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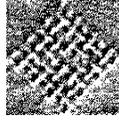
*Seeking Space  
Shaping Aesthetics*

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# *Politics and the Aesthetics of Recognition in Caribbean Film: A Case of Too Many Masseurs?*



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...at a time when masseurs were ten a penny in Trinidad (*The Mystic Masseur* 1).

The coinage of Trinidad is no longer measured in pennies, but masseurs still proliferate. Singling out and making representative, which are definitive characteristics of V. S. Naipaul's style, are evident in the careful penny selection and development of the character Ganesh in his first published novel, *The Mystic Masseur*. This is how the crafting of the novel begins: "Later he was to be famous and honoured throughout the South Caribbean; he was to be a hero of the people and, after that, a British representative at Lake Success. But when I first met him, he was still a struggling masseur..." (1).

In ironic reversal of the lone flower technique through which Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o discusses this aspect of Naipaul's creative process, however, the masseur of this first novel, *The Mystic Masseur*, has proliferated as well ramified over the years, often bearing but an oblique resemblance to the one first released into the world in 1957. One is hard pressed to say unequivocally therefore that the Ganesh character, who is sufficiently renowned as to have made it into the *Chambers Dictionary of Literary Characters*, is the same one that readers first met in 1957. This essay explores some of the problems of aesthetic recognition involved in this turn of events and the politics of these problems inherent to the production of some of the versions of *The Mystic Masseur* available for consumption today, among which the most important is the adaptation of the novel in the Merchant-Ivory film *The Mystic Masseur* on which this essay focusses.

## **The Everyday Politics of 'Mineness' and Beyond**

The film, *The Mystic Masseur*, was released in 2001 with the DVD version becoming available the next year, forty-five years after the bookish character first entered readers' consciousness. Off set, the combined formidable talents of V. S. Naipaul, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Caryl Phillips, Ismail Merchant and James Ivory, among many others, went into the production of the film. If,

as Caribbean film expert, Jean Antoine-Dunne, says: “Filmmaking, perhaps more than any other art form, complicates the question of national or regional affiliation;” then in this instance the complications of affiliation or lack thereof are immense indeed (“Sound and Vision” 95). If according to Christian Lara, five characteristics are essential for a film to be considered Caribbean: “the director should be from the Caribbean, the subject matter should be a Caribbean story, the lead actor/actress should be from the Caribbean, Creole should be used, the production unit should be Caribbean” – then this film would definitely not be considered Caribbean (qtd “Sound and Vision” 95).

Indeed, one of the more prominent aspects of this non-Caribbeanness in the film is the “accented speech of the diegetic characters,” which certainly required a little more attention than another film scholar, Hamid Naficy, calls for in *Accented Cinema*. Apart from this however, it may be necessary to view the film in terms such as those established by Naficy, who says that: “If the dominant cinema is considered universal and without accent, the films that diasporic and exilic subjects make are accented. ... the accent emanates not so much from the accented speech of the diegetic characters as from the displacement of the filmmakers and their artisanal production modes” (4). This of course raises its own issues with regard to negotiations between the dominant and the displaced. In the case of this film, as one pre-launch article put it, we must bear in mind that the film was “a bargain-basement production, even by Merchant-Ivory’s own cost-conscious standards [and on set, a clearly stunt] cocoa tree drops its solid fruit like grenades over the set and some stunt cockerels are tethered to the roof to add local colour” (“Waiting for Vidia...”).

Caribbean viewers are quite familiar with stunts pulled by many and are not generally averse to pulling some themselves but these and other aspects of the film were troublesome, nonetheless.<sup>1</sup> Beyond all expectations would be a convenient way to express my own reactions, if beyond is understood in Homi Bhabha’s terms as comprising in the first instance “a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the “beyond”: an exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the words *au-delà*—here and there, on all sides, *fort/da*, hither and thither, back and forth” (1). Certainly, as I concluded by and by, the disorientation was not due to academically over-trained eyes, a matter I ascertained by screening the film with a variety of audiences in private and professional settings: among family, friends and students. (I didn’t run the experiment with postgraduates whose eyes I feared may be too much like my own). In every setting, the film evoked a similar quizzical response.

Responses to the screening of the film at the sixtieth anniversary celebration of the novel’s publication echoed my own and those I had heard and felt before and revealed something of the difficult-to-articulate trouble involved. The sixtieth anniversary observance was held as a joint venture between the National Library and Information System of Trinidad and Tobago and

<sup>1</sup> See David Tindall “Trouble in paradise” *The Guardian*  
<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2001/mar/23/classics.culture>

the non-governmental organization, The Friends of Mr. Biswas, which was established with a two-pronged goal. The first is to nurture at least a few of the talents of the many present-day Biswases who still walk among Caribbean populations and the second for the first purpose: to take charge of the titular house immortalized in Naipaul's novel *A House for Mr Biswas*, purchased by the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago when it was put up for sale on the open market. Sixteen years after its release, the film screening was precursor to a round table the next day on local views of the adaptation.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> November 2017, Dara Healy wrote a brief article following the screening entitled "Whose Mystic Masseur?" in the Trinidad and Tobago daily newspaper, *Newsday*, in which she recorded and continued some of what the round table set out to achieve. She notes that "the general feeling [was] that the film missed many of the cultural nuances of TT [Trinidad and Tobago] that make the book so poignant." The point is echoed in a bit of Earl Lovelace's *Is Just a Movie* in which the distress associated with the loss of cultural nuance in the local experience of playing at shooting and the American filmic parallel is recounted:

[Among Caribbean children at play] There is a certain give-and-take, reasonableness, like in a fiction, rooted in the idea that life gives everybody a chance, that leaves everybody satisfied, whether you are the one shot or the one doing the shooting. The shooter must miss a few times, since it is quite fatal when he connects. But here, in this movie, the fellars who shooting, they not missing at all. The only people who they missing is the fellars from the States: the stars. (26)

Both Healy's and Lovelace's complaints are encompassed in the idea of *mineness*, which as Lovelace revealed in a class discussion on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2019, is based on what someone told him about his/her experiences on a local film set for a foreign movie – quite possibly the one in question in this essay. Healy meanwhile observes, "the goal [of the film] was not to present a story about this country to its people, which is the fundamental point of indigenous literature. Rather it was to create a film based on the book of a renowned author and Nobel laureate, and market it for commercial gain."

Such concerns are by no means confined to the Caribbean. Jennifer Jeffers, for example, has aired similar concerns about the Americanization of British culture to meet "American middle-class expectation" (112). And, she argues further that "capitalist Hollywood is now the only global model" for adaptation (206). Her study is also concerned about Merchant-Ivory productions, in this case *Remains of the Day* (1993). Her conclusion regarding that film is: "America has arrived and England is receding" (75). Merchant-Ivory Productions have also been queried in terms of complicity with cultural imperialism. Dan Venning, for example, explores their early 1965 film *Shakespeare Wallah* to determine: "whether the film engages in genuine, postcolonial intercultural exchange, by which I mean respectful balancing of cultures in the encounter and challenging Western hegemony, or is a work that, using Shakespeare as a tool,

perpetuates cultural imperialism, serving colonialist ideology although produced in a postcolonial era" (150)

Be that as it may, we are here concerned with Caribbean feelings of mineness. Julian Hannich has explored fears about transgressions of readers' feelings of *mineness* in film adaptations. He conceptualizes the idea of mine via Keith Oatley's description of the reader-text relationship: "the best metaphor for our relationship with a fictional story is friendship. Friends affect us. They change us. And just as we are careful whom we choose as friends . . . so we are careful what we read and what literary characters, or what narrators, we become mentally involved with" (101). The narrators and characters that we do 'become involved with' become ours and for casual Caribbean readers as well as Caribbean literary and cultural critics, mineness develops in relation to aesthetic recognition, a sense of the rightness of the representation of ourselves and acceptance, to use Healy's words, that the creative artist was attempting "to present a story about this country to its people."

This is never a straightforward matter. The isles, to appropriate a very familiar line, are always full of noises and these stories we consider mine are not always simple or pretty ones as the story of Ganesh in the novel, *The Mystic Masseur*, reveals. But, just like rest of the work written by Naipaul as well the man himself: they are important to Caribbean people because they have changed us and possess the potential to continue to do so in revealing us to ourselves.

### Noises of the Isles:

#### About Nothing, Mineness or Aesthetic Recognition and Complicated Relationships

In her examination of the unsavory in Ganesh's story, eminent Caribbean literary and linguistic scholar and creative writer, Barbara Lalla, rightly has the following to say about the novel:

[It] is about lack of signification. Observations of what are presented as curious facts lead to absence of information, cryptic utterances beneath which gape meaninglessness, rituals of lost significance, fake honors and letters behind the name that attest to nothing, titles like teacher or Lord that lack authenticity, directives like RSVP that "don't mean nothing but is nice to have," all "pretty wordings" empty of any signification beyond their niceness. ("Signifying Nothing")

This tango with nothing is a prevalent characteristic of a Caribbean aesthetic and lifestyle. Indeed, for many who live in the Caribbean, Lalla's articulations of these issues in the novel would be considered succinct expressions of their everyday realities. Phillips, who wrote the screenplay for the Merchant-Ivory film company's adaptation of Naipaul's novel *The Mystic Masseur* which became the first node for the adaptation, himself must have realized this down to the fidelity the script displays in giving the character Ramlogan, the question "But tell me, what is this 'R.S.V.P.'? Film script Ganesh is then allowed to repeat his answer in the novel: "It

don't mean nothing but it nice to have it." This fidelity is perhaps not surprising since Phillips has much in common with Naipaul, including the interesting equivalents in their ways of self-identification and feelings of homelessness. Abigail Ward remarks, for example, that Phillips "once requested that his ashes be scattered at his 'Atlantic home' - a point in the Atlantic Ocean between the Africa of his ancestors, the England of his childhood, and North America, where he now lives" (629). Like many other well-known Caribbean writers, these two have stared at the void of nothing quite intently.

So has Derek Walcott. Echoing fellow artist, writer, literary scholar and void-gazer, Garth St. Omer, in *Nor Any Country*, Walcott recreates the contrapuntal dance like this in "Homecoming: Anse La Raye," a poem dedicated to St. Omer:

You give them nothing.  
 Their curses melt in air.  
 The black cliffs scowl,  
 the ocean sucks its teeth,  
 like that dugout canoe  
 a drifting petal fallen in a cup,  
 with nothing but its image,  
 you sway, reflecting nothing.

(*The Gulf* p. 51)

In precarious spaces between nothing and everything in which quotidian Caribbean lives are lived, captured so exquisitely in this novel, the film will almost automatically be approached as *mine* because it is related to my 'friends' – the recognizably Trinidadian narrator and characters in the novel who are attempting to deal with the condition of living with a sensibility of plenitude albeit in the midst of a void. Both ends of the spectrum are equally ideologically loaded and partisanship can sometimes arise. Sometimes the response is linked to simple preferences such as that for optimism or pessimism. As filmographer Richard Fung reflectively explains:

One of the things that I find difficult to see with Trinidad is that you're stuck with so many inherited lenses. The lens of tourism, for example, that Trinidadians see themselves in. And I'm always struck when I'm there, and people say, "We live in a paradise," and at the same time, they're locking their gates and, you know, worrying if they can go out late at night and stuff like that. The lens of the paradise, the lens of the natural disaster, all those kinds of third-world lenses are there, and I

find it very hard to see Trinidad as fresh and to frame it in ways that are somehow new. (“Kitchen Table” 126)

As Fung’s remarks indicate, the creative impulse to see beyond inherited and constructed lenses is powerful indeed. When the impulse succeeds the creative output is widely embraced as mine.

Apparently sensitive to the ideological terrain of mineness, the day after Naipaul was awarded the Nobel Prize, a trained eye would have been able to recognize the care that went into the article Phillips wrote for *The Guardian*. In it, he reflects on Caribbean celebrations of the award and his earlier discussions with Walcott, the other Caribbean Nobel Laureate in Literature, after they had viewed the film *The Mystic Masseur* together, about the possibility of Naipaul being the next Laureate. This tête-à-tête would of course have been related to Walcott’s own long-standing “love affair with film” to use Antoine-Dunne’s term. But Phillips does not go into this. The article is about Naipaul and he asserts that Naipaul, in implicit contrast to Walcott, “is a writer whose hostility towards the Caribbean has been well documented ... One would imagine that such barbs would earn Naipaul only contempt and rejection from the people and the region ... but to my own cost I have discovered that this is not the case.”

In saying as much Phillips recalls old critical contestations that were at their hottest in the late 1960s and 70s in the Caribbean and linger on still. In her re-visitation to the quarrels, Alison Donnell reminds us that:

What shape critical agendas should take and what ideological bearings they might follow became ... a matter of serious contestation. What we commonly remember of this moment are the internal political and intellectual disputes among differently but equally committed critics that energized and mobilized critical debates for decades to come. (76)

Bridget Brereton speaks of debates like these in the context of “culture wars” and in light of their history as Donnell’s remarks show, Phillips’ explanation that: “the people of the Caribbean, not only those of Trinidad, celebrated because the self-contempt that Naipaul feels is part of their own colonial legacy” makes sense. But while his assertion gives some insight into Caribbean responses to Naipaul, whether or not they were also imbricated in wider global trends such as that indicated in Naipaul’s biography should also be considered.

In *The World is What It is: The Authorized Biography of V. S. Naipaul* Patrick French ends his very first paragraph with the following conclusion based on his observation of events following the award of the Nobel Prize: “At this point in British history, when the sensational and immediate mattered above all else and fame was becoming more important than the achievements that might give rise to fame, Naipaul’s half-century of work as a writer seemed less significant than his reputation for causing offence” (1). Clearly therefore, as this brief recap of the reception of book, film and man hopefully specifies, any analysis of Naipaul’s work and work related to that

work must take into account a dense discursive thicket in which the work will un/consciously be caught.

The sense of mineness or aesthetic recognition with which a Caribbean reader might approach the work is, of course, not solely or experientially immediately related to Caribbean colonial legacies or defense against them or on feelings of kinship. It is also about the relationship of reader and text which would be idiosyncratically linked to such legacies and feelings depending on how one is positioned in relation to them. On the most basic and important level, as Hannich argues by drawing on the work of Winfried Fluck, aesthetic recognition occurs because:

When readers effectively co-create the aesthetic object, they do so in very personal ways; during the act of reading they transfer parts of their own interiority onto the book. Yet seeing an adaptation on the screen means being confronted with another concretization of the novel. When this concretization corresponds to and thus confirms the reader's own concretization, this process can imply an aesthetic recognition: an intersubjective acknowledgment of what the reader has conjured up mentally while reading. (427)

Herein may lie the crux of the reception of the film since the co-creation that results in mineness of the aesthetic objects that Naipaul has proffered to us has always been mired in myriad adjustments for 'concretization' and 'intersubjective acknowledgment.' Revealing something of Phillips's position in this regard, according to Bénédicte Ledent: "That Phillips accepted the offer readily may have come as a surprise, if not a shock, to critics and scholars of Caribbean literature, for the younger writer is not exactly known as a Naipaul fan" (155-6). Despite the similarities noted above, Ledent asserts, that "their visions of the world and of literature are as widely apart as can be" and she supports the point with a quote from Phillips who says that his and Naipaul's "outlook on most things, literary and otherwise, differs quite radically" (156).

Ledent argues further that:

... in Phillips's decision was also the hope of seeing Caribbean life at last represented for an international audience as something else than 'an exotic backdrop for stories of people whose lives are not invested in the region.'<sup>2</sup> This film could therefore hopefully contribute to changing people's uninformed view of that part of the world as characterized exclusively by beaches, carnival and Calypso, a preoccupation that also underlies many of Phillips's artistic undertakings. (157)

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<sup>2</sup> Caryl Phillips, "Foreword," in Gerard Besson and Caryl Phillips, *The Mystic Masseur: Essays and Excerpts from the Screenplay* (Cascade, Trinidad: Paria Publishing, 2001) p. 6.

These would no doubt sound like wonderful intentions to many, hence the possibility of expressing them in the first place. They are also entrenched firmly in those early concerns that drove the critical debates about authenticity and misrepresentation, and the statement implies that Naipaul participated in the practice of faulty representation which Phillips set out to put aright.

Sharing something of Naipaul's background, just like Phillips, but because my parents were born in Trinidad, in parallel circumstances, somewhat later than Naipaul, and I have lived my whole life here, I have myself co-created Naipaul's work in myriad ways to accommodate its representations of the Caribbean. For example, I have not been overly thrilled by his lampooning of Ganesh's reverence for books because although I certainly do not measure books like the novel's characters, I trace Ganesh's and other characters' love of books in myself, among diverse groups of friends and all members of a long-lived family. The family members include those who were ex-indentured as well as those who are four generations removed from India and staunch members of a Creole class, in which there is a similar reverence for books. But the adaptation to film of the novel for which I had had to make such adjustments has demanded far greater adjustments which do not yield a perspective like Ledent's. Instead, they lead me to ask of the adaptation, like the fictional Beharry: Why? The answer that comes to mind immediately is imbricated in the loss of Naipaul the calypsonian and his carnivalesque and *créolité* in the film, which Gilberto M. Blasini describes as "the configuration and constant reinvention – the imaging and imagining – of transnational cultural communities emerging from or historically connected to the Caribbean" (70).

It is worthwhile in the circumstances therefore to pause a moment and consider how Ledent's statement positions carnival and calypso in a Caribbean aesthetic and this is best achieved by way of contrast. Bernadine Evaristo's praise for Lovelace's *Is Just A Movie* in *The Guardian*, reproduced in the publication of the novel, provides a convenient and necessary difference. She says: "And when things become too difficult, there is always the spirit of Carnival that presides over their lives: recuperative, cathartic, communal, celebratory." Here Calypso and Carnival, like the carnivalesque in any of its meanings, are rightly seen as possessing immense value for the people of the Caribbean rather than part of their stereotypical party-animal image, which underwrites Ledent's expression.

In what follows therefore I examine *créolité* and the carnivalesque in Naipaul's writing in relation to the film script and the film. This is to identify how the script re-constructed the novel. The relations among the two written texts and their conversion to vision, sound and moving images in the film will also be explored bearing in mind that in the final analysis, no one can be sure precisely who called the shots that resulted in the final aesthetic object we experienced as the film. Given situations of cultural war, to use Breerton's term, these are necessary investigations. Lisa Lowe, albeit in a different context, explains that such situations arise: "Where the political terrain can neither resolve nor suppress inequality, [and] it erupts in culture. Because culture is the contemporary repository of memory, of history, it is through

culture, rather than government, that alternative forms of subjectivity, collectivity, and public life are imagined" (22). It is thus useful to identify how some of the shots were called.

### **Calling the Shots for a Bollywood-Style Recreation:**

#### **Character Conflation and Other Metaphorical Collapses**

The easiest place to begin to look for where the shots are called is in the script. The first thing that stands out is that Ganesh becomes "Mr. Ransumair" – a title without meaning that impacts the reader with greater violence than the various encodings of meaninglessness and nothingness in the novel. The script thus reproduces the naming problem that has been an aspect of colonial rule across the globe as Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela lamented.<sup>3</sup> The Ransumair in the novel on the other hand carries layers of signification that are yet to be spelled out fully in any work of criticism. The misspelling, on the other hand, has been reproduced by those who commented on the film.<sup>4</sup>

The choice of Partap, a character who is quite violently despised by Ganesh and who appears very late in the novel in chapter nine, Press Pundit, as the narrator, is the second shot called by Phillips. The construction of a narrator so significantly different from the one in the novel seems a strange move to say the least. Partap of the script translates smoothly to screen although the casting of Phillip's Partap character provides another beyond moment. The film opens with an apparently white man, looking puzzled, wearing a long coat and carrying an umbrella waiting in a definitely non-Caribbean location on a train. It takes some adjustment to think him in terms of novel or filmscript Partap. The soundtrack that accompanies the train is composed by Zakir Hussain and Richard Robbins and emphasizes the opening scene's foreign location. The opening credits roll against the camera's movement towards and over the top of the rusting hulk of the smoking train and last for almost two minutes. The credits declare a twenty-first century Bollywood Indian *pardesi* or diaspora production in its roll call of starring actors and actresses.

Most of the actors were well known at the time and some went on to star in quintessential American blockbusters with Om Puri continuing to epitomize the rude, funny, illiterate immigrant, which he first manifests in the character of Ramlogan, right up to his death in 2017. Jimi Mistry who can easily pass for white and does as the trench coated Partap in the opening shot had acted previously as Om Puri's son and continues to play a variety of roles on stage and in film. Ayesha Dharker would glitter later in *Bombay Dreams* and has become one of the many faces of the *desi-pardesi* girl so prominent in Indian cinema that speaks to and for the diaspora.

<sup>3</sup> See the effort to redress the pain he suffered in not being addressed by his correct name at <https://www.nelsonmandela.org/content/page/names>

<sup>4</sup> See for example Kevin M. Williams "Indian 'Masseur' has mystic touch" *Chicago Tribune* 17<sup>th</sup> May 2002. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2002-05-17-0205170003-story.html> Accessed 06.04.19

The others are even bigger names now. The accents from the very beginning produced by these characters as well as the visual images distance the Caribbean viewer. Only two Caribbean names are included in the opening credits, Grace Maharaj and Albert Laveau, and as we view the roles they play in the film perplexity grows.

Once one becomes familiar with the name Partap being given to the unexpected narrator, the fact that this first scene collapses the epilogue and the first chapter into one can be viewed as part of the anticipated condensation necessary for a script that must provide only words spoken, with a minimum of description of place, time, mood and other directives permitted to the script writer. This complacency about Partap remains until he becomes not just narrator but replaces the non-Indian boy who is followed by the black cloud in the novel, which is a real manifestation of the psychological trauma of witnessing his brother's death. The brother was crushed to death as he was running an errand the mother had given to the boy. The kind of jarring this occasions is similar to that elicited in many of the next scenes. These complex issues play havoc with aesthetic recognition.

This happens for example with the third shot similarly called by Phillips, which is as interesting as those already mentioned. The Slugline or Scene Heading specifies: "2. FLASHBACK. 1943. EXT. HEADMASTER'S OFFICE – DAY. The HEADMASTER, a heavy-set, bald, black man, is sitting behind a desk" (3). The casting team eventually fitted Laveau to this role and the description in the script is annulled. But the relation of the description in the script to the one in the novel is worth considering. In the depiction of the headmaster in the novel, we see an early example of one kind of singling out that became a pivotal part of Naipaul's 'lone flower' style seen often enough throughout his oeuvre in depictions of big men in small places and small men in big spaces. What Phillips condenses to "heavy-set" in the script is transmitted in the novel through Naipaul's positioning of a big man in a small room full of children which serves as his office and classroom simultaneously. The image that Naipaul evokes is of a colonial school in which the disciplinary method of flogging that the headmaster dispenses to maintain stillness and quiet in the room causes him to expend energy incommensurate to that he attempts to control in the children. It is a potent illustration of colonial educational ineptitudes. The disappearance of the classroom in the movie turns the subsequent dialogue in the script and the film into a singularity of unabashed racial conflict rather than a reproduction of the multiplicities of class, race, gender and ethnicity that Naipaul illustrates in the text.

In addition, in the novel, we meet Ganesh at the beginning of World War II, in 1939, as an already established author. This allows us to pinpoint the setting of his story reasonably accurately as that period after the end of indentureship and the visit of the Moyne Commission which led to people of Indian origin perceiving themselves in a certain way through a variety of deliberate efforts to do so that have hardly abated to this day. These efforts and their motivations are some of the things the novel allows us to consider. The pieces of the novel not

incorporated into the script or re-formulated for the film are mainly from this chapter, Chapter 2, Pupil and Teacher, in which these issues are first signified.

In a few swift lines at the very beginning of this chapter Naipaul recalls indentureship and how it ended for many, with the acceptance in one way or another of an unusable five acres of land that required a great deal of creativity and innovation if it were to yield anything at all. But the background of indentureship and its triumphant end, the emerging into Caribbean life out of indentureship and into becoming colonial, driven by the desire for social mobility which is signified in the rural to urban movement, are all obliterated in the script and the film. In the novel Ganesh is introduced as a graduate of Queen's Royal College but what is even more important are the circumstances under which he goes there, the reasons he does so and their effects on him. The elimination of this part of the novel is an appropriation of the novel for different purposes entirely and a fact flagged in the opening credits with the line "from a novel by V. S. Naipaul" rather than the "based on a novel by V. S. Naipaul" in the script. 'From' is the more accurate signifier borne out in the rest of the movie, most prominently visible in the re-casting of the Mrs. Cooper of the novel.

Phillips seems to be attempting to reproduce the *créolité* of the novel in maintaining a similar fidelity to the novel's characterization as he did with the headmaster by making her Partap's mother. In novel and film script, Mrs Cooper is depicted as the quintessentially urban Creole figure who helps and guides the inept Indo-Caribbean newcomer. The film, however, casts Grace Maharaj in the role in which she almost exactly reproduced the character she played in the 1974 movie *Bim* whose Caribbean credentials were called into question for far fewer reasons and in far less complex ways than attempted here. The trouble in *The Mystic Masseur* is that her Mrs. Cooper is an undecidable cross between a Creole belle and the Indo-Trinidadian mother of Partap. Sometimes the two distinct positions lead to the thought that maybe she is playing a double role. More important however is the fact that the class structure of Trinidad and Tobago and how it manifested in the pre-independence period imbricated in race, gender and ethnicity which inheres in Naipaul's depiction of the headmaster and Mrs Cooper are erased.

Although much much more can be said in this vein, the last change that occurred in the adaptation of the book considered here is the use made of the symbol of the book which comprises a strange journey through an archetypal Caribbean Mi-Jean and stereotypical Western depictions of the Indian guru. The image on the DVD cover says it best. A generic guru sits on a stack of books with another stack in front of him as a desk on which the opened one from which he is reading rests. The man and his two stacks are positioned as though floating on blue water, possibly Caribbean waters, but definitely tropical waters since both banks are coconut palm-lined. The open book recalls the magic texts of every old world civilization around which a seemingly unending flow of movies has been emerging. The cover promises the film's location in the genre. Among the three texts, novel, film script and film, books play an even

more powerful role. The movie opens with Ganesh's awe over the books in Oxford University library, and then moves, in scene two, to the library behind the headmaster in his office "The HEADMASTER, a heavy-set, bald, black man, is sitting behind a desk. He looks at a young GANESH, in his early thirties. The air is being slowly turned over by an old ceiling fan. The office is book-lined, and the windows propped open with sticks" (2). From there, we become engulfed in Ganesh's desire to become a part of that world of books. His predecessor is without a doubt the second son, Mi-Jean of *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*. Ganesh in V. S. Naipaul's *The Mystic Masseur* thus merges seamlessly with the Shri Ganesha of W. Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* who is also in a Dictionary of Literary Characters and described as: "Benign, holy man whose teachings include the idea that wisdom is the means to freedom; at his Ashrama Larry Darrell experiences a strange mystical illumination that gives him a profound sense of inner peace" (724). The film may also have generated the new covers for more recent publications of *The Mystic Masseur* which are all very Bollywood Indian images for the typically Caribbean figure of the 1957 Ganesh, including one of a bansuri playing boy in dhoti and kurta. This is surely a great pity.

#### **To Aim beyond Mere Proliferation: Some Provisional Concluding Thoughts**

These many differences that occurred in the process of adaptation, which are but a mere few among the many in the three texts and their peri-texts, can be subsumed under one major difference. The most useful term for identification of that difference may be neo-racialization. The first manifestation of this inheres in how the narrator is reconstructed. The reconstructions after this are legion. One may consider therefore that the novel was re-scripted in terms of diaspora and out of the original framework of nationalism within which the novel was constructed. As Stuart Hall has taught us so well, all discourses of diaspora are identitarian discourses created within racist national spaces from which many who long to belong are excluded. Naipaul's representation of the offspring of the Indian indentured is therefore often read within the terms of an Indian diaspora in the Caribbean. However, Naipaul was writing in the late 1950s out of a nationalist sensibility and within that framework, Ganesh was depicted as trying to fit into a Trinidadian Creole mould represented in the figures of Mrs Cooper as well the Headmaster rather than actively trying to create an Indian identity. The Indian identity that he ends up with is as a result of the sheer need to survive and is no more or less real than the Member of the Legislative Council or Member of the British Empire ones that he also earned for himself. Ganesh's recreation as solely Indian positioned in antagonism to a solely African world can thus be seen as counter-intuitive if not deliberately provocative. There are also pronounced differences with regard to engendering of the characters as well as how class is depicted differently in the three texts.

For those who may be unaware, *The Mystic Masseur*, was not the first book Naipaul wrote. *The Mystic Masseur* was Naipaul's first published novel and an attempt to produce something less episodic than his first written work, *Miguel Street*, which has remained in most readers' minds, a collection of short stories, despite Kenneth Ramchand's call for recognition of the Caribbean novelist as a short story writer in disguise in his 1997 essay "The West Indian Short Story." Like the writers of whom he speaks, Ramchand somewhat hyperbolically claims: "There are no West Indian novelists, only short story writers in disguise; no West Indian novels, only fabrications taking their shape and structure from the transfigured short stories they contain" (22). Most of the features and techniques of *Miguel Street* are reproduced in *The Mystic Masseur* although the setting includes the rural which was placed as distant background in *Miguel Street*. The calypsonian techniques that most find vividly evident in *Miguel Street* are also present in this book, which also certainly fits Ramchand's perspective of the Caribbean writer.

As Paula Morgan reminds us: "the calypso has been traditionally regarded as the lash of the small man who deploys picong and wit for boastful self-assertion and for sustained counter discourse with the hegemonic worldview, in the protected arena of the performance space" (1). The space of his writing became that arena for Naipaul in which he created so many delightful characters by: "lift[ing] the petty events out of their specific confines and mak[ing] them representative experiences... The smallness of *Miguel Street* through which a stranger could drive and dismiss as a slum" could as easily be that of Fuente Grove. And as in *Miguel Street*, it "is alleviated by the notoriety of the calypso which projects the community's mundane dramas onto the national and international stage and thereby amplifies its tragedies. In the process it lends significance and import to all" as Morgan puts it (5-6).

The depiction of the narrator's mother is a case in point. The traits given to her are paradigmatic of the Indo-Trinidadian urban lower class of the time, whose members Naipaul unflinchingly depicted with the calypsonian's verve. The following brief scene in which she is shown in interaction with her son is illuminating:

My mother distrusted doctors and never took me to one. I am not blaming her for this because in those days people went by preference to the unqualified masseur or the quack dentist.

'I know the sort of doctors it have in Trinidad,' my mother used to say. 'They think nothing of killing two three people before breakfast.'

This wasn't as bad as it sounds: in Trinidad the midday meal is called breakfast. (1)

The scene is subtly comedic in ways that may escape those unfamiliar with cultural traits such as the extreme skepticism regarding figures of authority that both mother and son display. It is a characteristic that Naipaul endows on many including the taxi-driver: "Our taxi-driver shouted, 'Ai!'" When Beharry anticipates the question that follows the shout, the taxi-driver responds with a typical brand of exasperated sarcasm to say: "'Nah. We come all the way from Port of Spain just for the scenery.'" This feature of Naipaul's writing seems to be untranslatable into film because there is nothing to approximate it in the film. Instead we have quaint images of polite postmen and the barest hint of sarcasm from Bissoon the book seller which is negated by David Sammy's quiet demeanour. The diagnosis and perceptive representation of cultural features and social issues that we have come to associate with Caribbean literature were entirely eroded by the loss of the calypsonian and the *créolité* of the carnivalesque which comprise the prominent structures of this literature.

The centenary year of Indian cinema was commemorated in 2013. When it began in 1913, Indian indentureship in the Caribbean was still in effect. On the other hand when indentureship began in 1838, Indian cinema was not yet much of a dream, even though interest in photography and image making technologies was high and may have promised its coming. How the Indian diaspora is positioned in relation to the development of Indian cinema is a good question and one that is as yet not explored, although much has been said about developments in Indian cinema and the emergence of an Indian diaspora. This essay illustrates however, the caution required when Indian cinema does try to speak to and for the diaspora and in future work an attempt will be made to join in the discussion of the problems of Indian cinema in shaping the lives of those in diaspora.

At present it must suffice to state the obvious with Viranjini Munasinghe: "Ethnic stereotypes are pervasive in contemporary Trinidad." Given this state of affairs, her warning is pertinent and urgent: "When cultural attributes are perceived as natural and innate, it becomes imperative to understand the productive context for the emergence of such ethnic ideologies" (140). It is even more imperative to unveil such ethnic ideologies and to help to develop an understanding of the context of their emergence. Naipaul's work has done a great deal to do precisely that for the people of the Caribbean particularly those in Trinidad and Tobago. The film on the other hand unreflectively reproduces those ideologies and positions the Trinidadian characters in the diasporic framework of accented cinema, to use Naficy's term that flattens them beyond the point of caricature. The beyond that we seek, however, is of a different sort.

As Bhabha reminds us, our efforts can only "embody ...[the] restless and revisionary energy [of that beyond] if they transform the present into an expanded and excentric site of experience and empowerment" (4). Such a beyond is critically important in Naipaulian studies since Naipaul like so many of those who inherited a colonized world crossed vast terrains of space and time to try to understand the vulnerabilities of old worlds that facilitated a colonial world order and the problems posed by this order for individual self-actualization and fulfillment. Naipaul adopted techniques of the calypsonian in order to do this and his performances of *créolité* in the process

are inspirational early forays. The film that was generated off of his first novel betrayed this and atavistically regressed to the ethnic ideologies that existed even before the arrival of the indentured labourers in the Caribbean. The critical vigilance such an outcome demands cannot be overstated.

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