A Companion to Feminist Geography

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BLACKWELL COMPANIONS TO GEOGRAPHY
Chapter 27

Transversal Circuits: Transnational Sexualities and Trinidad

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In the past ten to fifteen years, there has been a rapid proliferation of literature on gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer identities within transnational and global frames. The work of queer scholars such as M. Jacqui Alexander (1991, 1994, 1997), Yukiko Hanawa (1994), Martin Manalansan (1995), José Muñoz (1995, 1997), and David Eng (2001) seeks to link an earlier generation of work on race and sexuality within national contexts (see Anzaldúa, 1987; Berlant and Freeman, 1991; Fung, 1991; Moraga, 1993) to current theorizing of globalization and transnationalism. By creating new analytical linkages and exploring new sites of inquiry, this new generation of queer scholarship expands the theoretical scope of queer theory and provides a crucial contribution to theorizing globalization and transnational processes.

The work by José Muñoz and others functions as a crucial intervention into queer theories that have largely drawn on literary and psychoanalytic frameworks. Literary and psychoanalytic approaches, while undermining assumptions of essentialized identities, unwittingly posit sexual orientation along a singular axis of identification by inadvertently freezing the fluidity of other positions of race, class, gender, and nationality (see Hennessey, 1994; Cohen, 1997). By exploring the construction and negotiation of queerness through a transnational frame, recent work in queer theory bridges psychoanalytical understandings with the concrete material geographies of daily life on a global scale.

At the same time, this emerging literature makes an important contribution to growing concerns about theorizing globalization, the local–global nexus, glocality, glocalization, and translocality. “Queer globalization” scholarship provides an important disruption of the masculinist configurations of subjectivity, time, space, and place that continue to dominate these conversations. Following Stuart Hall's seminal piece “The local and the global: globalization and ethnicity” (1991), local–global relationships have been fruitfully mined within debates about queer globalization, focused largely on three lines of inquiry. First, recent work examines
questions of identification in transnational contexts, i.e. what kinds of sexual identities are available, to whom, where, and when, especially in relation to national, diasporic, and immigrant identities (Morris, 1997; Muñoz, 1997; Lee, 1998; Luibheid, 2002). Second, this scholarship explores transnational organizing, in particular as it relates to NGOs, activist collaborations, conferences, human rights discourses, and movements of capital (Manalansan, 1995; Bacchetta, 2000). Third, a growing number of scholars are engaging questions of queer visibility and consumption debates, i.e. market access versus civil rights: tourism, class politics, representational and media issues (Hennessey, 1994; Chasin 2000; Puar 2002; see also Glen Elder, chapter 38 in this volume).

A central question for many of these scholars is whether globalization produces queerness (queer identities) as part of Western imperialism or whether queerness is produced as an identity of liberation from and resistance to dominant narratives. Local–global nuances have allowed thinking beyond a framework of resistance versus assimilation, but the tension between these two positions in queer globalization studies continues, with increasing repetition and little resolution (and I include my own work in this assessment). Despite trenchant critiques disavowing such oppositions, global–local theorizing frequently reproduces a (seemingly irreconcilable) dichotomy of “local versus global.” The constant invocation of “the local and the global” creates a hierarchy that implicitly or explicitly lauds the local as the space of authenticity, the local as democratic, originary, and in the case of queer research, the local as a site of “pure” homosexuality or a site of specific pre-queer identities unavailable elsewhere. Queer theorists, then, frequently reproduce a dichotomy present in the broader literature on globalization. They treat the local as the space of postmodern difference, and of (feminized) resistance, while implicitly conceptualizing the global, the “other” side of this dichotomy, as the space of opportunity. In this formulation the global is either homogenizing and equalizing, the space of sameness, or inversely, it is colonizing and creating greater inequities. In either regard the global is figured as masculine.

In the following discussion on sexuality and Trinidad, I begin to shift from local–global terminology to that of spatiality, scale, circuits, and geopolitics. This shift is inspired by the sexuality and space literature from US, British, and Australian queer geographers: Gill Valentine (1993), Jon Binnie (1995), Larry Knopp (1995, 1996, 1998), Ki Namaste (1996), Glen Elder (1998), Michael Brown (2000), Heidi Nast (2003); as well as collections engaged with space, place, and sexuality such as Mapping Desire (Bell and Valentine, 1995), Body Space (Duncan, 1996), Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire (Betsky, 1997), Queers in Space: Communities/Public Places/Sites of Resistance (Ingram et al., 1997), and Places through the Body (Nast and Pile, 1998), among others. Contextualizing “queer space” in terms of political economy, gentrification, tourism, urban/rural divides, privatization of public spaces, and hate violence, queer geographers have begun to foreground the relations of built, virtual, and conceptual space to theories of subjectivity, identity, performativity, and power. This work foregrounds multiple local networks that operate within national, subnational, regional, urban, and neighborhood arenas.

While queer theorist geographers have produced pathbreaking work on the relations between space, place, and sexuality, they have had less to say about...
transnational and globalized arrangements of sexual economies and grids. In other words, the important work on queer geography cited above generally does not analyze global connections between queer spaces/places/geographies. In the case of Trinidad, I examine two circuits suggestive of spatial, identity, and power relations between seemingly far-flung queer spaces. First, I explore how Western and modernist conceptions of gay rights and gay identities intersect with local activist politics and identities—a relationship that is not simple or necessarily mutually beneficial. Gay cruise ships, and their perceived right to dock at Caribbean harbors, embody the scalar articulation of US identity politics and colonial legacies with the perceptions and histories of Trinidadians and and queers, who cannot necessarily afford to actively support the docking-rights of the cruise ships. Second, I examine the local constructions of Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian sexualities in the context of “Divas,” a drag show. These performances, and the audience reaction to them, elucidate the intersection between sexuality, race, and nation in Trinidad. As performances increasingly included in the global gay tourism route, they intersect with changing global political economies and cultural dynamics. Through these two examples, I trace the spatiality of “transversal” transnational sexualities, disrupting the singular “local–global” framing of transnational approaches and expanding the geographies of queer theory.

Exploring “transversal” circuits sheds lights on unusual or unexpected arrangements of space, scale, and identities, and avoids the dichotomy of repeated invocations of “the local and the global” in transnational theory. Following the lead of Paola Bacchetta (2002), I am interested in thinking through what Bacchetta calls “transversal queer alliances,” which she describes as “connections of solidarity both within and across scale, such as within a local site, from one local site to another, from a local to a regional site, or transationally, in a myriad of possible arrangements” (Bacchetta, 2002, p. 947). Bacchetta problematizes both the temporal and spatial patterns asserted in dominant configurations of “transnational queerdom”: representations of queers outside the USA that reinscribe contemporary narratives of visibility and sexual emergence while effacing earlier, usually pre-internet histories of activism, organizing, and community-building.

These representations of “transnational queerdom,” found on the internet, in tourist literature, and in scholarly and activist work, privilege the activities of consumer-queers (queer tourism and scholars of “anthroqueer studies,” for example) and activist-queers (involved in global NGO work, for instance, and “national subjects who speak in transnational forums”; Bacchetta, 2002, p. 951). She points out, rightly, that these forms of visibility work to obscure other queerness; in other words “transnational queer representations can be inadvertently paired with other queer effacements in an inseparable representation/effacement configuration” (ibid., p. 947). In complicating the space of the “local” and scrambling the trajectories of the global, the concept of transversal circuits allows me to examine these relationships of representation and allude to the unanticipated spatial and scalar disjunctures within which gay and lesbian activists in Trinidad and the Caribbean struggle.

While some of what follows draws from research trips to Trinidad over a period of five years (1995–2000), I am most explicitly concerned with a period in 1998, from January to March, when I was in Trinidad for the entire length of the Carnival season. The purpose of my presence as an “ethnographer-tourist” in Trinidad was to evaluate the reality. Specifically, the aim of could be defined in terms of g shaping gay and lesbian spaces of globalization.

Certainly, palpable effects seemed to be surfacing in Trin- taking part in national, region formal organization for gays ; 1994, formed with a model of mind. Commonly referred to as Lambda, was composed primarily confrontational and publicly to Trinidad and Tobago (GREAT). the Caribbean Forum of Lesb directed its energies to the meetings in 1996 (Jamaica) primarily by the Dutch government as well as a sense epidemic in the Caribbean 1 research support from forme

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Tourism, Globalization

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Trinidad was to evaluate the relationships between globalization, gender, and sexuality. Specifically, the aim of my field research was to query how globalization could be defined in terms of gay and lesbian spatialities and what, in turn, was shaping gay and lesbian spaces in Trinidad in the wake of contemporary processes of globalization.

Certainly, palpable effects of globalization upon gay and lesbian communities seemed to be surfacing in Trinidad at every moment. Gay and lesbian activists were taking part in national, regional, and international organizing networks. The first formal organization for gays and lesbians in Trinidad, LAMBDA, was created in 1994, formed with a model of the “fist in the air activist” paradigm of Act-Up in mind. Commonly referred to in Trinidad as promoting “advocacy politics,” LAMBDA was composed predominantly of working-class members and focused on confrontational and publicly visible projects. The Gay Enhancement Association of Trinidad and Tobago (GEATT) created a year later, soon thereafter morphed into the Caribbean Forum of Lesbians, All-Genders, and Gays (C-FLAG); both groups directed their energies toward issues of legislative change. C-FLAG’s regional meetings in 1996 (Jamaica) and 1997 (Curaçao, Netherlands Antilles), funded primarily by the Dutch government, engendered comparative discussions of state oppression as well as a sense of broader “cosmopolitan” credibility. The HIV/AIDS epidemic in the Caribbean has generated a tremendous amount of funding and research support from former colonizing countries in the past fifteen years.

Furthermore, by the late 1990s, the internet had enabled global connections that were formerly impossible. An increasing number of gay and lesbian tourists, both “diaporic expatriates” and otherwise, were learning about gay and lesbian community meetings and fêtes as well as gay-friendly Carnival masquerades specifically through new websites and e-mail lists created in 1998 for Trinidadian gays and lesbians. Furthermore, a tremendous amount of Internet activity, diasporic familial scatterings, and educational endeavors had enabled a relatively small but privileged and prominent segment of the gay and lesbian community in Trinidad to experience what they called “gay life” not only in other parts of the Caribbean but also in Miami, New York, Toronto, and London. Finally, Carnival the world over was becoming increasingly coded and identified as a gay and lesbian affair, especially by the gay and lesbian tourist industry, and the case was no different in Trinidad.

Tourism, Globalization, and Sexuality

In February 1998, a curious incident set off a series of conversations about the often tense relationships between the interests and effects of globalization and postcolonial gay and lesbian identities. After the Cayman Islands refused docking privileges to a so-called gay cruise originating in the United States, several other Caribbean governments expressed the intention of refusing the same cruise ship and any that might follow. The local Caribbean media engaged in no editorial discussion or debate about the cruises, but printed press releases from Reuters and other global wire services. Caribbean Cana-Reuters Press reported that in the Bahamas, a cruise with 900 gay and lesbian passengers, arranged by California-based Atlantis Events Inc., had become a “test for the tourist-dependent Caribbean islands after the Cayman Islands refused the ship landing rights” in December (Trinidad Express,
998a, p. 29). Officials from the Cayman Islands, a British territory in the western Caribbean, said gay vacationers could not be counted on to “uphold standards of appropriate behavior” (Trinidad Express, 1998a, p. 29). Islanders were apparently offended ten years earlier when a gay tour landed and men were seen kissing and holding hands in the streets.9 A USA-based gay rights organization called on the British government to intervene. British Prime Minister Tony Blair did so and determined, in the case of the Cayman Islands (dubbed by Out and About the “Isle of Shame”), that codes outlawing gays and lesbians, many a legacy of colonial legislation, violated the International Covenant of Human Rights and must be rescinded.10 United States officials followed suit, insisting that human rights had been violated.

While the controversy focused predominantly on the Bahamas and the Cayman Islands, Trinidadian activists from C-FLAG, GEATT, and Artists Against Aids were outraged that gay and lesbian cruises could be denied docking privileges.11 Interestingly enough, no gay and lesbian cruises had yet ventured to Trinidad, although it had one of the most active gay and lesbian movements in the Caribbean and the largest (and “parent”) Carnival in the Caribbean (Nurse, 1999, p. 677). One explanation for this, perhaps, is that in Trinidad tourism makes up only about 3% of the gross domestic product, most of which is generated during the Carnival period (the beaches of Tobago are the other main attraction). Thus, the impact of tourism on Carnival, while growing, still appears to be minimal, since the demands of expatriates are “less intrusive,” according to Peter Mason (1998, p. 125). He writes: “This phenomenon, plus the fact that most tourists still come from English-speaking parts of the world with fairly close links to Trinidad, has so far kept the demands of tourism to a manageable level” (ibid.).

Interest in Trinidad as a gay and lesbian tourist site is growing, however, due to the growth of Carnival as a gay and lesbian tourist event, the increasing promotion of cruises and other forms of tourism by the Trinidadian government, and the overall expansion of the global gay and lesbian tourism market. Highlighted in a “Carnival around the world” special issue, the editors of Out and About (the leading gay and lesbian travel newsletter) write that “Trinidad’s Carnival is the biggest gay event in the region” and claim “The gay community here is relatively uncloseted. . . . Gays play an important role in the social fabric of the country, especially in the arts and in Carnival. . . . The islands are at their gayest, figuratively and literally, during the weeks prior to Ash Wednesday” (December 1996, p. 147). While many diasporic Trinidadian gays and lesbians express reluctance about coming “back home” because of the dearth of gay life in Trinidad, Out and About, Odyssey: The International Gay Travel Planner, and A Man’s Guide to the Caribbean 98/99 all list party and dining spots and bars for gay, and mostly male, travelers to Trinidad.

Therefore, Trinidadian gay and lesbian activists had good reason to anticipate that the gay cruises would eventually become an issue in Trinidad as well. I watched in confusion, hopeful on the one hand that the former British colonies would tell Blair and the United States to mind their own business in response to their neo-colonial gestures, but also aware of the other of my ambivalent solidarity with Caribbean activists, many of whom were uncertain about openly supporting the cruises.12 Some activists, attempting to generate support of the cruise ships through an appeal to the profit motive, did comment that “anti-gay protests could be costly to the tourist economies of [Trinidad Express, 1998a, p. 29]. Trinidad decided against iexposure could generate bu were just barely surviving. It seemed ironic to me that ships in the Caribbean, on their return home. T. protected, while, on the na tization of scale. Even so, ti well allow European and A of liberal belonging and on uality and the specific post In the meantime, the d produced complicated and ations who feared greater their more marked visibili identity politics in order to dock. By engaging in such and lesbians and other not the visibility of ships offer ibility or invisibility – for (more urgent for those not are caught in an opposit governments, and in a ser or may not be about sexu The final irony of scale alizing” signifier of gay a proclaimed (professional) not only in humanitarian contributors to the local e segment of gay and lesbia political discussions on h bolic of “radical” gay and normative, or corporate l the irony that certain fo radical agenda of liberat lesbian tourism.

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to the tourist economies of the Caribbean, a favorite playground for affluent gays” (Trinidad Express, 1998a, p. 29). However, most lesbian and gay organizations in Trinidad decided against issuing an official response, fearing that local publicity and exposure could generate backlash against individuals as well as nascent NGOs that were just barely surviving.

It seemed ironic to me that the UK and the USA advocated protection for cruise ships in the Caribbean, while granting no such absolute rights for the passengers upon their return home. Thus, on the transnational scale, these queer citizens are protected, while, on the national scale, they are not, suggesting another reschematization of scale. Even so, the official actions and statements of the two nations may well allow European and American cruisegoers to leave the Caribbean with a sense of liberal belonging and only a surface understanding of the complex politics of sexuality and the specific postcolonial struggles at issue in the region.

In the meantime, the debates stimulated by the arrival and presence of these ships produced complicated and ambivalent responses from local gay and lesbian populations who feared greater local backlash as a result of the increasing discussion and their more marked visibility. The cruise lines appealed to global gay and lesbian identity politics in order to bring about international intervention so that they might dock. By engaging in such strategies, the cruise lines affected the visibility of gays and lesbians and other non-normative sexualities in the Caribbean. In other words, the visibility of ships often creates a need to “lay low” — that is, for decreased visibility or invisibility — for Caribbean gay and lesbian activists; the case may be even more urgent for those not involved in identity politics. Gay and lesbian populations are caught in an oppositional conflict between postcolonial and former colonizing governments, and in a sense are used as examples or pawns in conflicts that may or may not be about sexuality.

The final irony of scale here, of course, is the presence of a mainstream “globalizing” signifier of gay and lesbian identities, namely of a cruise ship with self-proclaimed (professional) gays and lesbians aboard whose presence can be justified not only in humanitarian or in human rights terms, but also in economic terms as contributors to the local economy. A fairly narrow, and perhaps even conservative, segment of gay and lesbian tourists thus winds up triggering the most contentious political discussions on homosexuality in the Caribbean, in effect becoming symbolic of “radical” gay and lesbian activism. Distinctions drawn around mainstream, normative, or corporate homosexuality (Muñoz, 1997, p. 98) cannot fully absorb the irony that certain forms of “corporate gayness” are fueling the supposedly radical agenda of liberationist human rights projects in the context of gay and lesbian tourism.

The cruise ship can be thought of as one of Bacchetta’s “hot sites of power” (“points at which power interacts, settles; and gives off effects”) that incites a transnational circuitry. As a hot site, the cruise ship occupies several discrepant meanings through simultaneous scalar registers: an alternative form of travel for European and North American lesbians and gays marginalized by a heteronormative travel industry; a marker of mobile, cosmopolitan queerness for those (e.g. Caribbean gays and lesbians) without access to such spaces; an ad hoc space, for the cruise goers, of global sexual citizenship that temporarily reinstates previously denied national rights; a visible catalyst of contamination and/or an affront to
postcolonial governments. Thus transversal circuits display not only queer alliances of scale, but also queer disjunctures: the sites and moments where connections that appear naturalized due to a logic of scalar progression and coherence are disrupted and fissured.

Globalization, Gender, Sexuality, and Drag in Trinidad

... to be “visible” in the Caribbean is literally to be on stage, to perform. (Personal communication between Gordon Rohlehr and Tejaswini Niranjana, as quoted in Niranjana, 1999, p. 239)

In the Caribbean we are all performers. (Antonio Benitez-Rojo, as quoted in Muñoza, 1995, p. 83)

My attention, and the attention of many of my informants, flipped-flopped back and forth between the debates about the cruise ships and the preparations for “Diva” and Carnival. “Diva” started in 1992 not explicitly as a drag show but as an “artistic production” for professional actors. According to the producer, a Chinese-Trinidadian man in his fifties, labelling “Diva” an artistic production was a strategic approach used to circumvent the reluctance of theater owners to host the show. Over the years, however, “Diva” has become increasingly identified as a gay and lesbian community event, drawing increasing numbers of amateur participants as well as expatriates and overseas visitors. Since 1998, it has been advertised on several websites created by and for gay and lesbian Trinidadians, and it appears only a matter of time before “Diva” will be listed in mainstream gay and lesbian tourism publications as a cruising spot for gay men. “Diva” illustrates another transversal circuit of globalization, one that highlights different regimes of gay and lesbian identities and the attendant concerns of race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and nation as they occur in Trinidad. Colonial histories of cross-dressing and transvestism compete with contemporary globalizing understandings of drag to create debates among producers as well as spectators about whether “Diva” is, or should be, a “gay show.”

In 1998, ironically and yet appropriately enough, “Diva” was held in Queens Hall, a central and prominent theater in Port-of-Spain. The performances ranged from the spectacularizing of glamour, to comedic parodies, to tragic depictions of HIV/AIDS, poverty, and sex workers. Lip-syncing to Diana Ross’s “Ain’t no mountain high enough,” three performers in shiny yellow latex bodysuits, sporting huge feathered headdresses and sequined capes, echoed carnivalesque costumes and glamour. In several scenes, participants emphasized similar tropes of beauty and glamour, with heavily sequined ballgowns and cocktail dresses, as was the case in a James Bond Goldfinger skit and in an Annie Lennox impersonation. The dramatic performances also included somber depictions of a patient dying of AIDS in front of an AIDS quilt, as well as scenes of domestic abuse and a sex worker being kicked around by her pimp. While the judging still favors conventional glamour drag over pointed social commentary, the show has always been heavily dominated by references to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The show has never been advertised as a gay show or even a drag show – it has simply been announced as “Diva,” a performance guided primarily by a serious artistic and competitive agenda.

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The reviews of the con format. They commonly r whether they are publisher mainstream daily newsp the comedic moments of t As with the advertisement made. Explained the prod

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A brief historical disc porary racial performance that it left two groups of and Africans at 40 percent The impression of grown by the media. Indian mig need for indentured labo nial migrations from Ind Africa. Although Indians populations, and former
Over the years, the performers have tended to be working-class Afro-Trinidadian men. The audience is usually largely middle class, surprisingly even in terms of gender, and racially very mixed; thus there is commonly a notable disparity in the racial and class makeup between the audience and the performers. It also includes many diasporic expatriates who are home for Carnival, as well as tourists and well traveled Trinidadians. The show is not inexpensive by Trinidadian standards: in 1998 both evenings cost a total of 100 TT, the equivalent of US$18. According to the organizers, who claim to know who is in and out of the “community,” the audience is always at least half “straight.”

The reviews of the contest for the past six years have followed nearly the same format. They commonly ridicule the visuality of drag, regardless of the author or whether they are published in the Trinidad Express or the Trinidad Guardian, both mainstream daily newspapers. The commentaries focus on what they consider to be the comedic moments of the performance and dismiss much of the serious content. As with the advertisements for the shows, no mention of sexuality or gender is ever made. Explained the producer:

Last year when we were at the Central Bank, we got a review from someone that wrote from the news... Showtime Magazine. And she loved everything. She was surprised at the standard, she loved the acts, the lights, everything. But she started talking about the show as it being a gay show. And I had to write back, you know, and say, this is not a gay show. Because she had the conception that it was.

Thus, maintaining Diva first and foremost as an artistic production is one strategy used to enable this space for non-normative sexualities.

Most of the seven drag performers I interviewed talked about contemporary “Divas,” ranging from Barbara Streisand and Marilyn Monroe, who were parodied in the early shows, to Patti La Belle, Tina Turner, and Toni Braxton. Said a working-class Afro-Trinidadian male who has performed in nearly every “Diva” show: “The first two years, the older actors involved were very aware of the female icons of the cinema... Marilyn Monroe, Marlene Dietrich. Now, because they are younger and also blacker, they tend to follow Patti La Belle, Toni Braxton.” While figures of white womanhood are prominent in earlier “Diva” shows but somewhat absent in more recent ones, the competing definitions of black womanhood reflect the distinctions made between African-American, Afro-Trinidadian, and Indo-Trinidadian femininities. Thus “Diva” is an event where questions of racial performativity and Indian-African relations are highlighted.

A brief historical discussion of race and colonialism helps to situate contemporary racial performances in “Diva.” Trinidad’s decolonization in 1962 is ironic in that it left two groups of color of nearly equal proportion (Indians at 40.7 percent and Africans at 40 percent) pitted against each other as economic and cultural rivals. The impression of growing racial antagonisms has been termed the “war of cultures” by the media. Indian migration to Trinidad, precipitated in the mid-1800s by the need for indentured labor in the sugar industry, was part of a “first wave” of colonial migrations from India, including migration to Fiji, Suriname, Guyana, and Africa. Although Indians occupied a “fourth tier” underneath white colonists, mixed populations, and former black slaves (for excellent historical analysis see Kale,
1995), in contemporary postcolonial Trinidadian society many Indo-Trinidadians are beginning to access education and other institutionalized privileges. Moreover, they are entering key political, cultural, and social realms in increasing numbers.

Thus, while Afro-Trinidadians have historically dominated the political arena and are culturally associated with the Caribbean, Indo-Trinidadians have recently emerged as powerful challengers to the political and cultural space of the nation. This challenge, precipitated to some extent by the redistribution of wealth due to the oil boom and bust in the 1970s and 1980s, is evident in the growing economic power of the Indian bourgeoisie as well as the election of Basdeo Panday, the first Indo-Trinidadian Prime Minister, in 1995. That year also marked the 150th anniversary of Indian Arrival Day, although this date is not commemorated annually as an official holiday. Currently, attention is being drawn to the globalization of Indian ethnicity occurring throughout the Caribbean through the dissemination of Hindi film and the increasing circulation of aspects of Indo-Trinidadian popular culture, such as chutney music (Niranjan, 1999; see also Khan, 1995). However, the illegitimate, disavowed modernity of Indo-Trinidadians posits them as other vis-à-vis Afro-Trinidadians. Indo-Trinidadians appear as either culturally mimicking dominant notions of Trinidadian identity or cast in the realm of the traditional, backward, and primitive. The unmitigated effect of this renders Indo-Trinidadians without claim to a national Trinidadian identity of their own.

In this context, the categorization of who is and is not in "drag" is an important reflection of the relationships between African and Indian ethnicities. Despite the increasing Indianization of Trinidad, however, "Divā" continues to be dominated by Afro-Trinidadians. Every year has seen an Indian act, and 1998 was no different. As the producer comments:

I've always had an East Indian act. Always had one. I nearly did not have one this year. I always wanted one, I like variety. The gay community in Trinidad has a lot of class and racial differences, and you would find the Chinese, whites, the lighter-skinned Trinis would not be eager to participate in something like "Divā." They would come and look at it.

About halfway through the first show, the "Indian" act was announced, first, by the MC's comments on the problems he was having pronouncing the Indian names, and, second, by the distinct introductory notes of Indian film music that was quite different from the more contemporary "Top 40" pop tunes used in the rest of the acts. A pair of Indo-Trinidadians mimicked the motif of seduction so common in Hindi films. The male figure, dressed in an Indian kurta and pyjamas, pranced after his flirty, ponting partner, who was dressed in a bright pink top and long silk skirt, around trees and through fields. The female figure was barefoot, with long braided hair, an exposed belly, and gold earrings and wrist bangles. One could even imagine the rain so typical of Bollywood films. At the end of the scene, the male figure hoisted the female figure into his arms. This was the only coupling in any performance of "Divā," and the only performance of desire expressed through heterosexual partnering in the two shows.

Throughout, the audience was generally appreciative, but not overly enthusiastic. An undercurrent of chattering increased as the performance continued, and the final applause was lukewarm. During the most comedic moments, the audience did hoot with laughter. These familiarity of Hindi films to in theaters as well as by the not to mention by exposure through contests held in the The question remains: we question may illuminate the city versus the visibilities of femininity and how it "get striking." In the audience re comments indicated that the not "really" in drag; rather, Afro-Trinidadian male inter inhibited by fears of people female judge, lamenting the marked as ethnic dance, as i judge, an Afro-Trinidadian to you. The judges don't kno there are no subtitles." I repeatedly whether the India sidered to be drag. "He was anyway," said an Afro-Trinidadian classify it like that - it's eas; These varied reactions point and the moments of culture characterization of this perf drag even as it simultaneous of drag. The connections be are located when African inversely those national trad the specter of tradition just reference? In relation to Tri queer historical essentialism able to legitimize non-nort culture" is so often mobiliz wardness, while by normati national space.

I met Sasha and Vik at contest, where I asked if project. They readily agreed a relatively new mall. The considered the gateway to rural, the Indian, the back cosmopolitan Port-of-Spain.

We sat in Pizza Hut. Sas lipstick, and had pinned up over both of us, getting us d the performance and how th
ect many Indo-Trinidadians activities, privileges. Moreover, in increasing numbers, the political arena, and Trinidadians have recently cultural space of the nation, transportation of wealth due to a growing economic of Basdeo Panday, the first marked the 150th anniversaries commemorated annually as an the globalization of Trinidad popular culture, n, 1995). However, the illegitimizes them as other vis-à-vis culturally mimicking domi-lum of the traditional, back-frontiers Indo-Trinidadians in own, not in “drag” is an impor-
t Indian ethnicities. Despite ira continues to be domi-dian act, and 1998 was no early did not have one this in Trinidad has a lot of, whites, the lighter-skinned “Diva.” They would come

ct was announced, first, by nouncing the Indian names, film music that was quite unes used in the rest of the seduction so common in and pyjamess, pranced after pink top and long silk skirt, barefoot, with long braided hairs. One could even imagine, the male figure hoisted sling in any performance of through heterosexual part-

, but not overly enthousiasmance continued, and the moments, the audience did hoot with laughter. These acts were part dance, part acting, part parody. The familiarity of Hindi films to Trinidadian audiences is enabled by regular screenings in theaters as well as by the availability of Indian cable channels and Indian MTV, not to mention by exposure to the rich culture of dance and music made possible through contests held in the south and central areas of Trinidad.

The question remains: were the performances drag? The various answers to this question may illuminate the differences between the possibilities of race and sexuality versus the possibilities of race or sexuality. The differences between Afro-femininity and how it “gets dragged” and the dragging of Indian femininity are striking.17 In the audience response surveys that I conducted after the shows, many comments indicated that the Indian performers were regarded as closeted and thus not “really” in drag; rather, they were simply performing an “ethnic” dance. One Afro-Trinidadian male interviewee claimed: “This is an Indian drag queen who is inhibited by fears of people discovering who she really is.” An Indo-Trinidadian female judge, lamenting the dearth of Indo-Trinidadian performers, noted: “This is marked as ethnic dance, as Indian dance, while the African is not marked.” Another judge, an Afro-Trinidadian man, commented: “It’s just a dance. It’s a dance to me, to you. The judges don’t know what the movements mean. It’s not like a Hindi film – there are no subtitles.” During my questioning of audience members, I asked repeatedly whether the Indian dance, in the context of the “Diva” contest, was considered to be drag. “He was pretending to be a woman but he does Indian dance anyway,” said an Afro-Trinidadian female. “It’s an Indian dance because we can classify it like that – it’s easy to classify. It’s not drag though.”

These varied reactions point to several connections between performances of drag and the moments of cultural, racial, and national strategies utilized in them. The characterization of this performance as an Indian one erases Indo-Trinidadians in drag even as it simultaneously enables participation in a Trinidadian national space of drag. The connections between drag and the reterritorializing of national spaces are located when African traditions that are hailed as national traditions, or inversely those national traditions implicitly assumed to be African ones.18 When is the specter of tradition just barely referenced or not, and who is able to avoid that reference? In relation to Trinidad, the forces of cultural nationalism often prevent queer historical essentialisms. Indian cultural traditions are only marginally available to legitimate non-normative sexualities given that the category of “Indian culture” is so often mobilized by Afro-Trinidadians as one of tradition and backwardness, while by normative Indo-Trinidadians it is also used as a way to claim national space.

I met Sasha and Vik at the cast party after the second night of the “Diva” contest,19 where I asked if they would be interested in being interviewed for my project. They readily agreed and we arranged a meeting spot at the Grand Bazaar, a relatively new mall. The Grand Bazaar is located at the entrance to the freeway considered the gateway to the “South,” a demarcation commonly alluding to the rural, the Indian, the backward spaces of Trinidad from the vantage point of cosmopolitan Port-of-Spain.

We sat in Pizza Hut. Sasha was still in drag. She had long painted nails, wore lipstick, and had pinned up his/her long dark hair into a high ponytail. Vik hovered over both of us, getting us drinks and winking at Sasha. We started by talking about the performance and how they felt about the rehearsals and the show. Both Vik and
Sasha were excited about having had the opportunity to perform, and had not felt marginalized by the African-dominated spaces of the show, saying that the audience really appreciated Indian dance.

We spent hours talking about dance in general, about different types of Indian dance, and about the development of Vik's and Sasha's dance school, their business partnership, and the kinds of reactions their families and residential community had about their interest in an alternative career which was not conventional for Indo-Trinidadian men. They had established their dance school nearly six years earlier, and had performed all over Trinidad at Indian weddings and community events, as well as at Trinidadian cultural shows. They had also performed overseas in Guyana, New York, and Miami.

The point is that for the first two hours of the interview, we never once talked about drag, sexuality, homosexuality, gays, lesbians, or gendered roles. I hesitantly read my own assumptions of their sexual relationship through certain moments of affection between the two of them and their narration of a long joint history of living and working together. Having a partnership routed through material business arrangements is a common phenomenon for same-sex liaisons, especially in Indian circles in Trinidad, and may even be facilitated by the concept of arranged marriage that is seen purely as a familial and financial arrangement that benefits everyone. The one fleeting reference to anything remotely related to "Diva" as a space of gender illusion was made when Vikram commented about the Port-of-Spain "community parties" being pleasant though somewhat alienating.

Unlike with the other drag performers I interviewed, who were Afro-Trinidadian, I simply could not bring up the question of sexuality with Vikram and Sasha, largely because they did not appear gay to me in any intelligible way. That they were "closeted" is easy to assume here, except that Vikram and Sasha exist in their hometown of Chaguana as "openly" as any couple ever could, in a somewhat accepted/tolerated/negotiated transgendered partnering. I struggled to respect their privacy and interpretation on the one hand, and to access the meaning of their relationship in terms I could comprehend on the other. My problematic enthrallment with Sasha and Vikram may well have reflected my desire to produce a "queerer than queer", counternarrative to the homogenizing impulses of metropole-produced queer theory. I was also unable to gain any insight into what Sasha and Vik were thinking about me or if they read me as a lesbian; they asked me only about my family in the United States, my knowledge of Indian dance, and my connections to Indian musicians and performers overseas.

In fact, toward the end of our second hour together, Sasha and Vik started pressing what seemed to me at that time their real agenda; they wanted to know if I had any business contacts on the West Coast who could set them up with a show. In another illustration of jumping scale, in which they indicated that their shows were quite successful in New York and Miami, their emphasis on institutional and economic constraints and opportunities served to foreground the materiality of sexualities. They wanted to know what California was like. What may well have been most enabling for Sasha and Vik were the economic networks they mobilized and within which they moved. This is what I find so interesting, that Sasha and Vik had no investment whatsoever in the process of queer liberation. It is precisely their refusal of a politics around sexuality that was most striking; they appeared completely uninterested in the centerstage in USA-based queer drag contests who their sexual subjectivity to me.

I do not intend here to gender, racial, class, and to suggest several conundrums that might actually privilege it: is it visible, is it queer visible might define it? It may be involves an assimilationist ethic Indian dancers than gay. Yet they were more visit as a gay couple; viewed that they were invisible as a gay invisible in the context of a invisibility, or perhaps medicating "radical" element of their phenomenon. I will not go so far as to s or of Sasha in drag or as without repercussions by a Sasha and Vik performed ti dings and other communitid_VENDOR'S ally contemporary Bollywood these contexts. When I ask dance, and how it was representative: "I do think maybe no. The majority of people And they do enjoy seeing the most acceptable dances.

In this circuit, the global culture, as well as diasporic race. These moments of se: South to the North, from mopolitan, urban African couple is too reductive, th allows them a certain degendered" status often occur. De spite my lack of information or their sexual relations of sex/gender binaries with labor/work networks. Performers, drag queens, sub transvestism, and sex-char and class distinctions as traditions and subjects.
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\npletely uninterested in the politicized project of gender bending that often occupies
centerstage in USA-based queer theory. Sasha and Vik, and arguably many of the
other drag contestants who yearn to be awarded the prize money at “Diva,” linked
their sexual subjectivity to their work status.
I do not intend here to reductively position the wide range of different kinds of
gender, racial, class, and national identifications in such examples. Instead, I want
to suggest several conundrums of Bacchetta’s “representation/effacement” paradigm
that might actually privilege the modality of absence as desirable over presence. If
it is visible, is it queer visibility in the ways queer liberation in the United States
might define it? Is it may be in/visible, but is it in/visibility? Not every invisibility
involves an assimilationist narrative. Sasha and Vik were more visible in “Diva” as
ethnic Indian dancers than as drag performers, or rather they were invisible as
gay. Yet they were more visible at home in Chaguana as a male/female couple than
as a gay couple; viewed through the lens of gender rather than sexual orientation,
they were invisible as a gay couple. Sasha and Vik’s “queerness” is rendered nearly
invisible in the context of gay and lesbian identity politics in Port of Spain, yet their
invisibility, or perhaps more precisely their partial visibility, may be the most
“radical” element of their gendered sexuality.
I will not go so far as to say that the possibilities of Vikram and Sasha as a couple,
or of Sasha in drag or as transgendered, are completely invisible and accepted
without repercussions by a largely Indian community in Central Trinidad. In fact,
Sasha and Vik performed the very same acts in “Diva” as they did for Indian wed-
dings and other community functions in South and Central Trinidad. Given the
history of female impersoners and cross-dressing in Indian dance as well as in
contemporary Bollywood films, the framework of drag may well be irrelevant in
these contexts. When I asked about the tradition of Indian cross-dressing in Indian
dance, and how it was received at these predominantly heterosexual functions, Vik
stated: “I do think maybe they do still have a few negative people, I’m not saying
no. The majority of people widely accepted the fact that we do dance together . . .
And they do enjoy seeing boys dress up and dance, so we do the most popular ones,
the most acceptable dances.”
In this circuit, the globalization of Indian ethnicity via Hindi films and popular
culture, as well as diasporic cultural venues, is in conversation with sexuality and
race. These moments of sexuality and race are traversed in the movement from the
South to the North, from supposed subalternized rural Indian territory to cos-
mopolitan, urban African territory. Qualifying Vik and Sasha as a male/female
couple is too reductive, though perhaps it is precisely this reductive reading that
allows them a certain degree of gender fluidity. Similarly ineffectual is the “third
gender” status often accorded to hijras in India and Native American berdaches.31
Despite my lack of information or evidence about Sasha and Vik’s sexual orienta-
tions or their sexual relationship, what remains interesting here is the de/stabilizing
of sex/gender binaries within kinship structures, community events, and global
labor/work networks. Furthermore, distinctions rendered between drag, drag per-
formers, drag queens, subjects of drag, transsexuals, transgenders, cross-dressing,
transvestism, and sex-changes are intrinsically determined as much through racial
and class distinctions as they are through distinctions of sexual and gendered prac-
tices and subjects.
Globalization 2000: "Circuits of Desire"

In closing, I want to return to the opening dilemma posed by the cruise ship with 900 gays and lesbians from the United States, its presence intertwined with the performances of "Divas" and Sasha and Vik. As a South Asian queer academic based in the United States, I located myself as part of these multiple circuits: complicit with the production of queer theory in the United States and often unable to resist this location as my reference point, I attempted to comprehend the specificities of sexual identities in Trinidad.23

What do these circuits say about the uneven and contradictory situations enabled by globalization, particularly in terms of gender and sexuality? In Trinidad, queer sexualities create new communities that in some ways reinvent the spaces of the nation, redefine some citizens of Trinidad, and create new transversal queer alliances across ethnicity, gender, and certainly across scale through regional, transnational, and diasporic connections. I contend that these spaces also create and recreate long-standing divisions among and between different communities, sites, and locations, foregrounding the necessity to examine transversal queer *complicities*, not just alliances.

Furthermore, while the local may not be “dead,” as some theorists of globalization who focus on “world without boundaries” might claim, the local as a space of sexual signification continues to reference culture, ethnicity, and so-called native or indigenous sexual practices that are highly unnameable, i.e. unappable within Euro-American identity frameworks and categories. Their unapplicability renders them not sophisticated or “modern enough” to enter the realm of identity politics, nor representable, a moment of subalternization, even as they are then often mobilized as transgressive sexual practices through postmodern queer politics. The uncomfortable hierarchies resurrected in static local–global formulations with regard to non-normative sexualities could be as follows: the local is the space of the liminal, indigenous, the sexuality that cannot be named, the primitive, and the backwardness of tradition. The global represents the formations of identity that are deemed necessary for certain political movements and moments to take place, and in the case of sexuality, signals the positions of gay and lesbian. Meanwhile queerness is then proffered as a postmodern refusal of identity *par excellence*, often through a reclamation of the space of the indigenous, and without careful contextualization of the spatial interactions of these positions. Thus this reclamation seems at once a harking back to pre-modern pre-identity as much as an attempt at a new postmodern fluidity, one that keeps being captured by modernity.

While I want to insist on the refusal of an imported versus indigenous binary, mapping my own circuits of desire has been a difficult and confusing task. It is precisely upon the erasure of these circuits of globalization that my own desires, in the search for nameable and counter-nameable subjects, have often hinged. In retrospect, it is hard for me to say whether the “refusal of the subject” was indeed the denial of Sasha and Vik as the gay subjects that I could most easily identify, or actually my refusal to allow Sasha and Vik to be the (gay?) subjects that they are (Visweswaran, 1994). If the latter is the case, then I, too, colluded with Afro-Trinidadian assessments that they were not in drag, I, too, viewed the specificity of Sasha and Vik’s lives through the lens of romanticized queerness, searching for some kind of sexual liminality that I could not name or see, but still could somehow know.

I have also, with ambiva gender to describe people in nomenclature such as “bul nearest equivalent being “fe I used the term queer for n yet circulate as a descriptor readers this may be seen as of queer theory (and myself here. For other readers, us neocolonialist. Though I ha to this material, since the at counterproductive to my th when there appears to be n sions between identity posi that mark subjects beyond rizing about globalization, being untranslatable across

This chapter set out to gender and sexuality in th globalization on sexuality, site, nation-state, or legislat which decenter any one fo mobility, persecution, or pr is also concerned with an ex colonial and postcolonial le ization of the Caribbean an tion to understand how rac sexualization. The develop to international organizing, ties in Trinidad, and the pre will all continue to alter the Trinidad. The growing part postcolonial queers and pie foreground global and dias are no longer only, though salisms and Enlightenmen teleological march towards queer identities? This is the

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1 See the work of Judith Bt 2 “Divas” has taken place ev annual gay parties, or “6 and public events for Inte staged in Trinidad, during most established and wid
I have also, with ambivalence, used the terms gay and lesbian as well as transgender to describe people in Trinidad, namings that circulate in tandem with local nomenclature such as “buller” (a reclaimed derogatory slang word for men, its nearest equivalent being “faggot”) and the phrase “she goes with a woman,” while I used the term queer for myself. I have done this in part because queer does not yet circulate as a descriptor in Trinidad. However, I am well aware that for some readers this may be seen as a “withholding” of sorts that reinscribes the centrality of queer theory (and myself as a queer theorist) that I have attempted to trouble here. For other readers, using the term generically would have been unforgiveably neocolonialist. Though I have resisted offering definitions of these terms as a preface to this material, since the argument made in this discussion renders such definitions counterproductive to my theoretical intent, I have recuperated namings at moments when there appears to be no linguistic escape. All namings are underpinned by tensions between identity positions around race, ethnicity, class, and gender in ways that mark subjects beyond genre and sexual signification. In the context of theorizing about globalization, these namings are often freighted with the difficulty of being untranslatable across social locations.

This chapter set out to look at some specific moments of the globalization of gender and sexuality in the context of Trinidadian identities and the effects of globalization on sexuality. I have focused on Trinidad, not primarily or only as a site, nation-state, or legislative entity, but rather as a series of spatial relationships which decenter any one force to be an overriding determinant of social change, mobility, persecution, or promise. The larger project from which this work derives is also concerned with an exploration of the continuities and discontinuities between colonial and postcolonial legislation, i.e. a study of the British discourses of racialization of the Caribbean and Trinidad before and during the period of decolonization to understand how racial groups in Trinidad were being constructed through sexualization. The development of gay and lesbian activism in Trinidad and its links to international organizing, the negotiation of transsexual and transgender identities in Trinidad, and the practices of consumption, tourism, and cultural production will all continue to alter the ways that gay and lesbian sexualities are understood in Trinidad. The growing participation of “queers of color” organizations as well as postcolonial queer and people of color travelers in these practices and spaces that foreground global and diasporic unity around queerness mean that such discourses are no longer only, though still primarily, in the service of Euro-American universalisms and Enlightenment discourses. Does globalization entail a predictable teleological march towards recognizably gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer identities? This is the question that I, and others, continue to explore.

NOTES

1. See the work of Judith Butler, Teresa de Lauretis, and Diana Fuss, among others.
2. “Diva” has taken place every year in Trinidad’s capital, Port-of-Spain, since 1992. While annual gay parties, or “fetes,” during the holidays and Carnival had become routine, and public events for International AIDS Day and even gay pride had previously been staged in Trinidad, during the time of my visits “Diva” was still considered among the most established and widely recognized public arenas of gay and lesbian interaction.
3 The research in this chapter is based on fieldwork conducted in Trinidad during intermittent trips from 1994 to 2000. The analysis herein is derived from participant-observation in the field as well as from more than 30 interviews with activists from Trinidad and other Caribbean countries, “diva” performers, producers, and judges. I also distributed 47 audience response surveys after the “Divas” shows, and organized post-”Divas” discussion roundtables. Concurrently I spoke with participants in the urban Port-of-Spain Trinidadian gay and lesbian scene, including local residents, Trinidadians from other areas who traveled to the capital frequently to attend community events, and tourists.

4 I use the term ethnographer-tourist not to minimize or compromise my activities as an ethnographer and researcher but to highlight my overlapping positioning and participation in tourist circuits in Trinidad. Much has been written on the ethnographer as traveler. However, less has been discussed about how a hierarchical distinction between traveler and tourist serves to obscure the ways in which ethnographers are tourists in the field to varying degrees and are implicated in tourist economies.

5 There are tensions between different activist strategies and the class, racial, and gender components of each. Many middle-class gays and lesbians in Port-of-Spain tend to route their politics around sexuality through an HIV/AIDS activism, and are extremely distant from if not opposed to pushing for legislative changes, while many working-class gays, and fewer lesbians, are involved in forming national, regional, and international NGOs to address questions of persecution and oppression.

6 The most prominent example of such globalized organizations, the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC), is located in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, and is funded by various Caribbean islands as well as the Dutch and British governments.

7 See, for example, http://www.search.co.uk/trinidad/gay/

8 Keith Nurse (1999, p. 673) notes that the globalization of Carnival also generates a tremendous amount of travel and work-opportunities through an overseas Carnival circuit that spans the Caribbean, North America, and Europe and involves some of the largest gatherings in those locales.

9 In the same article, Bahamian clergymen claimed it was the “power of prayer” that steered the ship away from the island, a decision that was claimed to have been made due to inclement weather. Clergy said the cancellation was due to “divine intervention” (Trinidad Express, 1998a, p. 29).

10 The editors of Out and About (1998a, p. 27), the leading gay and lesbian tourism newsletter, called for a travel boycott against the Cayman Islands, encouraging letter-writing campaigns to American Airlines, American Express (the “official card” of the Cayman Islands), and Norwegian Cruise Lines.

11 See “Isle of Shame” in Out and About (1998b) for excerpts from the statement of welcome to gay and lesbian travelers eventually issued by the Prime Minister of the Bahamas, Hubert A. Ingraham. For contextualization of the tourist industry in the Bahamas, see Alexander (1997).

12 Debates continue through the spring, preceded by prison riots in Jamaica over the distribution of condoms and continuing pressure from the British to liberalize anti-gay laws. Britain had previously abolished the death penalty in several British territories (Anguilla, the Cayman Islands, British Virgin Islands, Turks and Caicos, and Montserrat) “despite public support for capital punishment in the colonies and throughout the Caribbean.” In response to Britain’s insinuation that it would do the same with regard to laws on homosexuality, Anguilla’s chief minister, Hubert Hughes, stated: “We would like Britain to understand that even though we are dependent on British aid, we will definitely not compromise our principles when it comes to Christianity” (Trinidad Express, 1998b, p. 30).

13 In this scenario, what I have left unattended is vast: disjunctures within the population of the ship, between consumers and laborers perhaps; internal debates within LGBTQ organizations that repre relations and interactio Caribbean nations.

14 While I focus in this chapter on performance in Trinidad Cubana, a well-known production of “Mark, A

15 In a longer unpublished zation of the “carnival/ drag performances

16 This effectively projecte indented populations, ivity,” and later, an “arti she writes, “they had n nation in the making” (c

17 Kanhai (1995) has writ Indian divides more diffi image of the oppressed to a preponderance of w ties. About the “gender o Kanhai (1995, p. 9) wr seems to be a chronicle of the feminist movement in the image of images that inscr ib Indian women.

18 One of the most impo the Dame Lorrain, a plante white (1984), The Dame Lor functions as a marker o cross-dressing and fema

19 These are pseudonyms. version of a more mascl

20 Due to space constraint caution against a decor dance that often happen mances. See Hansen (19

21 The bijra in South Asia sexuality that largely ef status of bijras in India. also been applied to con figures can be used by dence of homosexual tra streamed gay, lesbian, a attempts to issues of 1997).

22 For more detailed stud (1998) on homosexualit

23 This circuit has altered first came to Trinidad i
organizations that represented fissures despite the appearance of a unified stance; the relations and interactions between disembarked cruisegoers and residents of these Caribbean nations.

14 While I focus in this chapter on “Divas,” there are several other notable spaces of drag performance in Trinidad. Two examples are those created by drag performer Juana La Cubana, a well-known figure in entertainment circles in Trinidad, and in the stage production of “Mark, Maureen, and a Drag Queen” in October 1998.

15 In a longer unpublished version of this chapter I discuss Bakhtin and his conceptualization of the “carnivalesque” to shed more light on the genealogies of the costumes in these drag performances.

16 This effectively projected the modernities of East Indians in Trinidad, among other indentured populations, as what Niranjana (1999, p. 243) calls an “illegitimate modernity,” and later, an “artificial modernity,” as well as a “disavowed double,” because, as she writes, “they had not passed through, been formed by, the story of the [Indian] nation in the making” (Niranjana, 1999, p. 232).

17 Kanhai (1995) has written on how the tensions of decolonization make African and Indian divides more difficult for women as “cultural containers.” Kanhai claims that the image of the oppressed Indian “cooie woman” associated with indentureship has led to a preponderance of work on violence against women in Indo-Trinidadian communities. About the “gender control” of Indian women during indentureship and afterwards, Kanhai (1995, p. 9) writes: “Indeed the history of Indian presence in the Caribbean seems to be a chronicle of abusive male control within the community.” She notes how the feminist movement in Trinidad is complicit with, and responsible for, the perpetuation of images that inscribe a “tradition”/”modernity” dichotomy between African and Indian women.

18 One of the most important figures constructing African traditions as national ones is the Dame Lorraine, a traditional Carnival character who originally mocked French plantation wives. The Dame Lorraine, a highly performative form of “colonial mimicry” of French Creole whiteness, became a part of carnival processions in 1884 (Bhabha, 1984). The Dame Lorraine can be seen as a covert figure of legitimization, one which functions as a marker of Carnival masquerading and, hence, of a national tradition of cross-dressing and female impersonation (see also Hill, 1972).

19 These are pseudonyms. Vikram calls himself “Vik” for short, and Sasha is a female version of a more masculine Indian name.

20 Due to space constraints here I can only mention this argument. Generally, I want to caution against a decontextualization of histories of female impersonation in Indian dance that often happen through a queer reading that privileges drag in these performances. See Hansen (1992) on female impersonation in Indian dance.

21 The *bijra* in South Asian queer diasporic contexts has become a figure of transgressive sexuality that largely effaces the often non-transgressive (though not “normal”) status of *bijras* in India. The Native American concepts of berdache and two-spirit have also been applied to contemporary queer liberationist projects in a similar fashion. The figures can be used by diasporic communities in a historically essentialist way as evidence of homosexual traditions within the culture, but they are also used by more mainstream gay, lesbian, and queer organizing in similar ways but *without* the requisite attentiveness to issues of racism, immigration, and nationalism (see Nanda, 1993; Patel, 1997).

22 For more detailed studies about these relationships in different contexts, see Prieur (1998) on homosexuality in Mexico and Kulick (1998) on “travestis” in Brazil.

23 This circuit has altered significantly over the years of my research in Trinidad. When I first came to Trinidad in 1994, the few contacts that I made in the gay and lesbian
community were located through word of mouth, primarily from Triniadadian friends in the United States. Information was always cautiously dispensed. Now, fetes that were once invitation-only and known about strictly through word of mouth are advertised on the world wide web. It is also less problematic for me to write about specific places, events, and even people in Trinidad because they have all been “outed” by these websites as well as by the gay and lesbian tourism industry.

24 See Kaplan (1995) for a critique of this version of transnationalism as well as a study of how it operates in relation to consumption.

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transnationalism as well as a study


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