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Putting the ‘Cool’ in Coolie: *Disidentification, desire and dissent in the work of filmmaker Michelle Mohabeer*

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Abstract

“It’s referencing back all of those Indian women that have come worked on the plantations and in the cane fields. It’s empowering them to a degree and yet the dance is South Asian...it evokes Bengali folk dance. It has an Indianness coded in it....And on the side of that shot is the Guyana flag which I’ve inverted as well which is a big thing because in not showing the flag as is, I’m gesturing to the question of sexuality. So there are many layers there...” (Mohabeer 2008)

Toronto-based filmmaker Michelle Mohabeer’s films offer a rare glimpse into the multiple layers of irony and resistance that define dissident Caribbean sexualities. Mohabeer offers what she terms an “oppositional aesthetics” (Ibid) to capture the disparate layers of politics, memory, and desire which shape dissident sexualities in postcolonial Guyana and the Caribbean diaspora. In this paper, I am interested in how the complex entanglements through which Caribbean sexualities are processed are expressed through avant garde art forms.
