race and ethnicity and other social classifications. Transnationalism engenders a unique way of life grounded in the daily lives of migrants who use hyphenated identities to incorporate and refer to various social

categories, deconstructing solid classification systems in the process. Kivisto (2003) argues that transnationalism pioneers new understandings of citizenship and classification systems.

When multiculturalism leads to a more expansive understanding of the meaning of citizenship, it can increase the likelihood that sustained transnational communities might emerge. These would be cosmopolitan communities, reflecting the movement (psychic as much as physical) of immigrants in and out of the community, indicative of a general openness to the influences of both homeland and receiving nations' cultures and social institutions.

According to Kivisto (2003), instead of assimilating to the values and beliefs of the host country, transnationalism expands conceptions of citizenship and race and embraces universal values like diversity and multiculturalism. Is this the case in Indo-Guyanese transnational communities? Second-generation Indo-Guyanese embraced hybrid and fluid identities; however, this may not stand for the first generation. After taking another step of migration, how do they renegotiate identity in a new social context? How does the transnational experience shape culture and identity (the attitudes, roles, values and beliefs, as well as ethnic identification) for first generation Indo-Guyanese immigrants in their transnational community?

### CHAPTER III

#### OUTLINE OF PROCEDURES

My methodological perspective is ethnographic and interpretive. Ethnography involves detailed social description and interpretation of how participants understand their world (Becker 2007; Geertz 1983). These qualitative methodologies are oriented to “discovering life worlds ‘from the inside out’” by capturing the everyday, local knowledge of participants and utilizing cases as a starting point to gain better understanding of social reality (Denzin and Lincoln 1998; Flick, von Kardorff and Steinke 2004; Geertz 1983). Flyvbjerg (2005) proposes case-studies as being primary to social science because they cover depth rather than breadth and produce context-dependent knowledge by fitting people, time and place together. The advantage of depth allows narrative and thick description that digs into complex ideas. The researcher is then able to develop context-dependent theory that includes an “open-ended, contingent relation between contexts and actions and interpretations” (Flyvbjerg 2005).

Howard Becker (2007) points out the variety of colorful, interdisciplinary ways of telling about society in addition to the figures, tables and models ever-present in quantitative research. Various media such as film, photography, fiction and drama each have a unique mode representing a portion of society. Such media inform the narrative and incorporate the context. Contextuality thus guides qualitative research since data is gathered in a real context--the narrative surrounds the data (Flick et. al. 2004). This

project incorporates various sources of media such as newspaper and journal articles, photographs, images and video in my analysis and interpretation of this portion of society.

### Research Design

In this study I completed semi-structured in-depth interviews and ethnographic field work in Richmond Hill, New York. I chose Richmond Hill because it is the largest receiving community for Indo-Caribbeans in the United States. Richmond Hill is home to Little Guyana, an Indo-Caribbean transnational community that extends south from Atlantic to Liberty Avenue, and between the Van Wyck Expressway and Woodhaven Boulevard. It is estimated that over 100,000 Indo-Caribbeans live in Richmond Hill, however this number does not account for undocumented immigrants.

My research design is informed by researchers on Caribbean identity in New York City (Butterfield 2004; Clement 2006; Kasinitz et. al. 2002; Warikoo 2005; Waters 1999). In *Black Identities*, Waters (1999) explored race and identity for West Indian first and second generation immigrants in New York City. Waters (1999) selected her sample from worksites and high schools to complete life history interviews that covered the participant's life stories, experiences of migration, attitudes towards other ethnic groups, and their own racial identities. Butterfield's (2004) study of second-generation West Indian immigrants in New York City explored the salience of the concept of race for West Indians, and how West Indians may have had to renegotiate their racial identities in

the context of the United States. Butterfield (2004) gained entry into her population of interest through her own personal network of second generation West Indians in New York City and utilized a snowball sample to conduct in-depth interviews. Warikoo (2005) explored gender and ethnic identity among Indo-Caribbean teenagers in New York City and the Richmond Hill area through in-depth interviewing and month-long ethnographic work, visiting with community organizations and youth groups and at campaign offices and religious institutions (Warikoo 2005). Warikoo (2005) gained entry into the community through contacts with community leaders and by snowball sampling.

Participants for my study were selected through a community organization in Richmond Hill. With the help of Google, I found a listing of the contact information for Indo-Caribbean community organizations in Richmond Hill. I spoke with Mr. Ramesh Singh, the president of the Indo-Caribbean Association of New York (or ICANY, a pseudonym for the actual organization), who was enthralled by the project especially since a student from way down south was interested in his little-known community. Mr. Singh was eager to help and sent a formal letter of support agreeing to participate in my project.

ICANY works to educate the community and promote Indo-Caribbean culture and heritage. Since 1985 ICANY has organized annual cultural events, especially during Phagwah in March and Indian Arrival Day in May. Through ICANY I selected participants to gather a snowball sample. Snowball sampling was employed as a suitable sampling strategy for gathering participants since no known sampling frame exists for the Indo-Caribbean population. Warikoo (2005) noted in her study that an accurate

population count on Indo-Caribbeans in the United States is difficult to assess due to the lack of an obvious category on Census race and ancestry questions. Therefore, my sample initially derived from ICANY. Participant referrals from ICANY expanded my sample, and networks that extended from these participants further expanded my sample, thus allowing the sample to 'snowball'.

I completed in-depth interviews with eight participants whose age ranged from 38 to 65, comprising the first generation of Indo-Guyanese to migrate to Richmond Hill. I chose the first generation due to the lack of research on the Indo-Caribbean first generation, and to compare my findings on the identity and experience of the first generation with findings on the second-generation (Plaza 2006; Warikoo 2005). Interviews followed a flexible protocol that included questions on the participant's life story, specifically their migration experience, cultural adjustment, and life in their community. Several questions explored the attitudes towards their community and the beliefs and roles that were important to them. The duration of each interview ranged between 30 to 120 minutes.

I also completed over 250 hours (3 weeks) of ethnographic field work in Little Guyana, spending time in the community, informally talking with local community members, taking photographs and videos, and collecting local newsletters, Caribbean journals and flyers for local events. I attended several cultural events including Phagwah celebrations. Much of this time was spent observing local life in Little Guyana; observing everything from ordinary street activity to large organized cultural events. After each day of field work I took field notes that included thick descriptions. Field notes were used to

maintain record of locations, actions at these locations and notes on informal conversations. These notes provided narrative description of the setting and events. This information is incorporated into the discussion of my findings.

### Coding

I incorporated grounded theory in my analysis of interview data. Grounded theory involves a research process in which theory is generated from and grounded in the data (Strauss and Corbin 1998). After each interview was transcribed into an electronic text document, the text was coded based on themes that emerged from the text. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), in applying grounded theory to the process of coding, concepts are developed, connected and theory continues to evolve. The following concepts were conceptualized and categorized: attitudes, values, beliefs, roles and emergent themes. Interview text was then coded for these concepts.

“Attitudes” were the points of view or stances toward an idea, person, or event. For example, a participant could have a negative, positive or optimistic attitude, or an attitude of concern toward something. “Values” were the principles or virtues one lived by, imparted, or learned in the course of one’s life. “Beliefs” were the opinions or ideas that one adhered to, and were not necessarily value-related. “Roles” were the parts the person played in their everyday life, and could be manifest roles (such as mother or mortgage broker) or roles related to the participant’s persona (such as being a leader or a home maker). Emergent themes were the overarching ideas and were coded separately as

a “Theme” and then coded according to the theme. The code list thus includes attitudes, values, beliefs, roles and emergent themes.

Table 1. Code List

<b>Themes</b>		
	Life in Guyana	9
	Migration	7
	Indo-Caribbeans built Richmond Hill	8
	Home-away-from-home	13
	Migrating and resetting to zero	6
	Ideals of America vs. Reality	12
	Hard work	16
	Granite Ceiling	3
	Adapting	4
	Culture shock	5
	Climate differences	2
	Staying with own people	16
	Facing racism	4
	Americans are provincial	4
	Politics	6
	Religion vs. politics	5
	Lack of trust in politics	12
	Lack of representation and resources	7
	Elderly need care	3
	Women	2
	Problems of Youth	10
	Youth take America for granted	3
	Community is launch pad for youth	6
	Traditional culture vs. American culture	13
	Not By Choice but Design	11
	Guyanese Mentality	21
	Identity crisis	6

<b>Themes</b>	Ethnic identity	11	
	Education and empowerment is needed	11	
	Cultural events bring unity	4	
<b>Attitudes</b>	Optimism for community's future	15	
	Understands structural factors in society	8	
	Admires racial difference	5	
	Ethnic pride	13	
	Positive attitude towards America	7	
	Disappointment in America	8	
	Disappointment in other Indo-Guyanese	8	
	Beliefs	22	
	Belief in American Dream	17	
	Belief in political processes	16	
	<b>Question</b>	About Self	8
		Year Migrated	7
		First job	7
Returns trips to Guyana		7	
How would life be different if you moved far from Little Guyana?		7	
<b>Values</b>		17	
<b>Roles</b>		42	
<b>Leisure Activities</b>		13	

Several interview questions were also coded so that I could easily compare participant's year of migration, first job and current job, and whether the participant made frequent trips to Guyana. In doing so, I found several similarities among my participants.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### Little Guyana

##### *A Window into the Day-to-Day Life*

On Liberty Avenue, the major shopping and business strip in Little Guyana, there is the buzz of New York City life enlivened by an exotic freshness. Here people are gathered at storefronts, they are walking, bustling, and mingling through fresh food markets, across sidewalks, into shops, out of shops, across streets and through markets. Some people stand, waiting at bus stops, at storefronts, or pausing for conversation. The Guyanese accent is easy to distinguish; it is English with a West Indian accent, sprinkled by several distinct words like “gyal” for girl, or “me wan...” meaning “I want to”. From the street passersby can hear the bass of chutney soca music bumping from a passing vehicle or “coolie songs” (as locals call it) playing from the neighbor’s house. The rich, spicy smells linger at restaurant fronts and bake shops and like steam rising from a pan, humid and flavorful, they inevitably embed in one’s clothes. Among the numerous signs and flyers posted at light poles and on billboards and at storefronts are red, yellow, white and green Guyana flags.



Figure 2. Guyanese-Chinese Food on Liberty Avenue

The A train runs over Liberty Avenue, and is heralded by the humming roar, then a “clack-clack, clack-clack” as the speeding subway cars totter over bumpy track rails. Thousands of commuters from Little Guyana board these trains each day, leaving for work early in the morning, commuting to their second job, and returning late in the evening to their families to cook, clean, put children to bed, then prepare for the same routine the next day.

Participants were first generation Indo-Guyanese immigrants living in Richmond Hill whose age ranged from 38 to 65. They had all lived in the community for over twenty years, having migrated in the 1970s and 1980s. These participants were business owners of real estate, insurance, and mortgage businesses, as well as a hair salon. I also interviewed community leaders: a journalist who published a local journal on Guyanese

affairs, a priest of a local temple and a politician in Richmond Hill. These participants, who I have provided the pseudonyms Ramesh, Paul, Robert, Victor, Trevor, Anita, Hardeo and Joseph, were all part of the wave of immigrants that helped establish the services, institutions and networks that have allowed the community to flourish.

### Migration Experience

Ramesh, the president of ICANY, migrated to the United States in 1980. At this time, Richmond Hill was populated with other ethnic groups, mainly Italian, Irish and German. Indo-Caribbeans moved to the area because it was more affordable to buy homes.

...Eventually back in the Caribbean, as one family moves here, another one follows and then the next thing you know there's a big community here. Some of the services they offer over here, there's a lot of Indo-Caribbean doctor, there're services like immigration services that they offer, a lot of real estate, the stores where you can purchase your own foodstuff that came out of Guyana or Trinidad or the rest of the Caribbean. So it's more, it's very comfortable here and you know people don't have to go back home to pick up their foodstuffs or other stuff.

In this way, through cumulative causation, networks and institutionalization, Richmond Hill grew into the large Indo-Caribbean community it is today. According to Ramesh, it was Indo-Caribbeans who really built up Richmond Hill up into what it is now locally known as Little Guyana.

As our people came in here, we were, you know, we started to develop it, modifying their house, you know beautifying the properties, and eventually this is what it looks like today. If you had come here 20 years

ago, it was a totally, totally different environment and because of that the prices of the properties went up enormously because of the area and the way the property is and the maintenance that the people have done on it. So it is moving forward at a rapid pace.



Figure 3. Liberty Avenue

In his mid-fifties, Ramesh is well-connected in the community to business owners, religious leaders, family, friends, neighbors and politicians. His social status has been hard-earned, however, and he is not a stranger to struggle. Ramesh sees his own migration experience as being connected to the experiences of other Indo-Caribbean immigrants. “I think that it’s a story that not only myself, but many, many immigrants experience the same thing.”

Robert is an associate of Ramesh's, a retired military officer who owns a mortgage business. Robert is involved in several community organizations. He describes his family's reasons for migrating.

The government, the system was changing. The British had left and more and more there were Indians being attacked from the other nationals, from the African Guyanese, there were problems with that. We weren't directly affected but I guess my dad saw the light and said, 'We gotta get out of here.' We were cattle farmers. We were very successful, as a matter of a fact, my dad bought each one of us a house back in the 60s, so we had no reason to leave Guyana, except the government was changing. I didn't know much, my dad knew more about it than I did and my brother came here in '68 to study medicine and then eventually we all came up little by little to the United States to get a better life.

Participants saw the government and society in Guyana as a major push factor for migration. These push factors, more so than international pull factors, influenced participants' and their families' decisions to move. Paul, an insurance salesman, migrated in 1977.

1977 was a crucial time because the economy was sinking. I was just 19 years old but...under the Burnham regime they really, Burnham and his henchman really tried to clamp down on the economic activity of the people. And a lot of them just leave the country, Guyana of course sunk to poverty status, right, so it was the thing was it created that racial division, you know, where black people were suspicious of Indian people and Indian people were suspicious of black people and that was, that was really the crisis in the country.

Paul was able to migrate by being sponsored by his brother who obtained a student visa and gained citizenship. For Indo-Guyanese, there are three typical paths to migration: through family sponsorship under U.S. immigration legislation, by cashing in

on their assets and migrating under immigration allowance, and by the backtrack method (Roopnarine 2001). Backtracking is an illegal enterprise that allows immigrants to enter through the “back door” by leaving Guyana with bona fide travel documents. Immigrants then enter an intermediate country as the “pipeline”, and obtain false documents through the backtrack ring on arrival in the intended country. According to the 2000 Census, over 160,000 persons reported Guyanese as their national classification. This number does not account for immigrants who have entered the United States by backtracking, and does not distinguish Guyanese from Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese (Roopnarine 2001).

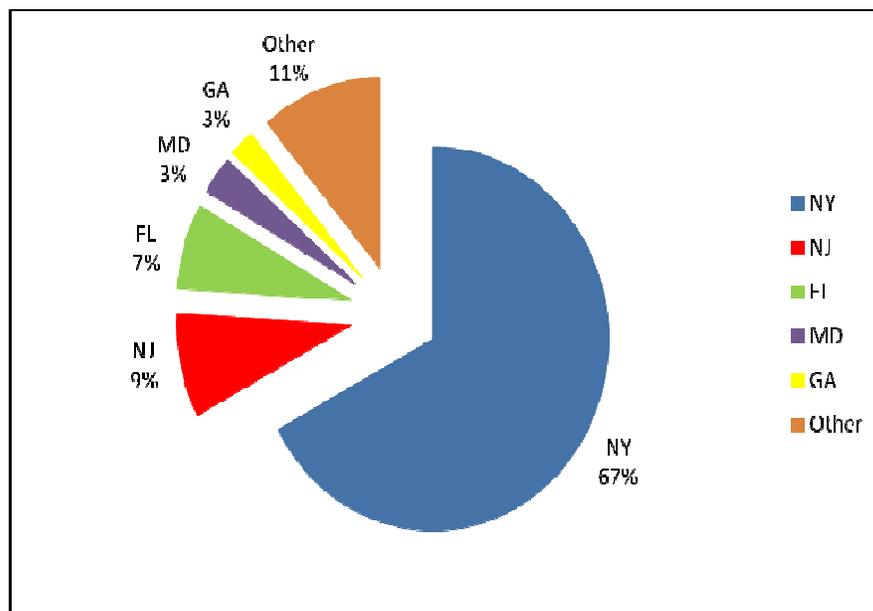


Figure 4. 2000 Census States with the Highest Guyanese Populations

New immigrants sponsored by families or that enter via the backtrack method temporarily stay with family in order to save enough earnings to rent an apartment and live independently. Unfortunately, large extended family members living in one house became a problem in Richmond Hill. Trevor, who works in the mortgage business, describes this situation:

At one time [the police] were raiding basements here a lot...When people come, especially new arrivals if you will, or new immigrants come, they're strapped for cash, they have no where to live so the family that sponsored them, he or she may have a house and may have a basement or an extra room so you find that for a little period of time maybe two months, three months, a house that had five people end up having fifteen people and it's not—fine, there's fire hazard, there's so many other contention but we have to understand where it's coming from. Instead of them going on public assistance or sleeping in the street, at least they're being housed with a family member. And then they'll move out, you know once they get a job and they find places. The community was misconstruing that like they were renting these basements for profit if you will. So it was a major crackdown by the Queens Building Department. And who were affected most? The Guyanese population, because they're the one with the extended family, you know...

On the other hand, participants who previously were very successful in Guyana, like Robert, cashed in on all their assets and used the money to move their families to the United States. They aspired to buy a home, take on a good job and live the American dream. Several participants recounted their belief in the American Dream and their aspirations in the United States.

...Because we so much influenced by Western, I mean the United States, is that everyone, you know, your dream was like to go to America, you know, go, get into college, get a good job and then maybe one day go back

and I don't know, marry your high school sweetheart or something like that. That's in the big grand scale of things.

The predicament that participants and other new immigrants ended up in, however, was that they had to work several minimum wage jobs for which they were overqualified, live in a busy city where they continued to deal with crime. They sent their children to overcrowded and under-funded city schools. Trevor is very familiar with this situation.

T: They sell everything up, the house, car, land, dog, sheep, you name it.

N: And then come here and get stuck?

T: And they come here, they're staying here. Now there's a lot of people who say 'I wanna go back', but they when they sold their house for 5 million, that same house now in Guyana is 7 or 8 million, so they can't buy it for the same value yet it is the same house--though its probably older, but that's one of the problem. A lot of folks spend money to come here and it's not what they expect, or a least not the vision or the image that they have.

### The Ideal America vs. the Reality

A dominant theme among participants was disappointment upon migrating to the United States. Their images and ideals of America did not match up with the actual reality and their experience in America.

### *Trevor and Anita's First Job*

Trevor, 38 years old, moved to New York City when he was 16. He tells a story of what he used to think of America before he arrived.

We used to read Archie and Jughead Comic books...those were popular, it's an American comic like you know, you have the Marvel comics like Spiderman or whatever, its Archie and Jughead, it's a whole series. And Archie and Jughead are supposed to be from Riverdale, supposedly somewhere up in the Bronx if you know what I'm saying, and they would talk about their high school and they would hang out. And that used to be our pastime, our reading in Guyana, and it paint this whole image of America the beautiful and its so great and you're well taken care of and there's no racial tension. Everybody's equal and so on and so forth and when you come here it's a whole different [story].

My first job was actually as a gas attendant. I was 17, and back then there were rarely self-serve, you mostly would be full service. I used to work right there at the Hess gas station and like anything else, someone [would] pull up, we'll pump their gas, check their oil, wipe their windshield and all that, we made minimum wage or whatever. But I was good at what I do, I mean I was very diligent, so when manager was having problem with the night staff, because some people—there was always money short or something missing. So he put me at night. But what end up happening at night it's a greater risk also because these guys would come, they would pull up, and I knew that I'm going to get robbed. They would pull-- because when they pull up, their gas tank doesn't have the cap, so I said, 'Oh God, here we go again' because as soon as you finish pumping the gas and take out the nozzle, they drive off. So that was a little scary at one point. But you know, that was my first job and it opened me up to like the reality of, you know, like in Guyana we're thinking, 'Oh its so great and people, you know, you work and it like all this fancy, this cushy job or whatever.' And here it is, I'm freezing my--I don't even know if my nose is running anymore because its so cold I can't feel my nose, and I'm standing and I'm saying, 'I didn't leave Guyana to come do this here.' I mean I was going to do A'levels in Guyana which is equivalent to college here. And you know, but remember you just migrate. I came in '87 but I didn't start college until 1990. You know, you got to work because I need to help pay the bills with my mom, you know, supplement the rent and so on and so forth, so its not what I, you know like you saw.

Several participants and their families were from the Guyanese middle or upper middle class, however, upon migrating to the United States, they were forced to take jobs that they felt less qualified for. They felt that once they migrated, they “reset to zero.”

Trevor explains:

Not everyone you see walking on the street are like the quote-unquote immigrant. Some of these people were teachers back home, they were nurses, they were doctors, they were high up there in the echelon of society there. But when you come back here it's like resetting back to zero if you will. Because some of the credentials you may have there it doesn't work here, you have to go back to school. People come here, they're trying to equal out a living, they're trying to pay the bills for rent, food, a lot of people don't have the luxury of going back to school and paying those tuition. So you kinda all the way up on the ladder, the social ladder, you come all the way back down and you gotta start over.

Anita migrated to the United States when she was in her thirties and has lived in New York City for over 25 years. Anita has a son that works in Chicago, a daughter who still lives in New York and two grandchildren. Anita owns several businesses and is deeply involved in the community.

I found it very hard getting the first job. I went to interviews after interviews after interviews. I had no American experience, and in each interview that you go to the first thing they ask you is, 'What's your experience?' And like I said I came here in my 30s...so I had no American experience and it was very difficult because they want some, some sort of experience. Even though it was just a sales job, they want to make sure that you had some sort of experience. So after a few such interviews I got angry one day and I said 'Listen!' --because they usually tell you, 'Oh, we'll let you know.' So one day I just got angry and I said, 'What is there for you to let me know? I either get the job or I don't get the job. You know...you don't have to be a brain surgeon to know if you're going to hire me. You see me here, this is just a sales job.' And then the guy looked at me and said, 'You know what, you're hired.' (LAUGHS) And that's how come I got my first job. After a lot of frustration I guess!

### *Hardeo and the Granite Ceiling*

Hardeo, a well-known politician and lawyer in the Richmond Hill area, also shares the difficult experience of breaking into the American workforce. Hardeo was a lawyer and magistrate back in Guyana, and he had earned the respect and admiration of his peers and the community. After migrating to the United States, Hardeo's main ambition was to study to become a lawyer. He worked hard to pass the bar exam, spending almost a year taking review courses. Hardeo felt as though he had worked very hard and applied to hundreds of law firms in the New York City area, however, he had a hard time getting hired and rarely received callbacks.

I guess they were looking for folks who had actually gone to the best law schools here and I think more of it had to do with your connections, who your parents were, who you know, and things like that. And I think that that's the reality of America...Immigrants come here, you really have to start from the bottom...

After many years of hardwork, however, Hardeo is pleased with his current success. Because he experienced the hardship of being a new immigrant, Hardeo understands the struggle of his clients and immigrants in Richmond Hill.

99% of the folks come to do well, to live the American Dream, to play by the rules, and to try to become American citizens of their own, own their own home, get good jobs, raise their kids and get a better life. They come here for a better life. Unfortunately, that has not been the case, they have found it very difficult and those problems have been crystallized into such a situation where they find it very hard to really be given fair shot. Hence, they have to deal with a lot of bureaucracy, a lot of false promises, there's always talk about amnesty, talk about helping them, and, and this is very slow. And now that our economy is in bad shape, immigrants are feeling

the brunt of it. They want to work hard, they want to pay their taxes and they want to be part of the system...

There's no help with the immigration, there's no support groups, you have to assimilate as quickly as you can, you have to really pull yourself up by the bootstraps...And I saw that when I first came that although I was well-known in Guyana and in the Caribbean, when you came to America you are just a statistic, and even so you are a minority within a minority and as we are always on the outside looking in.

Hardeo also reflects on how his immigrant status may lower the ceiling in his political career. Although he does not blame this limited mobility on the fact that he is an immigrant, and is grateful to his current success, he realizes that it may be harder to break into the higher levels of American politics being an immigrant. He finds it difficult getting his party's support and acceptance from political organizations. "I've been seen as an outsider...I'm not a member of the "club" so-to-speak." He calls this limited mobility as being a "granite ceiling", rather than a "glass ceiling" which Hardeo sees as being more relevant to other established minorities in America, such as women and Latinos. A granite ceiling is much more difficult to break through. Paul, who held an exceptionally successful first job on Wall Street, was respected in his position, but also encountered a ceiling. "...You know, I was the go-to guy, they would come to me you know...but leadership--true leadership options was not available to me. I knew that there was a glass ceiling..."

To achieve the success they have, participants stated that they had to work very hard. All participants acknowledged that hard work was a known and accepted characteristic of Indo-Guyanese, and West Indians in general. They attributed the hard work ethic of West Indians as the reason for their success and the ability for Richmond

Hill to flourish in the way that it has. Anita observed that “people on the whole...were very accepting of we West Indians [and] of who we are without knowing much. I guess because we are such hard workers.” “We exist by our own hard work.” Paul says that “you got to be oriented to hard work.”

“You have to take initiative and work hard for everything that you need in this country...I learned that nothing is for granted...”

“Guyanese on the whole are very ambitious and most of them that I know are good, working people...”

“People have put their blood, sweat and tears like myself, their resources, the lack of [spending time with] family. I have a five year old and I have given up a lot for him.”

Waters (1999) also touched on the theme of West Indian hard work in *Black Identities*. West Indian immigrant workers in Water’s (1999) study saw themselves as being hardworking, upward-striving and ambitious. Waters (1999) explored some of the cultural and structural explanations for West Indian success, including Dennis Forsythe’s argument that West Indian hard work reflects the Protestant work ethic instilled by the British educational system in which West Indians were schooled. In addition, because West Indians are the majority group in the Caribbean, having many positive role models and majority status fosters an attitude that “anything is possible” through hard work (Waters 1999). Participants in Richmond Hill conveyed similar attitudes.

### Adjusting, Cultural Differences and Race Relations

Indo-Guyanese participants also credited their hard work ethic as a factor that came into play during their initial adjustment in the United States. Robert, whose family sold their farm and houses to move to the United States, was only 15 when he and his family migrated. Although he was tempted by his peers to “hang out,” Robert worked hard, stayed focused, completed school and joined the military. He says, “I think to me it wasn’t that hard of an adjustment...I adjusted fairly well after a couple of months because I came here to make it in that sense, not to hang out. You know some people they did hang out, [but] I went to work and you know I went to school.”

The initial experience after migrating to the United States was one of culture shock. Participants had to adjust to the crowded city space, new foods, and even a colder climate. According to Robert:

...It was interesting, you know, seeing skyscrapers, you know, at age 15 seeing so many things were moving, the subway system was phenomenal, the tunnel system was phenomenal, you know, when you can go under water and come up on the other side...that was phenomenal.

The more difficult adjustment, however, was trying to understand cultural differences in the United States. Trevor noted the differences between the Guyanese and American youth. In Guyana, respect for adults was highly valued and children were strictly disciplined. Trevor and other participants had to reconcile these differences in the United States, viewing Americans as being too lax with their children. Some participants joked that in Guyana, if a child were to misbehave in school, the professor may

physically discipline the child. During the walk home after school, the child would then be scolded by the neighbors and other family relatives, and upon returning home, the child would be punished by their parents. In this way, the village helped to raise children and taught values and respect.

Trevor recounts an experience in which he could not understand why American children were so disrespectful and misbehaved.

I never went to high school here because I finished in Guyana, and with my transcript I went straight to college. But then when sometimes I would go around to the high school, I couldn't understand like, I didn't know who the teachers were and who were the students, cause the students looked older than the teachers and the way they were getting on and the way they were, it was like total chaos to me. I guess again it was like a cultural shock.

Overcoming the initial culture shock and cultural differences was a learning experience for several participants. The harder task, however, was making it in American society.

### *Returning to the "Old Talk"*

As his first job, Paul designed computer systems for 12 years on Wall Street. In 1992, Paul left Wall Street to work in the insurance sales business. He currently has a small office in Little Guyana in comparison to the large corporate office in downtown Manhattan. Paul loves the sales business and feels that it better suits his personality and lifestyle. He feels that his decision to leave such a high-profile job was not only due to burn-out, but to differences between Caribbean and American cultures and lifestyles.

When I went to work on Wall Street, I was the only Indian guy around you know, and there was a few others but they had menial position. I was like the only executive level person...Towards about 1990 which was about my 10<sup>th</sup> year my sense was I needed to get out, cause I forced myself into a very regimented lifestyle because I wanted to be this all-American boy so I got to work early, I worked late, and 10 years down the road, I'm saying 'Wait a minute, this is actually not me because my friends are down here, they're playing cricket, in the middle of the day they're getting together and they're having cookout and I'm over there!' (LAUGHS) And I was getting burnt out so I said you know what I need to come back and join my home community, which is what coming into the insurance business that's what happened. Not that I have given up anything because...I found the balance.

I was more of the Caribbean lifestyle person easygoing guy, you know...and even in my office here, we are fairly informal, my staff. I don't give them any rigid schedule or any kind of rigid structure to work with because, they're also Caribbean.

Paul does not like to believe that there are cultural differences between Caribbean people and Americans, but from his experience, he feels that there are. He sees Caribbean culture as being more easy-going and laid-back, even though they work hard, they have an easygoing attitude. By trying to fit into the American way of life, Paul became overwhelmed and yearned to return to "his own people." For several participants, being among other Indo-Caribbeans eased their adjustment in American society. For example, Ramesh initially moved to Tampa, Florida in 1982 when there was not a heavy Indo-Caribbean population.

Here they're your own people. You know, that's one of the things. Your community, there wasn't a big community over there compared to here in New York city where there was a wider variety of Indo-Guyanese or Indo-Caribbean people you know and it was totally different. Here you felt at home, whereas there you felt outside...

Victor, a journal author in Richmond Hill, understands Indo-Caribbeans longing to be among other Indo-Caribbeans as a need for common social interactions, or returning to the “old talk.” Although Indo-Caribbeans can move and make it in any city in the United States, there are no other Indo-Caribbeans around, and “it’s hard, very hard because you have to have this interaction with people that you can know and go, come back to the “old talk” as we say, the “old talk.””

Choosing to stay with one’s own ethnic group not insulated participants during adjustment, but it also creates social boundaries. Racial, cultural and social boundaries were other social factors to which participants learned to adjust.

### *Turf Wars*

Although Guyana is a multiethnic country, some participants were unfamiliar with the numerous ethnic groups the coexisted in New York City. Trevor recalled that he did not know what Jews or Puerto Ricans were, or what it meant to be Jewish or Puerto Rican in the United States. Participants had to learn what it meant to be a minority or an immigrant in the United States. Participants also had to learn inter-group boundaries, stereotypes, and inter-ethnic relations.

Victor, a prominent writer in Richmond Hill, authors a journal on Caribbean affairs and Guyanese-American issues. Victor provides insightful and reflective social commentary through his online journal, and feels deeply connected to his community and to Guyana. Victor explores the idea of “turf,” which is the physical or social territory

claimed by an ethnic group. Victor sees this turf as being allocated according to certain “rules” and governed by boundaries:

...There will always be social issues among Guyanese or any other group here. When people come into a new neighborhood, the people who are there originally there feel that, ‘You’re on my turf’, using street talk, ‘You’re on my turf.’ And that happened not too long ago, a Guyanese family went to a place called Howard Beach, in an area called Howard--and Howard Beach is notorious because it’s a predominantly white, 99% or more white people and a Guyanese man was killed a few years ago, black man killed, murdered, because he was in the wrong place, so-called wrong place buying pizza...A Sikh man was beaten, brutalized because—by some uh, white kid—white people. Another Sikh man was beaten badly in the heart of Richmond Hill...So that does not come, that is not only for the Guyanese community, I said that’s a general community problem.

Victor says that the Indo and Afro Guyanese tension in Guyana dissipates when Guyanese migrate to the United States because they are no longer on each other’s turf. However, in the United States there is new turf.

...What you find is that you have residential segregation just like America had Black people and White people, here you have mostly Indian people in this neighborhood, you have a lot of Black Guyanese or Caribbean people, but mostly Black people in Brooklyn. Its not that it’s deliberate, it’s just that when you sponsor your family, where will they come? They will come to you, in your neighborhood. What I find, whenever you go to a function and you have a mixed group of people, Black or Indian, they get along very, very nice over here in America. But if someone--so that prejudice is not as profound, it is not shown. But if someone makes the mistake, and says something that is *racist*, everything is turmoil. Trevor had a minor experience when he encountered turf:

One day I’m walking on campus, and I don’t know, a bunch of Spanish people I guess, yelled something about Gandhi, and I couldn’t understand it. So when I got into school, I asked someone, ‘What do they mean by Gandhi?’ Because ironically we were [learning about] Martin Luther King, and we were talking about how his role model was Gandhi, you

know, non-confrontational demonstration you know down in the South. So I'm saying how ignorant can people be, you call me [Gandhi], actually that's an honor! But I didn't realize it's meant as a racial slur.

After years of living in the United States, Trevor understands the idea of turf, or the social boundaries, covert racism, and stereotypes in American society. Trevor loves to travel, and when he does, he tries to keep the idea of 'turf' in mind. Trevor does not see his way of thinking as being pessimistic or negative, but he feels that he is being conscious about his surroundings and he understands how he may be perceived by other Americans. He hopes that Americans drop their preconceptions and stereotypes once they talk to and get to know foreign-born people.

One thing that I'm always kind of conscious of is like the hidden racism. Like people may not say something but you know what they're thinking kind of like. I'm not trying to be judgmental but you know what I'm talking about, you walk into certain bars in certain places and until they get to talk to you and understand what you're about.

According to some participants, some Americans are xenophobic or reprehensive toward foreign-born people because they are not cosmopolitan or "internationally-minded". In other words, Americans are provincial. Ramesh worked in the south for a short period of time, and encountered several instances in which he was questioned about his race.

I worked in Virginia and I run into the same problem, where people ask you know "Who are you and where do you come from?" And I explain to them, that's because of they're not knowledgeable about other ethnic groups. And you know, one of the things that I must say if you go, if anybody had ever went to school in the Caribbean, our geography teachers tell us about all of that stuff. Most of our kids that came from Guyana, or

adults that came from Guyana, who went to high school or whatever is knowledgeable about all the United States and all other parts of the world. Whereas here, Americans they think that this is the world. You know, they're not opened up to other views from other people and know what it is like to be out there. They don't know where Guyana is. But if you ask a kid in Guyana where New York is, they can point it on a map and they can tell you. And that's one of the problems over here, is the lack of knowledge about other countries...

Many [people] do not know where [Guyana] is, but there was an incident back in the 70's there was Jim Jones and that's the only thing that people remember about Guyana. You know, he brought us on the map. But altogether I think that is because of the lack of education, you know. Not educating them about, about, you know other countries...

Trevor agrees with Ramesh:

There's a lot of folks here, in the Midwest and in the South who have never left their state line. They never got on a plane...And that's why you know for example, like war...you got a lot of young kids they take them right out of wherever they're from, in their little cocoon if you will, put them on a plane, train them, put them on a plane and all of a sudden they're seeing people with "towelhead" and all they think "Oh that's the enemy!" and they're shooting to kill, never understand, there're Muslims in the world, they're other religious, other people in the world.

Although Trevor and Ramesh found these negative aspects in America, they were able to cope and understand social and cultural differences. When Trevor attended evening classes at a college in New York City, he would have class discussions and "very deep, soul-searching intellectual conversations" with the adult students in the class that taught him coping mechanisms. "I see things in a different light and I understand."

Although America presents its own problems with race and social relations, participants love America and are satisfied with their decision, although adapting has been a challenge. They continue to believe in the opportunity and promise of the American

Dream, and hope to bring that dream into their own community. Doing so is a challenge, as the community lacks political representation and resources.

*Politics is the four-letter word*

Hardeo has encountered many barriers in his political career, but the one that may frustrate him the most is the Indo-Guyanese community's lack of trust in politics, especially the lack of trust in Indo-Caribbean politicians. According to Hardeo, Indo-Guyanese are not as active in the political process as other New York City residents. Several participants attributed the lack of political participation to the fact that "they've been burnt by politicians in their own country." The political corruption in Guyana thus fostered attitudes of mistrust, doubt or even apathy, and Indo-Guyanese migrated to the United States with these attitudes, and continue to feel that many politicians are tainted and represent self-interest rather than the interest of the people.

When it come to political awareness, we're very distant and I think that it has to do with, for example, where our people come from, predominantly Guyana, where the political system hasn't worked fairly, so in other words you are voting for someone but yet your vote automatically end up in someone else's ballot. So they came here, like my parents for example, would come here with that mentality, 'Oh, why should I go and vote, it doesn't count anyway.' So they're not, they're not involved in the process.

Unfortunately, and as a result of Indo-Caribbean's lack of political participation, they lack representation. The politicians that are elected may not be familiar with the Indo-Caribbean community's needs. "You cannot expect a politician who does not understand the needs of the Indo-Caribbean community to table a bill that will get them

better schools, or will help them to have cultural activities in their schools or to help them to grow to the fullest extent.” As a result of the lack of political representation, the community lacks needed resources, and resources that are given are often mismanaged by district representatives. Participants felt that immigration support services, community centers, and after-school and youth development facilities were greatly needed.

A leading factor that encourages the community’s political mistrust is religion. Participants felt that religious leaders needed to support Indo-Caribbean politicians, and inferred that an Indo-Caribbean politician may have a harder time winning without support from religious leaders. Trevor explains his understanding of the interaction between religion and politics.

What I found that is our religious leaders in this community has what I call a God-complex, they have their flock, and they don’t want nobody else to go in there and tell them what to do, now, when I say religious leaders I’m talking about the ‘Majhi’ from the Muslim religion, Pandits from the Hindu, of course the preacher who come from Christianity. So one of the things that here you have a parishioner or a devotee or whatever you call them, goes to the Mandir or the Temple, and you have the quote-unquote the Pandit telling you, ‘Oh stay away from politics, it’s bad for you! Don’t get involved! Let’s not bring politics in church!’

Our people are taught in church, ‘Stay away from politics, that’s the four-letter word, that’s the devil, that’s 666, you don’t want to talk about it!’ And I think that’s one of the problem that we have, that our people they see politics like that’s the four-letter word. They don’t understand that politics is supposed to work for them, not against them. And it’s tough to get that message out to them.

According to Hardeo, Indo-Caribbeans will support an American candidate before they will support one of their own. The Indo-Caribbean community needs a politician that is one of their own, but one that is not corrupt or self-interested. Several participants

made references to Barack Obama and stated that they believed in the American political system. Participants praised Obama's grassroots organizing and stated that a grassroots-level Indo-Caribbean politician is needed in Richmond Hill, especially one that can unite Indo-Caribbeans across religious belief and work to bring needed resources to the community. At a local cultural celebration, a speaker urged his audience to "forget the big politician," or politicians that are not on-the-ground and in-tune with the needs of the Indo-Caribbean community.

#### *A Senior Center and Sakhi*

Two of the most repeated needed resources in the community were a senior center and women's support groups. Women and senior citizens are a significant part of Little Guyana. According to participants, grandparents often stay at home to watch after children while parents work all day, or, in the case that there are no children to look for, they stay at home alone. Unfortunately, for the senior population in Richmond Hill, senior services are lacking. Ramesh sympathizes with the problem of the elderly in his community:

...I mean, one of the things about the elderly people in this community is that, when it comes to winter, they're, they're locked down basically. There's nowhere to go. And it depresses them because compared to where they come from in Guyana, where they are up and out, they can pick up and go where they want to go, and in New York, when it comes to winter, there're not too many activities. And most of them they depressed, just sitting in the house, four walls, and they just sit there all day. And the winter last six months, and that's where they are and I think that if we have like a community center, then things can be arranged, transportation can be arranged where they can go and socialize with other older folks, you know, it bring some kind of different feelings in them...

Hardeo wants to work towards bringing a new senior center to the Richmond Hill community:

We have one senior center that is under-funded. And that's where these poor folks go and they, at least they should have a better life to enjoy their last um, their last segment of life they worked so hard to achieve. Just recently that same center was actually pillaged by prostitution and vandalism, the same place that they rent they had people carrying on prostitution. They had broke down the door, and broke up the place. And actually they destroyed it. That was in the Queens Chronicle, that report. So here it is where we don't have like exclusive, an exclusive senior center place for them to recreate, for them to mix, for them to play games, for them to meet and to have fellowship with God and with each other.

Women also face challenges in Little Guyana. Violence against women is often unseen or ignored, but is a problem in the Guyanese community, stemming from male domination and female marginalization in Guyana (Peake and Trotz 1999). Victor discusses the cultural differences between Indo-Guyanese and Americans.

V: ...[Indo-Guyanese] come with that behavior, you don't as I say, you don't switch off, you continue. And that's an issue, that's an issue and unfortunately students or academics don't yet have information, they're not doing empirical studies to see the real, the prevalence of that or wife abuse. Wife beating.

N: You think that's a big thing here?

V: I think it's a thing because there's a group of people...called Sakhi...it's a women's group...But it's a culture among Guyanese,

N: And you feel like it's been brought here?

V: I think it's here, I think it's here, but it is not as prevalent because here, people get wise, they'll call the cops.

Sakhi, meaning “women friend”, is an outreach organization against domestic violence that serves South Asian women in New York City. According to Sakhi’s website, the largest percent of all survivors of domestic violence come to Sakhi from Queens. Organization members and outreach activists operate in the community, attending local community events, disseminating flyers and speaking out against domestic violence. At a local Phagwah celebration, Sakhi outreach staff took the stage to speak on behalf of women’s rights and against domestic violence.

Some older survivors of domestic abuse have since become successful and act as role models to empower younger women in Little Guyana who may be experiencing similar circumstances. Anita, who migrated to the United States after a difficult divorce, is now a successful business owner. She sees herself as a role model to younger women in the community, and hopes that younger women can learn from her experience. “...I always tell them, ‘If I can do it, then you can do it’ cause I did not go to a university or college.” Anita says that being a role-model for women is an important role in her life. “...You know, it doesn’t matter what happened in your life or what path you take you could always do something for yourself, you could always upgrade yourself, you know.”



Figure 5. Women Serving Food at a Phagwah Celebration

Anita feels that even though younger women have more opportunities in the United States, unfortunately some younger women do not take advantage of them, and instead feel bound and obligated to their families. "...Women coming from the West Indies are comfortable and I hope that I'm not, that this is not taken out of context, I think that they are just comfortable with the 9 to 5 job and of course you know because they have family." Although Sakhi is a great resource for women in Little Guyana, participants felt that more work needed to be done on behalf of women's issues.

### *Youth Culture*

Trevor could not understand the chaos in schools when he first observed the interactions between students and teachers in a local high school. Trevor noted that

problems with youth may be due to the lack of parental supervision and involvement with children's lives. In addition, fixation on American pop culture divides the older and younger generations.

...Most family here are two incomes, in some case, three and four incomes which means the father may have two jobs and the mother may have two jobs, not counting she's a mother and a housewife at home also. So one of the problems is that the parents are out of the house most of the time. So they'll get up, mom will cook 2, 3 roti whatever she has to do, you know, put food in the pot, plate, whatever, leave for work, Dad probably is gone already or at the same time with her. He—both of them are gone all day, so the kids now become, you know, they kinda, uh what's the word? They have to fend for themselves if you will so they get up, get dressed, go to school, and then they come home but, at two, or three o'clock when school is finished, they're not necessarily home. Because they know mom and dad doesn't come home 'til six, seven o'clock. Which gives them that free time to do whatever they want, so most of the time you find them unsupervised...

As a result of their absence from the home, parents are not able to consistently discipline their children or follow-up on school progress because they are busy at work. The child lacks the "village," or the tight network of neighbors, relatives and community members to help with child-rearing. Hardeo says that "those villages exist abundantly in countries like Guyana and Trinidad, [where] there's a lot of love and a lot of community support." As a result, children have more autonomy and less structure, and may not face the harsh punishment that they may have back in Guyana, and children know this.



Figure 6. Adults Watch Phagwah Celebration at the Park



Figure 7. Youth Celebrating Phagwah at the Park

Youth are immersed in American pop culture, which according to some participants, is a culture of name-brands, consumerism, nightclubs and hip-hop music. Paul sees that “the kids don’t think like their parents, the kids are going to school and they have to socialize with all kinds of kids, they really don’t give a shit about what happened in Guyana, or the Caribbean.” In Victor’s point of view, “the youth fall trap to the culture, the bigger American culture, like the kind of music and they extend that in the nightclubs. The nightclubs are very popular, very big business...[for the] younger [generation].” Warikoo (2005) also made this observation in her study of second-generation Indo-Caribbeans in Queens where she observed the dance club scene. Advertisements for local parties and nightclubs are printed in local newspapers and on flyers posted on storefronts and on the street, promoting “ladies appreciation nights” and slogans like “get twisted, catch a hangover.”

Elders in the community events spoke out against the influence of American mainstream media on Indo-Caribbean youth. A speaker at a local cultural event admonished the young women in his audience who might emulate Indian women on American television, who are sexualized and “gyrating,” presenting objectifying images of Indian women. The speaker held the view that mass media are a negative influence on the youth in Little Guyana.

The hip-hop culture has also permeated Bollywood, which is also a major source of media entertainment for the Indo-Caribbean community. Many participants remembered watching Bollywood movies when they were young back in Guyana. Paul

especially enjoyed the “old Indian movies” and says that he cannot relate to the new movies because the songs and dances have changed so much. Trevor says:

I kind of kind of stop watching Indian movies because Indian movies back in the days when I was watching, they were pure Indian movies...I mean for example, *Speed* comes out, next thing you know there's something called, whatever the Indian version of *Speed* equal! You know so, it's all copy-cat going on right now. And I'm not knocking it down, that doesn't mean--but it's losing its culture—its, I mean, Bollywood wanted to blend so much with Hollywood its losing its core identity.

As her culture is also important to her, Anita hosted her own local television show that featured Bollywood music videos from the 1950s to the 1980s. Anita felt that the show may have brought families together on the afternoons when it aired. The show created a shared moment when families could congregate across age groups and enjoy pieces of their culture, which the older generation feels that the younger generation is losing. Trevor is comforted that his kids are “very much into the Indian costume, they wanna watch the Indian movies, the old one, they wanna know more about Guyana...”

Trevor reflects on the differences between generations and notes how youth take their parents and older generations' culture and hard work for granted.

I still hold my traditional values and got my upbringing from my grandparents and I'm kind of worried about my children. For example, I grew up in a house that had no refrigerator. I mean ice for us was a big thing, you had to go to the store and buy ice. We had no gas stove, it was kerosene, you know, we studied in the night when it was black out, I studied for exams with a broad lamp. And here my kids come home they open the refrigerator and there's cold stuff there, and it's like, and I'm not saying that they should be at a disadvantage, but I'm worried for them in the sense that, I never had a television in my house, we used to go to a neighbor house and watch television. We went to the movies, yeah, but we don't come home and turn on TV you know and you were so exposed to

all these different things. And I think that help mold and shape who I am today, and I'm afraid, I don't know how its gonna turn out for my children and our future generation if it's were living in conspicuous consumption or in an age of excess, I don't know.



Figure 8. Young Man on his Cell Phone during Phagwah Celebration

Since the younger generations are more distant from the culture of older generations, they would be more likely to leave Little Guyana and move to other cities in the United States. According to Joseph, who has been in the community long enough and has children of his own:

...The new generation are going to think differently, but the older generation, Indo-Guyanese in a sense they stay among themselves, family stay close to each other, and the older ones, yes they still stay close. But the younger ones with the new culture and the new, you know, way of living, they will tend to move out.

Paul also sees the community as a launching point for the second generation of Indo-Guyanese in Little Guyana.

I see this particular area here as a transient point. Nobody stays here... It's been the same way for the previous people who were here, the Italians, the Greeks, when their children grow up, they left. You know, our kids, they're leaving us. They get an education, they're gone to Manhattan, they're gone to another state.

In participant's eyes, Little Guyana serves as a launching pad for younger generations, and is a site for transition.

### Identity

The idea of transition reflects what participants referred to as being part of the "Guyanese mentality." In piecing together a definition generated by participants and other community members in Little Guyana, this mentality is an attitude and lifestyle that involves hard work, self-interest, self-mindedness, foreign-mindedness, conservatism and the "crabs-in-a-barrel" mentality.

#### *The Guyanese Mentality*

In reflecting on Indo-Guyanese reasons for migrating, Paul thinks that Indo-Guyanese history of migration and colonialism fosters a mentality of impermanence.

...They still think of themselves as Guyanese, or Trinidadians, and in their mind, this is not their home, they're going back...it's temporary. In reality they never go back because what happens is when they go back, they're

not comfortable there either...you know what it is? That's the other problem. We're foreign minded. We always think, you know 'I want to go to, to, to get ahead, you need to go somewhere else.' Rather than stay in one place, stay in your country and build it into, you know...they're constantly moving, looking for something better. It colonialism too you know...they move because they're looking for, in their mind, a better place. And once they move they realize that they don't really belong there either...

Trevor experienced this with the clients he serves in the mortgage business. "Our people mentality is that one day, they'll save and work and they'll go home. The relatives--and I told them this in many of my speeches, you're not going home, this is home. You know, you may go visit Guyana, two weeks you want to get away and visit back here." Although the older generation feels rooted in Little Guyana and would not want to move, but rather retire and settle in one place, newer migrants and younger generations will tend to move out, reflecting Roopnarine's (2001) idea of the Indo-Guyanese "propensity to move." This feeling of impermanence may be a positive and negative characteristic for Indo-Guyanese; it provides them the flexibility to move, but keeps them suspended in a state of constant transition.

Another aspect of the Guyanese mentality is related to the theme of hard work. This ambitious work ethic unfortunately and inadvertently fosters attitudes of self-interest and competition. Robert says that one of the reasons why Indo-Guyanese may not participate in the political process or be involved in community issues is because they are "busy trying to get rich." Trevor observed this same idea when he was chairman of a political club whose objective was to bring political representation to Little Guyana. Trevor helped to organize meetings and motivate community residents to attend to

discuss local issues. Trevor felt that the people attended, but were not active or came with ulterior motives.

When they [got] there it's like--I don't know what they were expecting, like you were supposed to give them a check for a couple hundred dollars or something, and here it is we're trying to make them aware and bring political awareness to them...its sad in a way, but we can't help that mentality...

Hardeo felt that the Guyanese mentality hurts the political process. He describes several aspects of the Guyanese mentality that he observed as being often discussed and debated by social commentators, politicians and other community leaders in Little Guyana. In addition to the characteristics of hard work and self-interest, Hardeo describes Indo-Guyanese as having a “plantation mentality” that stems back to colonialism and the political corruption in Guyana.

I think the major problem is that they came deprived of the vote from the motherland in Guyana and in Trinidad, it was always talk of being deprived of your vote and at election year and the stealing of elections. And the mentality has come here...The second thesis is that they come from a crab-eat-crab mentality that is like crabs in a barrel and they come with plantation mentality that they want to be—they can't support their own. They will support another but they won't support their own... anytime a foreign politician comes into our community, they'll reach for their pockets deep and give it to him, whether he's running for dogcatcher. When one of their own runs...they do not do that. They would try to run against him, they would try to push another candidate...They would criticize him. They would bad-mouth him. And this is the problem, this is a social, cultural problem, I think they need to put it aside because other groups don't do that. They lift each other up.

When applying the crabs-in-a-barrel analogy to Trevor's experience at the political club meeting, the attendees may not have come to support community leaders

and constructively contribute to community dialogue. Instead, they may have come with the intention of mustering criticism and finding fault in community leaders and the club. The theme of the “crab-eat-crab mentality” in which Indo-Guyanese push one another down rather than uplift one another also applied outside the realm of politics. Several participants described how family relationships reflect the crab-eat-crab attitude which perpetuated conflict in the family. Anita felt that this mentality is unfortunate, and she hoped that Guyanese would “upgrade their thinking” in addition to upgrading their social and economic status.

Some participants felt that the attitude of self-interest is exacerbated by Indo-Guyanese ambition to achieve the American Dream. Participants themselves strongly believed in the American Dream and believed that their hard work and determination helped them to get far. Paul stated that Indo-Guyanese may not need to unite for a particular cause because they are satisfied pursuing their own American Dream. Victor, on the other hand, felt that:

...This community needs a lot of nurturing still. Because people come here as I've said, and they've made it quick, they've made a change in their lifestyle. When you get a little bit of money you think you're a Republican, right away you buy a house, you buy a car, all whatever you want. You think you're a big shot. Everybody knows everything, everybody knows, they think they have the answers to everything.

Anita thinks that the problem with successful Indo-Guyanese is their ego.

We come from a country where we had to fight to have unity and I think when I left we didn't have that unity and we come over here and even though we have all these opportunity, we still haven't upgraded our

thoughts and our thinking. We sort of try to feed that ego that most of us have...

### *American Cultural Influence on Identity*

In addition to believing in the American Dream, participants felt that Indo-Guyanese tried to “be” American, and inevitably fell trap to the America culture in the same way that Victor described the youth in Little Guyana. Indo-Guyanese believe in the same ideals, adopt the same images and try to live the American lifestyle. Trevor tells a story in which he attributes consumerism and mass media as an influence on this mentality.

T: One of the problem in any small community is that for example, I admire the Jews and the Chinese and I’m speaking on behalf of them as a whole in the sense that you go to Chinatown. Everyone is selling, but everyone is buying, so the money stays there and it keeps revolving among their own people. Same thing with the Jewish people, but as Guyanese for example, we’ll come here, we’ll do business but we’re ready to buy a sneaker, a Nike, the guy right down the block sells the same sneaker, but we’ll end up in Manhattan and Macy’s, why? Because we want to walk around with the Macy’s bag that says Nike so that’s one of the--we don’t understand the power of consumerism I think. We take it for granted you know, or we get caught up in this situation whereby, it’s more important to be seen with a certain brand, as opposed to where your money is spending and what it does for the community.

N: What do you think that comes from?

T: Its, um, its, you know listen, we were brought up in Guyana and our people they come from—you know for example when I was smaller in Guyana, folks come from over here. I mean, you could smell the newness in the guy’s clothes. I mean his sneakers didn’t even have dirt on it yet. So when folks go back, and that’s one of the problem I have with people going back, they work hard, they save a couple of bucks,

then they use their credit card, they charge up from their socks to underwear to their hats that still have the tag on it. So when they land in Guyana here at the airport, now you have their family to meet them you know, after a long time, what impression are they creating on those folks in Guyana? 'My God, look, you can get everything brand new. Everything looks so, you know, so crisp and clear and clean.' So when our people in Guyana, when they come over here, what do you think they're looking for? Same thing...I think it has to do with the movies, you know, the movies you watch...the pop culture, I mean with all the bling-bling and all the you know all the drop-tops and everything else that they talk about there.

N: So you think that's a big thing in Guyana now?

T: Oh absolutely, absolutely. I mean, I think Guyanese are more American than Americans are...The latest they wear, I mean sometimes I go to Guyana and I feel underdressed. I'm like you know, you name it, you know I mean the latest shirt, latest fashion trend, everything is there. And they afford it and they buy it...the kids again, like anything else they get money, I mean, I don't know if you saw it on the news, but killing for the \$110 dollar Jordan or whatever sneakers, and it's all become, in other words, because of peer pressure and pop culture and because of the environment that we live in, everyone has to outdo the other person, so in a sense that, 'Oh, you're wearing that old jacket from last month? Get the new...' And you like, 'Last month? No, I have that one from five years ago!' (LAUGHS) You know so, that's one of the problem. It's this identity crisis...

### *Identity Crisis*

Several participants indicated that this "identity crisis" is a problem among Indo-Guyanese that stems from their constant migration and twice-removal from India. Trevor explains:

When you're put into a place with so many people, 8 million people in New York City, I mean yes, we're a New Yorker, yes they're an American, but beyond that who or what are you? And that's where that soul-searching comes in I think...they want to identify, yes I'm a New

Yorker, or yes I'm an American citizen, but first and foremost this is my history or this is where I'm tracking from...I'm pleased to say that [my children] are following, in some regards, in the tradition or the culture, or at least yearn to learn something about the culture...

Trevor is grateful that his culture is important to his family. In Little Guyana, advertisements for “rediscovery tours” of India, in which Indo-Guyanese can relocate their ethnic roots and identity, are commonly found throughout the community. The “rediscovery tourism” industry is widely advertised in local newspapers, on flyers and in stores around Little Guyana.



Figure 9. Rediscovery Tour Banner



Figure 10. Teenager Wearing a Guyanese Flag

In addition to “rediscovery tours,” images and symbols were also used to construct or assert identity. Guyanese flags are a common symbol of national identity in Little Guyana, as they can be found on vehicle dashboards, bumpers stickers, on front doors and on T-shirts. Trevor sees the use of images and symbols as being a primary method for identity construction.

T: ...Sometimes, for example you talk about comfort food you know when you're depressed of course you go for the chocolate and the cookies or whatever and of course you bulk up, you put on weight. I guess that's a comforting for some folks you know in the sense that, you know they may not be identified or belong to a group or a segment, but by buying things it gives them a way of feeling—listen, 'If I wear a you know G-Unit shirt, hey guess what, I'm a rapper'

N: So it gives them a sense of identity?

T: I would think so, I would think so. It's a major, major identity crisis going on.

Halstead (2002) found that American name brands were visible markers of identity that were incorporated into the appearances and identity of Indo-Caribbean youth in New York City. According to Halstead (2002), the fixation over American brand names is a prevalent trend in Guyana. For Indo-Caribbeans in Halstead's study, American brands, symbols and images had social meaning, made the individual visible, and marked their "arrival" as a person in American society. Persons without these material objects were seen as "lesser and incomplete" persons (Halstead 2002). In Trevors eyes, the people wearing G-Unit shirts and \$110 dollar Jordans are influenced by a culture of consumerism, but are also using these symbols and images to construct identity.

In addition to images and symbols that work to define identity, cultural events work to help construct identity. When Joseph, who co-operates a Mandir in Little Guyana migrated in 1973, cultural events such as Phagwah were virtually non-existent.

Well, coming from Guyana and you know, missing all of these festivals and activities was a big negative part of the early years because the Guyanese community was fairly small when I came here in 1973. And you would only meet a few Guyanese and only a certain occasions where they all meet. And of course we did not have these elaborate celebrations that we have today. The influx of Guyanese, especially in New York and in this Richmond Hill area has made it possible for us to gather for such events...

...This is one of their biggest occasion, so we would celebrate this in a very you know, flamboyant way so to speak. It's very extravagant, it's the Holi season, the coming of spring, and everybody will normally come out with their friends and family and have the celebrations. So this is a very big part of our culture and this is the way we were brought up and we maintain this culture.



Figure 11. Man celebrating Phagwah

According to Ramesh, cultural events such as Phagwah work to bring the community together and shape identity for Indo-Guyanese.

In any community there is, you know, the division in any community. And we have that here too. But at the end of the day, there is cohesiveness among them. And like one of the things that, like we have the Phagwah parade, which is something that goes on here every year...And come that day you got at least 15 to 20 thousand people coming out...



Figure 12. Traditional Indian Dance Performance during Phagwah



Figure 13. Powder Shower at the Park

Although cultural events temporarily bring about a limited degree of unity, the larger problem of the Guyanese mentality and identity crisis delays larger-scale cohesiveness and social mobility. Hardeo feels that Little Guyana does receive the political representation and resources it deserves because of the lack of alliances between community organizations, especially between religion and politics, and because of the identity crisis among Indo-Guyanese people. “Our people...need to...look at themselves in the mirror and see who their identity is and help their own identity, their own people. Because if you don’t, who is going to do it for you?”

#### *Entering the Fray: Race and Ethnic Identity*

In reflecting on their ethnic identity, participants used many terms and labels to construct their idea of their own ethnic identity. Participants referred to themselves as Indo-Guyanese, Indo-Caribbean, West Indian, Indian, Guyanese, and Guyanese American to refer to their racial or ethnic identity. In this way, race was not clear-cut.

When Paul worked on Wall Street, he encountered the “race question” by his American counterparts on several occasions.

I used to get that when I started, when I--my first job in 1977, ‘Are you white or Black?’ I’m like, ‘I’m Indian!’ ‘No, but don’t you have to be in one [category]!’ I said, ‘I don’t think so!’ You know, but I think it was common back then because there were not so many of us. Now you’re White, you’re Black, you’re Indian, you’re Chinese, like Barack Obama says, whether you’re’ Christian, Muslim, or Hindus. We’ve entered into the um, the fray. So its not, you’re not one or the other.

By entering “the fray”, Paul means that race is more fluid, and it is becoming increasingly impossible to check into one racial category. Choosing a racial or ethnic identity may also be a challenge to the second generation, who may include their American citizenship. According to Joseph, “they’re Indian-American or Guyanese-American I guess because, if you’re born here you’re an American citizen right, but where your ancestors came from, where your parents came from...” In this way, Indian ethnic ancestry, Guyanese national background and American citizenship should all be included in racial identification.

Victor, however, objects to the current racial definitions and classifications. He is especially opposed to the hyphenated Indo-Guyanese label.

V: ...I don’t like the hyphenation honestly.

N: So what would you call it?

V: I like to be known—I’m a Guyanese, I’m proud to be a Guyanese. I’m an American because I’m a naturalized American but I feel more Guyanese than American in my psyche. I’m a human being first of all, and I wish that people could see themselves as human beings; personally I don’t like this hyphenation at all. Unfortunately it’s being used in politics or in communities, people say that you’re an Indo-Guyanese or you’re an Afro-Guyanese. I don’t like it period. I’ve tried to avoid that. But that doesn’t mean that you’re not, you know, you have a right to feel proud of whoever you are, whether you’re Indian or Black or mix up or as we say, ‘pepper-pot,’ you know whatever you want that’s your business...but don’t impinge on other people’s rights also to be whoever they want.

Trevor also objects to certain racial distinctions, especially those that delineate “insiders” from “outsiders”. Trevor feels that the concept of “being an immigrant” is used to create “others” in American society. “I don’t see myself as an immigrant, I don’t see

myself as a...I'm a Guyanese American, you know. I'm a business person, I'm an entrepreneur here, I pay taxes and because of my tax dollar, I contribute significantly to the tax base of this community and the country at large." Hardeo states that he is "an American first and foremost", and when he is engaged in his political campaign, he does not run purely as an Indo-Caribbean or Guyanese politician, but as an American.

### *Liminal Identity*

Since no solid racial identity existed for participants, racial identity was more fluid and contextual. Ethnic identifications were used that deconstructed previous racial categories, as in Paul and Trevor's experience in which they were unable to choose one race identification category on college forms or surveys. In daily social interactions, race became the center focus and participants needed to explain their ethnic background that did not conform to the existing limited conceptions of race. Their transnational lives are grounded in their daily experiences in which they are connected to multiple societies and cultures and are constantly engaged in the work of creating culture and constructing identity.

Victor touches on what is like to live transnationally. "I'm rooted here but my, but this country--I still don't feel America is home. I—my, you know your constructs, your early constructs, my constructs are for there. I'm still, my heart is still there." Victor's "early constructs", or the identity and culture that he has long known and lived, belongs in Guyana, but he feels attached to Little Guyana. Victor describes feeling a state of being betwixt and in-between, or a state of liminality.

Liminality is a concept developed by anthropologist Victor Turner (1969) in describing rites of passage. Liminality refers to a state of being “neither here nor there” and “betwixt and between positions” (Turner 1969). An individual with a liminal persona is at a “threshold”, easy to “slip through the network of classifications that normally location states and positions in cultural space” (Turner 1969). Liminality is a state of transition, a moment between stability in which old rules and structures do not apply and new rules are constantly being created. The concept of liminality and the idea of being in a transitional state can be applied to the experience of Indo-Guyanese. The transnational experience fosters a way of being and a way of life that is located between spaces and multiple social contexts. It is a way of life that is oriented to transition, fluidity, and inevitably does not fit into standard ways of classifying.

This way of life reflects the “identity crisis” that Trevor and other participants notice. In the Eriksonian sense, this identity crisis is a sudden realization of the inadequacy of one’s identity, especially in a time of change, transition or trauma in one’s life (Erikson 1950). The individual attempts to seek new possibilities for identity. The search for and constant construction of identity becomes a prime activity in the ‘liminal’ life.

#### *Not by Choice, but by design*

Overall participants felt that community and identity issues were influenced by the social, historical and cultural context that existed in Guyana and is present in the

United States. According to Trevor, “it is not by choice that these things are happening, but by design.”

Parents and residents in Little Guyana work hard to provide for their families and adapt in a new country. However, the preoccupation with daily survival bars their ability to be as involved in their children’s lives as they would like. Parents do not want to send their children to under-funded schools, but because of the lack of resources and their lack of education, they miss out on opportunities to send their children to better schools.

Trevor himself has two young girls, and he wanted to ensure the best quality education for them. Trevor was able to enroll his girls at a Math and Science magnet school on Queens College because of his access to resources. Trevor was attending Queens College at the time, and observed that new trailers were being built. He found a brochure advertising a new school whose curriculum would be dictated by the College, and entered a school lottery or waiting list upon which he was able to enroll his children. He says that other parents may not be able to do this, however, because they may lack the resources, education and networks to do so.

Concern with daily survival also influences Indo-Guyanese’s ability to participate in the political process. Hardeo says that it is not only the political and historical context of Guyana that discourages Indo-Guyanese from voting in local elections, but it is also due to the fact that they are unable to take off of work, or because by the time they commute home after a twelve hour day at work, the polling stations have closed.

In addition to political representation and resources that are needed in the community, participants stated that education and empowerment to key to progress in the

Indo-Caribbean community. Victor believes in progress for Guyana and Indo-Guyanese abroad.

My hope for Guyana is that you need people to be well educated. To go beyond what people, ordinary people or what politicians are telling them. The ethnic instigators are telling them. They have to read a little bit, they have to understand that human beings are human beings, regardless of what color you are, what religion you belong to or whoever—nobody else should tell you differently, you have to---at the end of the day, you have to earn a living, you have to feed your family. That will only come through education. My hope is that—and people will have to be constantly reminded—and education does not mean ability to read a newspaper or a book only—to have the right understanding of what society is about. And that is the only way. And that does not mean it has to be done only at the university level, but it must be done in schools, from the early stages in school people must understand that.

Ramesh hopes to see the younger generations learning “where we came from and where we are going...” Victor feels that education empowers people and gives them a sense of worth.

I’m comfortable with who I am. [POINTING TO HEAD]. It’s in here. Nobody must make you feel that you can be abused if you don’t want to be abused. So I’m lucky in that my mind is strong and I remember a long, long time ago, do you remember the name Steve Biko? Steve Biko was jailed in South Africa during apartheid, and he was killed by the South African police. And somebody had an interview with him. He said ‘When your mind is free, no one can imprison you.’ Your mind must be free. So I’m hoping that by reading, by writing, by doing this magazine and having interaction with people, my mind will be kept alive...

Participants saw that Guyana’s history of colonialism continues to influence the mindset and mentality of Indo-Guyanese. It is the context, or the “design”, that shapes the life experiences and identity for Indo-Guyanese in the United States.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Day-to-day interactions, struggles and successes shaped how Indo-Guyanese made sense of their world. They incorporated American brands and images into personal appearance. They negotiated the schism between the first and second generations who held different attitudes towards Little Guyana and the United States. They worked multiple jobs and combined earnings to make ends meet. They felt betrayed by the promises and images of America the beautiful, and experienced the reality of America in which the ideals and promises were more like a far-fetched dream.

Participants were openly and constructively critical about their own community and people. They saw education and conversation about issues in the Indo-Caribbean community as a first step towards understanding and tackling community problems. Victor and Trevor understood the deep-seated structural factors that influenced the mentality and identity of Indo-Guyanese. Anita and Hardeo looked at the negative aspects of the Indo-Guyanese mentality as a source of community problems. They were both optimistic that over time the community and younger generations would be able to upgrade their thinking. Ramesh and Joseph saw culture as a unifier. Both men worked to organize and educate the community on Indo-Guyanese culture. Robert and Paul deeply believed in the American Dream and felt that they were able to achieve it. Participants

felt that through education, younger generations could use the community as a launching pad from which they could start successful lives in other cities outside of Little Guyana.

Participants described the migration of Indo-Guyanese as being connected to networks and influenced by transnational factors. Migration was incited by the political and ethnic conflict in Guyana. Several participants referred to the Burnham era, political corruption and ethnic violence in Guyana as reasons for migrating. Push factors alone, however, did not induce migration. Participants' migration was also influenced by established networks in the United States. In this way, cumulative causation best describes migration for Indo-Guyanese. International networks, institutions and services linked the United States to Guyana and created a flowing system of people, messages, ideas, and products. American products have been popular in Guyana, and Guyanese products are now sold in New York City.

Other recent immigrant groups also experience the reality of America as opposed to its promises and images. Migration scholars since the 1990s have discussed how 'new immigrants' post-1965 are differently incorporated into the United States and enter an economic context different from that of early European waves of migration. New immigrants must start from the bottom. However, despite their hard work and disappointment, participants continued to believe in the American Dream. They saw Little Guyana as a place where the American Dream was attainable.

Little Guyana reflected the spatial boundaries or 'turf' of an exclusive ethnic enclave. Families and relatives tended to stay together, and Indo-Guyanese who were involved in the American mainstream society yearned to return to the "old talk."

However, Little Guyana was also inclusive in the way that two societies: Little Guyana and America, merged. American products, brands and images were incorporated into the community. The hyphenated identity in Guyana that combined East Indian ethnic identity with Guyanese nationality was adjusted in the United States to include American citizenship.

Participants redefined their hyphenated Indo-Guyanese identity in the United States. Participants included their Indian ancestry, Guyanese nationality and American citizenship when they referred to ethnic identity. They also clarified that they were Indian twice-removed, and not Indian nationals. Some referred to themselves as being Indo-Caribbean, or Indians from the Caribbean region. The simple hyphenated Indo-Guyanese term no longer made sense in defining who they were. Victor stated that hyphenated identities were often used in Guyana to politically delineate a group. The term “Indo-Guyanese” was a social identity in Guyana that indicated a specific social meaning in Guyana’s racially polarized political context. In America, ethnic identity became more fluid and hybrid than the hyphenated Indo-Guyanese label. Participants saw themselves as West Indian, Indian, American, Indo-Caribbean, Guyanese-American, or simply Guyanese.

The socio-historical context in Guyana influenced community problems and the ‘Guyanese mentality’ in Little Guyana. Participants described Indo-Guyanese people as being so “busy trying to get rich.” This was seen as a negative aspect of the Guyanese mentality. It reflected the self-interested pursuit of the “big-man” status that was sought after in Guyana. Participants described Indo-Guyanese as working hard to buy nice

houses, start businesses, buy material possessions and “look” American or like a “big-man”. Unfortunately this pursuit was individualistic and did not constructively work towards upgrading the community, but the individual.

The inferiority of women in Guyana also surfaced in Little Guyana. Single women passing on the streets in the general public of Little Guyana were often subject to cat-calls, wolf-whistles and lewd sexual comments by onlooking men. Even as a researcher on the street of Little Guyana, I was warned by one of the more polite and friendlier young men that the men in the community would be aggressive compared to men in the general American public. He recommended that I should “bring the mace” if I were to walk down the street alone. Marginalization and physical violence towards women continued to be an issue in the community.

The lack of political participation among Indo-Guyanese was clearly indicative of the political context in Guyana. Attitudes of mistrust of the Guyanese government carried over into Little Guyana. Indo-Guyanese continued to mistrust local Indo-Caribbean politicians who sought to represent the community.

These issues were described as being consequences of the “design,” or the social context. The “design,” although not easily apparent, materialized in the community. From the outside, or from the sidewalk view, the Phagwah event underneath the tented arena at the Mandir looked like a cultural celebration that brought people together. Upon closer look however, after stepping off of the sidewalk and into the tent, the event became a space for re-working identity and culture.

The micro-level interactions--the interpersonal dealings, the way the crowd mingled and moved, the verbal exchanges and the glances and looks--all reflected the various themes I have discussed. Beneath the tented arena, generations self-separated themselves. Teenagers and younger adults congregated outside of the event, played in the streets and talked on cell phones. Older women in the community shook their heads and scoffed at younger women who dressed in the latest, provocative American fashions. Several banners were hung on the wall advertising the "rediscovery of India." Speakers admonished the community for the lack of support of local Indo-Caribbean politicians. They called for unity and fellowship. They talked about education and the need for Indo-Caribbeans to understand their heritage. During these passionate speeches, however, audience members were engaged in their own conversations with friends and family members.

The Phagwah event brought people to one place and in one space in which they were reminded of their Indian ancestry and Guyanese heritage. People met with old friends and loved ones. However, the larger, structural issues in the Indo-Guyanese community persisted. During events like Phagwah Indo-Guyanese are seeking possibilities for identity by reaching into their ancestry, understanding their background in Guyana, and finding a place in the United States. Their liminal identity motivates them to continue searching, constructing and shaping identity and culture to create meaning and a sense of stability.

The experience of liminality among Indo-Guyanese in this study is similar to that of other migrant groups in the United States. Cecilia Menjívar (2006) also applied

Turner's (1969) concept of liminality to Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants in the United States. Instead of liminal identity, Menjívar (2006) explored "liminal legality" that described an uncertain immigration status. The immigrant's unclear legal status penetrated other spheres of their lives: their health care, family, and occupation. Menjívar (2006) concluded that extended periods of liminal legality deconstructed prevailing notions of citizenship, very much in the way that Indo-Guyanese liminal identity deconstructs ideas about race.

Brazilians in Maxine Margolis' (1994) ethnographic study of Little Brazil, a small ethnic enclave in New York City, also had a "jumbled" status; they were South Americans, but not Hispanic. They were also Latin Americans, but they did not speak Spanish. Margolis (1994) asked the question of whether Brazilians were "sojourners" or constant migrants, "settlers" like the European immigrants of early migrant waves to the United States, or "commuters" that made trips to and from the home and host country. Margolis (1994) concluded that Brazilians started out as sojourners. They wished to commute or return to Brazil, but that dream never became a reality. What happened was that they became settlers, or "true transnationals." "They will continue to live in the United States, but they will not abandon Brazil; they will not stop thinking of themselves as Brazilians..." (Margolis 1994).

Indo-Guyanese are a group that started out as sojourners. Some Indo-Guyanese continue to commute and some, especially the older generation, have settled. The younger generation might not settle in Little Guyana, but continue to sojourn to other places in the United States. Future research should look at the trajectories for Indo-

Guyanese, especially by generation. According to participants, Guyana has improved since the 1960s and the Burnham era. There continues to be problems of security, but overall participants agreed that Guyana has improved. Will some Indo-Guyanese move back, or will they move to other cities in the United States? What is the next step in the migration process?

In addition, future research should further explore the idea of a liminal identity. Liminality, transition, fluidity and hybridity are characteristics that also describe the postmodern person. I have argued that the transnational context fosters a liminal identity, but how much of this identity is simply due to postmodern society? Liminal identity may also be relevant to non-immigrants and non-transnationals, and thought of as being part of the postmodern condition, not only of transnationalism. If thought of in this way, liminality deconstructs barriers and boundaries, such as the boundary between citizen and non-citizen, or the boundaries between race categories.

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## Appendix A. Interview Protocol

Note: The questions were modified to maintain the natural flow of the interview and to explore topics which arose during the course of the conversation. This interview protocol was a general guide to direct the conversation. Probes were used to encourage elaboration on answers. When the participant went off topic, but was providing useful content, probing and follow-up questions were used. The researcher then redirected to the original script. Interviews were audio recorded. Notes of most salient points were made during the interview. Notes were used to help guide where to look on recording for respondents' verbatim answers.

### BEGIN AUDIO RECORDING

[Obtain verbal consent]

#### Introduction

*Tell me a little bit about yourself...*

- What do you do for a living?
- How long have you been living here?

#### Life History/Experience of Migration

*Tell me about your experience moving to the US...*

- How old were you?
  - What year did you move?
- Do you remember the day that you moved?
  - If yes, tell me about the day that you moved to the United States?
- What was happening in Guyana at the time that you moved away?
  - Can you tell me about a political event that was occurring at the time that you moved?
- What did you know about the United States before you arrived?
- Did you move alone or with family?
  - If lived alone, describe that experience.
- How were you (and your family) able to move?

- What prompted the decision for you (and your family) to move?
- Why did you (and your family) move?

*Tell me about your adjustment here...*

- Where did you first move?
  - Did you attend school/college there?
  - If yes, what school?
- What were your first school experiences in America?
- Where did you first work?
  - What do remember about working there?
  - Did you/do you send money home to support family or to help them move?
  - Did you find it harder to make/save money in the United States?
- Did you find it easier to get things you needed in the United States than in Guyana?
- What were the differences in the currency?
- How did you get around town?
- Did you find the transportation system in the United States easier to use than in Guyana?
- What did you do for fun when you first moved?
  - Did you watch American movies, listen to American music?
- What about the United States did you enjoy most? Why?
- Did you find it difficult adjusting to the food?
- Did you find that people in the United States treated you differently than in Guyana? How?
- Did you find that other English-speaking Americans had a difficult time understanding you?
  - If yes, how did that make you feel?
- Did your family have a difficult time adjusting to life in America?

- If yes, please explain.
- If no, was it hard for you or your family members to find jobs?
- Did you or your family members have difficulty in school?
- Would you (and your family) ever move back to Guyana?
  - If not, why wouldn't you move back to Guyana?

### Transnational Identity

*So, compare your life in Guyana to your life today...*

- What differences did you see between your past life in Guyana and life for people in America?
- What is a typical day like for you today?
- Do you still eat/cook the same foods?
  - Who does the cooking in your family?
- How do you like to spend your free time?
  - Where do you go in your leisure time (for fun)?
  - Where do you shop?
- How are you involved in your community?
- Do you belong to any Guyanese organizations or clubs?
  - If so, what are they?
- What's the latest movie that you've seen that you enjoyed?
  - What is your favorite movie?
- What books have you read recently that you enjoyed?
  - Do you have a favorite book?
- What type of music do you like?
  - What songs have you heard recently that you enjoy listening to?
  - Do you have a favorite song?
- What are your most important roles for you during the day?

*Tell me about 'Little Guyana'...*

- Who lives in Little Guyana?

- What kinds of things are there to do here?
- Services/Resources/Institutions
  - What are the shopping places like?
  - What are some places to meet people?
  - Tell me about local events...
    - How often do you attend any of the cultural events?
    - Do you go to the Phagwah parades or other cultural events?
  - What does Little Guyana have to offer for people who don't live here?
- Politics/Crime
  - Who are the big figures in this community?
  - Are they wealthy people? Decision-makers? Well-known people? Gangs?
  - Do they have voice or political power?
  - What do they contribute to Little Guyana?
- Family
  - How hard is it to raise a family here?
  - What factors do you think make life difficult/easier for families?
  - Tell me about the youth in this community.
    - Are they well-behaved?
    - How well do they fare in school?
    - How do you think the second generation responds to life here?
  - How important is it to you that your children connect to their heritage/culture?
- Social Issues
  - What problems are there between the people who live here and other neighboring groups?
  - What are some of the problems that you see inside this community or among Indo-Guyanese?
    - What do you think is the cause of these problems?
    - How do these problems affect you?

- How do you think these problems could be resolved?
- How do you think people who live in Little Guyana view ‘outsiders’ (or other Americans), and vice-versa?
- What is the difference between Indo-Guyanese and other Guyanese, East Indians, or West Indians?
  - What do you consider yourself?
  - Do you run into any difficulty defining yourself in such a way?
  - How do you differentiate yourself as being Indian among Indians from India?
- When you are not in Little Guyana, do people often ask you about your ethnicity/nationality?
  - How do you usually respond?
  - How does this make you feel?
- How do you think your life would be if you were ever to move far from your current neighborhood/family in the future? Why?
- In considering your life experience and cultural background, what roles in your life are most important to you? Who do you understand yourself to be?

*Is there anything else that you would like to share related to what we talked about today?*

END AUDIO RECORDING