



The University of  
the West Indies  
Institute for Gender and  
Development Studies



CARIBBEAN REVIEW OF GENDER STUDIES

*A Journal of Caribbean Perspectives on Gender and Feminism*

Issue 6 – 2012

## *Ohrni and Cutlass*

*Andil Gosine*



*Ohrni*

Gold embroidery on lace and cotton

A collaboration with Leor Grady  
 Single edition  
 From the *Wardrobes* collection “Khala Pani”

I am not quite sure yet how to properly and fairly characterize an “Indo-Caribbean feminist aesthetic” but I am certain that *Ohrni* and *Cutlass* are examples of it. Both replicas of complicated objects, they are as much markers of oppression as they are evidence of the creative agency of women who lived through miserable conditions of colonization and the still-patriarchal postcolonial process of nation building that followed.

The two women for whom these were made are also responsible for their making: they were the early trainers of my own aesthetics and feminist politics. This *Ohrni* is for my father’s mother, Jasso. However much of Jasso’s “covering up” was her compliance with social norms, the way she recreated the experience was her own. Neither a daily nor necessary habit, she brought out her ohrni on special occasions like prayer rituals and family visits. She might have worn it because that was what was expected of her, but she also wore it simply to dress up, and to feel beautiful. I remember the care she took in placing it over her hair, tucking the ends, weighing how loose to let it fall. That embroidered gold anchor falls just along her arm, matching her own tattoo.



*Cutlass*  
 Brooch in Silver or White Gold  
 From the *Wardrobes* collection “Khala Pani” (2011)  
 Edition of 20 in silver, 20 in white gold

The cutlass is mired in blood—it's all of the Caribbean's history: the violence of slavery and indentureship, and all that followed too; reports of the cutlass being used in murders of spouses, strangers, and family members are still common across the region. This *Cutlass* brooch references that misery, but it also aspires to match the elegance of the ways my grandmother Ramadai wielded hers, a disposition that carried through in the conduct of her life despite its limiting conditions. Ramadai raised 11 rambunctious children, cared for a demanding husband and extended families, and tirelessly served her community. Nevertheless, like Jasso, Ramadai conjured aesthetic practices—like the way in which she used to cut cane and coconut—that not only created pleasurable experiences out of imposed duties in her daily life, but also resisted those inflictions of social forces meant to suppress her will.