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THE TIES THAT BIND: GENDER, RACE, AND EMPIRE IN CARIBBEAN INDENTURE
NARRATIVES

by

ALISON KLEIN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

2015

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE TIES THAT BIND: GENDER, RACE, AND EMPIRE IN CARIBBEAN INDENTURE NARRATIVES

by

ALISON KLEIN

Adviser: Professor Ashley Dawson

This dissertation traces the ways that oppressive gender roles and racial tensions in the Caribbean today developed out of the British imperial system of indentured labor. Between 1837 and 1920, after slavery was abolished in the British colonies and before most colonies achieved independence, approximately 750,000 laborers, primarily from India and China, traveled to the Caribbean under indenture. This is a critical but under-explored aspect of colonial history, as this immigration dramatically altered the ethnic make up of the Caribbean, the cultural norms and traditions of those who migrated, and the structure of British imperialism. I focus on depictions of marriage, sexuality, and homosocial relationships in novels and autobiographies about this time as a key component to understanding the history and impact of indenture. I show that these depictions are used to support ideologies of race, empire, and nationhood, and that even those authors who critique empire reinforce patriarchy as they do so.

To further understand the rhetoric that helped shape these dynamics, I use a comparative approach, considering texts by authors from different time periods and different nations, including Trinidad, Guyana, Britain, and the United States. For example, I examine a common trope in indenture narratives, a relationship between a British man in power and a female Indian laborer, and the ways that this trope is used to justify empire in texts that were written at the time of indenture, such as Edward Jenkins' *Lutchmee and Dilloo* (1877), or to attack colonization and indenture in contemporary texts, like David Dabydeen's *The Counting House* (1996). Through a

close reading of indenture narratives and the historical circumstances that produced them, I demonstrate that the British Empire rested on intersecting hierarchies of labor, race, gender, and class, and that these hierarchies linger in the Caribbean today.

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Introduction

Liminal Laborers

The short story “Boodhoo,” by Alfred Mendes, was published in 1932 in *The Beacon*, the first literary magazine of Trinidad and Tobago. It is a striking story, depicting a sexual relationship between the British wife of a planter and her half-Indian servant. Written shortly before the fracturing of the British Empire, “Boodhoo” challenges the view of the British as a noble, civilizing force, and it draws attention to the complex interactions of gender, race, and labor in the colonies of the Caribbean, as well as the impact of the British imperial indenture system of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Minnie, who has come to Trinidad as the wife of Henry, a plantation owner, is initially “nauseated” when she hears talk of planters having children by their Indian laborers (145). Yet, she is lonely and isolated, and is drawn into a love affair with her half-Indian, half-British servant, Boodhoo. Shortly after becoming pregnant, she learns that Boodhoo’s mother, an Indian woman, had been a laborer on Henry’s plantation twenty years before, and that Henry is Boodhoo’s father. Minnie dies in childbirth, terrified that her child will be dark skinned and give away her infidelity. The story is unusual for its time in several ways: it offers a sympathetic depiction of a woman’s infidelity, it features a love affair between a British woman and a half-Indian man, and it highlights the ways that planters often abused their power over their laborers. Most importantly, it demonstrates the destruction created by imperialism and indenture, not just to the colonized, but to the colonizers as well. Henry’s liaison with an Indian woman in his youth leads to his wife’s affair and death.

“Boodhoo” demonstrates the significance of intimate relationships in fictional and nonfiction narratives about indenture. My dissertation shows that the institution of indenture was entwined with ideologies of race, empire, and nationhood, and that these ideologies were reflected and supported in depictions of marriage, sexuality, and homosocial relationships in indenture narratives. In these texts, colonialism and race are mediated through gender, and particularly through the absence or presence of South Asian and Chinese women. To consider the role that indenture played in the British Empire and the Caribbean and the role of gender and racial dynamics in imperial and anti-imperial discourse, I examine metaphors of intimacy and nationhood in novels and autobiographies that depict the system of indentured labor in the Caribbean, which reached its peak between 1838 and 1918.

Depictions of indenture shift in texts by authors writing from different time periods and different subject positions, and so I use a comparative approach, exploring texts by authors writing at the time of indenture, texts by contemporary authors, and texts from Trinidad, Guyana, Cuba, Britain, and the United States. Authors writing at the peak of indenture depict it as a system that benefits all involved parties, while authors writing after the collapse of British colonialism focus on indenture as one of imperialism’s cruelest forms of control. For example, Edward Jenkins, a British barrister, wrote *Lutchmee and Dilloo* (1877) to draw attention to the problems within the indenture system but supports the system and imperialism, while in *The Counting House* (1996), David Dabydeen, a contemporary Indo-Caribbean writer, portrays a young Indian couple destroyed by indenture.

I came to the topic of Caribbean indenture while researching a paper on the Chinese and Indian characters in Maryse Condé’s 2002 novel *Who Slashed Celanire’s Throat*, set in colonial

Guadeloupe. I was struck by the scale of the immigration that took place after slavery was abolished in the British colonies in 1833. Much attention has been paid, with good reason, to the role of slavery in imperial history. Indentured labor, which, for seventy-five years was the primary movement of people to the colonies and the primary labor force on the plantations, receives much less attention, especially in literary theory. Between 1838 and 1918, approximately 500,000 Indians, as well as 200,000 Chinese, were brought to work in the Caribbean, a massive movement of people at a time when the voyage took three months. This immigration is a critical aspect of colonial history, as it dramatically altered the ethnic makeup of the Caribbean, the cultural norms and traditions of those who migrated, and the structure of British imperialism. However, the history of indenture and its effects remain invisible in many ways; those outside of the Caribbean generally think of it as a region populated by people of African descent, yet in some nations, including Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana, Indo-Caribbeans make up the largest ethnic group.

I was also fascinated by the ways that gender roles shifted under indenture. As indenture migration was, in theory at least, voluntary, far fewer women than men indentured, with the disparity ranging from 2:1 to 5:1 for Indian laborers, while there were hardly any Chinese women who migrated. Initially, women who traveled under indenture from traditional societies like India may have gained some freedoms. As they were able to earn wages, they had more economic independence, and their scarcity meant that they could choose a mate. Some gender-related traditions shifted during this time period: dowries were reversed, so that money went from the groom's family to that of the bride, rather than the other way around.

At the same time, the few women who traveled to the colonies were seen as the protectors of Indian civilization, culture, and tradition, which led to limitations on their freedom.

Historian Patricia Mohammed notes that most cultures contain the idea that men's honor is vested in women's virtue, and as a result, struggles between men to retain ethnic identity are viewed in terms of the power to control their own women, and guard and protect them from other men. This was especially true far from home, when one's culture seemed under threat. As a result, women's access to education was restricted, and once their period of indenture had ended, they were often confined to the home. The majority of indentured Indians lived in barracks on the estates. After they had completed their contracts and had chosen to remain permanently, villages and communities were reconstituted, and with this, the re-emergence or consolidation of many of the customs and traditions brought from India.

There are reports of increased violence against women during this time period: a man who believed his wife had consorted with another man often chopped off her arm or nose, or murdered her. Colonial authorities blamed this and many of the other ills of the system on the gender disparity, citing men's sexual frustration and jealousy as a cause for the violence. They also blamed the quality of women, claiming that the only women who were willing to indenture were of low moral character and therefore more likely to choose more than one mate and stir hostilities.

Due to these factors, women, especially women of Indian, Chinese, and African descent, take on a metaphoric weight in the narratives of indenture, acting as a site of contestation. Authors writing in favor of indenture and colonialism often use female laborers as scapegoats, the cause of the ills of the system. Authors writing against indenture and imperialism depict colonized women as the bearers of culture and tradition and portray colonizers desiring female laborers as an indication of their greed. By contrast, female authors writing about indenture veer

away from such metaphors, emphasizing instead the cyclical nature of various forms of oppression.

As with slavery, a major justification for indentured labor was the improvement of inferior races. Laborers would not only enjoy good food, medical care and an escape from the poverty of their home country, they would be exposed to Christianity, morality, and the technological and organizational advancements of the West. In reality, the system was brutal and corrupt at nearly every stage. Planters typically provided inadequate food and housing, worked the laborers far beyond the hours set out in the contracts, and cheated them of their wages. Colonial authorities blamed many of the ills of the system on the dramatic gender disparity: the male-to-female ratio of those who indentured averaged 5 to 1. As abuses became public, indentured labor became a controversial topic in Britain and its colonies, and after some temporary halts, the system ended for good in 1920.

Within the indenture system, the laborer occupied a liminal space, not quite a slave but not quite free, not at home but not quite foreign.¹ Europeans viewed the Chinese and Indians as a buffer between themselves and the Africans, inferior to the white races but superior to those of Africa. Their labor was used as a weapon against former slaves; the abundance of workers kept wages low and prevented laborers from negotiating for better conditions. Through the system of indentured labor, Britain, whose empire was beginning to fracture, maintained control of its colonies and its wealth for a little longer, and also bolstered the conviction of white superiority.

To justify slavery and indenture, British imperialists developed a teleological view of labor that was linked to hierarchical views of civilization and race. African, Asian and European nations represented stages in a progression of civilization; similarly slavery, indentured labor and wage labor were depicted as progressive steps necessary to civilize undeveloped races. While the

¹ See Lisa Yun, *The Coolie Speaks*, and Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane*.

stagnant view of civilization has been effectively attacked and dismantled, the teleological view of labor still permeates many discourses on labor. To suggest that systems of labor have become increasingly humane as we have moved from slavery to indenture to wage labor ignores the forms of exploitation that exist in each system. While it should be noted that there were significant differences between these forms of labor, Hugh Tinker calls indenture “a new system of slavery,” and Cedric Robinson suggests that indentured labor, “wage slavery...peonage, share-cropping, tenant-farming, forced labor, penal labor, and modern peasantry” (219) all share qualities of slavery.

In addition, far from occurring in stages, these systems have existed coterminously. Indentured servants traveled from Germany, Ireland, and England to the United States and the Caribbean before and during slavery, and forms of indenture and slavery continue to exist in the present. Although there are no longer official, state-sanctioned systems of slavery or indenture, human trafficking and other forms of economic oppression have grown out of these networks of mass labor migration. Studying indentured labor can help us understand how those systems of exploitation and domination develop.

There is a growing body of literature about the indenture system, and these texts draw attention to the damaging hierarchies of labor and race that indenture perpetuated. By my count, only two novels were written in English about indenture between 1834 and 1917, the peak of the system: Edward Jenkins’ *Lutchmee and Dilloo* (1877) and A.R.F. Webber’s *Those that Be in Bondage* (1917). However, eleven have been written between 1976 and today.² As third and fourth generation South Asian and Chinese diasporic citizens explore their history and the

² Deepchand Beeharry: *That Others Might Live* (1976); Sharlow Mohammed: *The Promise* (1995); David Dabydeen: *The Counting House* (1996); Roy Heath: *The Shadow Bride* (1996); Patricia Powell: *The Pagoda* (1998); Cristina Garcia: *Monkey Hunting* (2003); Ron Ramdin: *Rama’s Voyage* (2004); Ryhaan Shah’s *A Silent Life* (2005); Peggy Mohan: *Jahajin* (2007); Amitav Ghosh: *Seas of Poppies* (2008) and *River of Smoke* (2011).

reasons for the migration of their ancestors to the Caribbean, Africa, and the Pacific Islands, indentured labor is becoming a more and more common topic of literature. Unfortunately, there are few texts by the laborers themselves, who tended to lack education and the leisure to write about their experiences, and so we must rely on interviews and testimonials to hear their stories directly. As part of this project, I explore these oral narratives in order to bring attention to these underrepresented accounts and the insights they offer about indenture.

These indenture narratives are not generally included in the canon of Caribbean literature, but they are critical to enhancing our understanding of the British Imperial system of indentured labor. *Lutchmee and Dilloo* and *Those that Be in Bondage* are especially absent from studies of Caribbean literature, but offer a window into the gender and race hierarchies inherent to colonial rhetoric. Each was unearthed from archives and reprinted relatively recently by a well-known Caribbean scholar – *Lutchmee and Dilloo* in 2003 by David Dabydeen and *Those that Be in Bondage* in 1988 by Selwyn Cudjoe. *The Promise*, published in 1995 by the author, has also received little notice. Though it is a somewhat rough text, it draws attention to important aspects of the indenture system such as the prevalence of sexual assault.

The titles of my chapters, as well as the title of my dissertation, all involve idioms or metaphors having to do with rope. So many metaphors relating to marriage, intimate relationships, and family relationships involve rope in some way – tying the knot, family bonds – as do terms and metaphors having to do with indenture. Laborers were referred to as “bound coolies,” and woodcuts and caricatures of the laborers, such as the one below, often show immigrants with their hands tied in order to demonstrate their indentured status. It seems to me that this is not a coincidence; ties of love and ties of labor are not as separate as we might imagine. Sexual relationships are used as metaphors for struggles between nations, while

imperial hierarchies of gender, race, and class impact even supposedly private relationships such as that of a husband and wife.

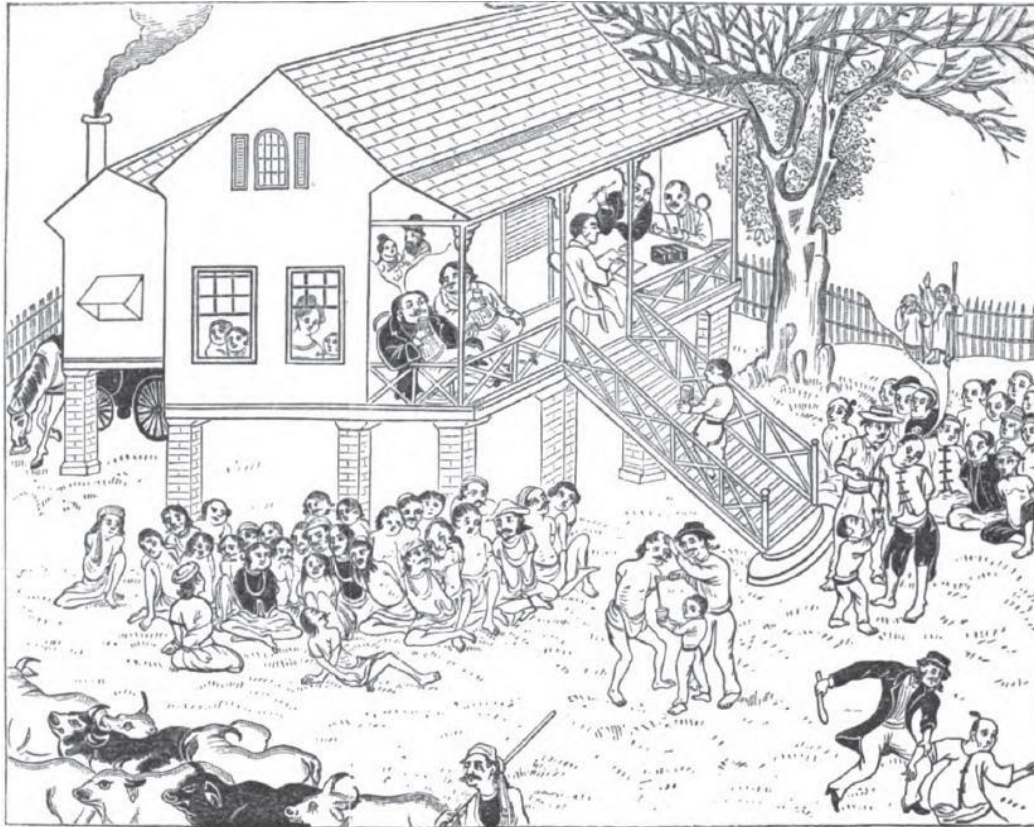


Fig. 1. “The Managers House,” a woodcut depicting indentured laborers on an estate in British Guiana. Image from: Jenkins, Edward. *The Coolie, his Rights and Wrongs*. London: Strahan & Co., 1871.

Theorizing Indenture

My work builds on Foucault-inspired postcolonial critics who challenge the notion that public and private domains are separate. For example, Robert Young’s *Colonial Desire* suggests that the imperial obsession with racial classification and miscegenation is a result of the colonizer’s suppressed desire for the colonized, Ann Stoler’s *Wayward Reproductions* examines the connections between colonial policies around child-rearing and intimate relationships and

imperial views of a racial hierarchy, and Alys Eve Weinbaum's *Carnal Knowledge* argues that discourses of biological reproduction have been employed to support ideologies of racism, nationalism and imperialism. In *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*, Amy Kaplan shows that domestic issues are closely linked to foreign policies in the United States.

The Caribbean is a growing but still underrepresented area in the field of postcolonial studies, as scholars tend to focus on Southeast Asia and Africa, and the role of indentured labor in both Caribbean history and worldwide migration is relatively understudied. This is especially true in literary studies; almost all of the work being done on indenture is in the field of history. For example, Patricia Mohammed's *Gender Negotiations among Indians in Trinidad, 1917-1947* examines the ways that gender roles shifted in the new environment, while in *Coolies and Cane*, Moon-Ho Jung notes that after emancipation, Chinese indentured laborers in Louisiana were used to strengthen notions of whiteness and white supremacy. Walton Look Lai's seminal book *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar* offers a broad and thorough historical overview of Indian and Chinese indenture in the Caribbean, while Lisa Yun's *The Coolie Speaks* explores written and oral testimonies of indentured laborers in Cuba and notes ways that these testimonies challenged dominant paradigms such as racial hierarchies. Lisa Lowe's "The Intimacy of Four Continents" focuses on ways the indentured system in 19th century created not only modern humanism but also modern racial divisions of labor, and argues that, "contracts of labor and marriage became symbols of humanity and freedom" (202). Gaiutra Bahadur's book, *Coolie Woman*, part memoir and part history, is a thorough exploration of the experiences of indentured women, built around Bahadur's research into the story of her own great-great grandmother, who indentured in Guyana from India.

Yet there is little critical attention to literary depictions of indentured labor. One of the few critics to examine this trope is Mariam Pirbhai. In *Mythologies of Migration, Vocabularies of Indenture*, Pirbhai emphasizes key themes in indenture narratives, such as the tension between forming alliances with other oppressed races versus seeking strength in one's community. However, she misses an important opportunity to examine how indentured labor functions in imperialist and anti-imperialist discourse.

Postcolonial theorists who examine the role of intimate relationship under imperialism, such as Ann Stoler and Alys Eve Weinbaum, tend to focus on the colonizers, using these relationships to explore the colonial mindset or the implementation of colonial power. While this is an important aspect of understanding imperialism, it leaves out the experience of the colonized. I examine relationships between the colonizers and the colonized, as well as between the colonized people themselves, which reveals the gendered, racialized, and class-oriented power struggles that existed between colonized peoples.

For example, the control of women was a site of contestation between the colonizers and the colonized, but also between colonized groups. Women immigrants were viewed as the bearers of culture and tradition, and so gaining power over these women was seen as a triumph in the struggles between ethnic groups. In most indenture narratives, particularly those written by men, the central conflict revolves around a female laborer involved in a sexual relationship (either consensual or nonconsensual) with a man outside of her ethnic group. Especially frequent is the trope of a British man having a sexual relationship with an Indian woman.

Authors writing at the time of indenture, Edward Jenkins and A.R.F. Webber use this relationship as a stand-in for Britain's relationship with India, suggesting that Britain raises India out of darkness and into civilization. The metaphors in these texts equate Indian women with

children or animals, vulnerable beings who need to be protected and controlled. In *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, Craig thinks of Lutchmee “Was she not a pretty animal?” (130), and Lutchmee is aware that “he regarded her rather as he regarded his dog and his horse, as a part of his establishment” (113). This demeaning language, which is not challenged by the text, demonstrates the view of female laborers as less than human.

Later authors Dabydeen and Sharlow use this same relationship to attack imperialism, showing Britain as taking advantage of India, yet maintaining the patriarchal view of indentured women. By most accounts, such connections between managers and laborers were common, but this does not explain the prevalence of this trope. These relationships act a focal point, a catalyst within the plot for tensions around colonialism, both by pro-imperial authors advocating Britain’s power and civilizing influence, and by anti-imperial authors attempting to demonstrate the selfishness and brutality of the colonizers. Yet, in these texts, women are still depicted as possessions to be controlled: they are compared to treasure or land being pillaged by other ethnic groups. When Vidia suspects Rohini of sleeping with an African man, he screams, ““Niggerman digging in your belly for gold that belong to me”” (87)

Literary critics have pointed to the dangers of seeing fictional characters as allegories for their nation. In his controversial essay, “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” Frederic Jameson suggests that, “Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private...necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory” (69). Aijaz Ahmad famously attacked the essentialism of this view, arguing that it makes sweeping generalizations based on a binary view of a capitalist first world versus a pre-capitalist third world, and that it defines third world nations by their experience of colonialism. It is the aim of

this project to avoid such over-generalizations while still drawing attention to the ways that authors themselves sometimes rely on such essentializing allegories.

The bleakness of these narratives also points to the violence that is often inherent in the creation of diasporic populations. Authors who focus on literary depictions of emerging nationalisms, as Doris Sommers does in *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*, offer a somewhat romantic view of these movements, suggesting that there is a redeeming quality to the violence of nation-making. Indenture narratives tend to deny this sense of redemption, ending in tragedy and destruction. Death is a common theme in these texts: *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, *Those that Be in Bondage*, *The Counting House*, and *The Promise* all include the violent death of one of the main Indian characters. In addition, the prevalence of children dying suggests a lack of hope for the future. In *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, Lutchmee has a miscarriage because she is forced to continue working in the fields, while in *The Counting House*, Rohini is forced to have an abortion by a jealous servant.

It is worth noting the differences that arise between the male and female authors treated here. The male authors tend to work metaphorically, using intimate relationships as a metaphor to demonstrate the impact of imperialism. Female authors such as Cristina Garcia and Peggy Mohan, on the other hand, tend to hone in on the intimate relations as subjects in and of themselves, with the structures of imperialism and indenture as a backdrop for these interactions. They seem to work from the public to the private, rather than the other way around, focusing on how issues of nationalism and imperialism play out in close quarters, rather than using intimate relationships to make statements about larger issues of colonial rule. This suggests that Caribbean women, who have gained many public rights in the last century, but who are still at

high risk for domestic violence in private, may be more concerned than men with how issues of domination play out in the domestic sphere.

Examining literature by the colonizers and the colonized also reveals the complex hierarchies of race and class that intersect with gender within the indenture system. These hierarchies permeate literature by both European authors and authors of Indian and Chinese descent. For example, early authors Edward Jenkins and A.R.F. Webber, but also the contemporary author Sharlow, describe their Indian protagonists as high-caste, light-skinned, and European-featured, while the Indian villains are invariably dark-skinned. Such hierarchies appear in the nonfiction texts as well. In Munshi Rahman Khan's autobiography, he is proud of his high status as a scholar, and he shows great respect for European women and Indian women with wealth and high caste, whereas African women and the Indian women of the working class are described as greedy, dishonorable, and coarse.

The nonfiction texts offer insights into the material existence of the laborers, such as the extent of imperial management over all aspects of a laborer's life. In theory, the indentured laborer was supervised in public, but his private life was his own. In practice, however, these texts show that even intimate, interpersonal relationships such as marriage are closely entwined with public issues. Marriage plays a central role in colonial legislation and in anti-colonial rhetoric, as well as interviews and autobiographies by laborers, again demonstrating the role that women played as the contested ground over which struggles for power played out between colonizers and the colonized. These texts also show that imperial legislation around marriage, meant to impose Victorian values, often solidified existing class and gender hierarchies in the laboring population. For example, the colonizers' anxiety about single women led to many regulations that bound a woman to her mate. Limits on women's wages made them economically

vulnerable and dependent on men, while laws prevented women from leaving their husbands, even in cases of extreme abuse.

The content shifts over time from supporting imperialism to promoting nationalism in former colonies, from perpetuating hierarchies to attacking them, and the changing form of indenture narratives reflects these shifts. The authors' styles shift as well, which can be attributed in part to changes in literary techniques over the hundred and fifty years that the texts cover, but also to the differing purpose of each author. Early authors Jenkins and Webber write in a third person omniscient point of view, aiming for a sense of objectivity as they capture the benefits of imperialism on the Indian laborers. Their stories are chronological, moving from cause to effect to show the rationality of the plantation and the inevitableness of imperialism. In *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, Dilloo becomes an agitator and rebels against management, and so he must die. Lutchmee recognizes the worth of the Scottish overseer and supports the management against Dilloo, and so she lives.

David Dabydeen, on the other hand, employs a fragmented storyline to show the damaging effects of imperialism. *The Counting House* shifts back and forth between Rohini and Vidia's experience as laborers in British Guiana and their lives in India before they indentured. These shifts emphasize the ways that British colonialism weakened the Indian economy and led to an increase in indenture and also the forms of oppression that laborers faced once they arrived on plantations. The novel follows the perspective of three different characters in order to capture the full experience of the colonized peoples – Rohini, a female Indian laborer, Miriam, a black servant, and Kampta, an unbound Indian laborer, and two sections of the novel are told in third person while the third is in first person. These techniques, which jar the reader, defamiliarize the text and force the reader to consider his or her own subject position while reading.

The novels by women authors tend even further towards fragmentation, reflecting their desire to demonstrate the insidious effects of indenture on the descendants of laborers. Both *Monkey Hunting*, by Cristina Garcia, and *Jahajin*, by Peggy Mohan, follow several generations of a single family. The storyline shifts back and forth between an indentured laborer and his or her descendants in order to capture the ongoing impact of indenture and imperialism and repeating patterns of oppression. These novels, like *The Counting House*, each focus on three different storylines; three seems to be a common choice by contemporary authors, perhaps seeking to avoid binaries and trouble neat categorizations.

The nonfiction narratives, by contrast, reflect the challenges of penning one's story when one lacks education, or time to write. Munshi Rahman Khan, the only known Caribbean laborer to write an autobiography, was a well-educated Muslim man who came from relative wealth and indentured out of a sense of adventure and an attempt to escape his family obligations. His tone is formal and didactic, and his autobiography is multi-genre, equal parts journal, poetry chapbook, and history lesson. He share his experiences as a laborer in order to solidify his reputation as an intellectual and tell the Muslim side of the Muslim-Hindu conflicts that erupted in Suriname in the mid-twentieth century. Alice Singh, whose journal provides interesting insights into women's experience of indenture, was not a laborer herself. Her father and grandmother were Brahmins who indentured when they became separated from their family in India, and with their education and high caste, they had little trouble entering the middle class of Suriname. Singh wrote her journal without the intention of publication, hoping more to share her experiences with her family, and so it is casual in style and content, reflecting largely on domestic matters. The interviewees, who were uneducated and did not escape a subsistence

lifestyle, share their lives with the interviewer for posterity. The interviewees are rather stoic, succinctly describing the challenges of indenture decades later.

Yet even the nonfiction texts contain metaphors around intimate relationships that reveal much about the laborers' views. Munshi Rahman Khan, who had been an indentured laborer in Suriname, describes marriage as a binding force, much more so than indenture itself. Upon arriving in Suriname, a female laborer claims to be his pregnant wife, and the estate manager forces Rahman Khan to support her financially. When he manages to move out of his lodging with her, he writes, "The chains that had bound me broke and I was set free" (96). The manager's insistence that Rahman Khan take responsibility for the woman reflects imperial anxiety about single women laborers, and Rahman Khan's response indicates his view of women as little more than a burden. By contrast, Alice Singh, whose parents had a cross-caste marriage, describes their marriage as "a ship sailing smoothly across the sea" indicating that marriages were sometimes viewed as a way of breaching religious and caste divisions, and also that metaphors of the ocean and of boats hold a strong place in the Indo-Caribbean imaginary.

Caribbean indenture narratives depart fairly widely from slave narratives, a genre that may be more familiar to North American readers. Autobiographies by former slaves like that of Frederick Douglass in the United States, and Mary Prince and Olaudah Equiano in the Caribbean, tend to describe the horrors of slavery as a call to arms to end the practice, and often follow the narrator's journey from slave to fugitive to free person. While such testimonials about indenture exist, such as Totaram Sanhadya's *My Twenty-One Years in the Fiji Islands*, there are no known equivalents in the Caribbean. Munshi Rahman Khan's *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer* details some of the abuses of the system, but does not attack the practice of indenture. This may be because indentured laborers who were educated, like Munshi Rahman

Khan, may have had a less brutal experience of indenture, as their skills allowed them to reach positions of management. In addition, they were better placed than their uneducated counterparts to enter the middle class after their period of indenture was over. Thus, the educated immigrants might have had less interest in abolishing the system and less incentive to record their stories, though they had more ability to do so. Early novels depicting indenture illuminate problems with the system but do not call for its end, and these texts tend to focus on the time of the laborer's indenture. It is only in later fictional texts, such as Sharlow's *The Promise*, that we see an excoriation of the system itself and the same progression from bound laborer to freedom that appears in many slave narratives.

While there is important historical work being done on indenture, literature offers a different view of this imperial system of labor and migration in the Caribbean. Literature reveals a society's views and prejudices on an intimate level; it both shapes and is shaped by the prevailing norms and values of a people. Particularly enlightening are the moments when the depictions in literature differ from the reality of the time. For example, commissions of inquiry indicate that the majority of women who traveled to the Caribbean under indenture were single, yet in almost every literary representation, the female characters travel with their husbands, suggesting that the authors view men as laborers and women as wives. Such moments enrich our understanding of individuals' experience of indenture, offering glimpses into the lives of both the laborers and the management, the colonizers and the colonized.

Chapter Summaries

My first three chapters focus on fiction, and each of these chapters concentrates on two novels written in the same time period in order to emphasize patterns and similarities in the

depictions of indenture. My final chapter focuses on nonfiction – an autobiography, a journal, and interviews – in order to emphasize the voices of the laborers themselves.

In Chapter One, “Tying the Knot: Early Depictions of Indenture,” I examine two novels by earlier authors, Edward Jenkins’ *Lutchmee and Dilloo* (1877) and A.R.F. Webber’s *Those that Be in Bondage* (1917). In both, a British man in power develops a relationship with a beautiful young Indian woman, raising her out of the degradation and harsh life of field labor and into a world of civilization and refinement. This represents the primary justification of colonization: Britain would protect its helpless colonies and civilize them. Both authors wrote their novels to suggest that the system of indenture needed corrections, but was generally beneficial to Britain, India, and the Caribbean nations involved in the system. Jenkins and Webber reveal more than they perhaps intended. The tragic ending of *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, for example, in which a noble Indian man is turned vicious by the evils of the system, counters Jenkins’ argument that indenture benefits the Indian people. On the other hand, Webber, who was of African and European descent, reveals an ambivalence towards empire; though he was an advocate of Guyanese independence, the depictions of his characters suggests that he accepts the colonial notion of a racialized hierarchy of civilization, with Britain at the top.

In Chapter 2: “Tangled Up: Gendered Metaphors of Nation in Contemporary Indo-Caribbean Narratives,” I examine novels by Indo-Caribbean writers, David Dabydeen’s *The Counting House* (1996) and Sharlow Mohammed’s *The Promise* (1995). Both authors use the same trope that appeared in the earlier texts, a British man in power developing a relationship with a young Indian woman. However, they do so to attack empire versus support it; the British male takes advantage of the Indian female, using her for sexual favors and giving little in return. This again represents the relationship of Britain to India, suggesting violent, greedy motivations

for imperialism, as opposed to noble, altruistic ones. While Dabydeen and Sharlow restructure the metaphor of the British man/Indian woman relationship, they fail to dismantle the traditional patriarchal view of gender that underlies this metaphor. By using female characters to represent India, they support the notion that women are the bearers of tradition and culture, that they are not individuals in their own right, and that their sexuality must be controlled and protected. I also explore the impact that such patriarchal views continue to have on gender roles in the Caribbean, such as the high rate of domestic violence in this region.

In Chapter 3, “At the End of their Tether: Echoes of Indenture in Contemporary Novels,” I examine the cyclical nature of trauma as depicted in two novels by contemporary women writers, Cristina García’s *Monkey Hunting* (2003), and Peggy Mohan’s *Jahajin* (2007). While *Monkey Hunting* focuses on Chinese indenture in Cuba and *Jahajin* explores Indian indenture in Trinidad, both novels weave together narrative strands from different time periods in order to demonstrate the ongoing impact of indenture on generations of a single family. Additionally, both novels draw parallels between family dynamics, such as unhappy marriages and parents abandoning their children, and national upheavals such as revolutions and uprisings. I argue that García and Mohan use these parallels to advocate an active engagement with the past in order to break cycles of trauma on both an individual and a national level. While García depicts the dangers of erasing the past, Mohan primarily warns against romanticizing the past in the form of nostalgia.

In Chapter 4, “To Have and to Hold: The Role of Marriage in Nonfiction Indenture Narratives,” I examine colonial legislation around marriage and the impact of that legislation, as reflected in autobiographies and interviews about indentured labor. I explore two written texts, Rahman Khan’s *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Labourer* (1972), the only published

first-person account of indenture, and *Autobiography of Alice Bhagwandy Sital Persaud* (1958), by the daughter of an indentured laborer. I also analyze the few available interviews with indentured laborers, including an unpublished interview with a 109-year old woman named Doolarie that I came across while conducting archival research in Trinidad. In these texts, I focus on marriage, the publicly recognized institution of a private relationship, as a flashpoint for religious, ethnic, and class tensions in the Caribbean colonies. As indicated by the laws that arose around marriage, both the British and Indians used the mistreatment of colonized women to support their imperial or anti-imperial ambitions. As I argue, however, the autobiographies and interviews indicate that the British legislation of marriage, meant to impose Victorian ideals and justify imperialism, tended instead to support the view of women as contested property, and to solidify existing class and racial hierarchies in both the colonizers and the colonized.

Boundaries of the Project

In order to focus my exploration of indenture, my project is limited to prose texts written in English about Caribbean indenture. I concentrate on texts that deal with the Caribbean in order to examine the changing role of indenture and gender roles in a single geographic location, as much as one can call the Caribbean such a thing. Novels written about the British imperial system of indenture in other parts of the world are equally significant but not discussed in this project. These include Deepchand Beeharry's *That Others Might Live* (1976), a prototypical indenture narrative that focuses on Indian indenture in Mauritius, and Amitav Ghosh's Ibis trilogy (2008, 2011, forthcoming in 2015), also about Mauritius. In order to hone in on issues of language and metaphor, I also examined only literature written in English, with the exception of the translated *Autobiography of an Indian Indenture Laborer*. A future study of indenture

narratives might include *Le 'Kooli' de morne Cabri* (2007) by Laure Moutoussamy, which deals with indenture in Martinique. Most of the texts that I address deal with Indian indenture because there are fewer texts written about Chinese indenture. The numbers of Indian indentured laborers were so much greater than those of Chinese laborers, and so there is a larger population of Indo-Caribbeans than Chinese-Caribbeans.

I also explore only texts that deal directly with indenture. Several novels touch on aspects of contract labor, such as Ron Ramdin's *Rama's Voyage* (2004), which tells the story of laborers on a voyage to the Caribbean, and Roy Heath's *The Shadow Bride* (1996), which deals with a doctor working on an indenture plantation. There are also many novels that depict the after effects of indenture, including Edgar Mittelholzer's *Corentyne Thunder* (1941), Jan Shinebourne's *The Last English Plantation* (1988), Sam Selvon's *A Brighter Sun* (1952), and Harold Sonny Ladoo's *No Pain Like This Body* (1972).

Finally, I focus primarily on prose, rather than poetry. Mahadai Das's seminal poem "They Came in Ships" (1977) and David Dabydeen's *Coolie Odyssey* (1988), among others, offer riveting imagery and have shaped our understanding of indenture, but my aim in this work is to examine metaphors as they appear in prose narratives; the concentrated nature of poetry shifts the role of metaphor into a slightly different domain.

Drawing Together the Strings

In the course of my research, I discovered an unpublished interview with Doolarie, a 109-year old formerly indentured woman. This is a rare example of a female laborer describing her experience of indenture. Doolarie describes the degrading experience of indenture: the laborers were loaded into trucks "like flour bags" and taken to the plantation, and she shows the scar on

her head where her husband beat her with a hoe for talking to another man. In Chapter 4, I explore the oppressive gender and racial dynamics revealed in this interview, as well as its omission from the existing body of literature. This work reflects the mission of my project: to draw attention to the under-examined experiences of the Indian and Chinese diaspora in the Caribbean and the ways that intimate relationships reflect larger issues of gender, class, and ethnicity in literature by both the dominant and the oppressed groups.

The repressive gender and racial ideologies of the British Imperial system of indentured labor continue to impact the Caribbean today. My research on indenture narratives shows how these dynamics developed and were perpetuated. Female laborers were triply vulnerable due to their ethnicity, class, and gender. In addition, the dramatic gender disparity meant that women laborers took on an added significance in struggles between ethnic groups. These conditions led to disturbing rates of sexual and domestic abuse that persist today, and in some cases, to limitations on women's education and freedom. While women have gained significant access to education and public positions of power, there has been less progress in domestic issues, such as violence against women. All of the Caribbean islands have higher rates of sexual violence than the world average, and the Indo-Caribbean community's comparative lack of awareness of government measures against domestic violence suggests that these women are still highly vulnerable to such abuse; in 1999, 77.3% of Indo-Guyanese women did not know about the Domestic Violence Act that had passed in 1996, the highest percentage of any ethnic group in Guyana.

Imperial ideologies continue to poison race relations as well. Colonizers promoted a view of the superiority of European races over Asian races, and Asian races over African races, and encouraged conflicts between colonized groups in order to prevent solidarity and rebellion. This

led to clashes between ethnic groups that continue today: as recently as 1998, violence erupted in Guyana between Afro-Caribbeans and Indo-Caribbeans in response to tensions between ethnically divided political parties.

Prose works depicting the Caribbean indenture system offer glimpses into the viewpoints of authors who defended and challenged imperialism and indenture. Awareness of these views can help us deconstruct the lingering, damaging effects of these systems.

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Chapter 1

Tying the Knot: Early Depictions of Indenture

In 1915, sixteen-year old Leslie Phillips arrived as an overseer on Plantation Cornelia Ida in British Guiana. Forty-five years later, in an essay titled “Single Men in Barracks” he described his sexual exploits with the female Indians who labored on the plantation. In a tone of amused nostalgia, he tells the story of an Indian woman named Rajama, “a comely but slightly promiscuous young Madrasi,” and her husband, whom he calls “complacent and indolent” (32).

He writes:

Rajama spent one Saturday night in my quarters, and daylight taking us unawares, we decided to let the next nightfall cover her journey home. About two o’clock on Sunday afternoon my house-boy brought the ominous news that Rajama’s husband had arrived and wished to speak to her. To permit this would have placed me in open jeopardy, so I sought means to distract him. Learning of my predicament, Brown, a fellow Overseer, offered to get the man completely drunk if I would supply the liquor. I sent my boy with a chit to Fung-a Fat’s Rum Shop, and he quickly returned with a large bottle of rum which Brown invited the man to share in his room. (32)

The distraction worked temporarily, but the man returned, again asking to speak his wife.

Phillips sent him away, giving him “the assurance that when conniving Night again returned to cover such delicate manoeuvres, his property would be returned to him in good order, reasonable wear and tear excepted” (32). Phillips describes this affair as one might describe a schoolboy prank, and his lack of concern for the feelings of the husband is matched only by his disturbing view of Indian women as property that may be borrowed at will by British men.

Phillips' intimacy with a female laborer, and his attitude towards it, is by no means unusual. This is demonstrated by the frequency with which British colonial officials sent out notices to plantation managers warning against these relationships. One British Guiana circular from 1869 condemned such managers for failing to set a high moral standard of behavior: "It appears there are some overseers on estates who, by their intimate relations with the female immigrants, are themselves fostering the laxity of morals which unfortunately obtains to a considerable extent amongst the Indian immigrants" (qtd in Bahadur 134).

Some planters suggested that the Indian women were engaging in these relationships of their own free will and did so purposely to gain some leverage. While this may have been true in some cases, most women had little choice when approached by a manager. In a letter to *The Daily Chronicle*, an Indian wrote, "As soon as an overseer eyes a nice looking coolie girl, she must fall a prey to him with the assistance of a *sirdar* or driver, who plays a great figure in it... If the girl does not consent and exposes the matter, she with her whole family will be turned off the estate" (qtd in Bahadur 150). At best, such relationships were exploitative, as the managers had great power over the women, and at worst, these women were forced into sex, either through physical threats or threats to their livelihood or family.

For the colonial officials, these relationships undermined the imperial justification of Britain's right to rule, which was based on the notion that the British were a more developed, moral, and civilized people, acting as role models for the less civilized races. For the Indians and other ethnic groups subjugated by colonization, these relationships demonstrated the hypocrisy and invasiveness of imperialism, and the *driot du seigneur* attitude that many planters adopted.

These tensions were heightened by the dramatic gender disparity among indentured laborers, averaging four men to one woman. This disparity meant that Indian women took on a

symbolic role for men vying for power. Historian Patricia Mohammed notes that most cultures contain the idea that men's honor is vested in women's virtue, and as a result, struggles between men to retain ethnic identity are viewed in terms of the power to control their own women, and guard and protect them from other men. For the laborers, the few Indian women who traveled to the colonies were seen as the protectors of civilization, culture and tradition. This was especially important in a foreign land, far from the societal institutions such as religious or governmental organizations that formed the structures of their culture.

It is not surprising, then, that one of the most common tropes to appear in indenture narratives is a relationship that forms between a British man in power – a plantation owner, an overseer, or an officer for the British government, and a female laborer. For instance, Edgar Mittelholzer's classic Caribbean novel *Corentyne Thunder* (1938) focuses on not one but two Indo-Caribbean women, half-sisters, who bear children to British planters, and the exploitative nature of these relationships.³ The frequency of this trope suggests not only the prevalence of this occurrence, but also that this dynamic was tied to larger issues of power, ethnicity, and class within the indenture system.

There are only two known novels about Caribbean indenture written while the system was still in place, and both depict a relationship between a British planter and a female Indian laborer. Edward Jenkins, a British barrister, wrote *Lutchmee and Dilloo* (1877) in order to draw attention to the challenges that the Indian laborers faced. It tells the story of a young Indian couple who indenture in British Guiana and form a friendship with a Scottish overseer. A.R.F. Webber, a Guyanese journalist and politician of mixed race, wrote *Those that Be in Bondage* (1917) to protest the unfair treatment of both the laborers and the plantation managers. This

³ See also Deepchand Beeharry's *That Others Might Live* (1976), Sharlow Mohammed's *The Promise* (1995), David Dabydeen: *The Counting House* (1996), and Ron Ramdin's *Rama's Voyage* (2004) for other examples.

novel focuses on a young overseer in British Guiana who falls in love with a female Indian laborer.

These texts do not appear often in the canon of Caribbean literature and are generally viewed as limited in their artistic merit, but they offer important insights into late 19th - early 20th century views on gender, ethnicity, imperialism and indenture. In particular, both authors depict a relationship between a British man and an Indian woman to suggest that, if handled correctly, an imperial relationship between Britain and India would be mutually beneficial to both nations.

In my exploration of these themes, I build on the work of postcolonial theorists who examine the connections between intimate relationships and issues of nation, race, and empire. In *Carnal Knowledge*, anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler shows that colonial officials regulated sexual relationships and child rearing in Indonesia in order to prevent mingling between the colonizers and the colonized and maintain racial distinctions. She notes that “connections between parenting and colonial power, between nursing mothers and cultural boundaries, between servants and sentiments, and between illicit sex, orphans, and race emerge as central concerns of state and at the heart of colonial politics” (8). Similarly, in “The Intimacy of Four Continents,” literary theorist Lisa Lowe suggests that contracts of labor and marriage, usually seen as private agreements between individuals, became signifiers of humanity and freedom for Europeans justifying the indenture system in the 19th Century. She also notes that colonial rhetoric held up the distinction between the private and the public spheres as an indicator of civilization, but that “the separation of the feminine home and the masculine world of work has been criticized...as a liberal abstraction for ordering relations in civil society that is contradicted by the social realities of laboring women” (195).

Lutchmee and Dilloo and *Those that Be in Bondage* demonstrate the justification of indenture and gendered views of labor that Lowe points to. Both Edward Jenkins and A.R.F. Webber wrote their novels to draw attention to the suffering of indentured laborers, yet neither of these texts directly challenges the indenture system or criticizes the European planters. They highlight unfair aspects of the system, such as the lack of legal recourse available to the laborers, but argue that overall, the system benefits the Indian laborers. In addition, both novels offer a hierarchical view of race, labor, and gender, with British land-owning men presented as the height of civilization.

These novels also point to an aspect of indenture that Lowe does not explore: the metaphoric significance of the laboring woman. In both novels, the British man is handsome, strong, honorable, and kind, representing the best of British gentility, while the Indian woman is lovely, virtuous, and vulnerable. The man raises the woman out of the degradation and harsh life of field labor, and into a world of civilization and refinement. Furthermore, this gentleman rescues the Indian woman from a brutal male Indian, who in turn dies a violent death as a result of his savage behavior. This represents the primary justification of colonization: Britain would protect its helpless colonies and civilize them, eradicating their barbaric tendencies.

The similarities in these two novels are striking, given the differences in the authors' ethnicities, nationality, and views on empire. Edward Jenkins was a British barrister who staunchly supported the British Empire. Though he lived most of his adult life in London, he was born in India and grew up in Canada. The son of a Presbyterian minister, he was most likely exposed to the rhetoric of British supremacy and the civilizing benefits of colonialism, which may have then filtered into his political views and his writings. A.R.F. Webber, a native of the Caribbean, was of mixed African and European descent and in later years advocated for

Guyanese independence. Yet, *Those Be in Bondage* supports the indenture system and imperialism. This suggests that, as a middle-class man of mixed race, he felt caught between his relatively high status in the colonial society, and his solidarity with the working people and desire for Guyanese autonomy. That two men writing from such different subject positions would promote the benefits of colonialism and indenture for both Britain and India indicates the pervasiveness of imperial ideology and the tensions between race and class in colonial Guiana.

Although there is extensive historical research on the British imperial system of indenture in the Caribbean, there is little critical attention to literature dealing with indentured labor. *Lutchmee and Dilloo* and *Those that Be in Bondage* in particular remain obscure. The criticism that does exist on these two novels tends to minimize the larger issues at stake in the relationship between the British man and the Indian woman. In his biography of A.R.F. Webber, Selwyn Cudjoe acknowledges that in *Those that Be in Bondage*, “both the East and West are depicted in stereotypical terms” (19). However, he ignores the problematic aspect of a romance in which an English overseer must make “a stupendous leap in yielding his heart” to an Indian laborer (Webber 35). In his introduction to *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, David Dabydeen suggests that the friendship between the Scottish overseer and the Indian woman, by leading her to defy her husband, has sparked “a nascent feminism, a nascent defiance of patriarchal structures” (18). Instead, I argue that she is simply transferring her loyalty from her Indian husband to her European savior.

In this chapter, I explore the overlapping hierarchies of race, labor, and gender that appear in *Lutchmee and Dilloo* and *Those that Be in Bondage*. Both Jenkins and Webber offer a racial classification of Caribbean society, showing the British and other Europeans as the height of civilization, the Indian and Chinese as cultured but unsophisticated, and those of African

descent as barbaric and ignorant. Tied to this was a teleological view of labor. Wage labor was seen as the ultimate indicator of societal progress, represented by the Europeans managers, while the Indians and Chinese labored under indenture as a step towards wage labor. Those of African descent, while no longer slaves, were good primarily for mindless tasks or brute labor.

Threaded through these hierarchies is the issue of gender. In *Imperial Leather*, feminist scholar Anne McClintock argues that in colonial societies, race, gender and class were intimately connected, and that:

they come into existence *in and through* relation to each other – if in contradictory and conflictual ways... Gender here, then, is not simply a question of sexuality but a question of subdued labor and imperial plunder; race is not simply a question of skin color but also a question of labor power, cross-hatched by gender. (5, emphasis original)

These intersections are demonstrated vividly in the novels discussed here: upper-class colonial women were subject to colonial men, but placed above men and women of other races.

Interestingly, the women of Chinese, Indian, and African descent, while retaining fewer rights than their male counterparts, are depicted as superior to them in cultivation and intelligence. In *Lutchmee and Dilloo* and *Those that Be in Bondage*, the Indian women are shown to be childlike in their mildness but wise in their acceptance of British superiority. This again points to the symbolic function of the Indian woman in struggles for power between the colonizer and the colonized. In these two novels, the relationship that develops between the British man and the Indian woman reveals the critical role of images of Indian women in rhetoric promoting empire.

While the novels discussed in this chapter focus primarily on the relationship between Indian immigrants and British colonizers, they take place in the Caribbean, emphasizing the

complex network of British capitalist imperialism. The Caribbean, in a sense, is the birthplace of British Imperialism. In the period between 1583 and 1783, termed the First British Empire, Britain colonized the Caribbean and North America. Colonies were attempted as early as 1604 in Guiana, St. Lucia, Grenada, St. Kitts, Barbados and Nevis. Though they initially failed, these sites became Britain's most lucrative and important early colonies. They produced sugar, among other products, which was in turn traded to Britain's colonies and other nations around the globe to great profit.

Sugar production required a massive, controlled labor population. Spanish colonialism had nearly wiped out the indigenous populations of the Caribbean, such as the Taíno and the Caribs, and so the British turned to slaves from Africa. In 1672, the Royal African Company was founded to provide slaves to the Americas, beginning two centuries of brutal slave trade. After slavery was abolished, Britain brought labor from India to the Caribbean in order to work the plantations. Many critics of indenture argued that the laborers were essentially treated as slaves, confined to the plantation, forced to endure long days of backbreaking work, and disciplined with beatings and whippings. Joseph Beaumont, who served as Chief Justice of British Guiana, titled his 1871 account of indentured labor, *The New Slavery*.

In 1869, William Des Voeux, a stipendiary magistrate in British Guiana, wrote a letter to Lord Granville, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, detailing the abuses of indentured laborers that he had witnessed. As a result, a commission was set up to inquire into the state of the immigrants in the colonies. The Aborigines Protection Services and the Anti-Slavery Society asked Edward Jenkins, a barrister, author, and politician, to travel to Guiana to examine the system of indentured labor. His report, *The Coolie, His Rights and Wrongs*, published in 1871, concludes that the indenture system is beneficial to all involved parties, but he details a number

of abuses to the system that need to be remedied. These include false promises made to recruit the laborers and a justice system that heavily favored the planters. When his report failed to spur reform, he felt he had not drawn enough attention to the issues, and so he attempted to individualize the suffering of the laborers.

Jenkins' novel, *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, published in 1877, focuses on a young Indian couple that travel to British Guiana as indentured laborers, and the many injustices that they face. It can be seen as a novel of purpose, a fictional text written to motivate social reform. Jenkins may have been inspired by anti-slavery novels such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which similarly sought to draw attention to the sufferings of a people, and similarly fostered stereotypes of those people in the process. *Lutchmee and Dilloo* is written in third person omniscient, switching between the perspectives of the Indian laborers, the British plantation managers, and the servants of African descent. This suggests that Jenkins is striving for a sense of objectivity in order to make his case more palatable, particularly to British readers.

Jenkins and Webber are, perhaps overtly in Jenkins' case and inadvertently in Webber's, repeating the discourse of imperialism. Britain's primary rationalization for colonization was the civilizing and improvement of the colonized people. In this view, missionaries would replace the superstitious, ignorant beliefs of Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims with the rational enlightenment of Christianity. The British would build schools to teach Indians literacy, history, and morals. Technology such as trains and telegraphs would bring the Indians ahead on the forward march of civilization. The Indian people would learn to be industrious, pious and moral.

In reality, British Imperialism had a devastating effect on the Indian economy and social structure. Ranajit Guha notes that the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793, generally seen as the initiation of imperial policy in India, endeavored to shape Bengal into an imitation of England

without attempting to understand the local culture or traditions. He argues that, “while being grafted to India by the most advanced capitalist power of that age, it became instrumental in building a neo-feudal organisation of landed property and in the absorption and reproduction of pre-capitalist elements in a colonial regime” (6). Ironically, then, Permanent Settlement, which was intended to promote a capitalist agricultural system similar to that of England, actually encouraged a feudal system, installing local leaders as landlords and tax collectors, and imposing heavy taxes. As a result, many farmers were forced off lands that their families had cultivated for generations. Walton Look Lai writes that the landlord system and the heavy taxation:

succeeded in bringing to an end the underlying communalism that lay at the heart of traditional village life, despite its internal occupational and caste stratifications. In its place was erected a system which was a mix of feudal landlord-tenant relations and an uneven system of commercial agriculture, growing crops for the market beyond the horizons of the village structure, and indeed for the British metropolis. (23)

The British also imposed tariffs on exported Indian crafts and flooded Indian markets with British made, mass-produced goods, which put local artisans out of work. Serious crop failures exacerbated the poverty cause by the restructuring of agriculture and elimination of local crafts. It is estimated that 15 million Indians died in the famines of the 19th century. Even colonial officials acknowledged the degree of this misfortune. Lord William Bentinck, who served as governor-general of India, stated, “The bones of the cotton-weavers are bleaching the plains of India” (qtd in Look Lai 23).

These restructurings also led to large numbers of landless peasants, a situation that British colonialism both created and took advantage of. In his article, “Beyond the Push and Pull Model,” Lomarsh Roopnarine suggests that colonialism was a major reason for the high numbers

of laborers emigrating as indentured laborers. Building on Immanuel Wallerstein's idea that the world economy is held together by one capitalist system, he writes "The process of capital accumulation is supported by a labor surplus drawn from the less progressive to the most flourishing areas of the world" (102). He argues that the colonial planting system in the Caribbean created a need for such labor, and that the upheaval caused by British imperialism in India created a surplus of laborers willing to travel to the Caribbean. Displacement was most severe in the provinces of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Bengal, and Madras, and these are the areas where most indentured laborers came from.

Early indenture narratives like *Lutchmee and Dilloo* show none of the devastating impacts of colonialism and minimize the dehumanizing quality of indenture. Edward Jenkins was concerned with the mistreatment of Indian laborers, which he saw when he was sent to investigate the indenture system, but he does not acknowledge the brutality of slavery, the destruction of India's economy, or the inherent inequities of indentured labor.

In *The Coolie, His Rights and Wrongs*, Jenkins' report on his visit to British Guiana, he describes the many abuses of the indenture system, which he argued were based largely on economic incentives. He noted that the bounty attached to the number of laborers brought to the Caribbean colonies led recruiters to use false descriptions and the doctors inspecting the migrants to allow as many through as possible. Within the colonies themselves, most of the government officials were either planters or socially connected to planters, and thus heavily influenced by planters' interests. He pointed to injustices within the legal system; laborers who committed infractions of the contract were sent to jail whereas planters who broke the contract were fined, if punished at all. Finally, he noted that the system was rigged to prevent laborers from becoming free men after their indenture, which was ostensibly the goal of the system.

In spite of these concerns, he concluded that the system was in general beneficial to the laborers, and with proper reforms and oversight, would be mutually advantageous to both India and Britain. He wrote, “Taking a fair review of the whole system, *it is one which, spite of its disabilities, its difficulties, its present evils, is full of promise, and in my belief, can be made, with care and skill and honest endeavour, not only an organisation of labour as successful as any hitherto attempted, but one leading to almost colossal benefits*” (301, emphasis original).

Disappointed by the lack of action to redress the injustices he described in his report, Jenkins wrote *Lutchmee and Dilloo* “to throw the problem of the Coolie labour in our Colonies into a concrete and picturesque form” (29). The novel does not seem to have gained much of a readership. The 1877 printing was the only edition, until it was reprinted in 2003 with an introduction by David Dabydeen.

Lutchmee and Dilloo is much more sympathetic than the few texts written previously about indentured laborers in the Caribbean. For example, Rev. J. G. Pearson’s *The New Overseer’s Manual* (1890) justifies indenture by describing a series of Indian “characters” in stereotypical terms and suggesting that the Indians who succeed in British Guiana are those who work hard, give up their ties to their homeland, and conform to the expectations of their European managers. Rev J. D. McKay’s *Under the Southern Cross* (1904), though billed as a novel, is really a missionary tract, depicting a Brahmin who, through hard work and exposure to Christianity, becomes a convert and learns to despise his own culture.

By contrast, *Lutchmee and Dilloo* effectively highlights the suffering of the laborers, and Jenkins delves into their perspective, creating developed characters. However, Jenkins also uses the relationships between the characters as an analogue to the relationship between Britain and its colonies and a justification for colonization and indenture. Jenkins suggests that Britain’s role

was that of the honorable, masculine hero, saving the innocent, defenseless India from her own violent, barbaric tendencies. Craig, a Scottish overseer, befriends Lutchmee, a young Indian woman, and through him, she comes to recognize the glory of British civilization.

Jenkins' defense of Britain's imperial relationship with India is unsurprising, as he was a firm proponent of empire, and both India and Guiana were highly profitable colonies. Furthermore, recent violence in both regions made the threat of revolt a real one, and Jenkins may have been attempting to prevent further violence by promoting a romantic view of imperialism. During the Indian Rebellion of 1857, members of the Indian army mutinied against the British, which led to the Government of India Act of 1858, in which the British government assumed the task of directly administering India. In 1872, Indian indentured laborers from the Devonshire Castle Plantation on the Essequibo Coast of British Guiana went on strike to protest their conditions. This led to a violent confrontation between laborers and police, in which five laborers died. Imperial officials were thus very aware that tensions could erupt into violence in any of their colonies. *Lutchmee and Dilloo* can be seen as a response to these tensions, and the interactions between the characters offer an idealized version of the colonized-colonizer relationship.

The characters' metaphoric roles can be seen as early as the opening scene of the novel, which introduces the three major Indian characters. Lutchmee, a beautiful young Indian woman, reclines on a grassy bank in an unnamed area of India. She is graceful, with features that fit European notions of beauty: "The long hair . . . hung black and disheveled from the symmetrical head, leaving her light-brown oval face, with its regular eyes, arched eyebrows, delicately-chiselled nostrils and well-turned mouth and chin, in fine relief" (31). She is also sensual, though unaware of it: her "loose white robe and jacket of coloured cotton scarcely hid one line of the

delicate mould of her form, displayed, as it was, by the abandon of her posture, in all its grace, litheness, and perfection” (30).

She does not realize that Hunoomaun, the villain of the story, watches her with mischief in his heart. He is “a tall, powerfully-built man, of extreme darkness of skin, with a shaggy head of hair and moustache that added their bristly terrors to a face naturally ugly and deeply pitted with small-pox” (32). His dark skin is closely linked with ugliness, aggression, and the corruption of disease. This is immediately borne out by his behavior - he tries to seduce Lutchmee, and when she runs away, he chases her and attacks her.

Lutchmee is rescued by her husband, Dilloo. Like Lutchmee, Dilloo is described as unusually attractive, with European features: “a young fellow of moderate height, but, for a Hindoo, of unusually fine development” (33) He beats Hunoomaun, who later takes revenge by stealing Dilloo’s livestock and money, and sabotaging his crops. Dilloo is eventually driven to sign a contract of indenture in British Guiana.

Jenkins thus depicts these three characters as representing the best and the worst of the Indian people. Lutchmee and Dilloo are European in appearance, and in temperament are open, innocent, and childlike, the finest examples of their people. They are threatened by Hunoomaun, who is dark-skinned, cunning, and malicious, always looking to take advantage of others.

Through Lutchmee and Dilloo’s experiences, Jenkins effectively shows how oppressive the indenture system is. A year after Dilloo leaves for British Guiana, Lutchmee also indentures in order to follow him. During Lutchmee’s voyage, Jenkins reflects on the flaws in the system and the way that each official deflects responsibility. As the immigration agent-general examines the ship and its passengers, he and the captain discuss the unhealthy aspect of many of the laborers. The captain responds ““But what can I do? I must bring ‘em, you know”” (55). Jenkins

reflects, “Probably every person involved would have asked the same question, and shrugged his shoulders, and in the same way, shifted the responsibility on some one else...The cunning Indian recruiters...the colonial agents...The highly-paid officials of the Indian Government...The British Government, and the Colonial Government would each have shrugged their shoulders, and said ‘What can we do?’” (55). In this way, Jenkins suggests that people tend to ignore the suffering of fellow humans when there are economic incentives to do so.

Jenkins is far more critical of Indians in this description of the indenture system, calling the recruiters “cunning” and noting that the Indian officials are “highly-paid,” suggesting that they are silent in exchange for good salaries, but making no such attacks on the British. Later in the novel, he explicitly lays the majority of the blame on the Indian recruiters: “The root of the injustice had been struck in India in the exaggerated representations made by the native recruiters to indict the Indians to migrate” (165).⁴ This supports the notion that the British are saving India from itself, and also shows an awareness of audience. As with abolitionist slave narratives, Jenkins’ text is written not to the sufferers but to those in power – in this case, British men and women.

Lutchmee finds Dilloo a deeply changed man, “graver, and more stern in manner,” with “a novel habit of reserve” (89). Prior to Lutchmee’s arrival, he was unjustly imprisoned, which made him lose faith in the British system of justice and darkened his disposition. While she is there, he is again unfairly imprisoned, this time for not working five days in one week, though in

⁴ See also *The Coolie*, page 165: “exaggerated statements in print, or made by the recruiters, mislead the ignorant Coolies, and lay the basis for that permanent sense of wrong, which makes for a resentful labourer, with the danger of corresponding harshness and oppression in enforcing another view of the contract.” Jenkins advises, “The action of these recruiters, therefore, needs careful watching on the part of the Indian government.”

reality the law stated that a laborer had to complete five tasks in a week rather than five days of work.⁵

As a result of these and other mistreatments, Dilloo becomes hardened, vowing revenge on Drummond, the white owner of the estate where Lutchmee and Dilloo are bound, and Marston, the magistrate who orders Dilloo to jail. As he is taken to jail, Dilloo urges Akaloo, a fellow laborer and an agitator, to stir up rebellion, stating, “For my part, I wish to fight – and die!” (180)

Dilloo’s hatred is shown to be understandable but misplaced, as Drummond and Marston are depicted as flawed but not cruel men. Marston is a somewhat cowardly and narrow-minded official who slowly awakens to the injustices of the system as the novel progresses. Drummond, on the other hand, was once a good man, but his morals and sense of justice have been loosened by his power on the plantation. He has sexual relationships with his workers, but does not force himself on them. When he attempts to seduce Lutchmee and she rejects him, Drummond lets her go: “In the pursuit of his whims, the remains of generosity and justice in his nature had always hitherto restrained him from any forcible assertion of his wishes. Nor did he meditate revenge. He was good-tempered, easy-going, morally indolent” (76).

Though Drummond and Marston hold all the power in the novel, Hunoomaun is the real villain of the story. Coincidentally, he too signs a contract of indenture and is assigned to Drummond’s estate. His cunning manipulation of others helps him achieve a position of power on the plantation, which he uses to torment Lutchmee and Dilloo. The tension culminates when Lutchmee, who is several months pregnant, is sent to work in the fields while Dilloo is in jail; the work is too much for her and she has a miscarriage. The death of Lutchmee’s baby can be seen

⁵ See *The Coolie*. Jenkins notes that the law states that laborers need only complete five tasks per week, whereas many managers forced their laborers to work five days even if they had already completed five tasks.

as the death of the couple's hope for the future. Children represent the continuation of one's line but also a sense of rootedness and community. After Lutchmee's miscarriage, Dilloo turns bitter and violent, rejecting any notion of building a home in Guiana or reaching a peace with the colonial management.

Just as the villain of the story is not Drummond but Hunoomaun, the hero of the story is not Dilloo, who is slowly corrupted by the evils of the system, but Craig, a young Scottish overseer with high principles. He is described as fine in both body and spirit, an Aryan ideal: "An inch over six feet in height, with broad shoulders, strong frame, bold regular features, of blonde complexion, Craig would have been marked by any one seeing the overseers together, to be as superior to the rest in both tone and manner as he was in appearance" (84-5). He gives Drummond some trouble because of his strong principles; over and over Drummond berates him for taking the side of the laborers, including in court. Drummond argues that the white population needs to stick together and show a united front, or else the laborers will sense weakness and revolt. Jenkins shows that this is clearly not the case; the laborers respect and admire Craig, and it is only his intervention that prevents violent outbreaks at various points. If only all British acted like Craig, Jenkins suggests, the system would work as it should, and all involved races would benefit.

This is particularly striking in Craig's treatment of Lutchmee, as he saves her in both figurative and literal ways. When Craig is stabbed during a riot, Drummond brings Lutchmee to the hospital to care for him. Lutchmee is released from the backbreaking labor of the fields, and by interacting with Craig, she is exposed to new ideas of refinement and civilization. As he recovers, they talk, and their conversation opens her mind: "It brought into her life fresh human elements, feelings she had never experienced before: ideas – novel, sweet piquant." This time is

described as “very holy” and “halcyon” to her (155). In the racially and gender encoded imperial ideal of the colonizer-colonized relationship, she comes to feel “a strange, half-god worship for him” (128). The use of religious terminology such as “holy” and “worship” emphasizes Craig’s role as Lutchmee’s savior as well as British Imperialism’s role in bringing Christianity to the colonized people.

Lutchmee feels a sense of resistance towards her husband for the first time when she remembers her obligation to return to him once Craig has healed. In his introduction to the novel, David Dabydeen suggests that this is the budding of “a nascent feminism, a nascent defiance of patriarchal structures” (18). Far from being a defiance of patriarchy as Dabydeen suggests, I would argue that this is enforcing *white* patriarchy; she is simply shifting her allegiance from Dilloo to the proper receptacle, the god-like white overseer.

Though other characters suspect a sexual relationship developing between Lutchmee and Craig, Craig is a consummate gentleman. The characters who doubt Craig’s motives, such as Drummond, Chester, the creole overseer, and eventually Dilloo, do so because of their own lack of honor, Jenkins suggests, rather than a lack of honor in Craig. He does not entertain any notions of such a relationship with Lutchmee, prevented first by his racist dismissal of her worth, and then by his purity of heart: “the repugnance of race...forbad the budding of any affectionate esteem in his heart, but he felt arising within him a strong sense of gratitude for her attentions; and...a sort of pleased admiration for her pretty features, lissome figure, and graceful ways” (130). This indication of Craig’s growing awareness of Lutchmee’s attractions is followed quickly by a reminder of her low status: “Was she not a pretty animal?” (130).

Throughout the text, Jenkins uses metaphors that compare Lutchmee to an animal or a child. Lutchmee is aware that Craig “regarded her rather as he regarded his dog and his horse, as

a part of his establishment” (113). Again and again Jenkins emphasizes that Craig’s feelings towards Lutchmee are no more than those of an owner towards a dog or a father towards a child. This is meant to be a sign of his pure intentions and protective instincts, but it serves to dehumanize Lutchmee and emphasize the view of Indian women as property.

Jenkins’ emphasis on Craig’s purity of mind can be seen as a response to concerns that arose in Britain and India over reports that British men were developing sexual relationships with laborers. Ashrufa Faruqee notes that the rigid hierarchical structure on the plantation “permitted plantation superiors to sexually exploit ‘coolie’ women, who held the lowest position within the plantation structure” (72). While later commissions, such as the McNeill-Lal Report of 1914, attempted to deny such relationships existed, the 1871 Royal Commission, parts of which Jenkins witnessed, recognized that they were common and suggested that they contributed to the general laxity of the indentured population (73).

Jenkins does acknowledge that these relationships exist, implying that Drummond has relations with laborers in his care and showing him trying to seduce Lutchmee though she declares herself to be married. However, he does not actually depict these relationships, and, as noted earlier, Jenkins is quick to point out that Drummond does not force himself on women. This does not represent the reality of relationships between European overseers and managers and female workers. Joseph Beaumont, Chief Justice of British Guiana, wrote in 1871 that it was common for overseers and managers to engage in “illicit sexual relations” with Indian women and that it was usually a result of a “forcible abuse of power” (74-5).

In contrast, Jenkins suggests that Craig’s paternalistic view towards Lutchmee is the solution to many of the ills of the system. In *The Coolie*, Jenkins argues that the employer should think of the laborers as his children, so that he will feel more tenderness towards them: “This

immigration relation [between an employer and laborer] should not only be looked as one of pure contract...No legal adjustments can make it a happy one unless there is conjoined with them, on the side of the employer, a spirit of generosity and of half-*parental* kindness” (122-3, emphasis mine). Thus Craig demonstrates the ideal relationship between an employer and laborer.

Craig’s protectiveness towards Lutchmee is expressed when he saves her from her husband as the tensions between the laborers and the planters reach their height. The workers prepare to revolt under the cover of the Indian festival of Tadjja, but the planters learn of their plan and buy up all the guns in town. This depiction turned out to be tragically prescient. On October 30 of 1884, seven years after *Lutchmee and Dilloo* was published, there was a massacre of laborers during the observance of Hosay, a Muslim holiday. Due to unrest, colonial officials in San Fernando had banned processions from entering the town. In defiance of this, on the day of Hosay, a procession of unarmed laborers marched toward the town, carrying tadjjas, models of the tombs of the brothers of the prophet Mohammed. A local magistrate read out the Riot Act in English, though few of the Indians spoke English, and when the crowd did not disperse, police fired into the crowd. Accounts vary, but between nine and twenty-two Indians were killed and about one hundred were injured.⁶ Jenkins’ depiction thus accurately warns laborers of the potential violence they might face, although in reality, they faced this bloodshed simply for celebrating a religious holiday.

Thwarted from revolting, Dilloo does not lose his desire for revenge, but instead shifts his focus to his individual enemies. When Dilloo sees Marston in the crowd during the festival, he attempts to stab him, but Craig intervenes and forces Dilloo to drop his knife. Lutchmee picks it

⁶ In *Historical Dictionary of Trinidad and Tobago*, Anthony Michael suggests that there were nine casualties, while in “Following Custom?” Prabhu P Mohapatra maintains that twenty-two died.

up and throws it to Marston. Dilloo is overwhelmed with rage at her perceived betrayal, and Craig recognizes that it is not safe to send Lutchmee home, so he takes her with him to the plantation house.

Jeremy Poynting sees this as an example of the complexity of Lutchmee's character: "She has strong moral values and at one point displays a risky independence from her husband by preventing him from murdering the hated local magistrate" (140). Lutchmee is certainly a more developed character than most Indian women in literature about the West Indies from this time period, including Webber's *Those that Be in Bondage*. Rather than an act of true independence, though, Lutchmee throwing the knife to Marston can be seen as another example of her swapping loyalties from an Indian man to a British one; instead of being faithful to and protecting her husband, she is now faithful to and protects Craig, and by default, Marston.

Since Dilloo is unsuccessful in his attempt to kill Marston, he must turn his anger to Hunoomaun. At the end of the festival, the two engage in a fight to the death. Dilloo triumphs and Hunoomaun falls dead, but Dilloo is fatally wounded in the process. Dilloo and Lutchmee have a deathbed reconciliation in which all is forgiven, but when a British priest speaks to Dilloo of the beauty and peace of the paradise that he is about to enter, Dilloo, in his last act of defiance, rejects this offering: "No! Jesu Kriss Massa Drummond's God – Massa Marston's God – all Inglees God. No God for Coolie!" (358). Though Jenkins depicts this as a tragic fate, there is an imperial logic to it – Hunoomaun has died for his evil behavior, as has Dilloo for giving in to rage and hatred and conspiring against the white men. Drummond, Marston and the other British officials remain in their positions of power, while Lutchmee, the purest and most innocent of the Indian characters, presumably will be cared for by these men.

Dilloo's degradation and moral disintegration effectively evokes sympathy for the workers, and Jenkins repeatedly rails against their mistreatment. He castigates the European ruling class for ignoring the suffering of the working class: "Blacks, Madeirans, Coolies, all swarming in tens of thousands, what were they? Why they were machines to make money for the people of Demerara - to provide cheap sugar to the world in general, and plenty of profit to speculating Britons in particular" (287-8). Here he perhaps inadvertently echoes Marx's critique that in a capitalist mode of production, the worker must sell his own labor power, and thus becomes a commodity himself, in fact "the most wretched of commodities" (35).

Dilloo, like the thousands of laborers that Jenkins describes here, is clearly viewed as less than human by his managers – Drummond recognizes that he is one of the best workers but is startled when Dilloo protects him in a riot, stating " 'Ha! Then a Coolie may have some sense of honour and fairplay!'" (115) He later complains that Dilloo is in fact " 'too honest and too clever...with sentimental notions of right or wrong, utterly inapplicable in our circumstances here'" (142). His ideal laborer is one who works well but doesn't think or have a sense of integrity or self-respect. Jenkins also depicts Dilloo as becoming alienated from his humanness – he becomes a violent, enraged man, and it is only in his death that he is redeemed.

In a critique of absentee plantation owners, Jenkins also cleverly indicates that even when planters do not directly manage their laborers, they are still responsible for the workers' well being. Drummond seeks to make peace with the laborers, urging them to remember how well he treats them. He asks, "I never beat you?" One laborer responds, "No, massa, ovaseah beat Coolie" (116). Though Drummond did not personally beat the laborer, Jenkins suggests, he is still implicated in the abuse.

In spite of this critique, Jenkins cannot counsel revolt, and so Dilloo must fail as a revolutionary and die for his attempts. Dilloo becomes part of a nascent labor movement that takes steps to redress their wrongs, writing a petition and gathering thousands of signatures with the intention of submitting it to Parliament. Dilloo himself is depicted as one of the strongest workers, and while Drummond expresses his frustration that such a good worker is a troublemaker, standing up for his fellow laborers, Craig suggests that Dilloo could have been a great boon to the system, if his mistreatment had not turned him against the management. Yet Dilloo does not revolt; at the key moment he advises his co-conspirators to back down, and wait for a time when the managers do not watch them so closely. His thirst for revenge eventually kills him. This is for at least two reasons; Jenkins' audience, as previously noted, is the British upper class, and so Jenkins cannot kill off the British upper class characters in his novel. In addition, Jenkins' own political beliefs would have prevented him from condoning revolution. As Poynting suggests, "Jenkins, as a political reformist, has no concept of the just revolt. He can identify with Dilloo the sufferer, but not Dilloo the underground leader" (216).

It is also worth noting that Jenkins does not depict any nonbonded field laborers. Though former slaves often joined together and worked in gangs, moving from plantation to plantation and offering their services in a form of collective bargaining, this kind of labor is notably absent from the text. The Afro-Guyanese characters who appear in the text, with the exception of the grotesque figure of the obeah man, who lives in the woods, are all house servants, and express no discontent with their roles. The planters had justified the need for indentured labor by arguing that there was a severe labor shortage, but as Madhavi Kale writes, "the alleged 'labor shortage' ...reflected colonial proprietors' determination to continue to use imperial discursive, material and human resources to protect privileges they had long enjoyed in colonial labor

relations, and in imperial trade” (*Casting Labor* 90). Planters used indentured labor as a means of maintaining a tight hold on the labor force and providing competition for the former slaves. Jenkins is careful not to challenge this view, depicting only Indian and Chinese indentured laborers.

In addition to focusing on certain forms of labor, Jenkins also focuses on specific, standardized views of relationships between men and women. Throughout the novel, there is a clear hierarchy of race, with Europeans as the most civilized, followed by Indians, Chinese, and Africans, and the level of civilization of each race is indicated by the way the men of the race treat the women. Though Jenkins gives his Indian characters a degree of humanity, he is not so generous with the other races that appear in his novel. While the Indians are often compared to children or dogs, the Afro-Guyanese are compared to gorillas. Sarcophagus, servant to the Marstons, is described as an ignorant ape: “If you tossed him a bundle of words, he used them as a gorilla would use a bundle of sticks. He unaccountably mixed and twisted them up together, her tore them to shreds between his teeth” (133-4), and the obeah man who appears at the end of the novel is described as having “baboon-like features” and “lips like those of a hippopotamus” (353).

Simon Pete, Drummond’s servant, gets slightly better treatment. Though he is not compared to an animal, he is shown as an amoral and ridiculous figure who takes advantage of women. A hypocritical preacher, he has a child with a rich widow, Susan Sankey, and maintains an intimate relationship with her, while simultaneously promising Rosalind Dallas that he will marry her. Pete is eventually pressured to marry Susan when she draws Drummond’s attention to the fact that she and Pete have a child together but are unmarried. Apparently unaware of the irony inherent in him making moral judgments, Drummond responds, “Well then, you

scoundrel, why don't you marry the woman? Don't stand there quoting texts at her you old hypocrite!" (236) The ceremony turns into something of a farce, as Rosalind appears and challenges Pete on the altar, though Susan appeals to her and the wedding eventually continues. Later in the text, Pete is shown to have changed his ways and is a more thoughtful and honest soul, clearly having been changed by the beneficial influence of marriage.

Just as the Indian laborers were seen as a buffer between the African workers and the European ruling class, the Indian characters are shown as midway between Africans and Europeans in their treatment of women. Hunoomaun shows no respect towards the Indian women in the novel – he attempts to rape Lutchmee more than once, and develops a relationship with Ramdoolah, a woman on the estate, only because she offers to help him get revenge on Dilloo.

By contrast, Lutchmee and Dilloo are described as having an honest, genuine, and pure love, at least initially. The two are proud of each other, and though their marriage is an arranged one, “the mutual liking that had sprung up between them grew into a genuine and pure affection...they seemed to have been fitted by nature for each other's company” (36). They are shown as ideals of traditional gender roles: “Lutchmee almost idolized her strong, active husband: he dwelt with pride on his wife's beauty, her obedience her humility, her love and attention” (36). At first he protects her from harm and treats her with respect, but this changes over the course of the novel. Dilloo's cruelty to Lutchmee suggests that, while the Indian men are not as barbaric as the Afro-Guyanese men, they are capable of viciousness towards women. Made hard and suspicious by his treatment by the overseers and managers, Dilloo begins to lose faith in his wife. He watches with resentment the friendship that develops between Craig and Lutchmee, and after Lutchmee chides Dilloo for not greeting Craig with more hospitality, Dilloo

beats her for the first time. Though this attack is meant to indicate that Dilloo's savage nature has been revealed, his aggression can be read as a dynamic of unequal power relationships that has been described by postcolonial theorists such as Frantz Fanon: those who lack power, unable to strike back at their oppressors, will often take out their frustration and anger on those who are less powerful than them, usually women and children.⁷

This tension reaches its peak after Lutchmee interferes with Dilloo's attempt on the magistrate's life, and he feels only hatred towards her, wishing to kill her. They reconcile at the end of the novel when Dilloo is on his deathbed, but the novel clearly indicates that their relationship is corruptible. Jenkins, a staunch supporter of empire and British superiority, has put himself in something of a bind with this depiction. Though Dilloo treats Lutchmee brutally, he is driven to do so by all of the injustices that he has faced at the hands of the Europeans. Had Lutchmee and Dilloo remained in India, their love would have remained innocent and pure. Jenkins suggests, perhaps without meaning to, that the unequal labor relations of indenture and capitalism are corrupting.

Finally, we are presented with the idealized relationship between Craig and Isabel, the magistrate's daughter. It is depicted as a passionate yet chaste romance that develops when Isabel visits Craig in the hospital. Isabel, nicknamed Bella, is the ideal of white beauty. Her "delicate features" seem "to shine with a glorious light," her skin is "ivory" and her neck, "an alabaster tower" gives her "a loveliness lily-like" (120). Though Jenkins does not challenge notions of racial divisions, with Isabel and Craig, he challenges class divisions: Isabel is the daughter of a government official and descended from nobility, while Craig is a low-class worker. As the magistrate discusses Craig with Isabel, Jenkins uses Marston's old-fashioned

⁷ See *Wretched of the Earth* for Fanon's discussion of this dynamic.

ideas of propriety to mock strict ideas of class and nobility: ““Do you think any one would associate your name with that of a Scottish overseer lad...Every one perfectly understands the footing on which all these people are permitted to hold intercourse with us”” (139). But of course, Isabel and Craig do develop a romance, which is depicted as a model of civilized interactions between a man and a woman. Craig is excessively polite and respectful towards Isabel, refusing to give in to his feelings for her until she has indicated that she loves him.

To emphasize the noble quality of their relationship and Craig’s chivalrous treatment of Isabel, Craig saves Isabel from danger in a chapter titled “Knight and Lady.” As Isabel walks home, a group of laborers blocks her path and begins to threaten her. It is actually Dilloo who saves her from harm, jumping into the group and pushing them away from her. Yet it is Craig who is depicted as the hero and the knight. As he walks her home, he “felt all the pleasure of a *preux chevalier* who had released his dame, and she all the bliss of a rescued lady-lorn leaning on the arm of her deliverer” (272, emphasis original). Their relationship is depicted as the ideal relationship between a man and a woman, giving the Europeans the justification to claim moral superiority.

This justification is reflected in many of the policies that the British implemented in India. Colonial officials abolished practices that they considered barbaric, such as *sati*, the act of a widow committing suicide by throwing herself on the funeral pyre of her husband. In an oft-cited quote, Gayatri Spivak writes that, “The abolition of this rite by the British has been generally understood as a case of ‘White men are saving brown women from brown men’” (93). This justification is evident in the dynamic between Craig, Lutchmee, Hunoomaun and Dilloo. Craig exposes Lutchmee to ideas of refinement and civilization, protects her from Hunoomaun, and even saves her from her own husband, who wants to kill her. Lutchmee represents the

innocent, exotic beauty of India, while Hunoomaun and even Dilloo represent the uncivilized, animalistic, self-destructive side of India. Writ large, this can be seen as a metaphor for the nations involved in the system of indenture; Britain acts as protector and savior, rescuing India from herself.

Yet, there is an inconsistency between Jenkins' stated ideology and the events of his novel. Jenkins clearly states that the cruelties of the system turned Dilloo against his wife. As Dilloo contemplates his hatred for Lutchmee, Jenkins writes his most dramatic indictment of the system: "an artificial system of indenture, with the laws that defined and regulated it, had succeeded in moulding out of a manly, tender, generous, and loving character, a hard, unnatural and ferocious savage" (331). His language suggests that the oppressiveness of indenture has had the opposite of its stated intention; rather than civilizing a barbarian race, it has taken a noble man and turned him savage. Jenkins argues that the system is worth saving, but the events of the novel suggest that the whole system is corrupt, and corrupts all those involved. As Jeremy Poynting notes, "As a manager, the true logic of the novel suggests, Craig could well become another Drummond" (217-8).

This inconsistency can be attributed to Jenkins' anxiety about the fragmenting of the British Empire. In *The Colonial Question*, a collection of three essays by Jenkins about the state of the empire, published in 1871, Jenkins advocates the consolidation of all of Britain's colonies into a federation as the solution to the growing threat of "imperial dissolution" (3). He describes the relationship between Britain and her colonies as one of "mutual dependency" and "mutual support" (53) and argues that the colonies are an essential source "of capital, of labour, of talent" (77), and of military strength. He acknowledges that greed plays a part in Empire: "there are colonies like India, Ceylon, and Hong Kong, which British avarice would never consent to

abandon” (61). At the same time, he maintains that Britain’s colonies are incapable of governing themselves, and to “abandon...the West Indies...would...consign [it] to what would be an inevitable barbarism” (63), that the empire brings peace to diverse factions of people who would descend into war without the “unity of federation” (63).

Furthermore, he points out that giving colonies independence did not mean they would not then be colonized by Germany, Russia or the United States. He seems particularly aware of the growing power of the latter, especially in regards to Canada. Jenkins implies that the only reason the United States had not invaded Canada was that Britain protected it: “What now restrains the unbridled lust for dominion of such a democracy but the waving of the Imperial flag over the ungarrisoned fortresses of Canada?” (62) He also raises the specter of American dominance by quoting an American diplomat: ““*The United States is watching, and I guess she’ll pick up everything you let drop*”” (20, emphasis original). This anxiety is reflected in the tensions of *Lutchmee and Dilloo*. While Jenkins hoped to draw attention to the suffering of the workers by telling the story of a young Indian couple, he also used their story to emphasize Britain’s moral superiority and the benefits of imperialism. Yet the novel reveals more than he perhaps intended.

Ginx’s Baby, Jenkins’ most famous work, is a satirical novel about a baby born into poverty who becomes a rallying cry for a variety of religious and political organizations, but is quickly cast off by each. The nameless child grows up barely subsisting on charity, but receives little actual love. As in *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, there is a single sterling example of British aristocracy – in this case, a lord named Sir Charles Sterling. Sterling is presented as the ideal British gentleman, kind, intelligent, and ardent. He is clearly meant to be the voice of reason in Jenkins’ text, calling attention to the baby’s unhealthy state and using him as an object lesson:

“This being, whom you treat like a dog at a fair, never had a day’s, no, nor an hour’s contact with goodness, purity, truth, or even human kindness; never had an opportunity of learning anything better. What right have you then, to hunt him like a wild beast, and kick him and whip him, and fetter him, and hang him by expensive complicated machinery, when you have done nothing to teach him the duties of citizenship?” (109)

This speech echoes Jenkins’ critique of Dilloo’s treatment as an indentured laborer.

Yet Sterling, like the religious and civil institutions that Jenkins disparages, does little to solve the problems in front of him. He gets caught up in larger debates, suggesting solutions in the form of education, emigration, and redistribution of land. These debates rage for years while Ginx’s baby grows up largely neglected as a servant in Lord Sterling’s club. Like Dilloo, Ginx’s baby turns immoral, running away from the club and surviving by begging and stealing. After several desperate years, he throws himself off a bridge. His tragic death, like that of Dilloo, draws attention to the lack of options available to the poor and oppressed. Without intending to, Jenkins creates similar portraits in Craig and Sterling. Both are British gentlemen who are meant to be ideals of civilization, but neither can prevent the tide of abuses that result from the capitalistic imperialism intrinsically tied to British civilization. In spite of Craig’s kind intentions, Lutchmee and Dilloo remain merely “machines to make money.”

Unlike Edward Jenkins, A.R.F. Webber lived his whole life in the Caribbean. Born in Tobago in 1880, he moved to British Guiana when he was nineteen and spent the rest of his life there. Webber was largely self-educated, ending his formal training after middle school. He worked in several different areas, as a clerk in a business office, an advertiser for a newspaper, a journalist, an editor, a poet, a novelist, and a politician. He was a member of what was called the

coloured class, personages of mixed African and European heritage. As such, he would have been at the center of the race and class tensions that shaped the colony's hierarchical social structure. In the highly stratified society of colonial Guiana, race distinctions played crucial roles, and his mixed race and middle class parents placed him in a position of tension between the poorer, laboring class, made up mostly of Africans, Chinese, and Indians, and the wealthy, land-owning class of Europeans.

Webber had ties to both the planters and the working class. Webber's brother, George, and uncle-in-law, Edward Percival Ross, worked as overseers on a plantation belonging to the Davsons, a prominent English family that settled in Guiana, and there are hints that Webber himself may have worked as an overseer for a brief time.⁸ In his early years, he worked as the secretary for the British Guiana Sugar Planters' Association and publicity secretary for the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce, which represented the planters' interests. Around the same time, he also worked in the advertising department of the *Daily Argosy* newspaper, and later as a freelance journalist, which gave him a broader understanding of Guyanese society and an awareness of the suffering of the working class. In later years he became a politician and a staunch anti-colonial activist, advocating for Guyanese independence and the rights of the working class. Yet after visiting London, his travelogues suggest that he maintained a certain awed and romantic view towards the imperial power.

Webber's political views clearly shifted over time. In his biography of Webber, Selwyn Cudjoe describes Webber's changing politics:

At the beginning of his career in Guyana, Webber may have been conservative or even indifferent to the political situation that surrounded him... Webber first worked in the

⁸In *Caribbean Visionary*, Selwyn Cudjoe reports that he spoke to a cousin of Webber who suggested but would not confirm that Webber worked as an overseer.

cause of the planters but later began to espouse liberal causes and identify with issues that concerned working people. At the end of his career, he identified with the ideas of Fabian socialism. (7)

In later years, he became an advocate for the African, Chinese, and Indian people who worked on these plantations and in other oppressive conditions. As a Financial Representative on the Guyanese Court of Policy he fought for self-government and became involved with the British Guiana Labour Union. In 1926, when the British sought to return Guiana to a Crown Colony, Webber and his colleagues responded by forming the Popular Party. The first political party in the West Indies, the Popular Party fought for self-government, women's suffrage, and the protection and promotion of trade unions. When Guyana finally achieved independence on May 26, 1966, it was in part because of the hard work of Webber and the party he helped found.

Yet Webber's changes did not progress in a linear trajectory, and elements of his conservatism remained throughout his career. Traces of racial hierarchies and an idealization of empire appear in his later writings. It is likely that, growing up with some amount of privilege due to the middle class standing of his family and his mixed heritage, he was caught between the European governing and planting class, who held the power in the colony, and the poorer laboring class of Africans, Indians, and Chinese, aware of the suffering of the latter but unwilling to give up his connections to the former.

This tension can be seen in his novel, *Those that Be in Bondage*, published in 1917, before Webber became active in politics, and set in British Guiana, Trinidad, and Tobago. He wrote this novel to draw attention to the exploitation of the indentured Indians, as well as the unfair treatment of the "coloured" middle class, yet the novel focuses on two generations of a European planting family. Though he expresses sympathy for the sufferings of the lower classes

and fights against some elements of racial prejudice, he does not challenge indenture, colonialism, or even the notion that some races are more civilized than others. Though he attacks Britain's policies in Guiana, he seems to maintain an awed respect for imperial might. This demonstrates the pervasiveness of racist colonial ideology; Webber replicates the very power structures that he struggles against. Rather than challenging stereotypes, he often maintains them in order to differentiate the middle, "coloured" class that he belongs to from those races and classes who are below him on the hierarchy.⁹

Those that Be in Bondage was published in 1917, though it may have been written years earlier, perhaps between 1913 and 1914, several years before Webber went into politics.¹⁰ It is largely unknown, but it is an important work - it is the first novel about East Indians in the Caribbean written by a Caribbean novelist, and one of the first novels on any topic by a Caribbean writer. Like *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, it is far more sympathetic to the East Indians than other works that came before. Webber is critical of aspects of the system, showing the limited control that the laborers had over their own lives. In addition, the two main Indian characters are intelligent, honorable, and strong-willed, unlike the passive Indian characters of earlier texts. Yet, the Indian characters are painted as racial stereotypes and have little voice in the text, and Webber, like Jenkins, does not counsel revolt. At times, Webber even seems to support the colonial mission and the indenture system, and he focuses more on the injustices that the managing class faced than the suffering of the laborers. This focus is most likely a result of his personal connections to the managerial class. Since his brother and uncle-in-law both worked as

⁹ In "Colonial Trauma/Postcolonial Recovery?" David Lloyd Lloyd notes that decolonized states struggling for nationalism often reproduce paradigms of oppression and violence. See also Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, among others.

¹⁰ See *Caribbean Visionary*.

overseers, he would have been more familiar with their experiences than those of the laborers and more attuned to the challenges the managers faced.

Like *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, the novel is written in third person omniscient, but it follows the lives of the planting class, rather than dividing the story between the overseers and the laborers. The novel has two parts, with the theme of bondage running through both. In the first part, which takes place on Plantation Never Out in Tobago, the bondage is more literal. It focuses on Edwin Hamilton, a young Englishman working as an overseer for his brother-in-law, who is the owner of the plantation, and Bibi Singh, a young Indian woman who is a bonded laborer on the plantation. Edwin and Bibi fall in love, marry, and have a baby, but die tragically shortly after the baby is born. In the second half of the novel, the bondage is metaphoric. This portion of the story follows the orphaned child Marjorie and her cousin Harold as they grapple with the constrictions of the Catholic Church and society's prejudices. My analysis focuses primarily on the first half of the novel, which deals directly with indentured labor.

The similarities between this section of the novel and *Lutchmee and Dilloo* are striking. Like Craig, Edwin Hamilton is a handsome and honorable British man. Bibi, the female Indian laborer who catches Edwin's attention, is young, beautiful, and vulnerable. Though John Walton, the owner of Plantation Never Out, and his wife Marion are responsible for many of the troubles that Bibi experiences, they are shown as well meaning, if somewhat narrow-minded. The true villain of the story, as in *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, is an Indian man, a violent and cunning man named Karim whose lust for Bibi leads to Edwin and Bibi's death. Webber, like Jenkins, seems to suggest that Britain's role in India is to protect her from herself. Even though Webber struggled against racism, there is still a clear hierarchy of race within the novel, with the European planting class shown to be the height of civilization.

There are other important similarities. Webber also seems to counsel against revolt. There is a brief but ill-advised rebellion that is defused by Edwin's quick and thoughtful actions. The Indians who rebel are shown to have legitimate concerns, such as the forced and unjustified removal of laborers from one plantation to another. However, their leader, Karim, is depicted as self-interested and malicious, spreading false rumors about Edwin and Bibi and stirring revolt in order to get revenge on Edwin. The laborers who revolt are shown as easily manipulated, whipped into a frenzy by Karim's rumors and rapidly assuaged by Edwin's assurances of his pure intentions.

On the other hand, *Those that Be In Bondage* focuses on the European planters and their children, and their experiences in the natural world of Tobago and the society of British Guiana. The Caribbean plays a much more central role, and the Indian characters are relatively minor. The relationship between Edwin, the British man, and Bibi, the Indian woman, can still be seen as a metaphor for relations between Britain and India, but added to this dynamic is their child, a girl named Marjorie. Marjorie, who combines British, African, and Indian ancestry, can be seen as representing the Caribbean, and Webber uses Marjorie to suggest that the Caribbean is a blending of the best of East and West. In some respects, this is a radical move, positioning not only the British and the Africans, but also Indians, who are often elided in the history of the Caribbean, as critical to Caribbean identity. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall, among others, explores this issue of cultural hybridity in the Caribbean. In his article "Negotiating Caribbean Identities," he lists the many ethnicities and religions that make up the peoples of the Caribbean islands and argues that, for Caribbean people today, the key to creating a sense of identity lies in acknowledging the histories of the marginalized and "in using the enormously rich and complex

cultural heritages to which history has made them heir” (8). In a sense, Webber performs this acknowledgement in the character of Marjorie, who is a mix of several ethnicities.

Though there is a clear hierarchy of race in the story, Webber also blurs the boundaries of race much more than Jenkins, suggesting that Webber did not entirely reject notions of racial superiority but did struggle with them. In *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, with the exception of one creole overseer, the characters fall clearly into categories that are fixed along ethnic and national lines: English and Scottish, Indians, Chinese, and Afro-Guyanese. In *Those that Be in Bondage*, the major characters, including those of the planting class, are of mixed ancestry, which challenges colonial rhetoric around racial purity and acknowledges the frequency of interracial unions. This hybridity is also depicted as a boon, rather than a source of embarrassment: the women of mixed blood are often the most beautiful, Webber suggests.

Women, particularly Indian women, play a key role in both authors’ promotion of imperialism, though the focus of each is different. Jenkins uses women as an indicator of civilization, hinting that the level of advancement of a society is represented by how the men treat the women. Webber, on the other hand, suggests that women, either in their absence or in their presence, are a primary cause of the workers’ troubles. This was a common argument in colonial rhetoric, which sought to blame the flaws of indenture on the women rather than the system itself.

Almost twenty years after writing *Those that Be in Bondage*, Webber wrote a detailed history of British Guiana entitled *Centenary History and Handbook of British Guiana*, which was published in 1931. In this text, he emphasizes again and again how necessary immigration was to save the economy of British Guiana. He notes that the high morbidity and return rates of the immigrants, combined with the low birth rates, meant that the population of British Guiana

was often decreasing, and he saw ongoing immigration as a solution to this problem. Like Jenkins, he recognizes many of the flaws of the indenture system, but expresses enthusiasm for its benefits to the colony and immigrants alike. He chastises planters for not immediately embracing this form of labor as a replacement for slavery, he describes the “Indian field” of indentured immigration as “the most promising” (198), and he writes that the history of the 1840s and 50s “is the history of immigration,” and that “1845 saw the re-opening *at last* of Indian immigration” (214, emphasis mine). Furthermore, he suggests that laborers gained by this system as well. Though indentured immigration ended in 1917, in 1919 a delegation was sent to convince the Indian government to send more immigrants and Webber writes that the “unbiased report” of C.F. Keatinge, a member of the Indian Civil Service, “established the wonderful benefits that were and could be derived by the immigrants” (348).

While Jenkins was anxious about the potential dissolution of the British Empire and believed that indentured immigration was one way to bolster the empire, Webber expresses anxiety about the potential collapse of the sugar industry and the destruction of the economy of the colony, and sees indentured immigration as a way of bolstering the labor force. Webber’s treatment of indentured labor, like that of Jenkins, suggests that if managed correctly, indentured labor would benefit all those involved.

This can be seen in the relationship between Edwin and Bibi. Edwin, like Craig, is an honorable British man who lifts Bibi out of the poverty and degradation of bonded labor. He, too, is a new arrival to the plantation system, having grown up in England. “Reared far from colonial influences,” he is less prone to the racism that his sister and brother-in-law feel towards the laborers who work on their plantation, and having been “bred in the atmosphere of an English public school, he had absorbed to a hypersensitive degree its spirit of fairplay” (6). Both

authors suggest that the plantation system corrupts those involved. Edwin, a recent transplant from the morally pure world of England, is more ethical and fairminded than those of the other overseers and even his own family members.

Like Craig, Edwin is described as chivalrous more than once. He has a clear sense of morality, and he “abhorred the loose relationships practised all around him by his fellow overseers” (27). This self-control is shown as particularly admirable because it is the only romantic option available to Edwin. Because he is an overseer, most European women of Edwin’s age scorn him as beneath their notice.

One major difference between Edwin and Craig is that Edwin is of mixed European and African descent. Marion, his sister, is described as having hair “of that sheen of raven so rarely met in pure-blooded Europeans, yet often found in colonial families – a sure index of some negro-blooded ancestor” (18). Thus Marion and Edwin, though they appear white, are both of mixed ancestry, challenging notions of racial purity. The descriptor “sheen of raven” has a highly positive connotation, indicating that Marion’s beauty comes in part from her African ancestry, while the phrase “so rarely seen in pure-blooded Europeans,” suggests that Marion is not the only member of the planting class with mixed blood. Yet, Marion and Edwin are still classified as European, and Webber depicts them as the height of beauty and nobility, so they do not radically challenge notions of racial superiority.

Like Lutchmee, Bibi has highly Europeanized features and is described as superior to most of her race: “Her bold luminous eyes and Caucasian features had brought many men to her feet...the soft clear tint of her skin proclaimed her parentage to be far beyond that of the average East Indian immigrant” (25). In fact, Edwin later learns that Bibi is a kind of Indian royalty. Bibi’s mother was the daughter of a hill chief, but when she fell in love with Afridi Singh, a

common farmer, the hill chief disowned her and hounded the couple for years. Bibi's mother died from the strain and Singh was forced to indenture himself and Bibi to escape the chief's persecutions.

In spite of Bibi's superiority, Edwin feels great inner conflict before he accepts that he loves Bibi, just as Craig is slow to recognize Lutchmee's humanity. Though he is aware of her beauty and refinement, he is equally conscious that "she was bare-toed and worked like Ruth in the fields" (28). When he first considers marrying her, he dismisses the idea immediately with the thought that "he was not quite prepared to make a fool of himself" (28). Perhaps if he were thousands of miles away in an "impenetrable jungle or mountain fastness" he could consider it, but in British Guiana, aware of the "local feeling on the subject of 'colour' marriages, the idea could not be entertained" (28).

Though Webber mocks the hill chief for looking "to his genealogy with as much punctiliousness as ever they did at Versailles" (38), it is clear that Bibi is only a viable mate for Edwin because of her high-class status. Edwin contemplates that "there was not really so much disparity in their social positions if she could take up her rightful place at the court of her grandfather" (42). This reflects the argument that historian David Cannadine makes in *Ornamentalism*: social hierarchies were just as integral to the British Empire as racial hierarchies. He notes that the British applied the conventions of their own society to the nations they colonized – royalty and members of the aristocracy in colonized societies were afforded more respect than peasants.

The importance of Bibi's heritage is emphasized again later in the novel. Edwin is said to be descended from Napoleon, and so their daughter Marjorie is described as uniting "in her own veins the blood of the old Indian chief and that of the mighty Genius who had stood astride the

world and rattled his scabbarded sabre in the presence of the Earth's greatest" (73). Though Webber challenges race and class distinctions in some ways, he emphasizes Bibi's superiority to the other laborers in order to make her an acceptable love interest for Edwin; an average laborer could not be so.

Singh, Bibi's father, though not descended from a hill chief, is also depicted as more refined than the average laborer. His father was "a wealthy landowner" and Singh was sent to a Mission School, where he did so well that he seemed destined for a "University career" (38). He has an exceptional mastery of English, speaking "with a correctness of diction that was remarkable" (32). Thus, he is an acceptable father-in-law: he is educated and intelligent, and would have been a wealthy landowner had he not married the daughter of a hill chief and spent all of his wealth running from the chief's persecutions. Singh's story suggests that Webber saw colonialism, in India at least, as beneficial. While this was not an uncommon view at the time, other early twentieth century Caribbean authors depict the damages of colonialism and indenture. As noted earlier, Edgar Mittelholzer's 1941 novel *Corentyne Thunder* depicts British planters exploiting their Indian laborers.

Singh's education at the Mission School and his chance at a university education are treated as valuable opportunities, and out of gratitude for his education, Singh gives his daughter the anglicized name of Ursula (even though she is called Bibi). In addition, Singh says that "nothing but the fear of the English Raj had saved his life from the fierce resentment of the Chief" (38), suggesting that British law and order protected the more civilized, westernized Indians like Singh from the barbaric violence of Indians like the Hill Chief.

Just as the antagonist in *Lutchmee and Dilloo* is not Drummond the plantation owner or Marston the magistrate, in *Those that Be in Bondage*, the villain is not John Walton, but Karim,

an Indian man. John and his wife Marion are depicted as flawed but well meaning. The novel opens with a pleasant description of “Honest John” Walton, “forty, hale and hearty” (3) and follows the intimate, playful conversation he has with his wife, Marion. Marion is concerned that Edwin has become too closely connected with Bibi. Marion does not call Bibi by name, instead reducing Bibi to an object by describing her as an assembly of body-parts: “that smooth-skinned, bare-toed East Indian young lady” (4). In fact, it is Marion’s love for her brother Edwin, and John’s love for his wife Marion, combined with a racist, classist disregard for the concerns of the laborers, that leads John to send Singh and Bibi away. Ironically, this, of course, is what draws Edwin and Bibi together.

The true villain of the tale is Karim, an Indian laborer and revolutionary. Though he is described as “a handsome type of his species,” he is also “hot-headed and educated above his station,” suggesting that is dangerous to educate the working class. Equally damning of Karim, “he indulged some of the fancies of East Indian socialism” (26). Over time, Webber became more sympathetic towards socialism. After visiting London in 1926, he expressed the belief that socialism was not relevant in British Guiana, but necessary in London: “In Urban England, industrialized to the fingertips, the strong crushing the weak, and the poor gripped in unspeakable misery, the plant must flourish” (qtd in Cudjoe 74). At the time of writing *Those*, he was much more connected to the commercial class in British Guiana and a firm supporter of capitalism. In this novel, he seems to view socialism as a weed, spreading dangerous ideas among the workers.

Karim is one of Bibi’s many suitors, and when she rejects him, he responds with jealous vitriol, accusing her of having a secret relationship with Edwin. In response, Bibi attacks Karim, and it is only the arrival of Singh that saves her from Karim’s rage. Here Webber clearly

contrasts Edwin's chivalry towards women with Karim's barbarity, writing that if Singh had not interfered, things would have "terminated very disastrously for the woman: these primitive natures exhibit none of the chivalry which is usually found in more developed minds" (26). This suggests that unlike a true (British) gentleman, who would have respected Bibi's weaker nature, Karim would have responded to her aggression with physical and perhaps sexual violence.

In the days that follow, Karim maliciously spreads the rumor that Bibi and Edwin have a secret relationship and plots ways to inflict further damage on Edwin. As in Jenkins' text, this scene suggests that the level of civilization of each race can be judged by how the men treat the women. The Indians, Webber indicates, have not developed as much as the European races, evidenced by Karim's attempted violence towards Bibi and his spreading false rumors about her sexual behavior.

Webber's treatment of Karim reflects a great deal of ambivalence towards the Indian immigrants; his harshest stereotypes and deepest sympathies are evoked when he describes Karim, often in the same moment. For example, Webber employs a common stereotype about Indians, noting that the stories Karim makes up about Edwin and Bibi in order to rouse the population are "clothed in every variety of fantastic detail," and that this is common of his race: "Those who know the East Indian character will readily realize how prone they are to romance every conceivable subject." The tone shifts, and Webber uses this moment to draw attention to the sufferings of the East Indians:

But when it is considered that he is the child of centuries of tyranny and oppression:
when it is remembered that lying and chicanery are perhaps the only weapons available to the defenseless and the bitterly oppressed; we may perhaps spare a tear for the failing of his race. (27)

However, this sympathy is rather condescending, and since it is attached to the description of a man who has just attempted to assault a woman and then spread the rumor that she is the consort of an overseer, it is difficult to see much genuine compassion for the Indians here.

One major difference between *Lutchmee and Dilloo* and *Those that Be in Bondage* is the role played by the Indian characters. Singh and Bibi are fairly minor characters, appearing primarily as a source of conflict. We see only the part of their lives that Edwin sees – we do not go inside their hut, or watch them labor in the fields, or see them struggle in court. This again may be a reflection of Webber’s familiarity with and connection to the estate managers, and his concern for the unjust treatment that they received. Jenkins, having interviewed laborers extensively for *The Coolie*, may have may have been more acquainted with their experiences and struggles.

Webber does draw attention to the lack of control that the laborers have over their own destiny. When John Walton, owner of the plantation, orders Singh and Bibi to leave seemingly on a whim, they must leave, though no reason is given and they have done nothing wrong: “No offense was alleged, none had to be proved...when an order such as this comes, rice beds must be abandoned, or sold for what they could fetch: and what does a forced sale realize?” (15) In addition, Webber uses Karim’s bad behavior towards his workers to note that the drivers on the estate often took advantage of the laborers: “to prey upon the labourers under them is the perquisite of the ‘driver.’ All must pay tribute for favours past or to come: the men must pay with silver, or service, and the women in pain and person” (29). Other than these indications, there is little sense of the laborers’ lives or the suffering they experience.

We also do not see any interactions between the Indians themselves. The only time Singh speaks is in conversation with Edwin. Bibi herself is a passive object. We know little of her

thoughts and feelings, as she does not speak throughout the whole text. The only words we have from her are conveyed through Edwin. When Edwin thinks about his previous interactions with Bibi, he remembers that “she had given little more than a coy ‘Salaam,’” (37), and when she is about to give birth she complains to him “of extreme weariness and being ‘Sick unto death’” (60).

Her role in their marriage is passive as well. As Edwin realizes that he loves Bibi and looks over at her, she sits, “at his table, shading her eyes from the rays of the rude lamp which was all the ornament boasted by Edwin’s room” (34). This lamp is symbolic of the blazing of his love, and she must shield herself from its brightness. When Edwin decides to marry Bibi, there is no question of her answer, only the obstacles he must overcome to marry a “bare-toed immigrant.” After announcing his attention to Singh, Edwin calls Bibi to him, and she quickly accedes. Her feelings are similar to the half-god worship that Lutchmee feels for Craig: “she had long secretly loved ‘the Sahib Hamilton’” (37).

This is another major difference between Jenkins and Webber: Jenkins emphasizes that Craig’s paternal, platonic feelings towards Lutchmee are a model for the proper employer-employee relationship. Edwin’s feelings towards Bibi, on the other hand, are decidedly unchaste, and his lust for her is one of the major forces that propel him towards marriage. As he looks at her, “the blood of his heart would cry that she was good to mate with” (37). Another reason he marries her is to protect her from the lust of others. When Singh learns that he and Bibi are being transferred, he seeks Edwin’s help, expressing his fear that the head overseer and driver on the plantation where they were to go were “men of evil minds” and that he feared his daughter would not be safe. Thus, Edwin’s “innate chivalry...and his animal passion, long held in leash, intoxicated by the graceful pose of the woman whom he now knew that he loved to distraction—

all drove Edwin to the leap” (36). Jenkins is careful to avoid showing sexual relationships between the managers and the laborers, but Webber shows not only an overseer lusting for an Indian woman, but other overseers doing so as well. This suggests that, having spent time on a plantation, Webber had a more realistic view of these relationships, or that as a person of color, he was more willing to show this reality.

In one way, Webber does not accurately describe such relationships, denying that sexual assault occurred on the plantations. Bibi is overwhelmed by various offers of marriage and sex, but Webber emphasizes that she had the option to decline each one: “No matter what may be written to the contrary of the sexual abuses under the present system of Emigration from India to the British Colonies, the fact remains that a woman, under any circumstances can remain mistress of herself.” In fact, Webber is quick to differentiate between the conditions of indentured labor and slavery: “while it is quite true that this question of sex relations between the various grades of labour is a very vexed one, there is no such question of forced relations, such as may be imagined under any aggravated system of White Slave Traffic” (25). This seems to contradict the events of the novel; Edwin decides to marry Bibi in part because he wants to protect Bibi from anyone “who dared to suborn the graceful young woman sitting in his presence, into an unwelcome or repulsive embrace” (34). As noted earlier, Webber also points out that women were forced to give their drivers sexual favors in exchange for positive treatment. It may be that Webber was trying to protect the planter class, with whom he had close relations, or that he was trying to present British Guiana as a highly civilized society. It could be that sexual assault was considered a taboo subject, as still it is to a lesser extent today, and so Webber may have truly believed that there were no such forced relations.

In another key way, Bibi is like Lutchmee – she cannot save herself, but must be rescued by Edwin. Just as Craig lifted Lutchmee out of a life of poverty and labor, Edwin lifts Bibi (and her father) out of poverty and distress. Initially, he believes he does so by marrying Bibi. The practical-minded Immigration Agent General informs him that the marriage does not cancel her bond of indenture, and Bibi and Singh must leave. In an echo of slave narratives, which often featured a wealthy white man buying the freedom of a slave consort and her children, a Creole overseer named Murray advises Edwin that he must buy the indentures of Bibi and her father in order to cancel their dismissal. Edwin is horrified and exclaims ““Why! are these poor people just human cattle to be bought and sold?”” (55) Yet, he does indeed buy their indentures, presumably using money that he earned as an overseer, money paid for by their labor. The Immigration Agent General is satisfied, and Bibi and Singh are allowed to stay.

In the meantime, Karim has been stirring up a revolt, using these circumstances to take revenge on Edwin. Jenkins showed sympathy towards Dilloo’s cause but could not condone his revolt, and so his novel ends with no anti-colonial action by the immigrants. In contrast, Webber shows a violent clash erupt between the immigrants and the police, but shows little sympathy or respect for this rebellion. Karim, the leader of the revolt is the villain of the piece, and his reasons for stirring rebellion are entirely selfish. Rather than fighting against injustices, he seeks revenge against Edwin for Bibi’s refusal of his overtures. When the order to transfer Singh and Bibi is given, Karim uses this “to serve his own ends,” spreading rumors that it has been done to “prevent the immigrants from acquiring independence” or that Edwin encouraged the transfer because Bibi had rejected his advances (29). His “machinations” have worked the immigrants “up to resistance point,” and when they learn that Bibi spent the night with Edwin, their rage

increases. These descriptions fit Karim neatly into the stereotype of Indians as cunning and deceitful.

After Edwin secures the release of Bibi and Singh, the three return to the estate but find it in chaos. In their absence, tensions had erupted into violence between the police and the immigrants, who are incensed by the rumors Karim has been spreading. Karim, seeing that the immigrants outnumber the police, “felt now that he had his rival in his grasp and openly incited the immigrants to drive out the ‘black dogs’ off the estate” (45-6). He is thwarted in his desire for revenge when Singh explains that Edwin has married Bibi and bought their indentures, and the crowd is appeased. Karim is eventually arrested for inciting violence. Webber focuses on the racism that leads to this violence, rather than the systemic oppressions of the system. The police were mobilized, he writes, “Because one heart had cooed to its mate, and that mate was bare-toed: her skin was not ivory, and she bound up the sheaves in the field” (44).

There is a tension here between the laborers’ legitimate reasons to revolt and the misguided way in which they do so. Webber shows some sympathy for the laborers, indicating that they have suffered legitimate abuses in the unfair transfer of Singh and Bibi, the cruelty and corruption of the drivers, and the sexual exploitation of the women. On the other hand, their leader is shown to be a malicious, jealous man stirring rebellion for his own selfish purposes. Furthermore, the fact that he is described as “over-educated” and a “half budding socialist” suggests an anxiety about immigrants receiving too much education and dabbling with forms of production other than capitalism. This section also suggests that the immigrants are easily deceived and manipulated, as they readily believe Karim’s rumors and riot as a result.

Edwin and Bibi live a brief but happy life together. Unlike Craig, Edwin is not depicted as civilizing Bibi. The civilizing influence of the British is a common theme in colonial

literature, but another frequent trope is the depiction of the colonized people as mysterious and alluring in their other-ness. Edwin demonstrates this view, seeing Bibi's cultural differences as delightfully exotic and striving to keep her unchanged by western culture: "Though Bibi showed wonderful aptitude for Western ideas, Edwin, however, resolutely set his face against any westernizing of her dress" (59). He makes their home as close to an Indian home as possible, and "thus was ensured unto him his wife as a never-ending source of delight; never once had he felt that indescribable feeling of disappointment in seeing anything like *gaucherie* in any effort to ape the manners and customs of her western sisters" (59, emphasis original). It is true that Webber ascribes value to Indian culture and shows that a relationship between the colonizer and colonized need not be one of civilizing, but there is still an imperial framework functioning here. The value of Bibi's culture lies only in its charming novelty, the mysterious orientalism that it holds for her British husband. There is no sense that he might learn something from her culture, or be changed in any way by their interactions. Similarly, Bibi is shown as incapable of learning anything valuable from western ideas; if she were to try, she would only be "aping," and the result would be disappointing and grotesque.

Their marriage ends in tragedy, due once more to Karim's villainy. After being released from prison, he visits Bibi, carrying "a villainous looking cutlass" (61). Edwin comes home at this moment, the two struggle, and Edwin is killed in the violence. The shock of this is too much for Bibi and she dies, leaving their daughter, Marjorie, an orphan.

Karim's trial, like much of his treatment in the novel, reflects an odd ambivalence towards the East Indians. In describing the scene at the courthouse, Webber employs the discourse of empire. He contrasts the viewing crowds, "a dense surging mass of every hue," including "gaudy" Indian women, with the "huge marble statue of Victoria...Empress of India,

looking down benign and calm on the struggling mass” (64). Queen Victoria looms above her subjects, who are depicted as a chaotic mass of people, desperately in need of her benevolent leadership and the salvation she offers.

The trial draws great attention from Indians, because it is the first time that a European has died in a conflict between the races: “Many a time had there been conflict of arms between immigrants and authorities, but always had the former only paid the sacrifice of life” (63). Webber briefly details some examples, such as an immigrant attacking an overseer who made advances on his wife and being shot dead, or police shooting immigrants who were rioting. These stories are depicted in a similar way to the riots that Karim incites, in that the Indians have legitimate grievances but overreact and are thus responsible for their own deaths. Webber writes that “Again and again had the police to supply ‘Lee-Enfield methods’ to quell strikes and disturbances” (63), Lee Enfield being a brand of rifle. The phrasing suggests that the immigrants gave the police no choice but to fire on them and offers little critique of the “Lee-Enfield methods.” It is also worth noting that Webber’s novel does not focus on one of these stories, in which a European kills an immigrant, which might have brought more attention to the plight of the Indians. Instead he tells the story of a European killed by an Indian, which supports the stereotype of Indian men as barbaric and violent.

The trial itself is a puzzling mixture of sympathy for and dismissal of the Indian immigrants. The defense lawyer, an Indian barrister, is described as “taking a peculiar turn” and taking “no notice of questions of fact” (64), instead focusing on the detail that Edwin could have chosen a wife from his own social circles, whereas there was an extreme shortage of female immigrants, and so Karim would have had a difficult time finding a wife. This is contradicted by the novel itself: Webber has already indicated that, as an overseer, Edwin had few social outlets.

The lawyer has also coached Karim to misrepresent the story: “it was clear that [Karim’s] own native intelligence had been well primed by Counsel” (65), and when he takes the stand, he claims that he deeply loved Bibi, that he had entered her room to gaze upon her while she slept. He was then attacked by Edwin and killed him in self-defense. In this way, both characters feed into the stereotype of Indians as cunning liars.

In his closing statements, the defense lawyer speaks of the injustices that Indians faced in British Guiana: “brought across two oceans to be shot down, or hanged; their liberty impaired and their wives stolen” (66). This is one of the clearest indictments of the system, but it is difficult to give it much weight, as it comes in the defense of the villain of the story, a defense that is largely made up of lies.

Webber’s critique of the indentured labor system is not a call to overthrow the system. He draws attention to the sexual predation of women and the undue control that planters have over the workers, but he does not show the lives of the worker in any detail, and the one true revolutionary among the Indian workers is the villain of the novel, suggesting little regard for workers’ labor movements. Webber’s main critiques of the system are the gender imbalance and the treatment of overseers. In more than one place Webber rails against the lack of social opportunities available to overseers. In part, this is the cause of Edwin’s relationship with Bibi, and thus leads to both of their deaths. This section of the novel ends with Eloise Funston, the one European woman in whom Edwin had shown interest, learning of Edwin’s death and finally accepting an offer of marriage from another man. If social norms were looser and allowed overseers to interact with upper class European women, the novel suggests, Edwin and Eloise might have married and prevented the “ghastly tragedy” of Edwin and Bibi’s death (68).

The remainder of the novel deals with the next generation of the Waltons. Marion, Edwin's sister, adopts Marjorie, the orphaned daughter, after "brushing aside...the stately protests of the infant's maternal grandfather." This is the last we see of Singh, or any of the immigrant characters. Marion moves to Tobago with her debilitated husband, John Walton (who never quite recovers from the shock of learning that Edwin married Bibi), their son, named Harold, and Marjorie. The characters thus repeat Webber's movements in reverse, as he grew up in Tobago and then moved to British Guiana. As adults, Harold and Marjorie fall in love, but since Harold has acceded to his mother's wishes and become a priest, they cannot marry. This conflict is resolved when Harold leaves the priesthood, but the two experience further difficulties because the church interferes with Harold's attempts to earn a living. The novel ends with the couple determined to move to London, where they will be truly free.

Though Bibi and the other Indian characters are largely depicted as passive objects, Bibi's daughter Marjorie is not a stereotype, and this section of the novel deals equally with her story and that of her cousin Harold. Marjorie is the true heroine of the novel, and more than any other character in the book, she is fully developed, impetuous, intelligent, and kind-hearted. The narrator shares her thoughts with us, helping us to understand and sympathize with her.

While Edwin and Bibi can be seen as symbols of Britain and India, their child, Marjorie, represents the Caribbean. Like the population of the Caribbean, she combines different ancestries: Marjorie's mother is Indian, and her father is of British and African descent. She is both born and raised in the Caribbean, and she knows and loves its history. When Harold returns from his studies for a visit, Marjorie plans several excursions to various notable spots in Tobago, including a large rock outcropping in the sea and the cave that she believes is the setting of *Robinson Crusoe*.

In addition, Marjorie is depicted as combining the best of East and West, though what she gains from each culture fits the colonial stereotypes that appear earlier in the novel. From her mother's side of the family, she gains her sensual beauty: "at fourteen Marjorie had developed with all the precocity of the tropics and her Indian blood" (73). She is also depicted as strong-willed and independent, which she presumably inherited from her mother, who herself combined "the warrior spirit of generations of Afridis" (26) and the blood of the imperious hill chief.

From her father's side of the family, she is exposed to western culture and civilization. Her aunt raises her and gives her a British education, so that Marjorie quotes Keats and Robert Louis Stevenson. Bibi and Singh remain mysterious, but Marjorie is knowable because she is, intellectually at least, British. Though Marjorie is depicted as having some African ancestry, there is little indication that she has gained from this, suggesting that Webber does not see the contributions of the Africans to the Caribbean culture as significant. This is emphasized by the limited space given to Afro-Caribbean characters in the novel, who appear only to guide Harold and Marjorie in their explorations of the island.

Jenkins suggests through the interactions of Lutchmee, Dilloo, and Craig that both India and Britain would prosper if the system of indenture and colonization continued with some modifications. Webber, through Bibi, Edwin and Marjorie, also suggests that colonization has been beneficial to both Britain and its colonies, but adds that the child of this relationship, Marjorie/the Caribbean, combines the best of both worlds.

Though Webber later fights for Guyanese independence, in this novel, he seems more concerned with injustices he sees within the colonial structure, such as the lack of opportunities available to men of mixed race. This is especially evident in the second section of the novel, when we briefly return to the plantation. Harold has left the church and attempts to earn a living

in Trinidad by becoming an overseer. The immigrant workers are entirely absent from these scenes. Instead, we see the lives of the overseers and the plantation managers, and Webber uses these scenes to criticize the treatment of overseers.

In a prolonged polemic thinly veiled as a discussion between Harold and two older gentlemen, Webber argues that the country does not prosper because the sugar industry does not prosper, and that the sugar industry does not prosper because the overseers create no ties. They either leave their position or fall into self-destructive behavior: “no home life, no social element, no anything—save gin and coolie women. No wonder that these young men are so frequently to be found strewn along the byways of the country” (182). If overseers were allowed into the social gatherings of the upper class, he argues, they would create families, they would settle down, they would build up knowledge, and they would pass that knowledge down to their children. As it is, a new crop of overseers is brought in every few years and must be trained from scratch, costing the sugar industry “‘thousands and thousands of pounds’” (203). He does not challenge the system itself, but the mistreatment of the mid-level managers within the system, perhaps as a result of his own mid-level status in Guyanese society. In *Centenary History*, too, he does not object openly to the system of colonization, but to how it is run, complaining that officials are not given enough time to effect any real change: “Ere one could sense the essentials of colonial economics, and reach to the point where his counsels would be listened to with respect or patience, he was transported to another field: to earn anew his lesson” (234).

Webber’s other criticism is that positions of power are given only to European men, not to more qualified men of mixed African and European descent. Murray, an overseer of “mixed colour, though not enough of white to pass” (51) is described as being exceptionally knowledgeable about the sugar industry and indenture. In spite of this, he has not been able to

pass into a management position, “for it is writ large...that no coloured creole may be appointed to a management” (52). The unfairness of this, Webber adds, is compounded by the damage to the sugar industry, because it leads to the “necessity for importing young, raw and untrained Europeans” to work in these positions of management” (52). Again, Webber does not argue for an overthrow of the system, but wants men of mixed race to have more access to management positions.

In this instance, and in other examples, Webber advocates a more progressive view of race, but one still limited by a sense of a racial hierarchy. Many of his major European characters are of mixed race, acknowledging the prevalence of interracial unions in colonial society. For example, there are indications that Marion and Edwin have African ancestors. Eloise Funston, the woman who catches Edwin’s attention, “could trace her ancestry with ease to a manumitted slave of mixed blood” (18). Webber notes the arbitrary nature of the prejudice against these people of mixed race, that this ancestry, were it known, might have caused some social ostracism, but “today they all pass for white, and none are the worse or the wiser for it” (18). Yet, he seems to accept passing for white as an acceptable goal, and objects only to the fact that those who look white are not treated as white. In addition, he falls into racial stereotypes when describing Eloise Funston: “this ancestry may, peradventure, have accounted for her inordinate love of dancing; for these children of mixed blood are emotional to an extreme” (19). He notes that she succeeds in society *in spite* of her African blood. He seems to accept the accuracy of racial stereotypes and the superiority of European races, but suggests that those of mixed race be allowed the same privileges and respect as those of more pure European descent.

Webber, like Jenkins, perpetuates a racial hierarchy of labor in his text, underscored by how visible each ethnicity is within the story. The few Africans who appear in the novel are

minor characters, servants delighted to help their European masters. A “bare-footed black girl...her face all wreathed in smiles” brings milk to Marjorie (100), and an African man named Old Cudjoe guides Harold and Marjorie on their explorations through a cave. When the two later visit Cudjoe’s home, he is deeply honored by their visit: “If Angels had descended on the habitation of the old African...he could not have been more overwhelmed” (116). He is depicted as acting with solemn dignity as he offers the two his hospitality and shows them his house and animals. Webber shows respect to this old man, as do Harold and Marjorie, yet he is still in a position of subservience. While Webber addresses the injustice of limiting management positions to whites, he does not go so far as to suggest that workers of African descent like Old Cudjoe might also be suited to these positions.

This dismissal of Africans is echoed in his nonfiction works. In his historical account, *Centenary History and Handbook of British Guiana*, Webber feeds in to the stereotype that Africans were childlike and lazy. After emancipation, he writes, “there was...no effort made to engender self-reliance and industry in the Negro. He was still a child, to be induced to labour by free gifts” (197). Here he ascribes to the same paternalistic view as Jenkins; inferior races are like children, and civilized races must treat them as such. In an article for *The Daily Chronicle* he writes that it is a mistake “to confuse the higher standard of civilization and culture of the West Indies with that of the African dependencies...where you have millions of illiterate people, practically naked savages, you cannot compare them with the clothed people of British Guiana” (as qtd in Cudjoe 100). In order to emphasize British Guiana’s level of civilization, he contrasts it with the uncivilized, barbaric stereotyped view of Africans, and in doing so he reinforces those stereotypes.

The Indian laborers, in particular Bibi, Singh, and Karim, are only shown as field laborers. They are more central to the text than the African servants, yet, they appear primarily as plot devices. The third person narrator does not attempt to explore their thoughts or feelings as he does with the European characters, and we only see the Indian characters as they interact with the Europeans, not with each other. The sole direct interaction between the Indian characters is a moment of violence; as noted earlier, Karim attempts to seduce Bibi, which results in a brief physical altercation between them. The characters of mixed race also play a minor role in the novel. Murray, the creole overseer, makes a brief appearance to advise Edwin, but is otherwise absent from the text.

The European planters occupy the positions of power, both within the plantation, and within the novel itself. As with Jenkins, this may be an issue of audience. Webber's foreword suggests that his story is aimed at Europe; he describes his novel as a ship, and he hopes that she will weather the storms she experiences "while sailing to the West." In addition, Vishmudat Singh points out that the second half of the novel, which spends a great deal of time following Harold and Marjorie on their explorations of the Tobago coast, has the "exotic characteristic of so much early writing about the region" (48), the travelogue quality of works by British writers who visited the Caribbean, like Anthony Trollope's *The West Indies and the Spanish Main*. Singh concludes, "He wants to explain Guyana to those who stay at home, the clearest indication that the novel is addressed to metropolitan readers" (49). If he was appealing to British readers to relax their views on race and give overseers more access to high society, it makes sense that his primary characters would be European.

The text itself suggests another reason for this depiction of a racial hierarchy. In spite of Webber's later political battles for Guyanese independence, he maintained a certain awe and

respect for the British Empire and its citizens. Throughout the second half of the novel, Marjorie, who has been raised by her great aunt Marion with a thoroughly western education, makes references to great English writers. This is reflective of the typical West Indian education, which usually employed British classics for the dual purpose of teaching children to read and write (in English) and promoting the splendor of British civilization. Marjorie quotes Mary Howitt's poem "The Spider and the Fly" and searches Tobago for the cave in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Robinson Crusoe*. She reads George Eliot, Byron, and Pope.

Significantly, the novel ends when Harold and Marjorie, after a series of misfortunes, decide to move to London. There they will be free from the church's persecutions of Harold, and Marjorie, who has been writing for the London newspapers, will gain the worldwide recognition that she craves. In an act of reverse colonization, Marjorie states that she and Harold "shall...make a little Tobago Colony in London...I can close my eyes and see the world before me" (235-6). London is the source of freedom, where their dreams will come true. Wilson Harris points out that this is especially striking given the timing: "It seems incongruous that Harold and Marjorie contemplated departure for England in 1913...that no inkling possessed them of the end of an age and the impending outbreak of the Great War" (149). I suggest that Webber maintains a view of the metropole as the height of power and civilization, and though he advocates for the independence of the colonies, he also mourns the impending end of the empire and all that it represents.

This ambivalence can also be seen in his journalism, especially *An Innocent's Pilgrimage*, in which he describes his impressions of London. Though he is critical of Britain, he also shows a certain awe for its history: "This is the London which inspired the arrogance that cost the Empire the American colonies; the London which freed the slaves; the London which

has been guilty of every sin under the sun; and has been in the van of every cause of righteousness. What mighty traditions, what fatal errors lay enshrouded in its folds” (as qtd in Cudjoe 72). In *Centenary History*, Webber demonstrates great admiration for colonial authorities like James Crosby, who acted as Immigration Agent General, and Joseph Beaumont, who acted as Chief Justice of British Guiana, who “burnt at any sense of wrong, and the defenceless at once made him a crusader” (268). Thus we see in the relationships between the characters the same ambivalence towards race and empire that Webber himself felt. Edwin, like Craig, raises Bibi out of poverty and degradation, and Singh owes his education and his life to the British government, suggesting that in India at least colonization has been a good thing.

It is worth noting that this perspective is not the norm in texts from this time period. H. G. de Lisser, a Jamaican journalist and author who lived around the same time as Webber, published *Jane’s Career* in 1913. This novel, a coming of age story about a young peasant woman who moves from the countryside to Kingston, is one of the first published novels by a West Indian author, and one of the first to depict a peasant as the main character. De Lisser challenges notions of racial superiority, showing characters of lighter complexions affecting superiority over the poorer, darker-skinned workers as a justification for treating them with cruelty and selfishness.

Finally, the role of women in the novel is an important difference between *Those that Be in Bondage* and *Lutchmee and Dilloo*. In both texts, women hold a symbolic role in bolstering colonialism, but that role differs dramatically between the two novels. The treatment of the women in *Lutchmee and Dilloo* serves as a kind of badge of civilization, linking European notions of chivalry and pure love as the height of development. On the other hand, each major conflict in *Those that Be in Bondage* revolves around women; either the lack of available women

causes tensions between men, or a man falls in love with a woman from a different class, which leads to his downfall. Though the gender disparity appears in *Lutchmee and Dilloo* - there are only two female Indian characters in the entire text - it is much less central to the plot. This suggests that Jenkins saw other issues, such as the government and legal system's partiality to the planters, as more responsible for the suffering of the workers.

British colonizers often used the gender imbalance as a scapegoat, arguing that it was the root of many of the problems of the system. Ashrufa Faruqee notes the contradiction in colonial rhetoric: "The colonial state believed that women were causing the problems on the estate, yet it also maintained that women were needed to solve these same problems" (62). The lack of women, they suggested, led to jealousy among the men, which turned into violence. Without women, the men lost the softening benefit of civilization, and became amoral and vicious. In addition, British authorities blamed the class of women who did immigrate for the degradation of the workers' morals and lifestyle; it was commonly reported that only prostitutes and other low class women could be persuaded to travel under indenture. In the Des Voeux hearings, the commissioners conclude, "There is among the Coolie population in India no class of respectable single women. The proportion of females was accordingly made up 'in the bazaars' and the results were, few children and many diseases" (*Evidence and Proceedings* 53).

No doubt the disproportionate number of men to women did lead to tensions and unhappiness, but the focus on this issue draws attention away from the more systemic ways that laborers suffered – the brutal labor they were forced to perform, the terrible living conditions they endured, the rigging of the system to protect the planters, and the lack of control of their own lives.

Yet many critics today still focus on the gender imbalance as the cause of the immigrants' unhappiness and violence. Wilson Harris writes of the unequal gender ratio and its role in the events of *Those that Be in Bondage*, "Such disproportion--though it had begun to ease—still remained a disfiguring feature in British Guiana in the early twentieth century. No wonder Karim the rebel was blindly jealous of the overseer Edwin Hamilton" (149). This perspective is supported in the text, as Webber suggests that Karim's jealousy is the main motivation for his hatred of Edwin. Both Harris and Webber brush aside the other reasons that Karim might have had for hating Edwin, such as the position of power he holds based solely on his race and family connection to John Walton.

In various places in his text, Webber rails against the disproportionate number of males who emigrate. When describing Edwin's limited options for marriage, Webber pauses to expound on the problems created by this imbalance: "the problems of sex on a sugar estate are the problems of that immigration system on which the very existence of the sugar industry, and consequently the whole industrial life of the colony, may be said to be at stake" (7). He goes on to describe the violent feelings that are aroused by this disproportion, citing as proof the numbers of wife slayers who are hanged every year and the women whose noses or hands have been chopped off by a jealous husband.

As noted earlier, Edwin finds solace in Bibi in part because of the lack of social and marriage options available to overseers, which then leads to the tragic death of both. Had either Edwin or Karim had more suitable options for a mate, the book suggests, all of the tragedy that follows could have been avoided. In addition, Edwin and Bibi are repeating the experiences of her parents; Singh, too, fell in love with a woman from a different class and suffered as a result, hounded by her father, the hill chief. Singh warns Edwin not to follow in his footsteps, citing his

marriage to the hill chief's daughter as the beginning of all his troubles: "I would pray you watch carefully the temptations of an impulsive heart" (38). Edwin, however, promptly ignores this warning.

Women cause the conflict in the second half of the novel, as well. Harold has become a famous and successful preacher for the Catholic Church, but he succumbs to temptation and has sex with Marjorie. He then feels that he must leave the priesthood, which makes his life very difficult for years to come. There is also the minor but noteworthy story of the couple that manages the plantation where Harold goes to work as an overseer. The manager's wife is a stark contrast to Bibi, a caricature of the unwomanly woman, "spare and angular in look, manner and speech. Her husband she ruled with a rod of iron...so far as the social element or feminine softness was concerned, she might as well have stayed away" (183). Her presence is even worse than her absence; not only does she not play the role of hostess, as Webber expects women to do, she has control over the estate's finances.

In his treatment of the role of women, Webber again echoes colonial rhetoric. In *Those that Be in Bondage*, both the absence and the presence of women have disastrous effects on the men of the colony. Women become scapegoats in Webber's text, responsible for most of the problems that the male characters endure, thus letting the colonialism and indenture off the hook.

Together, *Lutchmee and Dilloo* and *Those that Be in Bondage* demonstrate the pervasiveness of imperial rhetoric, indicated by the similarities between the texts' promotion of colonialism, but the differences in these novels are equally noteworthy, pointing to the diversity of concerns for those reflecting on the indenture system. Both Jenkins and Webber draw attention to the injustices that immigrant laborers faced, and both offer the Caribbean as a worthy

focus of literature. Jenkins firmly advocated empire, but he advocates directly for the Indian laborers, as reflected in the focus of his novel. Lutchmee and Dilloo are developed, with complex motivations and interiority, and they have their own narrative. Webber demonstrates ambivalence towards empire and challenges some imperial rhetoric such as the notion of racial purity, but his novel is primarily concerned with the injustices faced by mid-level plantation managers and men and women of mixed race. Webber's Indian characters serve mainly as plot devices, and Bibi, Singh and Karim fall into stereotypes: the beautiful, chaste woman, the wise old man, the cunning villain.

One key similarity is that both authors supported the system of indenture, believing, for different reasons, that its benefits outweighed its flaws. Jenkins saw indenture as an important step in exposing Asian races to European civilization. Underneath this belief was an awareness that indentured labor helped continue systems of trade that provided great wealth to Britain. Underneath that awareness was perhaps an unconscious understanding that indenture bolstered notions of European superiority. Jenkins' anxiety about the dissolution of the British Empire can be seen in Craig's relationship with Lutchmee, which serves as a justification for colonialism.

Webber, on the other hand, saw immigrant labor as necessary for the survival of the colony. Although he did not actively support empire, he seemed to admire it and accept that colonialism brought civilization to Britain's colonies. His ambivalence about race and class leads him to repeat many of the paradigms of colonial discourse, including the idea of a racial hierarchy of civilization and labor. His love of Tobago and British Guiana can be seen in his depiction of Marjorie, who is shown as combining the best of British and Indian culture.

As noted previously, one reason that recruiters in India were able to persuade so many men and women to immigrate under indenture was the devastating economic impact of British

colonial policies. Farmers were driven off their land by the introduction of private property and a heavier taxation system, and artisans were driven out of business by the importation of cheap, mass-produced British products. This led to a growing population of landless peasants, many of whom sought escape from their poverty through indenture. Neither *Lutchmee and Dilloo* nor *Those that Be in Bondage* addresses this dynamic – in both texts, the Indians who travel to British Guiana under indenture do so because of conflicts with other Indians rather than the economic shifts that took place under imperialism. This aspect of indenture is addressed in two more contemporary texts, *The Counting House*, by David Dabydeen, and *The Promise*, by Sharlow Mohammed, discussed in the following chapter.

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Chapter 2

Tangled Up: Gendered Metaphors of Nation in Contemporary Indo-Caribbean Narratives

The University of the West Indies in St. Augustine, Trinidad holds the transcript of an unpublished interview with a 109-year old woman named Doolarie, who traveled from India to Trinidad as an indentured laborer in 1913. In this interview, a rare first-person account from a female laborer, Doolarie describes the degrading experience of indenture. The workers were loaded into trucks “like flour bags” and taken to the plantation, and she points to the scar on her head where her husband beat her with a hoe for talking to another man. Indo-Caribbean women like Doolarie were triply vulnerable because of their gender, race, and class, and they often suffered a perilous existence on the estates. Their experiences have remained largely hidden in the archives of history, in part because of the low status they held, but also because of another, seemingly counterintuitive reason. Far more men indentured than women, and so the lives of the few female laborers took on a metaphoric weight in the rhetoric around indenture. These women became symbols for colonial and anti-colonial authors alike, used to support ideologies of empire and nationalism. As a result, the impact of indenture on real women like Doolarie is often erased.

As noted in the previous chapter, a trope that appears again and again in fictional depictions of the British imperial system of indenture is a relationship developing between a British man in power and a female Indian laborer. The persistence of this trope reflects the tangled intersection of gender and race in struggles between ethnic groups during indenture. The characters often act as stand-ins for their home nations, and the relationship between them serves as an analogy for colonialism. For example, authors writing at the time of indentured labor used

this relationship to justify indenture and the colonial system that depended on it. In Edward Jenkins' *Lutchmee and Dilloo* (1877), the British man rescues the Indian woman, lifting her from poverty and introducing her to refined ideas, suggesting that Britain would protect India from her own barbaric tendencies and expose her to civilization and Christianity.

Two contemporary authors, David Dabydeen and Sharlow Mohammad, who writes under the name Sharlow, use this same relationship to demonstrate the devastating impact of colonialism. David Dabydeen's *The Counting House*, published in 1996, focuses on Vidia and Rohini, a young Indian couple, who travel to British Guiana seeking an escape from the poverty of their hometown in India. Once there, their life improves in some material ways, but Rohini develops a sexual relationship with John Gladstone in which he reaps all the benefits. This relationship destroys her marriage to Vidia, and Rohini is eventually driven mad. *The Promise*, published in 1995, by Sharlow, follows another young couple, Guha and Rati, who emigrate from India to Trinidad. This novel offers a grim view of the British; Rati is repeatedly raped by the plantation manager, and when she and Guha attempt to escape, Guha is attacked and dies.

In both, the British man takes advantage of the Indian woman, getting what he wants from her and giving little in return. There is no sense that he is saving her, and there is no Indian male villain who threatens her or the white men. The indenture system is depicted as exploitative, growing out of colonialism and helping to bolster it, and the relationship between the British man and the Indian woman is representative of this exploitation. If the British men in power in the earlier texts were meant to show that Britain was the protector and savior of India, the similar characters in these later texts treat the Indian women in a way that suggests that Britain used its civilizing mission as a justification to take labor and raw goods from India.

The system of indenture, which began in 1838, went through some temporary halts, due primarily to the objections of the laborers' home countries. As abuses became public, indentured labor became a controversial topic in Britain and its colonies, fueled by the economic arguments of the powerful plantocracy, the human rights arguments of abolitionists, increasing protest from the home countries of the laborers, and the ever present fear of revolt. The Haitian Revolution of 1791 to 1804, in which slaves successfully overthrew their French masters and founded a republic, had shaken planters' sense of security. Historian Lommarsh Roopnarine notes that throughout the period of indenture, laborers engaged in direct forms of resistance, including arson, strikes, boycotts, and riots (49). Revolts of indentured laborers, such as the Rose Hall Disturbances of 1913, in which 300 laborers in Berbice, British Guiana rioted over unfair treatment and police killed fourteen Indians suggested that outbreaks of violence were not a thing of the past. In 1917, the British outlawed indentured labor, and the system came to a halt for good.

After the system ended, plantation laborers sought better opportunities for their children and generally prioritized education for them as a way out of hard labor and into managerial or merchant positions. Second and third generation immigrants began exploring their experiences through writing, and as part of the Caribbean literary renaissance of the 1950s and 60s, there was an explosion of Indo-Caribbean literature by authors like Sam Selvon and Shiva and V.S. Naipaul. These authors tended to explore the recent experiences of Indians in the Caribbean, such as Sam Selvon's *A Brighter Sun*, which follows a young man's efforts to understand his role as a new husband and father in Trinidad during the turbulent years of World War Two.

The next generation of authors, such as David Dabydeen and Sharlow Mohammed, look to the lives of their ancestors for inspiration, seeking to understand the conditions that brought

them to the Caribbean. These authors, writing after the anti-colonial liberation movements of the mid-twentieth century and a century after Edward Jenkins and A.R.F. Webber, reflect on the same time period but with a dramatically dissimilar viewpoint, due to their different subject positions, the many changes that have taken place in the Caribbean, and the political climate during which these novels were written. Both novels focus on the early stages of the indenture period to draw attention to the shifting role of the British empire in the mid-nineteenth century, the more active role it took in India and the connections it created between Britain, India, and the Caribbean, as well as the continuing effect those connections have on the Caribbean.

Mariam Pirbhai writes of contemporary indenture narratives, “[they] present a new frontier in Indo-Trinidadian writing, since they seem to have arisen, along with the growing body of scholarship, through the restoration of and access to archival data on the early stages of indentureship, from recruitment in India to arrival in the plantation colony” (133). This access has increased our understanding of the laborers’ experience, such as the deceptive recruitment practices, the physical abuse that they suffered, and the lack of legal recourse available to them. It has also given us details about individuals, such as the artifacts discovered at Plantation Albion that inspired Dabydeen to write *The Counting House*.

The depictions of indenture in *The Counting House* and *The Promise* address many of the exploitative aspects of colonialism that are left out of early texts. While the British argued that they offered Indians education and civilization, in reality most Indians gained little; at best they shifted from one form of poverty to another and at worst lost their means of subsistence. The heavy taxes placed on Indian farmers, the selling of formerly public property as private land, and the flooding of textile and other artisan markets with cheap, mass manufactured goods from England, created a class of landless, wandering peasants with few ways to survive. As described

in later texts about indenture, there was a connection between the disruption of traditional life caused by colonialism and the number of people who were willing to emigrate under indenture. Many of those people might otherwise have been unwilling to sign contracts of indenture or leave India but did so because they saw no other choice for survival.

Both Dabydeen and Sharlow use the romantic storyline of their novel to attack rather than support indenture. *The Counting House* and *The Promise* begin with a love story between an Indian man and woman from different castes, offering a hope of nation-building across class and caste lines. Yet when these couples travel to the Caribbean, their relationship is destroyed by the cruelties of plantation life, suggesting a rejection of Victorian ideals of family but also a cynicism towards national projects both past and present. In both texts, death is pervasive on the estates. Both male Indian protagonists die, suggesting that these authors see Indian masculinity as a threat to colonial power. In *The Counting House*, as in *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, Rohini's baby dies in the womb, again indicating a lack of hope for the future.

To consider the significance of these aspects of the texts, I would like to bring into conversation two critics who write about family dynamics in Latin America and the Caribbean, Doris Sommer and Mary Chamberlain. In *Foundational Fictions*, Doris Sommer investigates the nationalistic romances that preceded the Latin American Boom in fiction. She suggests that nineteenth century authors like José Mármol and Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, who wrote during periods of nation-building and conflict, offered hope for the binding of the nation through a heterosexual love story between two members of different racial, class or religious groups. Later authors like Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Isabel Allende, critical of the corrupt, authoritarian regimes that took power after colonialism, write against these national romances, offering fractured, tragic, or stultified romance stories instead.

Dabydeen and Sharlow write at the same historical moment and from a similar geopolitical position as Marquez and Allende; in the Caribbean, as in Latin America, the full impact of colonialism in the Caribbean is coming to be understood and nationalistic projects may seem naïve. Dabydeen in particular has expressed dismay at the current state of politics in the Caribbean, describing Guyana as “a dangerous pit, fitter for the habitation of the unscrupulous, immoral, and criminal” (Birbalsingh 28). The anti-romance, anti-nationalism storyline of these novels can be seen as an expression of this frustration.

Instead, both texts offer an alternative version of family relationships that represents a more fluid, inclusive view of Caribbean identity. In *Family Love in the Diaspora*, Mary Chamberlain uses oral histories from Afro-Caribbeans to challenge the notion that slaves and their descendants lacked stable, loving families simply because their family structures did not conform to the Victorian ideal of a mother, father, and children living in one household. Slaves brought different patterns of family from their homelands, and slavery and its after effects forced Afro-Caribbeans to find alternative ways to constitute families. These include common-law unions, matriarchal households, generations living together, and broad views of kinship.

The characters in Dabydeen and Sharlow’s texts extend the notion of family, as well. In *The Counting House*, Miriam supports her brothers, cohabits with a man who she is not married to, and treats Rohini, another laborer, like a sister. In *The Promise*, Rati and Indrani’s homosocial bonds play a more important role than any of the romantic relationships, offering a different view of family bonds. Both Dabydeen and Sharlow reject the Victorian ideal of a nuclear family as well as the romantic storyline of a couple overcoming obstacles to form a union that symbolizes the binding together of the nation. Instead, each points to the flexible forms of family that developed for those living under slavery, indenture, and colonialism, such as extended views of

kinship and cohabitation. This acts as both a challenge to colonial norms and as an indication of the alternative survival strategies developed by those living under the harsh conditions of plantation life.

Yet in their depictions of gender as it relates to culture, nationalism, and labor, these two texts maintain a traditional view of intimate relationships. While both texts include a female Indian laborer as the main character, critics have faulted the authors for their incomplete representation of these women. Sharmila Sen suggests that Rohini's character falls into a pattern of vulnerable, promiscuous female characters in Indo-Caribbean literature and is effectively silenced because the section of the book telling her story is in third person: "Dabydeen's novel, while ostensibly attempting to give a voice to Rohini, finds itself unable to articulate that experience in the first person" (194-195). Similarly, Mariam Pirbhai suggests that Sharlow fails to capture Rati's internal life: "Though Rati is set up as the ostensible heroine of the indenture narrative, her heroism is couched in Hindu patriarchal discourse, for she is typecast as a spiritually chaste devotee to father, husband, and Brahma" (144).

These critics raise important issues, but there are more systemic silencings of Indo-Caribbean females in these texts. For example, the metaphoric role that each woman plays diminishes the sense of her as an individual caught in the system of colonialism and indenture, and denies her a degree of agency. In *The Promise* in particular, the female character is clearly meant to represent India, as she is described as an ideal of Indian womanhood, and her abuse at the hands of a British manager is symbolic of the rape of her homeland by the British colonizers. This maintains the view of women as the bearers of culture who must be protected and controlled, and whose virtue must be fought over. The use of rape as symbol also minimizes the

impact of sexual abuse, suggesting that it is only meaningful when it is indicative of the subjugation of a whole people.

In addition, in some ways, the women are depicted as strong, independent characters, but other aspects of the novel undermine this view. For example, both Rohini and Rati travel to the Caribbean with their husbands, while in reality, the majority of women who traveled under indenture were not married. The 1915 McNeil-Lal Reports states that “The women who come out consist as to one-third of married women who accompany their husbands, the remainder being mostly widows and women who have run away from their husbands or been put away from them” (313)

Very few fictional narratives about indenture depict single women. The main characters are usually males traveling alone or a male and female couple, which suggests that images of labor remain highly gendered. When we imagine workers performing physical labor, we imagine men, even though in many traditional cultures, women perform the majority of the hard labor. Chandra Mohanty notes that in developing societies, it is usually women who perform agricultural and factory work, yet women are often defined as “housewives” as opposed to “workers.” She writes, “The effects of this definition of labor is not only that it makes women’s labor and its costs invisible, but that it undercuts women’s agency by defining them as victims of a process of pauperization or of ‘tradition’ or ‘patriarchy,’ rather than as agents capable of making their own choices” (151). Similarly, the female characters, like Rati and Rohini, who indenture with their husbands, tend to obscure the real women who traveled alone under indenture. In addition, it codes these characters as “wives,” thus limiting their role and placing them in a recognizable, “safe” category for women.

The remainder of this chapter will explore the ways that *The Counting House* and *The Promise* expose the brutality of indenture, the destructiveness of imperialism, and the dangers of neocolonialism, but also maintain traditional patriarchal views of Indo-Caribbean women.

David Dabydeen is an Indo-Guyanese writer and the descendant of indentured laborers. He was born in 1955, on a sugar plantation in Berbice, Guyana. At the time, Guyana was still a colony of Britain, gaining independence in 1966. During his childhood, the colony was in a state of political turmoil, and in 1964 his family moved from New Amsterdam back to his family village of Brighton to escape race riots. When Dabydeen was thirteen years old, he moved to London to join his father, in part to avoid increasing violence against Indo-Guyanese. In London, he continued to face prejudice and violence. His highly autobiographical novel, *The Intended* focuses on this time period, and his lack of a sense of belonging. At 18, he won a scholarship to Cambridge to read English, where he earned his Bachelor's Degree in 1978. In 1982 he earned a PhD in 18th century literature and art at University College London. He worked as a professor, then director of the Centre for Caribbean Studies at the University of Warwick in Coventry, and since 2010, he has been the Guyanese ambassador to China.

Dabydeen is best known for his poetry: his first collection, *Slave Song*, which gives voice to African slaves and Indian laborers in the Caribbean, was published in 1984 and won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize. It was praised for its use of a harsh but lyrical Guyanese Creole and its subversion of British colonial literature and criticism. *Coolie Odyssey* (1988), his second book of poetry, deals with the displacements and longings of immigrants who travel from the Caribbean to Britain and back. *Turner*, first published in 1994, is a long narrative poem written in response to J.M.W. Turner's 1840 painting *The Slave Ship*, which depicts a ship leaving

human bodies floating in its wake. His novels include *The Intended*, published in 1991, a semi-autobiographical novel about an Indo-Guyanese boy who is abandoned by his father while living in London. This novel won the Guyana Prize for Literature. *Harlot's Progress* (1999), is based on a series of pictures painted by William Hogarth in 1732 and develops the story of Hogarth's black slave boy. *Our Lady of Demerara*, Dabydeen's most recent novel, was published in 2004. Dabydeen was awarded the title of fellow of the Royal Society of Literature – he is the only Guyanese writer to be given this award, and the second West Indian writer, after V.S. Naipaul.

Interviews with Dabydeen reveal that he was strongly influenced by the political turmoil he witnessed in Guyana as a child before emigrating to England. In one interview, he attacked the process of decolonization in the 50s and 60s: “The CIA and the British government ‘fixed’ Guyana’s history. They fixed it historically and then when they left, they fixed who would be in positions of power. As a result of their political corruption, we all had to flee” (Macedo 133). He has also drawn attention to the abuse of natural resources in underdeveloped nations: “the West is slowly destroying not just large parts of the planet, those parts that are specifically in the Third World by a kind of an indiscriminate, almost a brutish use of resources” (Macedo 128). He suggests that climate change disproportionately affects Third World nations, and that if the sea level rises another few inches, “that’s the end of Guyana, never mind Guyanese literature. We’d have to be writing from boats!” (129). Finally, he condemns the financial aspect of neocolonialism: “Economically, of course, the fact is that we still bleed the Third World. There’s more money coming into the West from debt repayments than there’s going out in terms of new loans. It’s like mugging a beggar...it’s very unsubtle; it’s just the banks grabbing chunks of rainforest, and chunks of people’s hard-earned foreign exports” (Macedo 129).

The Counting House can be seen as a response to these experiences. It is based on real artifacts discovered on Plantation Albion, the plantation belonging to John Gladstone. John Gladstone was the first planter to petition the British government for Indian laborers, and in a sense is the architect of the migration of Indian indentured laborers. In the preface, Dabydeen explains that the artifacts that were found included “a cow-skin purse, a child’s tooth, an ivory button, a drawing of the Hind God, Rama, haloed by seven stars, a set of iron needles, some kumari seeds, and an empty tin marked ‘Huntley’s Dominion Biscuits’, its cover depicting a scene of the Battle of Waterloo.” The preface also includes a quote by John Gladstone, ““No account of the coolie experience can ever be complete, for they are but the scraps of history.”” *The Counting House* is clearly a response to this quote, an attempt to fill in the gaps of history, to help expand our understanding of the experiences of the Indian migrants.

The novel has received mixed critical reception. In his review, Charles P. Sarvan suggests that the novel lacks empathy: “This text treats degraded lives degradingly. The depiction of poverty is contemptuous; the character, mind and efforts of the workers cruelly ridiculed” (635). He argues that Dabydeen blames the characters for their own misery: “Failing to see ‘crudity’ as the result of prolonged and hopeless suffering, the novel seems to argue that, because the Indians are powerless and crude, they must suffer and be reviled” (635). On the other hand, Gail Low acknowledges that the novel “frustrates expectations of a redemptive and cathartic delivery” (205), but sees this as a realistic depiction and a deliberate critique: “What happens to the characters in the novel corresponds to the real life experience of indentured labourers, swept up in the anonymous statistics of capitalism’s remorseless expansions across the globe” (213).

As suggested in this quotation, Dabydeen’s novel highlights the close connections between wealth, sex, and imperialism. Like many critics of empire, Dabydeen dismisses the

moral justifications given for colonization and points instead to the economic benefits reaped by the colonizers. In his article “On Not Being Milton,” he writes, “The British Empire was... a feudal structure with robber barons and serfs” (Dabydeen and Macedo 23). The title of *The Counting House* draws attention to this dynamic; the name refers to the building that held the colonizer’s wealth, gained through the exploitation of the laborers. Furthermore, the artifacts upon which the story is based, the scant remainders of the lives of the largely anonymous migrants, were found in the counting house of Plantation Albion, as if their lives were counted among the colonizers’ wealth.

Power is intrinsically tied to each of these forms of exploitation, and in *The Counting House*, sexual relations are closely connected to power. Foucault notes that sexuality appears as “an especially dense transfer point for relations of power” (103). In this novel, having access to money and sex is both a signifier of and a means to increase power. This is true both of those in power and those who seek to gain power; power does not flow in only one direction.

Dabydeen seeks to expose and upend that power dynamic, in part by imagining the lives of those migrants and establishing their place in colonial history. This is reflected in the structure of the novel. Dabydeen splits the novel into three sections, each told from the point of view of a different character – Rohini, a female indentured laborer, Kampta, an Indian laborer who is not bound by indenture, and Miriam, a former slave. This helps convey the variety of experiences of the laborers who were silenced by imperialism, but it also forms a solidarity that is invisible to the characters themselves. While the Indian and African characters tend to see each other as rivals, the reader sees the similarity of their suffering as laborers on a British plantation.

Additionally, in order to capture the disjointed experience of the laborers, whose lives were dramatically altered by their immigration to Guiana, *The Counting House* is written in

fragmented chronology, beginning two years into the indenture of the main characters in British Guiana and then flashing back to their time in India. This fragmentation emphasizes the difference between their expectations of life in Guiana, where they believed that they would rapidly gain wealth and status, and the reality of the physical and emotional toll of indenture. Gail Low notes that the characters use the same Creole slang and folk expressions both in Guiana and in the flashback scenes that take place in their village in India. She suggests that, “this has the effect of making the world of the village community echo the world of Plantation Albion, as if the latter has corrupted – against apparent causal logic – even the temporal space of the former” (215).

Dabydeen does not romanticize India before colonialism. Rohini, described as “a low-caste, dark-skinned, barefooted girl” (28) lives with her widowed mother in grinding poverty. To lift her spirits, Rohini polishes their few treasured belongings, “their insurance against starvation: the silver anklet belonging to her mother, two brass lotas, an enamel plate painted with maharajas on elephants” (28). The image on the plate is a sign of the inequality of wealth and the cruelty of the caste system; while maharajas ride on elephants, poor peasants treasure a piece of pottery imprinted with their image. In both India and Guiana, Dabydeen suggests, the poor are exploited by the wealthy.

In an interview, Dabydeen said “I reject any notion of home that is idyllic...India was a desperate and, in some ways, turmoiled place. We were...enslaved in the caste system and the women were enslaved in the sati system” (Dabydeen and Macedo 134). Dabydeen’s critical view of India is particularly striking when compared with the way it is depicted in other novels about indentured labor. Both Jenkins in *Lutchmee and Dilloo* and Sharlow in *The Promise* describe India in Edenic terms, though for very different purposes. In *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, India is

shown to be a sort of primitive paradise where the young couple lead a life of childlike simplicity, threatened only by the evil of other Indians. This romantic view supports the view of India as an exotic, uncivilized land in comparison to the well-structured world of industrial England. Sharlow's novel, *The Promise*, also depicts India as an idyllic world, but with a different purpose; he indicates that this Eden was destroyed by colonialism, suggesting nostalgia for a home that never really existed. By contrast, Dabydeen certainly depicts the damages of colonialism, but shows that the exploitation of the poor in India did not begin with British imperialism.

At first, the novel seems to follow the pattern of national romances as described by Doris Sommer, in which a young couple overcome obstacles in order to be together, offering hope for the nation. Rohini marries a young, handsome and relatively wealthy man, Vidia, briefly suggesting that love can overcome class barriers. However, this symbolic hope does not last long. Rohini is unhappy, chaffing under the restrictions and demands of her mother-in-law and frustrated with Vidia's dependence on his parents. When a labor recruiter visits the town and describes Britain's colonization of the Caribbean, she is drawn to his propaganda:

“British people them come and clear away all we mud and bamboo huts and put up things like this,’ he said proudly, showing them a drawing of the Governor’s residence – a massive building surrounded by colonnades, its arches enriched with white marble and coloured stone.” (46)

Of course, the building is the home of the head of the colonial government, and is no more accessible to her than the palaces of the maharajas who ride elephants. Nevertheless, Rohini is lured by the recruiter's descriptions and the promise of life beyond her hut.

As noted earlier, in the years since indenture has ended, historians have explored the ways that British imperialism upset traditional village life in India, which increased the number of people willing to indenture. The events of the novel begin shortly after the Indian Rebellion of 1857, which was one of the leading factors in the increase of Indians indenturing. There was brutality on both sides of the rebellion; rioting Indians killed many European civilians as well as soldiers, and in retribution, the British Army summarily executed great numbers of Indians, claiming they were involved in the revolt. The British targeted Muslims in particular, viewing the uprising as an Islamic movement, although Hindus were also involved. In *The Counting House*, the recruiter draws in the villagers by describing the rebellion and the British army's retribution: "Less than one hundred miles from here, Muslim slaughtering and British fighting back, killing everybody, they don't care who is sow-keeper from Hindu" (47).

Rohini takes advantage of the chaos caused by the recruiter's visit, and in some ways, she is an example of the ways that Indian women worked against cultural gender restrictions in order to improve their lives. She takes radical action, secretly poisoning the family's cow so that when it dies, the family will believe they are cursed and move to another town, and she and Vidia will be free to indenture. However, it is worth noting that she does not consider signing a contract of indenture alone; she takes these dramatic actions so that Vidia will indenture with her. As indicated earlier, women indenturing with their husbands were in the minority. In the interview described above, we see a specific example of this – Doolarie explains that she indentured by herself because both her parents had died and there was no work for her in India. That Rohini, strong-willed and aggravated as she is with Vidia's helplessness, cannot conceive of leaving Vidia, casts her clearly in the role of "wife."

The Counting House does treat with complexity one dimension of gender roles that shifted under indenture. Unlike Jenkins and Webber, who suggested that the gender disparity on the plantations led only to violence, Dabydeen shows that woman may have gained some benefits. Rohini earns wages, giving her a measure of independence, and she is aware that she could leave Vidia for another man if she desired. Indentured women often made strategic partnerships to gain a measure of protection and financial stability. There are reports of relatively high numbers of women changing mates, or having more than one romantic partner at a time, demonstrating a fluid view of partnership. Sarah Morton, a Canadian missionary, describes a conversation with an Indian woman who said, ““When the last [immigrant] ship came in I took a papa. I will keep him as long as he treats me well. If he does not treat me well I shall send him off at once; that’s the right way, is it not?”” (Niranjana 65). At the same time, Dabydeen demonstrates the limits of Rohini’s options: “What could she gain by them, these uncouth coolies who would throw a few coppers her way and expect to devour her in return” (66-7). Rohini would be forced to choose between different men who would each use her as they saw fit, “devour” her in exchange for a bit more financial security. Being Indian and female, she is still doubly marginalized.

In this moment, intimate relationships clearly reflect larger issues of race and class in the novel. Vidia beats Rohini not just because of her plot against the family cow, but also because of his own sense of failure. This stems in part from his inability to impregnate her. The other workers “gossip about her lack of child, spreading malice about Vidia’s manhood” (112). Vidia develops a sense of sexual inadequacy and becomes jealous of Rohini, believing that her enjoyment of and experimentation with sex with him means that she must be unfaithful. He wonders, “was she learning from the niggers how to do it in shameless ways, spreading her legs

and opening her mouth?” (92) When he beats her again, he accuses her of sleeping with Africans: ““Niggerman digging in your belly for gold that belong to me”” (87). Historian Patricia Mohammed notes that most cultures contain the idea that men’s honor is vested in women’s virtue, and as a result, struggles between men to retain ethnic identity are viewed in terms of the power to control their own women, and guard and protect them from other men. Vidia’s behavior emphasizes this view; in this metaphor, he equates Rohini’s sexuality with wealth that is by rights his. In addition, he seems to have accepted the stereotype that Africans are hypersexual and is terrified that they will offer her something that he cannot.

There is another, deeper sense of inadequacy at work, as well. Laboring on the plantation, in close contact with John Gladstone and his wealth, Vidia has a direct comparison to his poverty in a way that he never did in India. He has internalized the racial hierarchy and the idea that British industrialization is the height of civilization:

To be something you had to be like Gladstone. Gladstone was the science that invented the machines, and the world run by machines like the steam turbines and boilers which made molasses, sugar and rum from a simple plant. A coolie could stay pagan and chew on the plant, or he could learn the science of the machine. To be a Gladstone-coolie was the first stage in becoming Gladstone himself. (126)

Vidia becomes obsessed with earning money, seeing himself as unworthy of Rohini unless he can scrape together enough money to acquire some of the same material goods as the colonizers.

Vidia takes out these feelings of inadequacy on Rohini. As he beats her, she cries out, “not so much in terror of the blows, but of what he had become. Only two years previously, in India, he would not have conceived of hurting her” (87). Though he may not consciously realize it, Vidia blames Rohini for exposing him to these sources of comparison. Had Rohini not killed

the cow, they would not have come to British Guiana and he would never have come to feel a sense of sexual inferiority to the Africans and a sense of cultural and material inferiority to the British.

In this particular moment in the story, the violence acts as an effective critique of the abuse of women as well as the system of imperialism that encouraged such dynamics. Yet violence against and humiliation of women is pervasive throughout the novel and not always challenged by the text itself. Sexual assault is described in casual and graphic terms, as when the recruiter incites the villagers to rape Muslim women: “‘Mouth or pokey-hole or arse-hole, or puncture she belly and bore new hole, it is all one to me’” (48). The men of the village follow this command, raping and killing a peasant named Rashida. None of the characters in the novel challenge the ethics of such behavior except Finee, Rohini’s mother, but her criticism is immediately undermined when Rohini points out that Finee stole two pots from Rashida’s house while the woman was being raped.

The language in the scenes of sexual and domestic violence is striking, not only for its graphic nature, but also because of the connections it draws between wealth, women’s sexuality, and death. Vidia refers to African men digging in Rohini’s belly, while the recruiter, urging the villagers to rape Muslim women, makes repeated reference to holes. These descriptions of digging and holes liken women’s sexuality to treasure, an association strengthened by the fact that Vidia buries his money in order to hide it. Yet these images are also associated with burial and death, suggesting a casualness towards the lives of Indian women. This is further emphasized when the recruiter suggests the villagers puncture the belly of women in order to assault them. Such violence does, in a sense, come to pass later in the novel, when Rohini’s baby is aborted against her will, boring a hole in her belly and killing her unborn child.

It might be argued that this a critique of the sexual violence that accompanied colonialism, but the degradation of the female characters in the novel, a degradation that the male characters do not experience, precedes the arrival of colonizers in the novel and comes primarily from the Indian and African characters in the book.¹¹ In Rohini and Vidia's village, a peasant named Kumar calls to a young girl, "You with bow-leg as if egg hatching in your panty... When period pain catch you... and your Ma stuff you with cloth, then we really see how crooked you does walk'" (35). On the estate, the Indians jeer at Miriam, an Afro-Caribbean woman: "Is true nigger pokey-hair hard like wire broom and scratch up your face when you go down to suck? I hear you got to close your eyes when you go down in case the hairs juk them out and blind you" (78).

There is even a touch of misogyny in Rohini's response to the abuse. At first, she is pleased that Vidia hits her, because it makes him more like Gladstone: "It proved he had his own will, even though it was not as big and important as Gladstone's who was in charge of more than a wife, but nine-ten hundred coolies" (70). Rohini and Vidia have internalized the notion that they are inferior, although they do not see themselves as culturally inferior, so much as lacking the wealth and the power that makes the colonizers great. Ironically, in seeking a better life through indenture, they become more aware of their own poverty than they would have had they remained in India.

Historians like Marina Carter, Shaheeda Hosein, and Gaiutra Bahadur have drawn attention to the various ways Indian women pushed against traditional gender roles within the

¹¹ Dabydeen denies that he is especially hard on his female characters, suggesting that instead he is drawing attention to the fact that "at the heart of empire... is callousness to the female," which he terms "the pornography of empire" (153).

indenture system.¹² Women found ways to supplement their wages, selling homemade food, charcoal, or animals they had raised. They held positions of authority, acting as labor recruiters in India and *sirdars*¹³ on the estates. They sought justice from the colonial administration, such as a woman named Baby who took her former lover, Talloo, and a constable to court for assault when they seized her jewelry (Bahadur 97). Yet these initiatives are rarely depicted in fiction, and *The Counting House* is no exception. Once on the estate, Rohini falls into the stereotypical role of the abused wife.

Gladstone, the British plantation owner, appears in the novel after Vidia beats Rohini, and he seems to play the paternal role of British savior, protecting the beautiful young Indian woman from the violent Indian man. Moved by Rohini's bruises, he lets her stay in his house and threatens to punish Vidia. British imperialists often stated that the colonial officers acted *in loco parentis*¹⁴ for the laborers and used the parent-child metaphor to describe the ideal relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. At first, Gladstone fits this model, but as the novel progresses, his character challenges this view of imperialism, showing that the colonizers' intentions were rarely so pure.

Gladstone is not an honorable British gentleman; he has an exploitative sexual relationship with Miriam, his servant, and he develops a similar relationship with Rohini, even though Rohini is married. At times, he treats his laborers with brutal force. Kampta, an Indian laborer, is caught stealing from him and sentenced to fourteen whiplashes every Sunday for three months. Gladstone turns this into a public spectacle; he has Kampta whipped in his garden and

¹² See Marina Carter, *Lakshmi's Legacy*; Shaheeda Hosein, *Rural Indian Women in Trinidad*; and Gaiutra Bahadur, *Coolie Woman*.

¹³ Drivers

¹⁴ Latin for "in place of a parent"; See Walter Rodney on Immigration Agent General James Crosby's approach to his duties, 151.

watches from the balcony of his house. He even summons the newly landed coolie laborers to watch, as a deterrent against misbehaving.

In addition, while Vidia is abusive at times, he is not a villain like Hunoomaun from *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, or Karim from *Those that Be in Bondage*. He cares for Rohini and often makes sacrifices for her. When Gladstone asks Rohini to stay in the Great House overnight to help with visitors, Vidia insists that she take their only blanket. He dreams of taking a day off with her, picnicking by the river, and walking through the market to examine the goods that they will one day be able to afford. Rohini's relationship with Gladstone pulls Rohini away from her husband, but this is depicted as harmful to both Vidia and Rohini, rather than a way of saving her.

Rohini is initially awed by Gladstone, "not daring to remain in a room if he walked in as she was dusting and polishing" (70), just as Lutchmee is awed by Craig. However, Rohini does not benefit from her interactions with Gladstone; there is no sense that she is awakening to more refined, civilized ideas. She is primarily impressed by his wealth, not his education or his culture, and she finds herself coveting his power and fine things. Dabydeen writes, "Gladstone's bedroom was the only space in the plantation where Rohini felt privileged, marked out from the misery of her coolie status. She moved among his possessions as if they belonged to her. The silk, the silver, the curios, the leather-clad books were hers to pick up, examine...rub, replace" (112).

Rohini gains small favors from Gladstone - he gives her castaway objects, such as the empty biscuit tin that appears in the prologue to the novel, and he agrees to give Vidia a job in the counting house, where he will earn more money and be saved from the labor of the fields. It is clear, though, that these are throwaway favors that cost Gladstone nothing. On the other hand,

he gains a great deal: a sexual relationship, a maid, and power over someone who is willing to do just about anything in the hopes that some of his power and wealth will rub off on her.

While Rohini longs for Gladstone's material wealth, she does not seem to want to be rescued by him. Both Lutchmee and Bibi gratefully accept the help of the British men in their lives, but when Gladstone offers to let Rohini stay in his house after Vidia beats her, she declines, instead returning to Vidia. Her loyalty remains with her husband.

Furthermore, Dabydeen indicates that Rohini's interactions with Gladstone exacerbate the degradation she faces as a poor laborer. Although Rohini's relationship with Gladstone seems to be consensual, it is a source of shame for her. As she waxes a table, she imagines herself conversing with Gladstone, demanding more from him:

“You think you can fill my mouth with your confectionary and do nastiness inside me and afterwards give me empty glass jar and tin-can... You think you can dig me up, put something inside me secretly, then bury me again so that no one can catch you and bring shame on your name?” (111).

Rohini realizes that Gladstone gains much more from their interactions than she does, and she knows that their relationship cannot be publicly recognized because she is considered to be beneath him.

There is little sense that Rohini likes Gladstone, or even admires him personally. Instead, she admires his power and his wealth, and she uses her sexual relationship with him in order to gain power. When she becomes pregnant with Gladstone's baby, she dreams of her child inheriting Gladstone's wealth and status: “Rohini would bear Gladstone's baby, reveling even as it burdened her with pain, swelling her body to the roundness of the globe which one day it would inherit.” (133) That it is Gladstone, not Vidia, who impregnates Rohini, acts as a

challenge to Vidia's manhood. Her pregnancy thus plays on a fear that often arises in diasporic populations, that their reproductive capacities will be superseded by other races and their culture will be diluted.

Rohini's pregnancy eventually destroys her and Vidia. Miriam, Gladstone's maid, becomes jealous and forces Rohini to abort the baby. After the operation, Rohini goes mad, and Vidia takes a return trip to India, only to die on the voyage. Although this may not have been Dabydeen's intent, his depiction of this pregnancy and its effects feeds into the patriarchal views of traditional Indo-Caribbean culture, suggesting that if the women are not controlled, they will consort with men of other races, bringing devastation to the Indians and their culture.

These interactions suggest that the characters have internalized the view of Britain as the height, if not of civilization, at least of wealth and power. Similarly, they accept the colonial rhetoric that the different ethnic groups are rivals, competing for the best of the positions of servitude. For example, Rohini believes the stereotypes of the Africans: "They were lazy and ignorant people, living only for their bellies and the day; their huts stank of unwashed children" (71). Miriam accuses Rohini of deliberately supplanting her: "Don't think I don't realize that all-you coolie people come to Guiana to enslave we. And everything we build up, all the dams and all the canals we dig and all the cane we plant, you people greed for and conspire to inherit" (108). When Rohini becomes pregnant, Miriam sees this as a threat to her own power over Gladstone: "If the bastard come and the coolie agitate, then all my freedom gone. Gladstone could rightly blame me for temping him with Rohini, and I get dismiss" (143).

In earlier texts such as *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, there is a clear sense that the British characters are the most civilized, while the Indian characters are primitive and childlike and the African characters are barely human. Colonial policies tended to play races against each other –

they brought in Indians as a weapon against former African slaves, to prevent them from organizing for better pay and conditions. Planters also did their best to keep laborers of different ethnicities from interacting, worried that they might find solidarity and resist the imperial power. This came in the form of physical separation – creating different living areas for laborers of different ethnic backgrounds and forbidding them from interacting with each other, but also in rhetoric – the colonial stereotypes of Africans as lazy and barbaric and Indians as stingy and passive were insidious, and often led to further tensions between groups. Historian Walter Rodney writes that, “Planters took advantage of the possibilities of manipulating existing racial separation or tension between African and Indians. The notion that races should help police each other was at the center of the racially divisive policy of the colonial state” (187).

While the characters in *The Counting House* don’t directly challenge this view of racial rivalry, the novel itself does, drawing attention to the similarities of their suffering. Rohini and Miriam are exploited by Gladstone in the same way, engaged in a sexual relationship with him in order to gain some small measure of material improvement. Each of the women also has a relationship with another man, which is poisoned by her interactions with Gladstone.

Miriam’s sexual relationship with Gladstone began under slavery, but she continues the relationship because she has grown accustomed to the easier lifestyle of a house servant: “I taste too much Cadbury and sweet-biscuits to go back to when Ma abscond and hunger scratch” (144). Like Rohini, though, she finds the relationship humiliating and debasing. When Rohini asks Miriam why she has not become pregnant Yet Miriam describes intercourse as a dehumanizing experience: “Because they take you from behind. Because they lash you so you can bray, which is the only noise they want to hear. Because they feed in the trough between your breasts or in the trough of your mouth. Because nigger women is her back-end” (100).

In spite of the degrading quality of Miriam and Rohini's relationships with Gladstone, both have some measure of power over him. This indicates not only that their experiences are similar but also that the laborers were not completely subservient to their masters. Miriam has the run of the house and occasionally steals small amounts of money from Gladstone's safe, explaining to Rohini, "If I ask him he would give me ten coin but I'd rather thief. He thief it from me in the first place, from my Ma and Pa and grandpa and all the niggers who old Gladstone murder, so how he can give what don't belong to him?" (108) Miriam is physically stronger than both Kampta and Gladstone, At one point when Gladstone's sexual aggressions become too much for her, she knocks him off, "leaving him sprawling at the foot of the couch, utterly terrified by what else she might do" (98).

Although Rohini does not have the same physical strength to frighten Gladstone as Miriam, she too has some power over him, able to gain small favors such as Vidia working in the counting house. In addition, she gains leverage over him when she becomes pregnant with his child. When Miriam tells Gladstone of Rohini's pregnancy, Gladstone rages at her, a strong reaction that suggests some level of investment. Criticizing the demeaning quality of the sexual relationships in *The Counting House*, Charles P. Darvan writes, "[They] are exploitative or sadistic, unsatisfying or humiliating" (635). While this is true, these relationships serve a purpose, which is to indicate that the power structure between the British colonists, the former slaves, and the Indian laborers is not a hierarchy but a web. Each person entangled in this web is able to tug on the strings and, to some extent, shift the position of the others.

In general, Dabydeen writes against the notion of characters as allegorical representatives of their country - the individual experiences of these characters are more important than their nationality. However, there are points when Dabydeen draws a direct connection between the

individual lives and the larger dynamics of colonialism, slavery, and indenture. For example, Kampta compares Miriam's sexual relationship with Gladstone to the subjugation of Britain's colonies: "So everytime you lie with Gladstone, is England you lying with? When he heave on top of you is a whole country, great and heavy, pressing down on you so you can't escape?" (117) Kampta sees a parallel between the coercive nature of her sexual relationship with Gladstone and the suffocating weight of imperial power. This connection is similar to the moment when Rohini compares her pregnant belly to the "roundness of the globe which one day [her baby] would inherit" (133); she sees Gladstone as a representative of British imperialism and believes her child will play the same role.

Although it becomes fractured by the end of the novel, there is initially a sense of deep friendship between Miriam and Rohini. Miriam treats Rohini like a little sister, helping her to adjust to plantation life. She shows Rohini how to make curls in her hair "like the whiteladies in the photographs," (67) gives her pieces of cloth to make headbands, tends to her bruises after Vidia beats her, and empathizes with Rohini's desire for a baby, telling her consolingly, "The baby will come" (100). This makes it all the more painful when Miriam decides that she must abort Rohini's baby in order to survive, which in turn leads to the destruction of all of the main characters other than herself.

There is also solidarity between Kampta, an unbound Indian laborer, and the African characters. After he is whipped, none of the Indian workers dare to help him, but a gang of African workers "cut him loose, laid him in a makeshift stretcher and took him to their village," where Miriam dresses his wounds and cares for him until he recovers (77). Kampta also trains Miriam's younger brothers in acts of sabotage, sending them on raids to steal from Gladstone. Kampta's presence in the novel challenges colonial power and colonial rhetoric on several levels.

His unbound status emphasizes that there were many forms of labor, while earlier authors who wrote about indenture depicted only the laborers under contract. This shows the flaw in the arguments of the planters, that indentured laborers were necessary to maintain a working population. Kampta stands out from the workers in other ways - he is rebellious, stealing from Gladstone and accepting his punishment with seeming indifference.

Historian Walter Rodney acknowledges that there was a sense of rivalry between the African and Indian laborers but points to forms of solidarity that existed between them, as well. He writes:

The first experiment in 1838 with Indian indentured labor was terminated by the British government because of substantiated allegations as to the neo-slave nature of indentureship; and ex-slaves were among those who testified that the first Indian arrivals were treated in precisely the same manner as Africans under slavery (32).

In addition, he argues that there was a greater blending of their cultures than is often recognized. He notes that Indians born on the estate would pass through the Creole gang, “the earliest socializing *work experience*; and work experience was one of the imperatives of indigenization” (178, emphasis original). He indicates that the Indian culture influenced the former slaves as well – Afro-Guyanese often participated in the Muslim Tadjah ceremony, which has become a firm part of Guyanese culture. This is reflected in the interactions between the Indian and African characters in *The Counting House*; though they do not rise up together to fight their mutual foe, that potential exists in their small acts of compassion and unity.

Further complicating these relationships is the fact that although Gladstone is not an honorable, young British man who rescues Rohini, he is not a villain, either. In fact, he is strangely absent from the text. Interestingly, the real John Gladstone never lived in the

Caribbean. Though he did own plantations in British Guiana, he lived most of his life in Liverpool, England, managing his estates and the laborers who worked them from afar. In *The Counting House*, Dabydeen shifts this narrative, creating a more direct connection between the plantation owner and the laborers, making his abuse of power all the more evident.

Yet in the novel, the character of Gladstone is still something of a ghostly presence. He appears primarily as refracted by other characters' view of him, as when Rohini imagines a conversation in which she convinces him to give up Miriam. Through Miriam's eyes, Gladstone is aging and lonely, even, at times, ridiculous: "a middle-age man rising and falling and fanning me with his flab, and he so excited he fart and dribble" (117). Even Kampta, planning to kill Gladstone, begins to doubt his mission: "What Gladstone do to him to deserve death? He didn't ask to born whiteman, just as Kampta didn't ask to born a base coolie" (122).

During Gladstone's cruelest act in the novel, prosecuting Kampta for theft, he adopts the role of British colonizer as if it is a mask he puts on and takes off. In court, he switches from his curt plantation speech to official-sounding English, declaring Kampta to be "of an incorrigible and unrepentant nature" (74). Hearing this, the villagers are terrified, "wondering whether Kampta had not committed even greater crimes. They had never before heard such words from his lips, accustomed only to his terse commands" (74). The court scene is one of the only times in the text that we hear Gladstone speak. Dabydeen thus reverses the silence that colonial archives impose on the subaltern. Documents from these archives tend to record legal and judicial proceedings from the colonizers point of view, but in this novel, we only hear the colonizer's voice when he is in court, as if he exists only in archival documents. The rest of the text is given to the voices of the laborers, making their lives appear real while the lives of the colonizers appear as constructions of empire.

Gladstone's description of Kampta in this scene is worth quoting at length, as it effectively captures the British colonial prejudices towards the Indian laborers:

Through birth and rearing in the colony he has taken on nigger values to add to his Madrasi instincts for troublesomeness; he is indolent, thievish and cunning, and seeks the company of lewd and faithless Creole women in preference to the sobriety of a settled relationship. He has no sense of the rights of ownership and in stealing from his fellow coolies – a crime to which he is habituated – he creates a web of accusation and counter-accusation among them, which is detrimental to the welfare of the Plantation. The loss of his property causes acute distress to a coolie. It will provoke the most docile of them to the kind of barbarism that breaks out in India randomly and for no apparent reason other than the conditioning of centuries which no English effort can reverse (75).

Well versed in colonial rhetoric, Gladstone employs stereotypes of both Indians and Africans, describing the former as amoral and inherently barbaric and the latter as sexual and heathen. He also appeals to fears of the races interacting with each other, suggesting that they will bring out the worst in each other. By playing on these fears, Gladstone inspires the court to impose a harsh punishment on Kampta, which buttresses Gladstone's control over his workers.

The novel ends tragically. Miriam predicts the fate of each of the characters: Rohini will live out her life as either the whore of the plantation, or as a nun, embodying the virgin/whore dichotomy; Vidia will die on the return trip to India and his body will be thrown into the sea; Kampta will seek refuge from the Amerindian tribes and be killed - his body will float down the river. Miriam will be left alone, crying out in mourning, and only Gladstone will be left to comfort her. Dabydeen describes this last chapter as "one loud creole outburst...where she curses the world and then ends up by cursing herself" (Dabydeen and Macedo155). Though she has

saved her position on the plantation by aborting Rohini's baby, it is an empty, lonely victory, emphasizing the importance of the solidarity that she sacrificed.

Gladstone's absence from the text and his adoption of colonial rhetoric in court suggest that the true villain in the novel is the systematic exploitation of the poor that comes with divisions of wealth and labor. Rohini struggles with poverty while living under a caste system in India, but her problems intensify once she encounters colonialism and the capitalism that drives it. Although Vidia and Rohini gain some small material comforts under indenture, their relationship is destroyed by Gladstone's exploitation of Rohini's sexuality and Vidia's labor, and in the end, their lives are destroyed as well.

This, in turn, can be seen as a reflection of the aftereffects of colonialism that Dabydeen experienced in his own life. In interviews he has made direct comparisons between his personal experiences and historical novels that he has written. Speaking about *A Harlot's Progress*, he said:

Although it is set in eighteenth-century Britain, it comes out of a Thatcherite period, because I don't think that anybody who grew up under Thatcher as I did for those fifteen years or so...could not have been affected by the greed that she represented, and the way she placed accountancy and commerce, free market values, and a naked capitalism and privatization at the heart of social and political policy. (166)

This same criticism of capitalism can be seen in *The Counting House*, in the tight connections between money, sex, and colonialism.

Dabydeen criticizes the exploitative nature of indentured labor, but also uses this time period to reflect on current day forms of exploitation. In interviews and articles, Dabydeen has commented on the anti-immigration racism he experiences in Europe, and in England, in

particular. He has also spoken about the ethnic violence that he witnessed in Guyana as a young boy, which can be seen in part as an outgrowth of the colonial policy of separating races and creating rivalries between them. Guyana today has one of the poorest economies in South America, due primarily to “high corruption, political instability, and ethnic tensions” (Gafar 94). Many skilled Guyanese, including Dabydeen himself, have migrated to different countries, and tensions remain between Guyanese of Indian and African descent, which contributes to the political instability.

Critics argue that the neoliberal policies aimed at reducing poverty in developing nations such as Guyana often have the opposite effect. Organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan money to developing nations, then impose policies that include reducing spending on health, education, and development, and prioritizing debt repayment. These policies encourage privatization and reduced protection of domestic industries, instead focusing on exports. This may increase the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) but also tends to increase dependence on foreign markets and leads to a decreased value of labor, thereby deepening economic differences in nations such as Guyana. India has fared a bit better – its economy is the tenth largest in the world. Yet poverty in India is still widespread, and the nation is estimated as having one-third of the world’s poor.

The relationship between the Indian and British characters in *The Counting House* serves a different purpose than in *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, or *Those that Be in Bondage*. It is not as clearly allegorical – while Jenkins seeks to justify colonialism by demonstrating that noble British men can save beautiful young Indian women from poverty and barbarism, Dabydeen complicates this relationship and offers a much more devastating view of colonialism. In a cycle of domination, Gladstone uses his Indian laborers to gain wealth, which he then employs to maintain his power

over them. Just as Gladstone does not save Rohini, but exploits her, neither India nor Guyana benefit from their relationship with Britain; Britain is callous, casual, taking what it needs from its colonies and then leaving the wreckage that it created.

In this view of imperialism, colonizers are not malevolent or evil so much as indifferent, so far removed by wealth and power from the colonized that they cannot see the suffering that they are causing. In an interview, Dabydeen said of the eighteenth century satirical British painter William Hogarth, “One of the major themes in [his] works is the way that materialism affects ethical, moral, imaginative sensibilities...the cash nexus replaces human relationships” (166). This is the cruelty at the heart of *The Counting House*; the ties between Rohini, Vidia, Gladstone, Miriam, and Kampta are eroded by the power of capital.

Yet Dabydeen does not effectively challenge what he terms “the pornography of empire.” The degradation of his female characters dehumanizes them, and the ubiquitous descriptions of violence against women normalizes such behavior. The character of Rohini in particular serves to maintain, rather than confront the stereotypes of Indo-Caribbean women as passive objects whose sexuality must be controlled in order to protect Indian culture.

The Promise similarly focuses on the corrupting quality of capital, and similarly supports the problematic view of woman as nation. Like *The Counting House*, this novel describes the experiences of a young indentured couple. This novel is set in Trinidad, which, in addition to British Guiana, was a major center of the British indenture system. Trinidad’s history with colonialism, the plantation system, slavery and indenture is similar to that of British Guiana, although its current economy is stronger than that of Guyana, due in part to tourism and exports of natural gas and oil.

Sharlow Mohammed, author of *The Promise*, writes under the name Sharlow.¹⁵ Of Indian descent, he was born in 1949 in Longdenville, a rural township in Trinidad. He considered secondary school “a waste of four years” except for his English classes (“Sharlow Mohammed”). Born into a Muslim family, he converted to Christian Presbyterianism; from the mid-nineteenth century, the Canadian Presbyterian Church had an incredibly strong influence on Trinidadian society, and often the church was the only way Indians could acquire an education. Sharlow worked in a variety of jobs, including fireman and office work, then returned to night school to continue his education. Supported by his wife, he then began writing full time.

One of his first novels, *When Gods Were Slaves* (1992), focuses on the Atlantic slave trade. Mariam Pirbhai notes that, “Unlike those of the pre- and post-independence generation, Sharlow remained on the island of his birth, and his works tend not to reflect the anxiety over ethnic difference that is evident among the earlier generation” (132). This can be seen in the varied subject matter of his work – he writes about the subjugation of the Indians, but also of Africans under slavery.

In *The Elect* (1992), Sharlow attacks the Christian evangelical movement that spread through the Caribbean in the 1970s, illustrating his views on the postcolonial influence of the United States in this region. The novel focuses on the town of Palmist, Trinidad, after an Indian man named Pastor Goberdan arrives and starts a church. He uses his position to gain wealth from the donations of his converts, he turns the townspeople against each other when they refuse to convert, and he exploits his influence to have sex with nearly all of the women in his congregation. At the end of the novel, he is revealed as a fraud and replaced by Pastor Deodat. Deodat, while not as blatantly self-serving as Goberdan, also attempts to gain sexual favors from

¹⁵ At times, he writes under the name “Sharlowe,” as well.

women in the congregation, indicating the pervasive hypocrisy of the church. Importantly, the pastors, though Indian, have strong ties to the United States; they receive their orders from a church in the U.S., they have American accents, wear American clothes, and drive American cars. Goberdan's followers attempt to adopt American accents in order to sound cultivated, and when the pastor is cast out, he goes to the United States to sell real estate.

This connection between the United States and the power-hungry, immoral, and hypocritical pastor suggests that Sharlow sees the American influence in the Caribbean as a destructive one. This is also indicated by the blurb on the book cover of the novel: "*The Elect* is a timely and abrasive satire on the new imperialism of the fundamentalist Christian sects of North American which have swept through the Caribbean...threatening the cultural independence of the region." *The Promise* depicts British colonists in a similar way, as power-hungry hypocrites who profit from the back-breaking labor of the Indians and take sexual advantage of the Indian women. These depictions serve both to bring to light an underexplored aspect of Indian, Caribbean and British history, but also as a metaphor for current day politics, a symbol of the ongoing exploitation of the Caribbean.

The Promise, which was self-published, has not received much critical attention. In the only review of the novel, Frank Birbalsingh writes that "*The Promise* can be said to do for Indian indentureship what novels by Phillips and D'Aguiar do for African slavery: present basic facts of Caribbean history in all their human complexity...these novels show us what works of history can never do: the complex and varied reaction of individual human beings both to historical circumstances and to one another." Mariam Pirbhai briefly discusses *The Promise* in *Mythologies of Migration*, noting that it "provides a scathing indictment of colonial practices and the internal forms of displacement they produced for the local Indian civilian" (6). *The Promise*

does bring to light many aspects of colonialism and indenture that are otherwise ignored, such as the frequency of sexual violence against female laborers. However, aspects of the text are so polemical as to become exaggerated – the depictions of India before colonization are idealistic and the British characters become caricatures of evil rather than complex human beings capable of terrible cruelty. This simplification simply reverses the civilized-barbaric binary of colonization, rather than recognizing the hazards of such a binary.

As in Dabydeen's novel, Sharlow's depiction of a relationship between a British man in power and a young Indian woman acts as a metaphoric criticism of colonialism. In *The Promise*, however, there is a much clearer indictment of colonialism. Rati, a beautiful young Indian woman who works under indenture on a plantation in Trinidad, is repeatedly raped by the plantation manager, Emmanuel Chase, directly challenging the colonial view of the planters as benevolent, paternal figures interested only in exposing the Indians to civilization and Christianity. Instead, Sharlow suggests that the British colonizers were cruel and selfish, taking what they wanted from India by force and giving nothing in return. As noted earlier, this use of rape as a literary trope is somewhat problematic, suggesting that women, the bearers of tradition and culture, must be protected, and minimizing women's individual experiences of violent oppression.

While Dabydeen examines various forms of economic oppression of the poor, Sharlow focuses specifically on colonialism and its damaging effects. Dabydeen's goal seems to be to give voice to the laborers, to make their lives real. On the other hand, Sharlow's purpose is to fight back against imperial stereotypes of India as barbaric and uncivilized and to draw attention to the cruelty and destruction of colonialism. He effectively calls attention to some aspects of colonialism that have not received much attention, such as the ways that the colonial policies in

India led more people to indenture, and the sexual violence against immigrant women in the Caribbean. In addition, Dabydeen's depictions of his Indian characters can be seen as degrading, as they accept the imperial view that they are worthless. On the other hand, Sharlow treats his Indian characters with respect and compassion, showing their value as individuals and the richness of their culture, which perhaps does more to fight against the psychological damage of colonialism.

Yet there are key similarities between the texts. Both *The Counting House* and *The Promise* offer an anti-romance, and both focus on alternative formations of family, such as homosocial bonds. Finally, both texts recognize the potential for solidarity when oppressed groups realize that they fight against a common foe. While this potential is eventually wasted in Dabydeen's text, in Sharlow's novel the friendship that develops between the female Indian characters and an African woman named Miss Mary is one of the rays of hope at the end of the novel.

The Promise begins as a love story set in the town of Gaya, India, in the early nineteenth century, when British military rule was replacing company rule in India. Rati, the main character of the novel, is kind, virtuous, and stunningly beautiful, and as the daughter of a Brahmin she is well educated. Rati is drawn to the boldness and noble manner of Guha, a visitor to the town. Though he is a member of the Chandal, or untouchable caste, Rati and Guha quickly fall in love.

In these early chapters, the novel strives to counter the negative stereotypes of India as a backwards, poverty-ridden, caste-bound society. Unlike Dabydeen's descriptions of Rohini's village in India, Sharlow's descriptions of Gaya before colonialism are somewhat romanticized, suggesting a nostalgia for an idyllic time that most likely never existed. Rati and Mura, Rati's friend, repeatedly tell Guha that caste is unimportant in their town, that "In Gaya, even a

Chandal may obtain the highest stage of life” (8). Rati’s father, a Brahmin, easily overlooks Guha’s caste and gives the couple his blessings.

Yet caste was pervasive in India prior to colonization, and Gaya, located in the province of Bihar, was no exception. Radhakanta Barik writes, “It is the Indo-Gangetic belt of Bihar where the social formation in *varna*¹⁶ terms took a strong root” due to the “prosperous agrarian society in the Bihar region” (185). He notes that even the Moghul rule in the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries did not shift the caste system much, and it wasn’t until British colonialism disrupted traditional life in the late nineteenth century that caste barriers began to break down. Idealizing India before colonialism may help combat negative imperial stereotypes, but it also brushes aside the negative aspects of India in the nineteenth century, such as the widespread poverty and the oppressive caste system.

The text itself contradicts the idea that caste is unimportant in Gaya. When Guha first tells Rati that he is untouchable, she is surprised; she “looked again at his intelligent face, his noble bearing,” (8) suggesting that she expects those of low caste to be stupid and humble, and that only those of high caste are “intelligent” and “noble.” The choice of characters in the novel confirms this bias. The two heroes are essentially Brahmin; Rati is born a Brahmin and educated as a Brahmin in the village’s Hindu temple. Guha, though untouchable, was born into a Brahmin family and for all purposes is high caste. In reality, the majority of Indians who indentured were of low caste.¹⁷ Sharlow has said that he wrote *The Promise* out of “the need to return the pride and dignity of the East Indian, defamed through the system of indentureship” (Milne). That he

¹⁶ Four categories of people in ancient India.

¹⁷ There were indeed some Brahmin who traveled to the Caribbean as indentured laborers, but they were in the minority. For Hindus, crossing the ocean, or the *kali pani*, erased caste, and so high caste Hindus were reluctant to do so, whereas low caste Hindus, who had little to lose, and were more likely to be struggling to survive, were much more willing to indenture themselves.

chooses to do so by focusing on two characters from high caste families suggests that a bias against low caste Indians remains.

Tensions in the novel begin when Raja Ram, a rich and powerful local leader, is captivated by Rati's beauty and requests that she become one of his wives. She refuses, and the novel suggests that this story would have ended there, with Rati happily married to Guha, were it not for the interference of colonialism. The British begin to take over the town and change the idyllic quality of life in Gaya, and Raja Ram gains more power as a result.

Sharlow directly challenges the justification of colonialism as a civilizing mission. The British officials show little respect for Indian culture: on a tour of Gaya, "Judge Jennings was contemptuous of their school and hospital, of their language and dress, and even of their eating habits" (19). The only time he appears happy is when the Indians present him with gifts of food and jewelry. Jennings represents British colonialism at its worst – he is dismissive of the culture of the colonized and seeks only to gain wealth from his interactions with them, rather than engaging with their culture or offering anything in return.

As noted in the previous chapter, historians have identified the many ways that British colonizers disrupted traditional village life. The traditional Indian village system was largely disrupted, and replaced by "a mix of feudal landlord-tenant relations and an uneven system of commercial agriculture, growing crops for the market beyond the horizons of the village structure, and indeed for the British metropolis" (Look Lai 23). The British installed local landlords and imposed heavy taxes, which drove many Indians off their land. This is effectively demonstrated in the novel when the British officials give Raja Ram, the local landlord, full control over Gaya as long as he collects the taxes they have imposed. He introduces low quality, factory-made British products to the markets: "The folks gazed with a kind of bizarre curiosity at

the plimsoles, the gross-looking leather shoes; at the awkward and inferior textile materials”

(22). The situation becomes more and more dire – those who cannot pay the taxes lose their land, while Raja Ram and other wealthy landowners gain more and more property.

The text also illuminates an important aspect of colonization that is not explored in earlier texts about indentured labor: the connection between imperialism and the increase in emigration. Both Edward Jenkins and A.R.F. Webber depict Indians emigrating to British Guiana in order to seek better opportunities. Sharlow, on the other hand, focuses on the disruption of Indian life by colonialism as a major cause for emigration. Though Raja Ram’s cruel behavior drives Rati and Guha from India, Sharlow makes it clear that he gained his power through the British colonial authorities. Raja Ram himself reflects,

What did it matter to him if the provinces were to have British laws?...In return for the execution of the new laws, the governor-general had given him, Raja Ram absolute power. In Patna, the rulers were helping him to build his own textile factory. Ay, he was already the most powerful man, with his own band of thuggees to guard his dynasty. (20)

Rati and Guha decide that the only way to escape him is to leave India, swayed by the false promises of a recruiter.

Earlier texts like *Lutchmee and Dilloo* acknowledge that recruiters were often misleading, but do not go so far as to suggest that laborers were taken against their will. However, on board the ship, Rati and Guha hear many tales of coercive recruitment. One woman tells the story of being offered work locally, then taken at gunpoint to the depot. Another says she was kidnapped in a temple. “Some men told how they were kidnapped, forced at gun point. Others were duped into drunkenness, and when they realized themselves again, were already imprisoned inside the depot” (42). This was a fairly common practice, encouraged by the bounty that recruiters

received for each laborer they brought in. Walton Look Lai writes, “Cases of illegal detention or kidnapping or other coercion were frequent enough to warrant the attention of the authorities in India” (28).

The novel employs a split narrative technique, switching between the story of Rati and Guha’s story, and that of John Paul, a young British man who becomes the owner of the plantation where Rati and Guha are bound. Sharlow strives to tell both sides of the story, in order to give a more complete view of indenture. Birbalsingh writes that the depiction of the plantation owners as well as the indentured laborers in Sharlow’s book “enables us to see the human dimensions of the indenture experience in greater fullness, not just as a conflict between victims and victimisers, but as an experience in which either side felt justified in what they did.” While it is true that Sharlow broadens the scope of his novel, I would argue that the characterization of the British characters is more limited than that of the Indian characters. Rati, Guha, and the other Indians in the novel are complex, with both strengths and flaws, but the British characters tend to be caricatures like John Paul and his father, Thomas Fox, brutal aristocrats interested only in extracting all they can from the colonial people.

This simplification is dangerous, repeating the very Manichean binary that the colonizers used as justification for imperialism. The British presented a vision of the world as east versus west, barbaric versus civilized. The view of India and Britain in *The Promise* is simply reversing that binary, suggesting that all evil originated from outsiders, as opposed to acknowledging the complexity of culture and power dynamics in India and in its invaders.

These exaggerations do serve a purpose; the cruelty of the British characters indicates that the plantation system corrupts those in positions of power. Abolitionists made a similar argument about slavery, that it destroyed the morals of the slave owners, and Sharlow draws

clear links between slavery and indenture. For example, Thomas Fox, John Paul's father, is shaped by his experiences as a slave owner in Jamaica. After meeting John Paul's mother for the first time, "Thomas grinned, hardly owning that the Jamaican exercise had left its abuse and aberrations, its cruelties and complexities deep within his system" (46). He takes Anne as a mistress and treats her as a possession, buying her expensive clothes and jewelry but allowing her no freedom or independence and abusing her emotionally and physically.

In addition, Thomas Fox believes that managing a plantation in the West Indies is the place for a British man to learn what it is to be a man. To convince Anne to send their son to Trinidad, he tells her "Were you to become Queen of England, you would not command the authority...nay half the authority of the West Indian planter...Do you know what it is to own scores, hundreds of slaves, to have absolute power over their lives?" (53) In other words, the way to become a real man is to own other men; masculine strength depends on making others weak. We have already seen how this experience has corrupted Thomas Fox, made him treat others like objects and believe he is entitled to whomever he wants, and as the novel develops, we see the plantation system corrupt John Paul in the same way.

Sharlow suggests that even the colonizers were aware that their moral rationales were a cover for the economic benefits of imperialism. Thomas Fox tells a wealthy friend that indenture is beneficial to both England and the Indians: "The coolie...is to be controlled by contracts and a penal code. For his labour, he shall earn the benefits of our superior civilization." He then adds, "England has at the moment, the capacity to manufacture the entire world" (48), drawing a clear link between "civilizing" the laborers and increasing England's economic power.

As early as the boat trip to Trinidad, John Paul begins giving up his anti-slavery ideals in exchange for a sense of power over others. On the journey, Emmanuel Chase, who will manage

his plantation, summarizes England's justification for colonialism, slavery, and indenture in terms very similar to those of Thomas Fox. John Paul seems receptive to these ideas and shortly after their conversation, he reflects, "his destiny after all, was to civilize the barbarian, the primitive worshippers of idols" (58). Sharlow suggests that notions of moral and intellectual superiority can be highly seductive, especially to a man like John Paul who is struggling to prove his worth to his father.

This is a dramatically different image of British men than those that appear in earlier texts – John Paul and Chase may tell themselves that they are noble and altruistic, doing their duty to civilize the other races, but it is clearly a way of rationalizing the cruelty and self-interested quality of their behavior, and by extension, colonialism. This hypocrisy becomes even clearer once these men encounter the beautiful young Indian woman, and her sexuality becomes a source of contention between the various men in the novel.

The two sets of characters meet on John Paul's plantation in Trinidad, and both John Paul and Chase are drawn to Rati's beauty and dignity. John Paul attempts to build intimacy with Rati, ordering her to attend lessons with him on the tenets of Christianity. It is clear that this is a ploy – he does not attempt to convert any of the other laborers, only the woman he finds seductively attractive.

Chase, on the other hand, makes no attempt to hide his feelings. He dehumanizes the laborers, and the women in particular, as when he asks John Paul if he has taken a liking to "coolie flesh." Coming across Rati half-naked as she bathes in a stream, Chase thinks, "This was a splendid beast" (94). Chase's view of Rati is not so different from that of Craig, the Scottish hero of *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, who compares his affection for Lutchmee to the affection he would have for his dog; both characters deny the humanity of the Indians. The difference is that for

Jenkins, this comparison is meant to show how noble Craig is, that his feelings towards Lutchmee are protective and paternalistic, whereas Sharlow is drawing attention to Chase's dehumanizing treatment of the Indians in order to criticize the British sense of superiority.

In contrast to the image of Craig as the honorable and pure British gentleman, Chase is brutal and cruel, and he considers Rati his property, to do with as he likes. When Rati resists Chase's advances, he forces himself upon her, and then threatens to kill her husband if she tells him what happened. This is not an isolated incident – Chase rapes Rati repeatedly, an acknowledgement of the violence against women on the estates that does not appear in earlier texts.

As noted in the previous chapter, female indentured laborers were in a doubly vulnerable position, at risk of abuse because of their colonized status and because of their gender. In *The Promise*, it is also a metaphor for Britain's conquest of India. Towards the end of the novel, Sharlow makes the comparison overt:

The rape of the sub-continent was in full swing...Realizing that imperialism must be supported by the concept of a superior civilization, the British now held that all things Indian were contemptible. As in the previous system of slavery, Christianity was employed as the forerunner, paving the way for a college of organized schemes and outright lies" (161).

This parallels John Paul and Chase's treatment of Rati and the other Indians: under the guise of civilizing the laborers, they exploit their labor; John Paul attempts to convert Rati to Christianity in order to gain power over her, while Chase, who has control over every aspect of her life, uses this control to rape her.

It is important to note that Sharlow draws attention to the sexual exploitation of laborers on the plantation, an aspect that many previous authors ignored or brushed over. In addition, Rati is a powerful female figure in many ways, using various forms of resistance to fight back against colonial power and survive her brutal treatment; she remains defiant towards Chase and John Paul in spite of the ongoing sexual assault, she stands up to the police, and she eventually becomes an entrepreneur, running her own store.

Yet the use of rape as a metaphor for colonialism and Rati as a stand in for India feeds into the view of women as the contested ground over which men fight, and the notion that men's honor is vested in controlling women's sexuality. Rati is viewed by the men in the novel as a prize, a symbol of power. When John Paul discovers that Chase has assaulted Rati, he confronts Chase, but it is not so much the assault that bothers John Paul as the fact that Chase has had sexual intercourse with Rati and he has not. He thinks to himself, "He felt utterly defeated. Once again, he saw how Chase was the complete master... The Indian woman was his reward" (100). He, too, sees Rati as a possession, a thing that he has earned and that Chase has taken away from him.

While this could be seen as a criticism of the British, this mindset is not specific to the colonizers – nearly every other male in the text views Rati as an object to be possessed. In addition to Raja Ram's attempts to take Rati by force, Manu, a recruiter who promises to help Guha and Rati, separates the two and attempts to rape Rati, and even Bodil, Rati's friend and Indrani's husband, expects Rati to give herself to him: "'You think it easy for Bodil to live and to see Rati's beauty every day, ay, and not to have desire for one single day?'" (196) This repetition supports and normalizes such a mindset, suggesting that if a woman is pretty enough, men will lose their ability to control themselves around her.

Somewhat startlingly, the female characters support the view that it is the women's duty to please the men, to ease their burden. In their first year, when the men celebrate the end of the crop harvest, Indrani urges Rati to dance for the men. Rati protests, saying that she still thinks of Guha. "Whether Guha is alive or not is not about this matter. Here there are so many men, miserable without women. Proper *dharma*¹⁸ is to make our hard-working men happy" (117)

As in earlier texts like *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, the British man in power takes the Indian woman away from her husband, but instead of doing so to protect her, he tears apart a loving, devoted couple for his own desires. Guha and Rati attempt to run away, but Chase discovers them and Guha is killed. The destruction of this relationship can be seen as representing Britain's resistance to Indian statehood. Guha's loss leaves Rati adrift, disconnected from her homeland. She gives up all hope of returning to Gaya, and the symbolic hope of Indian nationhood offered by their union has been destroyed, as well.

Separated from her loved ones, Rati is forced to create new family ties and find support in less traditional ways. The tragedy leads to one positive development – the forming of a proto-feminist bond between Indrani and Rati, based on a recognition of their shared oppression. Instead of rewarding Indrani for informing him of Rati's escape plan, Chase whips her, an act that is never fully explained in the text. Indrani realizes how untrustworthy the British are, and seeks forgiveness for her behavior from Rati. The two become close friends, and this friendship sustains them throughout their indenture and afterwards.

The development of bonds between these women can be seen as a challenge to the pre-eminence of the male-female erotic relationship. The friendship that develops between Rati and Indrani is the central relationship of *The Promise*, more so than that of Guha and Rati. Sharlow spends much more time on these friendships than on the heterosexual relationships that form

¹⁸ Moral duty

between the characters in the novel, emphasizing the importance of nontraditional forms of family in the survival of the laborers.

The nature of the sexual relationships between the characters takes a surprising turn, as well, when Rati saves Chase's life, killing a snake with her hoe as it is about to attack him. In spite of his treatment of her, she has saved him from a painful death, demonstrating her magnanimity and challenging the view of Indians as lacking honor or nobleness. In a sense, she saves him both physically and spiritually. He offers her land or money as a reward, but she refuses both, instead asking that he stop raping her. He is upset by her request, and for the first time, shows vulnerability: "She saw his face suddenly crumble, and become old. And for a brief moment, pitiful" (125). Chase is forced to acknowledge her humanity, and in doing so, remembers his own. He finally relents, promising not to assault her, and gives her a plot of land. From this moment on, he is kinder towards Rati and the other laborers. This is another example of the reversal of the Manichean binary used to justify colonialism; Rati has civilized Chase and made him more human.

In the meantime, John Paul has been moving in the opposite direction, becoming more cruel and power hungry. When he learns that he owns the plantation, and Chase has only been managing it for him, his greed and savagery increases. He is enraged to hear that Chase gave Rati some of his land. Chase takes on the role of protecting the laborers, reminding John Paul that the five-year contract is almost up. John Paul replies, "I know the penal code by rote, Mr. Chase...The coolies will never be free unless it is my will," referencing the many ways that plantation owners extended the contract of the laborers.¹⁹ Clearly, the power that comes with

¹⁹ According to colonial law, managers could count the days that laborers missed work because of illness and add them to the end of the contract, and in some colonies, managers were allowed to double that time. Since this was only reported to the laborers once the contract was over, laborers had no way of protesting the managers' calculations.

owning the plantation and controlling the lives of so many people, as well as the wealth the plantation generates, is corrupting; it has destroyed John Paul's kindness and empathy, while Chase, once he relinquishes that power, becomes more benevolent.

John Paul's cruelty extends to other aspects of his life. He develops a romantic relationship with Christine Fuller, the daughter of another plantation owner. In contrast to the gentle, pure love between Guha and Rati, their relationship is described in terms of sadism and masochism, qualities that have been developed in both of them by their experiences on the plantation. When Christine and John Paul first talk, she "took his hand, pinching harshly. John Paul returned the pinching... He dug his nails into her flesh then, bleeding her skin." (80). On a later visit, he thinks, "Christine remained with childhood images of her father at the whipping-post; and in their last meeting, she'd shocked him by telling about her papa's brutal fetish. John Paul had knowledge then of Christine's pent-up emotions, her yearning for strange passions" (96).

Though Sharlow is trying to indicate the extent to which the brutality of slavery and indenture corrupt those in power, there is an element of misogyny here, and a sense that Christine is asking to be raped. Christine thinks of John Paul, "Oh, it was his total lack of respect, his boldness towards her body that aroused the beast inside her" (97). The use of "beast" here connects this passage to Chase's description of Rati as "a splendid beast"; women in this novel, Indian and British alike, are repeatedly dehumanized. In addition, Christine's longings feed into one of the most common defenses that rapists give, that the victim "asked for it." Finally, there is a sense that a woman who is openly sexual must be depraved. Rati, who is modest, enjoys sex in a pure way, and does not seek it out, while Christine actively pursues John

Paul. This aggressiveness is tied to her “strange passions,” indicating that an overtly sexual woman is also degenerate.

Christine and John Paul marry and have a child, but their marriage quickly falls apart. He cannot forget his lust for Rati, whom he has driven away with his cruelty. Even though he has power over the material aspects of her life, she has emotional power over him, because he cannot contain her – he will long for her forever and never fully grasp her. It is tempting to see this as Sharlow’s statement about Britain after the end of colonialism, that it would never regain the strength it once had as an empire.

Conditions do not improve for Rati and her friends, Indrani, Bohil, and Arjun, once their contract is up. They eke out a living cultivating their own land and trying to save enough money to open a shop or build a house. In general, life for the former laborers is depicted as grim: “With no place to go, the Indians wandered about the countryside... By the dozens, and by the score, they became either the victims of venomous snakes, or the savage beasts of the wild” (129). The police arrest anyone who is found off a plantation, and when they fall ill, the plantation owners charge a full day’s work for medicine. The officials who are meant to protect them also oversee the laws against them. “And so, despite their papers of completion, their bonded status continued” (166).

Rati, Indrani, Arjun, and Bohil are able to survive because they treat each other as kin, living in the same household, pooling financial resources, and supporting each other emotionally. Mariam Pirbhai notes that the Hindi term “jahaji bhai,” or “ship brother” is unique to indentured peoples and their descendants (50). It indicates the bond that is formed by those who travel across the water together under indenture, and suggests an alternative form of family bond for

those who have been separated from many or all of their blood relatives. Though Sharlow does not directly use the term, the bond it represents is depicted between the four friends.

This can be seen in particular in the close friendship that develops between Rati and Indrani after Guha's disappearance. Rati's strength and virtue inspire Indrani, and Indrani's sharp wit makes Rati laugh at moments when their pain becomes almost unbearable. When they discuss the power the British still hold over the Indians, and Rati despairs that it will ever end, Indrani says "'Perhaps one day, the British might drop dead from eating too much sugar?'" (177) In addition, having grown up as a courtesan to British, Indrani understands their culture and civilization, and is able to decode their rhetoric. She teaches Rati how to read their newspapers and interpret their discourse: "Indrani would recall the conversations of her last years in Calcutta, and it became very simple to read between the lines of the newspapers... And so she unraveled all that she gathered, to Rati" (173).

In addition, Indrani and Rati develop a friendship with an African woman named Miss Mary, indicating the importance of forming connections between oppressed groups. Sharlow draws attention to the ways that the planting class tried to prevent different groups from interacting, fearing the strength that they would have if they did. When Miss Mary, upon meeting the two women, learns that they speak English, she says "'I have heard otherwise. It must be that you Indians are playing dead to catch corbeaux alive?'" (169)²⁰

The friendship between the Indian women and Miss Mary helps them realize the similarity of their experiences and the necessity of solidarity. Miss Mary comments, "'The white man lies on the African nation, and now the Indian. If we do not fight back, the lies will become truth'" (177). This sense of solidarity between the former slaves and the indentured Indians can

²⁰ A corbeau is a kind of vulture. "Playing dead to catch corbeau alive" is a Trinidadian expression that means to act passive, ignorant, or humble in order to win out in the end.

also be seen in the subject matter of Sharlow's novel *When Gods Were Slaves*. Written two years before *The Promise*, this novel traces the transatlantic journey of a group of Africans who were kidnapped, sold as slaves, and taken to the Caribbean to work on sugar plantations. Many of the same themes can be seen in this novel, including the corruption of those in power, the use of a racial hierarchy to justify the exploitation of a people, and the sexual abuse of women as a symbol of oppression. Sharlow writes that his novels "achieve the specific perspective of returning the pride and dignity of the peoples of the continents defamed through the systems of slavery and indentureship," indicating a desire to draw connections between these forms of exploitation ("Sharlow").

The intimacy between Rati and Indrani continues into the final scenes of the novel; they even die within six months of each other, at the age of 84 and 86. As Rati dies, she whispers, '*O Mura, gandharva,*²¹ *you never left Rati,*' (220) thinking back to her friendship with Mura. This again indicates the importance of the bonds of friendship – it is not Guha that she speaks to, but her childhood friend Mura.

Rati and Indrani die knowing that the system of indenture is coming to an end and their children's lives are somewhat improved, working in shops instead of fields, but Sharlow indicates that the oppression continues. One day, Savita, Rati's daughter, observes the children playing teacher by pretending to whip a post. She thinks, "Ay, indentureship continued in the schools. They even educate with the whip!" (221) The effects of indenture are long lasting, Sharlow suggests.

²¹ Heavenly singer

In The Counting House and The Promise, David Dabydeen and Sharlow seek to humanize the suffering of the Indian laborers, to give a face to the experiences of the laborers. Their novels clearly demonstrate the similarities between various forms of oppressive plantation labor that led Hugh Tinker, among others, to describe indenture as “a new system of slavery.” They draw attention to the connections between British imperialism, the destruction of traditional life in India, the system of slavery that brought millions of Africans to the Caribbean, and the system of indenture that brought hundreds of thousands of Asians to the Caribbean. *The Counting House* and *The Promise* turn the metaphor of a relationship between an Indian woman and a British man into a critique of these systems of oppression.

These metaphors are problematic, though, as they tend to erase the real experiences of female laborers like Doolarie, instead suggesting that women are the bearers of culture and must be restricted to the domestic sphere. This view was concretized by the imperial indentured labor system, in which women were doubly marginalized and became a site of contestation between ethnic groups.

Today, the female descendants of indentured laborers are doubly invisible. Although many people think of the inhabitants of the Caribbean as being primarily descended from African slaves and European colonizers, in some countries, including Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana, the largest ethnic group is those of Indian descent. Yet this population is largely unseen, underrepresented in government and receiving little attention abroad. Within this population, Indo-Caribbean women today may be even more marginalized.

Certainly, Indo-Caribbean women today have vastly improved access to education and public positions of power. For example, more Indo-Guyanese girls complete primary and secondary education than their male counterparts, and the current Prime Minister of Trinidad and

Tobago is Kamla Persad-Bissessar, a woman of Indian descent. However, the impact of indenture lingers, especially in violence against women. According to the World Bank, all of the Caribbean islands have higher rates of sexual violence than the world average, and in Guyana, one in four women has been physically abused in a relationship. While there are few statistics on rates of violence against Indo-Caribbean women in particular, the Indo-Caribbean community's comparative lack of involvement in or awareness of government measures against domestic violence suggests that these women are still highly vulnerable to such abuse. For example, in 1999, 77.3% of Indo-Guyanese women did not know about the Domestic Violence Act that had passed in 1996, the highest percentage of any ethnic group in Guyana. In Trinidad and Tobago, the Hindu community reportedly did not participate in the public debate that took place before the passing of the Domestic Violence Act in 1999, indicating a silence around such topics. Ramabai Espinet writes that Indo-Caribbean women "are absent from the sphere of influence which produces public figures, writers, artists, politicians, performers and other persons of impact and influence" ("Representation" 42).

Novels such as Harold Sonny Ladoo's *No Pain Like this Body* or Peggy Mohan's *Jahanji* depict Indo-Caribbean women struggling with the day-to-day brutality of poverty and gender oppression, but do so in a way that memorializes them as individuals rather than as representatives of their ethnicity or nation. By comparison, *The Counting House* and *The Promise* both reflect and support the troubling view of woman as representatives of Indian culture and heritage, who must be protected and controlled. In our examination of the rhetoric around labor, nation and gender, it is critical that we recognize the dangers of such representations.

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Chapter 3

At the End of their Tether: Women Writing about Indenture

Mahadi Das' seminal 1977 poem, "They Came in Ships," is one of the earliest examples of Indo-Caribbean women writing about indenture. In this poem, she describes the denigration they faced, treated "like cattle" and placed "in chains," and she suggests that the exploitation of Indo-Caribbean people has continued, passed on to later generations: "I recall my grandfather's haunting gaze;/my eye sweeps over history/to my child, unborn" (12, 63, 27-29). She remembers the constricting dwellings where her ancestors lived as if she lived in them, as if her ancestors' experiences have been transmitted through her blood: "I remember logies, barrackrooms, ranges/nigga-yards" (33-34). In response to these memories, Das condemns the attempts of contemporary Indo-Caribbeans to forget their traumatic past, particularly a past of gendered violence: "Remember one-third quota, coolie woman,/Was your blood spilled so I might reject my history - /forget tears among the paddy leaves" (40-42). Her poem is a powerful evocation of the experiences of the laborers and the necessity of remembering their struggles.

The themes that arise in this poem, including the impact of indenture on future generations, and the importance of resisting the impulse to erase the degradation of one's ancestors, are concerns that appear in many writings by women authors depicting indenture. These include several novels: Patricia Powell's *The Pagoda* (1998), Ryhaan Shah's *A Silent Life* (2005), and Ramabai Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge* (2013), as well as Gaiutra Bahadur's nonfiction text, *Coolie Woman* (2013), a historical account of women's experience of indenture framed through Bahadur's research into the life of her great-grandmother. These texts are all fairly recent: until the tail end of the twentieth century, there was no fiction about Caribbean

indenture by women and little nonfiction or poetry, but in the twenty-first century, there has been a wave of female authors writing literature that either directly or indirectly deals with Caribbean indenture.

This chapter explores the themes of generational trauma and the political act of remembering in two novels by women authors, *Jahajin* (2007), by Peggy Mohan, and *Monkey Hunting* (2003), by Cristina García. Both novels directly describe the indenture experience, but their geographic locations, plot, and protagonists differ dramatically. *Jahajin*, set in the present, focuses on an unnamed female protagonist from Trinidad of Indian and Canadian descent. While earning a PhD in linguistics in the United States, she returns to Trinidad to record older Indians speaking in Bhojpuri, a dying language originally from North India. In the process, she uncovers the largely untold story of female indentured laborers, including her own great-great-grandmother, Sunnariya. *Monkey Hunting* begins in the 1860s with a destitute Chinese farmer named Chen Pan who is indentured in Cuba. The novel switches back and forth between Chen Pan and two of his descendants: Chen Fang, his granddaughter, who is raised as a boy in China, and Domingo Chen, his great-grandson, who moves from Cuba to New York in search of a better life.

In spite of their differences, the two stories are strikingly similar in their structure and theme. Both novels move across locations, set in areas termed the global south, including India, Trinidad, Vietnam, and Cuba, as well as western nations such as the United States and Canada. In addition, both blend narratives from different eras in order to emphasize the ties between successive generations. This structure, in which the past melds with the future, shows the ways that the systematic violence and gender oppression of indenture ripple forward in time, impacting

generations to come. It also warns against creating a selective vision of the past in order to validate a sense of personal or national identity.

In these novels, Mohan and García advocate an active engagement with history as a means of understanding cycles of domination and finding models of resistance to that domination. In particular, they focus on the importance of building family connections across generations to develop a deeper understanding of the past and combat the tendency towards blinding nostalgia. In *Jahajin*, for example, the narrator comes to understand the trauma and constraints that her female ancestors experienced and is able to recognize and avoid similar constraints in her own life. In *Monkey Hunting*, García suggests that cultivating a pragmatic sense of altruism is the best way to cope with and move past the cruelty of systematic forms of oppression and to build equitable and sustaining family relationships.

Postcolonial critics have considered the crucial role nostalgia²² plays in the aftermath of colonialism. It is often viewed as a harmful emotion: in individuals, it can be seen as sentimental self-indulgence, while critics note that on a national scale, over-romanticizing the past can lead to dangerous blindness.²³ Colonized nations seeking self-government or newly independent nations have often looked to a pre-colonial past as an idyllic time in order to build a sense of

²² The word “nostalgia” was first coined in seventeenth century Switzerland by the physician Johannes Hofer. He used the term to identify the extreme homesickness felt by Swiss mercenaries, and classified it as a (treatable) medical condition. By the nineteenth century, nostalgia had ceased to be viewed as a disease, and was seen instead as an emotion, a longing for a particular time, rather than a particular place. Today, theorists focus on the cultural, as well as the individual experience of nostalgia. For instance, psychologist Janelle Wilson writes that, “While [nostalgia] began – conceptually and experientially – as solely a private phenomenon centered on one’s longing for home, it has become...a more public experience” (30).

²³ Historians studying nostalgia tend to note its dangers but also propose that it can play a positive role. For example, Historian Svetlana Boym argues that contemporary ideologies often create a vision of an ideal home to tap into people’s emotional needs: “The danger of nostalgia is that it tends to confuse the actual home and the imaginary one. In extreme cases it can create a phantom homeland, for the sake of which one is ready to die or kill” (xvi). Yet she suggests that, “for many displaced people from all over the world, creative rethinking of nostalgia was...a strategy of survival, a way of making sense of the impossibility of homecoming” (xvii). Similarly, Janelle Wilson writes that, “Collective nostalgia can serve the purpose of forging a national identity, expressing patriotism. It might also reflect selective remembering and selective forgetting that occur at the collective level” (31).

national pride. At times, this has been a powerful tool to combat colonial stereotypes of the inferiority of the colonized peoples. For example, the Negritude movement of Francophone African and Caribbean writers like Léopold Sédar Senghor and Aimé Césaire celebrated the mystery, rhythms and sensuality of Africa, traits that had been reviled by the colonizers.

However, in postcolonial nations, this kind of nostalgia has also been used to consolidate the power of a small, elite group. Of early twentieth century Indian and African independence movements, Elleke Boehmer writes:

As well as being male, nationalist leadership at this time was...middle class, highly educated—also urbanized, liberal-minded, cosmopolitan, and often more proficient in European than indigenous forms of expression...Nostalgia and reconstruction, therefore, helped legitimate...the more ‘advanced’ of an elite’s progressive or modernist attitudes. (122)

Boehmer indicates that nostalgia helped native leaders create a sense of identity and togetherness even when they were starkly divided from the majority of the people by wealth, education, and status.

In *Postcolonial Nostalgias*, Dennis Walder argues that nostalgia can be a powerful way of understanding the past, if used as a means of creating a more complete picture of historical events rather than forming a narrative that dwells on one’s hurts: “Exploring nostalgia can and should open up a negotiation between the present and the past, leading to a fuller understanding of the past and how it has shaped the present, for good and bad, and how it has shaped the self in connection with others” (9). This is a useful concept for exploring *Jahajin* and *Monkey Hunting*, both of which advocate an active engagement with the past in order to create an empathetic understanding of others. However, Mohan and García suggest a move away from nostalgia,

which creates a sort of crystallized version of the past, and instead offer a more fluid, open approach to history.

They indicate that nostalgia often requires selective memory, erasing the pain and suffering of oppressed groups, including women, ethnic minorities, and political dissidents, in order to create a peaceful, comforting memory of the past. Mohan focuses on individual nostalgia. She shows that ignoring the trauma in the lives of one's ancestors leads to repeating the mistakes of prior generations, and thus can threaten one's future. García, on the other hand, draws attention to nostalgia on a cultural level. She focuses on multiple postcolonial contexts, indicating that nostalgia is often used to legitimate those in power or as an attempt to regain power: in the early twentieth century, the Chinese in Cuba longed for the clear-cut gender and class roles of traditional China; and the Spanish in Cuba looked back to a time of colonial domination. She suggests that the strongest way to escape nostalgia and to move forward is to acknowledge the traumas of the past, and to combat the prejudices and injustices of the present by developing a pragmatic altruism, in which one balances a generousness towards those in need with an awareness of one's limitations.

The cyclical chronology of both novels draws attention to the way that historical blindness sustains repeating patterns of abuse, which has been a common technique in recent depictions of indenture by female authors. *The Pagoda*, *A Silent Life*, and *The Swinging Bridge*, as well as *Jahajin* and *Monkey Hunting*, move backward and forward in time to draw attention to the recurring nature of oppression.²⁴ While David Dabydeen uses a fractured timeline in *The Counting House* to demonstrate the connection between events in India and in British Guiana, the events all take place within the lifetime of the main characters. His novel gives voice to the

²⁴ Contemporary indenture narratives by male authors, such as Amitav Gosh's Ibis trilogy and Sharlowe's *The Promise*, tend to employ straightforward chronology.

laborers who have been written out of history, showing the ways that imperialism affected Indians in the past. The goal of the female authors, on the other hand, seems to be to show the echoes of indenture in the present and to express a collective frustration with ongoing, repetitive patterns of violence against those who are othered, particularly women.

David Lowenthal suggests that nostalgia's appeal lies in its ability to offer "an ordered clarity contrasting with the chaos or imprecision of our own times" (30). Mohan and García, however, urge readers to acknowledge the chaos and imprecision of the past, in order to find a clarity in the present.

Peggy Mohan, author of *Jahajin*, was born in Trinidad; her father was of Indian descent and her mother was from Newfoundland, Canada. She studied linguistics at the University of the West Indies in Trinidad and received her PhD from the University of Michigan. She wrote her thesis on Trinidadian Bhojpuri, based on recordings she made of Indo-Trinidadians in the 1970s. In 1979, she moved to India with her husband, where she first taught linguistics at Jawaharlal Nehru University; she currently teaches music at Vasant Valley School. Her second novel, *The Youngest Suspect*, was published in 2012. Set in contemporary India, it focuses on the trial of eighteen young men accused of terrorism. Like *Jahajin*, *The Youngest Suspect* is based on real events, a 2002 train fire that killed fifty-eight Hindu pilgrims and religious workers and led to three days of rioting and anti-Muslim violence in the state of Gujarat. This novel, too, focuses on state-sanctioned injustices against minorities.

Jahajin is a highly autobiographical novel that follows an unnamed narrator, a young woman, as she completes her graduate research on the Indian language of Bhojpuri. In a review, Rukmini Bhaya Nair draws attention to the overlap between the author's life and that of the main

character: “In trendy postcolonialesse, it is what's known as ‘auto-ethnography,’ a hybrid genre where the author's fictionalised biography intimately mirrors the story of her community.”

Mohan adds, “I have lived so long with *Jahajin* that I am not sure any more what actually happened and what is purely my invention” (“Writing *Jahajin*”). Many women authors have made use of hybrid genres of autobiography to demonstrate the overlap between the personal and the political. Feminist critics like Gloria Anzaldúa, Angela Davis, and Shulamith Firestone have mixed life writing with theoretical arguments, while the above-mentioned *Coolie Woman* is a mixture of history and personal reflection. Mohan’s novel is similarly hybrid, blending fiction, autobiography, and oral narratives to make women’s experience of indenture accessible to a wide audience.

The personal nature of the text is reflected in the intimate style of the novel. The transcriptions of the oral narratives, which make up a large portion of the novel, include chitchat and interruptions, as when a dog steals a roti from the kitchen. The narrator’s dialogue also switches between formal, academic English when she is in a scholarly setting, and casual, Creole-inflected English with her friends and family. When speaking at a seminar about her research, she says “I just want long samples of natural speech to analyze. You can’t get rich complicated sentences just by asking for them” (14), but when she is stealing sugarcane stalks from an estate, she asks Fyzie, her partner in crime, “Yuh mean dey doan arrest yuh for dis?” (94)

The narrator, like Peggy Mohan, was born and raised in Trinidad to a father of Indian descent and a Canadian mother, and she is earning her PhD at the University of Michigan in linguistics. She has returned to Trinidad to record Indian immigrants speaking in Bhojpuri, a language from North India, where many of the laborers came from. In Trinidad in the 1970s,

Bhojpuri was a dying language, replaced by Hindi and Creole English. In her quest to preserve and study the language by recording the last of the native speakers, the narrator inadvertently also preserves the story of these laborers, the last living men and women to experience indenture. Staying at her parents' house while she performs her work, she feels caught between the pressure from her family to leave Trinidad and pursue her scholarly career, and her desire to find a place for herself and to shape her own life.

The novel weaves together three different stories: the narrator's experiences as she records the voices of older Indo-Trinidadians and develops a love affair with Fyzie, her local guide; the indenture narrative recounted by Deeda, a 109-year old woman whom the narrator interviews; and a folk tale that Deeda tells about a monkey boy and girl who become human and encounter great obstacles in their quest to be together. The three stories overlap in clear ways – in each, a female protagonist goes on a great voyage; in each she struggles against cultural norms around gender and class in an effort to carve out a measure of independence; and in each she searches for a way to hold on to that independence as she becomes entangled in a romantic relationship. These parallels emphasize that many Indo-Caribbean women have faced similar tensions, caught between the desire to strike out on one's own and the pressure to shape one's identity around a male partner.

The critical attention on this book focuses on the relationships formed between the female characters – the solidarity of the women who indentured, but also the bonds of women across generations. Mariam Pirbhai writes, “In accessing these women's stories in their own voice, so-to-speak, the narrator discovers not only the history of one jahaji-bhain but also an animated record of the new sisterhood formed among early women migrants, and alongside what was, for some, an emerging spirit of female emancipation” (32). Abigail Ward argues that Peggy

Mohan “examines how women, in particular, have been edited from official versions of both Trinidadian and Indian migratory histories” (271).

Jahajin is indeed notable for the degree of attention given to the stories of the women who indentured. Though other novels such as *Lutchmee and Dilloo* and *The Counting House* feature female characters, their stories are framed as one half of the story of a man and a woman who indenture, as opposed to being worthy of a tale of their own. As noted in previous chapters, most indenture narratives depict women traveling with a partner or men traveling alone, when in fact the majority of women who indentured did so alone.²⁵ *Jahajin* is one of the few novels to represent this fact.

Through the narrator’s growing awareness of the experiences of the bonded labors and how that experience has been filtered by later generations, the novel highlights the ways that nostalgia can erase the suffering of oppressed groups, including minorities and women. Mohan advocates a move away from romantic views of previous eras and towards an active engagement with the past, modeled in the relationships formed between the narrator and the other women in the novel. These relationships develop through her interviews with Bhojpuri speakers, which draw a web of connections between her, her grandmother, her great-great-grandmother, and Deeda, her interviewee. As the narrator is drawn closer to the women of previous generations, she comes to recognize the lingering effects of indenture, including the ways it impacts her own life. She begins to resist her family’s gender-inflected expectations that she be self-sacrificing, studious, and chaste, and she notices the sexism that she faces in academic and social settings. The novel ends on an ambiguous note, as it is unclear whether the narrator will be able to escape the fate of her ancestors, who suffered sexual assault, the constraints of gender norms, and

²⁵ See the McNeil-Lal report, 313.

unhappy marriages. However, there are hints that the awareness she has gained will help her dodge these traps.

The folktale and the oral narrative of indenture act as a bridge between the past and the present, emphasizing the connections between the generations of Indo-Caribbean women. *Jahajin* opens with the narrator recording the folk story of the monkey couple, as told by Deeda. Interestingly, monkeys play a key role in both *Jahajin* and *Monkey Hunting*. It is not unusual for monkeys to play a role in Indian indenture narratives. Hanuman, the monkey god in the Hindu pantheon, is a key part of the Ramayana, a Hindu epic that tells the story of Rama, a prince who is exiled from his homeland, and Sita, his devoted and chaste wife. It was often used as a source of inspiration and comfort by the laborers, particularly males, because of the many parallels with their own story.²⁶

When Deeda pauses in telling her story, the scene shifts; the narrator is now at home translating the story with the help of her grandmother, Aijie. This is the first of several shifts back and forth between the narrator's present day story, the folktale, and Deeda's story of her indenture, shifts that draw together the female characters in the novel. Deeda, the storyteller, indentured with the narrator's great-great-grandmother, Sunnariya, and so her description of their experience of bonded labor ties together generations of women from two different families. In addition, Aijie helps her granddaughter to translate the stories, and so on a literal level, the narratives have brought together these two women.

The ties between women of different generations are strengthened by the many overlaps between the three storylines. The girl monkey-turned-human leaves her mate to take a journey.

²⁶ Novels by contemporary Indo-Caribbean women often subvert the Ramayana, as in Ryhaan Shah's *A Silent Life*. Njelle Hamilton notes that in this novel, the female character of Baboonie sings the Ramayana but weaves her own story into it as she sings, and thereby "inserts herself in the grooves of the rigid epic of 'purity' and chastity...and forces it to sound out her victimization" (82).

In her new home, she is wooed by a prince, but demands some degree of independence from him. We later learn that this parallels Deeda's story, as she indentured with her son, leaving her husband behind in India, then declined to return to India with a high caste man named Mukoon Singh. The monkey girl also asks the prince for twelve years, which almost exactly matches the period of Sunnariya's indenture: "Their indentureship was not, in the end, for the five years they had expected or the ten years they had ultimately signed up for, Esperanza Estate manages to extend their indentureship period until it finally lasted eleven years and five months" (182). This was a common experience for laborers, as employers often extended the time of the contract through dubious procedures such as adding (or making up) days missed for illness.

These connections between the narratives give the narrator a richer, deeper understanding of her family's history and the history of indenture, which in turn helps her recognize her own tendency to romanticize the past. At one point, the narrator asks Deeda whether food didn't taste better when it was all made fresh at home, by hand. Deeda dismisses this idea, focusing instead on the unseen labor of women that was intrinsic to traditional cooking:

She gave me a skeptical look and told me that she didn't care at all. All that good food I was talking about, for her it was just a lot of hard work, and she was tired of that. Any amount of curry powder was better than always being poor, and tired. (50).

In addition to the burdensome nature of these traditional ways of doing things, Deeda also hints at the economic damage that can be caused by traditional gender roles – the effort it took to feed a family cooking from scratch was energy that could have been spent on creating products to sell, through farming, gardening, craftwork, or selling merchandise. Historians such as Marina Carter have noted that women frequently supplemented the family income through such tasks, and that this in turn led to the purchase of land (124). This suggests that families were far more

likely to rise above subsistence level agriculture when the women in the family were involved in trades.

Deeda's pragmatic response shakes the narrator out of her misty view of the past: "All my middle class angst and nostalgia suddenly seemed like an affectation, and insensitive to boot" (50). As the novel progresses, the narrator begins to recognize the forms of oppression that are intrinsically tied to traditional gender roles, and is able to see that oppression continuing in her own life, as in the dismissal of women's scholarship by male academics.

We see the narrator begin to articulate this awareness when she attends the presentation of Rosa, a colleague who is researching the women who indentured. When Rosa states that most of the women traveled alone, the audience is shocked:

Alone! Here was the big point at issue, the notion that Indian women might, in fact...[have] shown signs of independence. What a blow to the ideal of the great Indian family, where every Indian male must be yoked to the only other creature on this planet subordinate enough to stand behind him and shore up his self-esteem through famine, indentureship and poverty: an Indian woman. (13)

Here the novel directly addresses the historical elision of single women who indentured, an elision that the narrator, and the novel itself, seeks to remedy. Though the narrator tells herself, "this feminist stuff isn't your scene, you'll screw it up!" (14), she stands up and tells the audience about the women she has interviewed, most of whom indentured alone, thus supporting Rosa's assertions.

Deeda's stories about her past help the narrator come to a new understanding of women's roles during indenture. In one interview, Deeda lists off the women who indentured with her, "who all had come as widows, who had come with parents, who had run away from hard times,

and who had simply walked out of the house. And a kind of woman who never got married at all” (204). The narrator is struck by this new view of women migrants:

The migration came across to me as a story of women making their way alone, with men in the backgrounds, strangers, extras. In the history books it had always been the other way around: it was the men who were the main actors. But there was also the unwritten history of the birth of a new community in Trinidad. And it was women at the centre of the story. (204)

The narrator thus realizes that Indian women performed a crucial community-building role in Trinidad.

This in turn helps her develop her own theory of women’s roles in the development of language. In a presentation to other linguistic scholars, she suggests that a sudden surge of women migrating in the nineteenth century led to Bhojpuri speakers in Trinidad all speaking the same dialect, contrasted with India, where the dialect shifts from village to village.²⁷ The women brought and birthed children, and one woman cared for these children on each estate while the rest worked in the fields. As a result, the children all grew up speaking a common dialect of Bhojpuri. In this way, the arrival of women created a sense of community in unexpected ways: “the blossoming of Bhojpuri into a lingua franca in Trinidad had a lot to do with women coming away from India as migrants, and the community childrearing that was practiced on estates” (47-8). However, as the narrator reports to her audience, that language has begun to die, as more and more Indo-Trinidadians shift to English and Hindi.

This is an important moment that indicates her emerging views about the hazards of nostalgia. The scholars in the audience challenge her seeming indifference to the death of Bhojpuri, asking whether she thinks the language should be saved. She reflects, “Not too long

²⁷ Peggy Mohan makes this argument in more depth in her article “Indians Under a Caribbean Sky.”

back I would have been asking the same rhetorical questions” (50). Yet, she remembers her conversation with Deeda about meals made from scratch, and makes a connection to the impending death of Bhojpuri. She realizes that all of the people who spoke this language were poor and lacked education. Languages like Hindi and English were often learned in school, and so those who spoke them were the ones who had escaped from fieldwork and other forms of subsistence labor. Its death might mean the rising of an Indian middle class. The scholars who decried the death of Bhojpuri had the luxury of choosing to study it, as opposed to the native speakers who had no access to other languages. She responds, “It isn’t up to us, you know. It is the poor people who still speak the language who will decide if they want to pass it on or not...They will decide, and you and I will only talk about it” (51). Here, Mohan draws attention to the ways that nostalgia, whether for cooking or for a language, often depends on selective memory, erasing suffering and inequality to create a warm, comforting image of home. There is also a gendered element to this nostalgia, as the tasks of keeping the home, cooking food, and even teaching language to children are often seen as the domain of women, and thus it is the exploitation of women that gets forgotten in these romanticized views.

This erasure is emphasized through Deeda’s stories, which offer a vivid view of the denigration that the laborers, and particularly the women, experience. Even the voyage to Trinidad is trying – on the train from Faizabad to the depot in Calcutta, they must sleep sitting up and endure the rain coming through the windows. At the depot, onlookers, struck by their dazed expressions, call them “the walking dead” (23). Deeda alludes to the harassment that women experienced on the journey when she describes their quarters on the boat: “The women had to sleep the whole night with lamps on, so that none of the sailors could come in the dark and try to interfere with us. That was a rule” (54). Historians Verene Shepherd and Gaiutra Bahadur note

that these partitions did little to protect women from sexual assault on the voyage. In *Maharani's Misery*, Shepherd relates the harrowing story of a young woman named Maharani who was forcefully assaulted on board a ship and later died from her injuries, while Bahadur gives several cases of British sailors, officers, and even the ship's surgeon harassing and assaulting Indian women and girls. In almost all cases, the perpetrators escaped with mild or no consequences.

Although we hear extensive accounts of the laborers' suffering, the British are largely absent from the novel, indicating their lack of importance to Deeda. She occasionally refers to the colonial officials as "they," as when she describes the boat ride: "They didn't like us to stay below too much" (54). The British characters are never named, so they tend to blur together.

Mohan says that the women she interviewed hardly ever spoke about the British: "They really didn't see anybody who wasn't relevant to them. And as far as they were concerned, the entire life on the estate was Indians ...they talked of [the British] the way you would talk of maybe seeing Haley's Comet or something. Something that passed by" (Personal Interview). This focus contrasts sharply with earlier depictions of indenture in which the relationships between the British and the Indians are the central concern, and reshapes the story of indenture as the story of the laborers.

At the same time, Mohan does not ignore the brutality the British often displayed, as she references the harsh punishments used to subdue the laborers. When the ship hits the doldrums, everyone becomes tense: "all the goras, the white sailors, were watching us carefully, waiting to flog people if they caused any disturbance on the boat" (61). The sailors never get the chance, though, in large part because of the leadership and camaraderie shown by the laborers themselves. While they are stuck in the doldrums, a fight breaks out between two laborers over tobacco. Mukoon Singh, Sunnariya's father, breaks up the fights and takes on the role of

arbitrator. He listens to both sides and then makes a judgment, then asks the other men if they agree. He also warns the laborers not to get into any other altercations: “he wasn’t going to see anybody giving the goras an excuse to come in and try to rough up his men. Because if they came and tried to flog anybody from his quarters, he would make sure their blood flowed” (62). This is an interesting moment of negotiation with colonial power. Mukoon Singh acknowledges that the British have some degree of control over the laborers, but they are not without recourse, should the British take their power too far.

Unlike many depictions of indenture, such as Sharlow’s *The Promise*, Mohan emphasizes the strength of the bonds between the laborers against the power of the colonizers, rather than Britain’s destruction of an idyllic way of life. In fact, there were historical examples of such resistance. In 1860, Indian laborers on the *Junon*, already suffering from lack of food, went on a hunger strike when the captain refused to let them disembark while docked at Reunion (Carter and Torabully 39). On one voyage of the *Independence*, Chinese laborers mutinied three or four times (Grey 1). In 1875, when *The Ailsa* landed in St. Helena, the protector of emigrants boarded for a routine check. He was immediately surrounded by female indentured laborers complaining that the ship’s surgeon, Dr. William Holman, had sexually harassed and even assaulted them. Holman was eventually forced off the ship (Bahadur 57-60).

Once the laborers arrive and begin cutting cane, the work is brutal. Beharry, a seasoned laborer, has them rub oil into their hands and place them over a fire the evening before they start work in order to toughen their skin. Deeda captures the repetitive, grueling nature of the work in short, choppy sentences, as if, years later, just talking about it is exhausting: “Strip cane. Make bundles. Move on...Hands were hurting...Sit down and think. Head spinning now! Drink some water. This is too much, too much. Try again. Get up and keep working” (122-4). In addition,

Mohan draws attention to the prevalence of sexual assault on the estates, as well as its devastating impact. Beharry warns the laborers about one overseer in particular, who “had a habit of interfering with women” (117).

This turns out to be an apt warning, as this overseer, drunk one afternoon, comes across Sunnariya in the cane fields and attempts to rape her. She is traumatized when she returns to Deeda: “The look in her eyes was something I will never forget. As if she didn’t care anymore. As if there was nothing worse that could happen to her now” (151). Her distress is further indicated by the way she changes her story each time she tells it, in one version saying she had tricked him and escaped, in another saying that he had been too drunk to do anything to her. She seeks to gain control over the situation and to shape it into a narrative that she can live with. In each version of the story, she manages to escape the overseer’s attempts, and Deeda reports, “It did not look as though the overseer had managed to rape her,” but the depth of Sunnariya’s shock suggests that may not be the case. Mohan said of the actual events that inspired this section of the story, “People keep editing their memories...that we aren’t the kind of people to whom such things could happen. So Sunnariya is just too classy a lady to have been abused or assaulted, and we don’t know to this day what it was” (Personal Interview). This suggests that the erasure of Sunnariya’s assault may have been a community choice, an unwillingness to believe that such a thing could have happened to one of their own and a desire to keep Sunnariya’s honor intact. Woven in to this silence are the issues of gender and class, as denying Sunnariya’s rape sustains the myth that only low-class, promiscuous women are sexually assaulted.

The after effects of the attack on Sunnariya also show that indenture was not a complete domination of a passive people. When Mukoon Singh, Sunnariya’s father, learns of the assault, he goes to the overseer’s quarters and kills him. The Indian community is complicit in this act of

revenge: “The guards on the estate knew, everyone who was Indian knew that he would come like this in the middle of the night...so they had quietly slipped away, disappeared” (154). The plantation officials do not dare send Sunnariya to the fields again – instead she becomes the *khelauni*, the woman who watches over the children of the laborers. Deeda reports that “The estate people...were afraid of her brothers, or maybe of her father, or of the other men in the barracks” (176). This response shows that the laborers were not completely powerless.

Mohan uses this moment to reflect on the broader context of violence against women under indenture. Mukoon Singh disappears into the forest and becomes a folk hero, hunted by the plantation authorities but never caught. The Christian missionaries advocate for Mukoon Singh, pointing out to the colonial government that as part of the indenture scheme, they had agreed to respect the immigrants’ culture, and that they should understand Mukoon Singh’s duty to take care of his daughter. “And the colonial government was conscious that it had a bad track record in terms of not having done enough to curb the excesses committed against the Indians by the estates” (157). This is something of an understatement, given the role the colonizers played in creating the culture of violence against women. If anything, this is a rather charitable view of the colonial officials, suggesting that they acknowledged their wrongdoings and sought to address them.

The missionaries and the government officials come to a compromise; Mukoon Singh surrenders, and his death sentence is repealed, but he is repatriated to India. This brings up a complicated issue. Certainly, it is the terrible actions of the overseer and the lack of justice for laborers that puts him in this impossible situation, but before he went to kill the overseer, Mukoon Singh lay his pagri²⁸ next to the sleeping Sunnariya and said to her “I will take this back from you...when I bring back your honour” (154). His emphasis on his daughter’s honor raises

²⁸ Turban

the question of whether Sunnariya and Deeda wouldn't both have been happier to have him within their family even if it meant the overseer went unpunished. Because he has killed the overseer, he must go into hiding, and then is sent back to India, so he cannot care for his daughter. In addition, he and Deeda had been moving towards a partnership, a dream that they must now give up. This suggests that gender roles for men, such as the need to protect women's honor, can be equally confining as gender roles for women.

Deeda's vivid stories about the racialized and gendered oppression of the laborers help the narrator recognize the lingering effects of these dynamics in contemporary Trinidad. Shortly after listening to the tale of Sunnariya's assault, the narrator visits the Sevilla Club, which had once been one of the leisure locations for estate management. There she experiences a milder version of the entitlement that the overseer seemed to feel over Sunnariya. A Scottish overseer, seeing the narrator walking through the club in her bathing suit, looks her up and down and asks, "Are you a member here?" (164). She is distressed and quickly leaves the club to go home, trying "to dispel the image of the overseer focusing his eyes on me through an alcoholic haze, sizing me up. Deciding if I belonged or not. Like, was I some Indian girl poaching on his property?" (165) Critic Abigail Ward notes that Mohan walks a fine line in this moment of the novel to demonstrate the dangers of over-identification with victims: "Whilst the narrator's meeting with the Scottish man appears to be reminiscent of Sunnariya's encounter with the overseer, it is short-lived, and a clear distinction is made between the trauma experienced by Sunnariya and the narrator's empathy for her indentured ancestor" (279).

There are places, however, when the narrator's identification with the laborers is problematic. For example, Ward points to a moment in which the narrator equates translating the stories with cutting cane. "The narrator's involvement in translating Deeda's stories seems to

have drawn her into experiencing a postmemory of indenture, where she is left exhausted after her physical toil of translating-as-working-the-cane” (280). This identification, however, is somewhat troubling, as choosing to translate a text as a scholarly project, while mentally and physically draining, cannot be equivalent to a full day of field labor, especially given that the punishment for shirking this labor would be a beating or jail.

Taping and transcribing Deeda’s story also helps the narrator recognize the pattern of restrictive gender roles in her own family. Sunnariya blames herself for her assault and seems to fall back into the conventional view that women’s sexuality and agency are a danger to her whole community. The novel, however, does not condone this view: Sunnariya has an unhappy marriage, as her husband turns out to be an alcoholic, and “When her indentureship period was over, Sunnariya more or less retreated from the public gaze” (191). She dies young, giving birth to her fifth child, and she is the first of the family to be buried in Trinidad.

These gender roles continue to impact the generations that follow. Ajie, Sunnariya’s granddaughter, has a similar fate. She is a bright girl and proud of her success at a boarding school, and so she is devastated when she learns at age fourteen that she must give up school and be married. Her marriage, like Sunnariya’s, is an unhappy one: she “had been chosen by her in-laws in the hope that a fair pretty girl would be able to wean their son away from an unsuitable relationship with a woman on one of their estates” (197). After divorcing her husband, Ajie takes a job in a store, where she sits in a cage with the store’s cash. This is a not-so-subtle metaphor for the confined life she lives and the view of women as a commodity, like money. The narrator’s mother suffers a similar confinement after moving to Trinidad, unable “to go out the gate and walk down the street” (210). She is told that it is because she is too fair, but it is likely that if she had been a fair-skinned man, she would not have faced the same restrictions.

The narrator herself begins to recognize that when she was a child, her life was constricted in similar ways; instead of exploring her neighborhood or the island, as her male cousins have done, she was pushed into the role of the diligent student. For example, after hearing Deeda's story of surviving the storm on the voyage to Trinidad, the narrator is energized and goes swimming in the ocean out past the breakers. As she and Fyzie return home, she considers the goals her family has set for her: "My whole life had been headed up only towards going abroad: going abroad to study, going abroad to make my mark, going abroad to make a life" (75). Her parents do not see Trinidad as a worthy location for their daughter to settle, pushing her instead towards the imperial nations that dominate the world stage: the United States, Canada, England. Many contemporary Indo-Caribbean women authors have written about this tendency to push girls into scholarly pursuits as a means of bettering their lives but also of limiting their exposure to boys and reducing the risk that they will become pregnant and shame the family. For example, in *The Swinging Bridge*, Ramabai Espinet tells the story of Mona, a bright young woman whose father forces her to focus on her studies in order to keep her away from boys and give her a way to escape Trinidad. He punishes her harshly when he finds out that she is dating a man of mixed race, believing that she is besmirching the family's honor and destroying her future.²⁹

In recording the stories of the older Indo-Trinidadians, the narrator comes to recognize that she is living her life for others, as the women in her family have done before her, and she resents it. Remembering that her father was happier about her graduation from college than she was, she thinks, "I had known then that I was making up for all the things that hadn't happened in his life" (80). This is certainly about more than her gender, as parents generally want their children's lives to be better than their own, but the self-sacrifice and constraint that is expected

²⁹ See also *A Silent Life*.

of her has the tinge of Sunnariya's self-sacrifice and constraint, and that of Ajie before she determined to divorce her husband and start a new life on her own.

This conflict comes to a head in a decision that the narrator must make about her future. In Michigan, she was involved with an Indian man named Nishant, but she was unsure of her feelings for him. In Trinidad, she begins a relationship with Fyzie, the man her father engaged to take her around the island to visit older Indian men and women. Her family objects to this relationship, perhaps because he has a reputation as a ladies' man, or perhaps because of his working class status. Although his race is never explicitly identified, Abigail Ward suggests that he is of African descent, and that this is another strike against him.

When the family learns of their involvement, they are upset, especially her grandmother. "The family had gone for my guts because of my relationship with 'all kind of dog and cat' as Ajie had put it" (112). It later becomes evident that Ajie is upset because she doesn't want her granddaughter trapped in an unhappy relationship, the way she had been. Her anger at her granddaughter can be seen as the fear that she will repeat this same pattern, settling down with a man who is known to have casual relationship with other women and living an unhappy life as a result.

The narrator faces a danger in becoming involved with Nishant, as well. The narrator's cousin Dylan compares Nishant to the prince in the Saranga the story, ready to sweep up the narrator and take her away to a privileged but confined life. This seems an apt comparison, as Nishant is determined to return to India, which would limit the narrator's career options: "There were no foreign wives who had managed to find their feet in a career in India. Someone like me might have a hard time finding work: the job scene in Indian academia was xenophobic" (162). If she travels to India with him, she will have to give up her career, and she will be pushed into

the traditional gender role of the passive wife. This parallels the decision that Deeda had to make when Mukoon Singh asked her to return to India with him. She is tempted, but is aware that her lower caste, a difference that was erased in Trinidad, would cause tension should she return to India with him. She wants to hold on to the freedom she has gained in Trinidad, and so she politely declines his offer.

As the narrator considers this possibility, she imagines the division between Trinidad and India as a handwoven cloth: “India was on the other side of a porous handloom curtain. Once I crossed that curtain to settle in India, coming back would not be easy...A purdah,³⁰ I thought. Like Ajie’s orhnis³¹. Woven in the mind. But stronger than a curtain you could touch” (163). Once there, it would be difficult to regain the independence that she developed in Trinidad. She would be swallowed up and lose her sense of self, just as Deeda would have been had she returned with Mukoon Singh.

Mohan’s comparison to hand-woven cloth here is noteworthy. She references curtains and orhnis, cloths that are meant to protect women from the eyes of men, but are also identified with the traditional Indian craft of homemade textiles. As part of his nationalist campaign, Gandhi advocated a return to older Indian crafts, such as the handloom and the chakra. This was intended to develop the economy in rural areas and make India self-sufficient, rather than relying on the mass-produced British textiles and other goods that had flooded the markets. While Gandhi advocated women’s rights and wanted everyone in India, male, female, wealthy, poor, to learn to weave as an equalizer, he also exhibited some nostalgia for traditional gender roles. He was reportedly charmed to see “lovely maidens of Assam weave poems on their looms” (Mahmud 46). Mohan pushes against such comforting, idyllic image of women weaving,

³⁰ A practice among Muslims and some Hindus of secluding women.

³¹ A long scarf or veil that Indian women wore to cover their hair and the upper part of their body.

demonstrating that it idealizes a moment when women faced oppressive cultural practices, such as the systematic seclusion of women.

The narrator feels caught between these two choices: will she stay in Trinidad with Fyzie, the unreliable ladies' man, in a relationship similar to Ajie's marriage, or will she marry Nishant and move to India, following the path that Deeda did not take with Mukhoon Singh? Deeda's decision to remain in Trinidad offers the narrator another model, which is to make her way through life without a partner. The narrator gains a bit of a reprieve when she wins a scholarship to travel to India to continue her research, which she accepts almost without thinking about it. The narrator recognizes that her choice to go may be a reaction to her family's pressure to succeed, "to turn my face away from happiness into the winds of a cold future" (199). However, she is determined to end the cycle: "I was not going to make the next generation sail the high seas for me. The curse had to end" (200). Her engagement with the stories of her ancestors has helped her recognize this "curse" and hopefully break it.

Though she is not traveling to India with Nishant, the danger remains that this trip will cement her relationship with him. Ward suggests that the narrator's translations of the women's stories and learning about their lives "allows her to reach a fuller sense of her own identity" and to "establish a stronger, more assertive, sense of self" (277). The narrator has indeed gained some independence, but it is unclear whether this will translate into the future. She stops in Michigan on her way to India, and she seems to lose some of that independence. When Nishant picks her up, "I gratefully slipped into my old role and let him take over" (231). He catches her up on the United States but asks no questions about her trip or her work. She thinks, "I was bewildered by the compliant creature I had become. I hadn't even said a word about my time in Trinidad!" (231) She assumes the blame, indicating that she has "become" a passive listener, but

Nishant is complicit, taking over without asking and not displaying any interest in her work. By contrast, at a party later, an older man asks about her research, and she finds herself talking about her work in detail.

It is clear, though, that her interviews with older Indo-Trinidadians have helped her to recognize lingering caste, class, and gender prejudices, as can be seen when the narrator travels to India. On the plane, the stewardess, confused by the conflicting identities displayed in the narrator's appearance, asks if she is Indian, and then asks her caste. When the narrator replies "Sonaar," or goldsmith, the stewardess, used only to higher castes replies, "That isn't a caste!" The narrator is struck that railway porters in India are called coolies, a word that was banned in Trinidad after Independence because of its derogatory nature. When the narrator arrives in India, Nishant's family takes her in, and it is clear that they expect the couple to marry, tightening the threads around the narrator. It is also evident that Nishant's sister Manju is in a somewhat passive role in her relationship, as she has brought her boyfriend to the airport, "to drive the car she had borrowed from her aunt" (237).

Given Bhojpuri's association with the working class in Trinidad, it is ironic that the narrator's scholarly research into this language finally earns her the respect that her family craved. At lunch with professors and scholars, an older man asks her caste. When she gives the four castes that she is descended from, which include two peasant classes, "The old man's smile froze and in his next question the honorifics were gone" (249). The conversation is awkward for a few minutes, until he announces that she deserves to be granted upper caste status because of her scholarly work. The narrator smiles, but her thoughts are elsewhere, with her great-grandfather, "who had distanced us all from the Bhojpuri of the sugar estates and bided his

time...waiting for the day when brahmins from the heartland would have to recognize his descendants as their equal in learning” (250).

In Deeda’s home village, where the narrator has gone to record older Indians speaking Bhojpuri, she sees indications of ongoing degradation of the lower class. The pradhan, the village headman, summons an old man who deferentially squats and waits for his instructions. When the pradhan leans forward to get the old man’s attention, “The old man grimaced and flinched back from the expected blow” (263). Attempting to sidestep this power dynamic, the narrator asks to speak to the old man alone, but the pradhan resists, trying to maintain control of the situation. It is only when another man, Manju’s father, steps in, that the pradhan agrees to leave the two alone.

For the narrator, returning to India is not a homecoming. Though she forms connections with Nishant’s family, the hotel employees, the university scholars, and the old man in the village, she is also struck by the pervasive gender and class hierarchies she witnesses. Sociologist Gayatri Gopinath explores the gendered aspect of images of diaspora and homecoming, as in the lyrics and video of a bhangra song by Malkit Singh, a Punjabi folk singer. Gopinath writes:

Shots of Malkit singing are interspersed with images of the Punjabi countryside and of a homecoming and/or leave-taking, where a young man embraces an old woman on the verandah of a large family house. The song and video images generate a narrative of exile, in which the mythic homeland for which the singer yearns is embodied in the figure of the mother, while the diasporic subject—the one capable of leave-taking or homecoming—is clearly male (310).

She further suggests that “‘India’ be written into the diaspora as yet another diasporic location, rather than remaining a signifier of an original, essentialized identity around which a diasporic

network is constructed and to which it always refers” (313). Mohan similarly troubles the idea of an idealized homeland, indicating that laborers and other migrants who romanticize the notion of homecoming may have brushed over the gender and class oppressions that existed and continue to exist in their native land.

The novel ends with the narrator playing the ending of Deeda’s folktale for the old man. In the story, the two lovers escape the king on a flying cot and return to his home, where they live happily ever after, suggesting a subversion of both social hierarchies, in which the king is all powerful, and of gender roles, as the woman’s bold life choices have led to happiness for both her and her mate. Additionally, the story links together different eras and distant geographic locations. The old man’s recognition of the story connects his village to Trinidad, albeit briefly. When the narrator hits stop on her tape player, “the bridge across two great oceans to Deeda’s little house in Orange Valley disappeared” (267). The scene closes with the narrator, Manju, Manju’s father, and the driver getting into a car together, echoing Saranga’s magic carpet cot ride.

The ending is not as conclusive for the narrator as it is for Saranga. She is still entangled in Nishant’s family, suggesting that she may settle with him, yet her fate is not set. Thanks to her work with the indenture narratives, she has several models of Indo-Caribbean women’s lives to learn from. Sunnariya retreated into seclusion and suffered a short, unhappy life, married to an alcoholic. Ajie, too, endured an unhappy marriage, but managed to leave her husband. While the folktale is somewhat subversive, it still ends with Saranga’s marriage as a happy ending. More subversive yet is Deeda’s story – she left her husband behind to seek a better life, rejected a life with another suitor, and raised her son by herself, living a long and seemingly happy life. The

narrator recognizes the dangers in living her life for others, and so it seems possible that she might find a way to avoid this fate.

Prior to her interactions with Deeda, the narrator, along with others of her generation, feels pride in her ancestors, yet feels wary of being associated too closely with them. When Fyzie and the narrator steal cane from an estate, echoing Sunnariya's theft generations ago, the narrator's cousin Dylan remarks wryly "You can take the coolie out of the cane field but you can't take the cane field out of the coolie" (95). The narrator reflects:

We lionized our ancestors who had worked in the cane fields, yet on the other hand we kept our own evolved selves light years away from the sugar estates. Our hearts bled for the poor aging cane cutters, the last repository of 'our' culture. But to go near the life of the estates was to place your feet too close to the quicksand. (95)

She had previously viewed her ancestral connections to field labor as "quicksand," a deadly and suffocating trap. Through her work, she has come to see her ancestors as real people with real experiences, as opposed to symbols of a terrible fate or repositories of culture. This in turn helps her to recognize that she is not as far from the life of the estates as she might think, and that the barriers the female laborers faced have not been entirely dismantled.

Faulkner famously wrote, "The past is never dead. It's not even past" (73). Nostalgia requires a separation of the past and present, a sense that the previous era was not only preferable, it has ended, and is disconnected from the present. Through her engagement with the stories of the *jahajin*, the narrator comes to recognize that the allure of nostalgia, the image of a simpler, more authentic time, hides the fact that the past is deeply implicated in the present. Perhaps with this understanding, she will be able to break the cycles of the past that is not past.

Monkey Hunting, by Cristina García, also focuses on cycles of trauma, but unlike Mohan's work, treats large-scale, systematic forms of oppression such as the slavery-like Spanish indenture system, the repression that occurred during the Cuban Revolution and the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and the aggression of American neo-imperialism.

García, like Mohan, has lived in both the Caribbean and North America. She was born in 1958 in Cuba, but after Fidel Castro took power in 1961, her family moved to New York City, where she grew up. Her educational training was largely political: she earned a Bachelor's degree in political science from Barnard and a Master's in international relations from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. After working briefly in Europe, she returned to the U.S., where she took a job at *The New York Times*. She worked in reporting for several years, and in 1990, she left her job at *Time* to write fiction full-time. She says "I always thought of myself as Cuban" ("...And There Is Only" 607), in part because she grew up speaking Spanish and hearing stories about Cuba. García has reported tension with other Cubans, including those who live in Cuba and the United States, who question her decision to write in English or her lack of engagement with anti-Castro movements. In response, she has said that in her novels, she tries to emphasize that, "there is no one Cuban exile" ("At Home" 75).

García has received much critical acclaim: she has been a Guggenheim Fellow and won the Whiting Writers Award. She has also taught as a visiting professor at various colleges and universities, most recently the University of Texas at Austin. She is probably best known for her novel *Dreaming in Cuban*, which was nominated for the National Book Award in 1992. Like *Monkey Hunting*, *Dreaming in Cuban* is told in non-linear order and jumps between members of a family. However, it is more focused in time and place, following three generations of the del Pino family, and moving between Cuba and the United States. The themes are similar, though –

the experience of diaspora, the stretching of family ties. In *Dreaming in Cuban*, García is critical of both Cuban socialism and American capitalism, pointing to the repression of dissent in the first and the money-driven interventionist policies of the second.

Her second novel, *The Agüero Sisters*, which won the Janet Heidiger Kafka Prize, focuses more on family than national politics. Published in 1997, it tells the story of two Cuban sisters unearthing the violence of their family's past, and focuses on women's experience of history. García said in an interview, "Traditional history, the way it has been written, interpreted and recorded, obviates women and the evolution of home, family and society, and basically becomes a recording of battles and wars and dubious accomplishments of men." ("...And There is Only" 610). García has described *Dreaming in Cuban*, *The Agüero Sisters*, and *Monkey Hunting* as a loose trilogy meant to capture the wide variety of the Cuban experience ("An Interview" 178).

Monkey Hunting is a rare fictional representation of the experience of Chinese laborers. It is a sprawling book that begins in 19th century China with Chen Pan, a young farmer who indentures to Cuba. The novel moves through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and is set in Cuba, the United States, China and Vietnam. The scenes are held together by their emphasis on rebellions and revolutions; the novel skips across history, pausing at moments of upheaval such as the Spanish-American War, the Boxer Rebellion and the Cultural Revolution in China, and the Vietnam War. The extensive family tree at the beginning of the book emphasizes the breadth of the novel and also acts as a necessary aid to keep track of the various family members. The novel begins with Chen Pan, and focuses on two of his descendants; Chen Fang, the granddaughter of Chen Pan, who is raised as a man in China, and Domingo Chen, Chen Pan's great-great-grandson, who migrated from Cuba to New York and then fought in the Vietnam War. The

scenes switch back and forth between the stories of these three characters, creating a blurriness in time and place, a sense that history is a jumble of events loosely tied together, rather than a clear line marching forward.

Like *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Agüero Sisters*, *Monkey Hunting* criticizes European imperialism and American neo-imperialism as well as repressive socialist regimes, echoing the views that García openly expresses. In 2007, García spoke against American intervention in Cuba, saying that the Spanish-American War was a period “of enormous upheaval, and the changes came on the very edge of a big empire—the United States—that was increasingly placing its weight around the world” (“An Interview” 177).

Monkey Hunting's depiction of Caribbean indenture diverges in key ways from that of *Jahajin*, and from the other texts treated in this dissertation. The most immediate distinction is that *Monkey Hunting* is set in Cuba, when it was still a Spanish colony, and García focuses on Chinese indenture, rather than Indian. While Indians made up the vast majority of the approximately 500,000 indentured laborers who migrated to the Caribbean, the 18,000 indentured Chinese constituted a significant number (*Indentured Labor* 19). In 1877, the height of Chinese habitation in Cuba, there were more than 40,000 Chinese living on the island.

There were several important differences between the two systems. Unlike the Indian migrants, who went primarily to British colonies, the Chinese generally traveled to Spanish colonies such as Peru and Cuba, although some went to British colonies including Jamaica, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, and Suriname.³² Another distinction was the number of females who migrated. While both British colonizers and Indian migrants focused on the low numbers of

³² The Chinese migration to the Caribbean in the nineteenth century was part of a broader Chinese migration throughout the globe. The mid-nineteenth century was a period of turmoil for China, as the Qing Dynasty was losing power in the face of western imperialism and widespread social unrest. Roughly two and a half million Chinese workers left China in the nineteenth century for overseas destinations, including Australia and California during the gold rush.

Indian women who migrated, women still made up a sizable portion of those who indentured, between 30 and 40 percent (*Indentured Labor* 46). However, migration of Chinese females was incredibly rare, to the point that the British Consul at Canton wrote, “Chinese women never emigrate” (qtd in *Indentured Labor* 47). This was in part because of the traditional gender roles in China, but also because, even more so than in India, most Chinese who traveled did not intend to remain in their new destinations. British colonizers wanted Indians to settle in the colonies, sometimes offering them land in lieu of the return passage, while the Chinese migration process, controlled by Chinese middlemen, was much more of a back-and-forth system. Even though Chinese migrants did often stay in the colonies, the expectation of return was a persistent one that prevented men from bringing their wives or women from traveling alone.

Monkey Hunting not only tells the tale of Chinese indenture in a Spanish colony, it focuses on a male laborer and his descendants, which separates it from the female-centered *Jahajin*. Because so few Chinese women indentured, we only see female Chinese characters in the scenes that take place in China. For Chen Pan, Chinese women exist only in wisps of memory – his mother, the dancing girl in Amoy who takes all of his money, and the women of the old imperial court whom he dreams about, women best admired from afar.

Some historians suggest that the Chinese system of indenture was harsher than the Indian system, and “almost indistinguishable from slavery itself” (“Asian Diasporas” 52). While most Indian migrants traveled under indenture, only about 11 percent of the Chinese migrants were contract or indentured laborers (*Indentured Labor* 38). Because the majority of these laborers were not indentured, overseas migration was primarily run by Chinese businessman as opposed to British or Chinese authorities. Walton Look Lai argues that as a result of this private

operation, in terms of abuse of laborers “there was nothing in the British Empire labor tradition to compare with what was standard practice in Cuba or Peru” (“Asian Diasporas” 52).

Unlike in British colonies, where indentured laborers were meant to replace the slave force, Chinese laborers often worked alongside slaves on plantations. The first Cantonese laborers arrived in Cuba in 1847 to work the sugar plantations, but slavery was legal in Cuba until 1886, so there was a significant period of overlap. *Monkey Hunting* begins in 1857, during this period of overlap, and it emphasizes the similarities between the treatment of the slaves of African descent and the Chinese workers.

Reviews of *Monkey Hunting* emphasize the evocative language and the engaging exploration of history, but generally fault the lack of character development. Jennifer Schuessler writes, “The poetry is there, but not the spark of life that allows the Chen family to survive and transcend its forced march through endless war and revolution.” Michiko Kakutani adds, “Like so many of the characters in this author's earlier fiction, these people find that the large convulsions of history reverberate noisily through their lives... This novel lacks the fierce magic and unexpected humor of Ms. García's remarkable 1992 debut novel, *Dreaming in Cuban*.” In his article, “Search for Utopia, Desire for the Sublime: Cristina García's *Monkey Hunting*,” Sean Moiles challenges this view of *Monkey Hunting*, arguing that the novel's minimalism “rejects grand historical narratives and teleology – and the sublime advances a political worldview at odds with both 1960s nationalist radicalism and assimilationist, pro-market, multicultural platforms” (182). I would argue that both views of the novel are accurate – the minimalism may serve a purpose in taking to task nationalist epics, but our insight into the lives of the characters feels somewhat glancing, which minimizes the emotional connection we feel to them.

Like *Jahajin*, *Monkey Hunting* shifts back and forth between the present and the past, following several generations of one family. Each of the three main characters is associated with a different location and a key moment in the history of that location. The novel begins with Chen Pan's story of indenture, which takes place just before and during Cuba's struggles for independence. The next section moves forward in time to Chen Pan's great-grandson, Domingo Chen, who joins the United States army and fights in the Vietnam War. The novel then switches to the story of Chen Fang, Chen Pan's granddaughter, and her experiences of the Cultural Revolution in China. With this structure, García draws attention to the cycles of domination that persist across the globe and throughout different eras in a similar way as *Jahajin*. While Mohan focuses on the dangers of dwelling on an idealized version of the past, García warns that it is equally dangerous to erase the past. She draws parallels between the cultural revolutions that erupt across the world, revolutions that break the links between the present and the past and shatter the relationships between the various members of Chen Pan's family.

While both *Jahajin* and *Monkey Hunting* include a fractured timeline, the effect created by each is different. Mohan focuses on indenture as a starting point, a break in the history of a people. She shows the rippling effects of the indenture system and imperialism, including systemic abuse of women. By contrast, García depicts indenture as one of many forms of oppression that developed out of imperial violence. Marta Lysik writes that *Monkey Hunting* "brings to the foreground various forms of slavery: chattel system in Cuba, forced marriages, foot-binding and cross-dressing in pre-Cultural Revolution China, and prostitution during the Vietnam War. García...is concerned with slavery under many guises-slavery of the mind, body and soul, and she positions a classical slave society of nineteenth century Cuba next to societies practicing slavery-like forms of oppression" (1). García indicates that one must continue to

challenge these forms of domination through revolutionary acts on a national level and revolutionary acts of kindness on a personal level.

This difference can be attributed in part to their different backgrounds. Peggy Mohan has stated in an interview that in Trinidad, her home country, indentureship and colonialism are viewed as things of the past. “We see in a sense that it’s been fortunate that we are here...that we are in the Caribbean or Mauritius rather than in villages in India... that the problem is essentially over. A little bit of history” (Personal Interview). García, on the other hand, sees her home nation of Cuba struggling under multiple forms of dominance. She has criticized both the Cuban government for the increased “repression of dissidence” (“An Interview” 185) and the United States government for its disregard of human rights and Cuban sovereignty in Guantanamo Bay (184).

Nostalgia is a key theme in García’s novels, as many critics have noted. Dalia Kandiyoti looks at the role of commodified nostalgia in García’s novel *The Agüero Sisters*. She writes, “Nostalgia is central to identity-for-purchase because it ‘manufactures collective history as a bygone, ideal experience of everyday life, community, landscape, and heritage, to which the consumer presumable wants to return’ (82). She notes that García and the other authors she examines “take care to validate loss, mourning and suffering evoked in the original definition of nostalgia. What they oppose are the stale, stultifying forms of nostalgia that serve consumerism and dominant exile politics” (82). Sean Moiles builds on this argument, examining the way that García writes against nostalgia in *Monkey Hunting*. He argues that “Chen Pan learns to embrace new possibilities following the rejection of codified nostalgia,” (177) when he gives up hope of returning to China and finds a new home in Havana. Missing from these interpretations is García’s view of *how* we move forward, how we proceed once we have rejected nostalgia.

There are hints to the answer in García's earlier work. In *The Agüero Sisters*, García emphasizes the hazards of erasing one's past. Dulce, a young Cuban woman, mourns the lack of information she has about her own family: "There should be rituals like in primitive societies, where the elders confer their knowledge in their descendants bit by bit. Then we could dismiss all the false histories pressed upon us, accumulate our true history like a river in rainy season" (144). Nostalgia, García suggests in *Monkey Hunting*, creates these false histories. It involves a kind of willful blindness, caused either by a selfishness that ignores the suffering of others, or an idealism that ignores the reality of the situation.

The key to moving forward from nostalgia, then, seems to be in finding a balance between blind selfishness and blind idealism, a kind of open-eyed, pragmatic altruism. This can be seen most clearly in the role of Chen Pan, the main character of the story. As a child, his father was considered a hero because he tried to save a young girl from being raped by bandits, and was killed in the process. His mother objects to this act, complaining that he abandoned his family. She tells her children, "Avert your eyes to the sorrows of others and keep your own plates full" (19). Chen Pan finds a middle ground between these two approaches, hopeless heroism and cold-hearted self-interest, by helping others but also maintaining a sense of self-preservation. It is evident that he passes this worldview on to his descendants. Pipó Chen later offers his son, Domingo Chen, a more empathetic version of the advice that Chen Pan received from his mother, saying: "*Don't watch with interest the suffering of others*" (151, italics original). The theme of vision is one that repeats throughout the novel, emphasizing the importance of seeing with clarity both the suffering of others and the obstacles in one's path. The characters in the novel who find the most happiness are those who, like Chen Pan, are generous

and kind in the face of brutality, nurturing relationships with lovers, parents, and children, yet not martyring themselves for others or for ideological causes.

The erasures of the past inherent in cycles of colonialism and revolution play out in the microcosms of family relationships in *Monkey Hunting*. There is a great deal of misery in the novel, which grows primarily out of the systematic forms of oppression it depicts, including slavery, indenture, and totalitarianism. In addition to the physical brutality of such subjugations, these systems of repression act like acid upon interpersonal connections, leading to blindly selfish behaviors such as parents abandoning their children. This in turn separates generations, thus obscuring the past on both a national and an individual level. These concerns are ones that can be seen in real testimonials given by Chinese laborers in Cuba. Lisa Yun notes that “broken family and social disintegration were major preoccupations in the testimonies,” and that “The Chinese expressed grave concern over obligations to parents [and] children left behind” (99).

Many postcolonial critics have explored the links between family relationships and societal tensions. Frantz Fanon notes that, “There are close connections between the structure of the family and the structure of the nation” (141). He writes that in Europe, a child finds the same laws and principles in the society that he grew up with in his family. By contrast, for a black child growing up in a normal family, once he has contact with the white world, he becomes abnormal, and so he must choose to reject either his family or his society. In *Carnal Knowledge*, Ann Stoler seeks to understand “why connections between parenting and colonial power, between nursing mothers and cultural boundaries, between servants and sentiments, and between illicit sex, orphans, and race emerge as central concerns of state and at the heart of colonial politics” (8). These critics draw attention to the ways that colonialism corroded or sought to control family relationships, a central concern of *Monkey Hunting*.

The theme of the erosion of family ties by systematic forms of oppression appears in the opening scenes of the novel. The story begins with an italicized prologue, a brief description of Chen Pan in China at the moment that he decides to indenture. A farmer with a wife, his crops have failed, and he has traveled to Amoy in search of work. He loses his money to opium, gambling, and women, and is convinced by a recruiter to leave his family and indenture in Cuba. This man, dressed in a “Western-style suit and a ring on his little finger flecked with diamond chips” represents the influence of European imperialism and capitalism in China (5).³³

The recruiter demonstrates a callousness that pervaded the private recruitment system. In China, the British attempted to avoid using paid professional recruiters in favor of voluntary recruiters such as Europeans based in China, such as missionaries, in order to avoid fraudulent recruitment practices, though they were not always successful. By contrast, the private companies that recruited labor for Cuba or Peru were paid based on how many laborers they recruited, which often led to highly deceptive practices and even kidnapping. The man in the Western suit tempts Chen Pan with stories of mineral-rich drinking water that will make him twice as strong, beautiful Cuban women, warm temperatures, and easy wealth. Swayed in part by these promises and in part by a desire for adventure, Chen Pan agrees to indenture. He imagines himself returning a few years later with wealth and status, bringing honor to his family. In fact, he is leaving forever his wife and his parents.

The brutal conditions of Chen Pan’s voyage indicate that the indenture of the Chinese in Cuba was only nominally different from slavery. The laborers suffer from hunger, cold, and thirst, and many die from illness and beatings, or commit suicide. The ship is “outfitted like a prison, with irons and grates” and on board, the crew threatens the laborers “with muskets and

³³ Chen Pan’s voyage further emphasizes the links between imperialism and capitalism. Though he is traveling to Cuba, a Spanish colony, he does so on a British boat. As Mark Tumbridge notes, British boats were allowed to carry laborers for rival empires in the interest of making a profit (244).

cutlasses and rattan rods, shackled those whom the ropes didn't tame" (8). Literary theorist Lisa Yun notes that mortality rates on board these ships was actually higher than that of the African slave trade, between 12-30 percent, sometimes reaching as high as 50 percent, and that approximately 16,400 Chinese died on European and American coolie ships to Cuba (18). She describes the retrofitting that some ships underwent in order to transport laborers, making them very similar to slave ships: "The infamous iron hatch was utilized to imprison coolies below the deck and to insure the protection of the armed crew above. The hatches were symbolic of Chinese coolie traffic as pirated slave traffic" (27).

In these moments on the boat, as the nature of his indenture dawns on Chen Pan, we see his emerging sense of practical morality. Chen Pan reflects on the different worldviews of each of his parents. Even before his attempt at heroism, his father had been idealistic in the face of defeat. A poet and an educated man, he took the Imperial exams for twenty years, but failed to earn a post and was forced to be a farmer instead. Chen Pan's mother, though callous in response to her husband's death, raises a practical point in her dismissal of his heroism: "What father leave his children nothing but his good reputation to eat?" In his response to the harsh conditions on the boat, Chen Pan seems to combine the approaches of his parents, rather than dwelling on what he has lost. Like his mother, he has a sense of self-preservation: he determines that "he would survive unless someone managed to kill him" (15) and that if "any of the other city cocks so much as jostled his elbow, he would knock them unconscious with a blow" (12). Yet, he is also kind, like his father – when the ship's doctor cures him of a fever, he tries to pay the man with "one of his precious Mexican coins" (14).

On the plantation, there is even less distinction between indenture and slavery than on the boat. As noted above, bound Chinese laborers and African slaves often worked side-by-side on

the plantations. Chen Pan soon realizes that “he was in Cuba not as a hired worker but as a slave, no different from the Africans” (9). The labor is endless, the quarters where the laborers are locked in at night are filthy, laborers are whipped for defiance or even speaking their own language, and, as on the voyage, men, both African and Chinese, frequently commit suicide to escape their pain and humiliation. Sean Moiles notes that, “The novel’s portrayal of Chinese and African enslavement on a sugar plantation rejects the myth of pre-Castro Cuba as a prelapsarian paradise. García blurs the distinction between slavery and indentured servitude, the official status of Chinese laborers” (181).

In Chen Pan’s early days on the plantation, we see him benefiting from his openness and generosity, particularly in the solidarity he forms with the Africans. The other Chinese ridicule Chen Pan for this association. They mock the Africans with racialized insults, calling them thieves and saying they smell like monkeys. In spite of this, Chen Pan and the Africans become friends, and they share elements of their cultures with each other. The Africans offer Chen Pan the yams they roast, show him how to swing a machete, and give him healing leaves for his wounds when he is whipped. In exchange, Chen Pan teaches his friend Cabeza Chinese exercises to do in the morning in order to gather strength. Through this creolization and mutual friendship, a theme that continues throughout the novel, García emphasizes the benefits of solidarity between races.

While Chen Pan is generous with the other laborers, he is not subservient to the management. In a scene that gives the novel its title, he wins the admiration and gratitude of the Africans when he kills the cruel Creole overseer by hurling a rock at his head. Chen Pan’s action echoes a similar moment back in China, when he threw a stone at a mischievous monkey who was gorging himself on the fruit from the family’s kumquat tree and trying to mount the local

dogs. The implication is that the overseer is no better than this monkey, stealing the labor of the workers and attacking the women. Chen Pan's act of violent resistance is similar to real incidences of laborers overpowering and even killing managers. Lisa Yun notes that the laborers' "predicament of unending bondage combined with a high mortality rate led to the preponderance of explosive resistance and chaos" (174).

The events of the plantation indicate that romantic relationships, as well as familial ones, were destroyed by indenture. After Chen Pan kills the overseer, he draws the attention of a slave woman named Rita, who is also involved with the owner of the estate and a slave named Narciso. These connections lead to violence: the master has Narciso shot and fed to the bloodhounds, and when Rita becomes pregnant with the master's child, she is sold to a coffee plantation in the mountains, where the conditions are even worse than the sugarcane. The slaves predict that she will be dead before she gives birth, indicating the plantation owners' view of the slaves as disposable.³⁴

Chen Pan manages to escape into the woods, where he lives for nine months, the length of time of a pregnancy. This echoes Rita's pregnancy but also hints at his own rebirth. The theme of rebirth is strengthened by the fact that he is haunted by an owl who scolds him with the voice of his mother, calling out "unfilial son!" (39). Chen Pan attempts to appease the owl with offerings of food and shelter, indicating that he feels guilty for leaving his family and cannot let go of his life in China. Finally, he lies down in a cave and resigns himself to death, but he wakes the next morning feeling refreshed. Chen Pan's near-death experience releases him from his nostalgic attachments to China. Sean Moiles points out, "After escaping the plantation and living

³⁴ As noted, Chinese women almost never migrated, and so Chinese laborers, as well as the European managers, often formed connections with African women, which raised issues of the inheritance of slavery. A Chinese laborer giving a deposition notes, "I saw some Chinese have children with black women, and their children will still be owners' slaves" (As qtd in Yun 158).

in the forest as a runaway, he cuts his queue, a definite signifier of Chineseness” (177). This is a key moment in the novel, which García emphasizes by ending this section of Chen Pan’s story and switching to the story of Domingo Chen, Chen Pan’s great-grandson. This shift, in turn emphasizes that Chen Pan’s line has continued, offering a sense of hope and progression.

Chen Pan becomes a success story, owning his own secondhand shop in Havana, which comes as a direct result of his ability to simultaneously be idealistic and realistic. By saving a Spanish nobleman, Count de Santovenia, from a bandit, he wins a Letter of Domicile, which guarantees his freedom, and with the count’s support, he is able to open the store that helps him enter the middle class. The protection of the de Santovenias even prevents the police from harassing him, as they do to other wealthy Chinese.

Chen Pan’s decision to help the count, however, is a curious one. As a laborer, Chen Pan killed a Creole overseer for his cruelty. Shortly before he rescues the count, he sees an overseer herding a chain gang of slaves through the streets of Havana. As he watches, he touches the knife in his jacket and thinks that the overseer’s time will come. Yet, he rescues a count who leads a lavish lifestyle in a palace where he “once hosted a three-day feast that ended with a sunset ride in a gas-filled balloon” (64). The Count de Santovenia was a real nobleman in Cuba, a planter named Nicolás Martínez de Campos, who bought the title of count in 1824 for somewhere between \$25,000 and \$30,000 (Thomas 142). While the fictional de Santovenia may not have been directly involved in Chen Pan’s suffering, as a planter, he was in a sense more responsible for the indenture system than the overseer who Chen Pan killed or the overseer in charge of the chain gang. If anything, one might expect Chen Pan to side with the bandit. Sean Moiles argues that Chen Pan is influenced by his father’s acts of heroism, which “provide memories that inspire Chen Pan’s own heroic acts” (173). Attempting to rescue a ten-year old girl from rape, though,

does not seem equivalent to saving a count who flaunts the wealth that he earned through the exploitation of his laborers.

Chen Pan's motivations are not described, and so it is indeed possible that he aided the count out of a sense of honor and a desire to follow in his father's heroic footsteps. It also seems possible that Chen Pan made a calculated decision to help a man who could help him. This, then, could be seen as another combination of his father's model of idealism and his mother's sense of self-preservation.

Interestingly, when the story is passed on, these events change shape. Chen Pan's granddaughter, Chen Fang, who lives in China, is told that Chen Pan "became rich after saving a Spanish lady's honor, although he never succeeded in marrying her" (91). The story has shifted to make his role a more heroic one, and as the suggestion is that he saved a woman from rape, Chen Pan's actions also become more similar to his father's attempt to save a young girl from the bandits' assault. This points to the quixotic nature of memory and also indicates the ways that history is shaped by what we want to remember.

Once Chen Pan becomes successful, he adopts the appearance of the Spanish, making a point of dressing well in "a white linen suit and a Panama hat" (65). The Cubans stare at him, seeing him as an anomaly, like "a talking monkey or a sheep in evening dress" (65). This degrading view of the Chinese as akin to animals is one that appears frequently in testimonials given by laborers. One man reported that "Every Chinese who was locked up was forced by the manager to bark like dogs and bleat like sheep" (Yun 153). Chen Pan is an unsettling incongruity, and his position of wealth and status threatens the Spanish sense of a racialized division of labor: they "would have preferred that he still worked for them in the fields, or sold garlic at their kitchen door" (66). Mark Tumbridge points out that Chen Pan's escape, success,

and long life, like the success of Phularjee and Munshi Rahman Khan, are not the norm: “His eventual success is a departure from the everyday fight for survival of the majority of Chinese indentured labourers in Cuba” (245). Lisa Yun notes that in the 1899 Census, only 13% of Chinese Cubans were listed as merchants, “while 73% remained day laborers and servants” (218).

With his wealth, Chen Pan is equipped to help others, as he does when he buys Lucrecia, a slave woman, and her son Victor. Lucrecia’s treatment at the hands of her former owner, Don Joaquín, links her to the other women in the novel, including Rita, who suffer sexual abuse on top of the denigrations and cruelty of slavery. We later learn that Lucrecia is actually Don Joaquín’s daughter, and that he had brutally assaulted her mother, and Lucrecia as well after her mother’s death. Slavery has perverted the ties of family to the point that Don Joaquín will not even acknowledge that Lucrecia is his daughter, strangling her and threatening to kill her when she calls him Papa. When selling her to Chen Pan, Don Joaquín equates her with an animal: ““You can cancel the milkman with this heifer in the house...breed [her] with a few young bucks and populate your own plantation!”” (67).

Chen Pan, Lucrecia, and Victor form a new kind of family, based on an equality of relations that none has yet experienced. Chen Pan offers Lucrecia her freedom, but she insists on buying it in order to have no debts between them. Chen Pan helps her find ways to support herself, encouraging her to start a candle-making business. He considers whether her identity is fixed in her labor – “If he bought the girl and paid her a small salary, would she still be considered a slave?” (67-8), drawing attention to the contradictions inherent in teleologies of labor. In the same way that Chen Pan benefited from his friendship with the African slaves, he is

rewarded for his kindness towards Lucrecia. The two eventually become lovers, then husband and wife, and they have three children together: Lorenzo, Desiderio, and Caridad.

Lucrecia's generosity and balanced worldview enable her to move beyond the traumatic experiences of her childhood, and she is perhaps the happiest character in the novel. She is deeply syncretic in her beliefs, borrowing from Christian, Santeria, and Buddhist traditions: "In her opinion, it was better to mix a little of this and that, like when she prepared an *ajiaco* stew...she lit a candle here, made an offering there, said prayers to the gods of heaven and the ones here on earth" (129, italics original). She refuses to pledge herself to just one, politely declining when Protestant missionaries attempt to convert her: "If she believed anything, it was this: Whenever you helped someone else, you saved yourself" (129).

Lucrecia finds a sense of belonging in her ties to her family and adopting Chen Pan's homeland as her own: "Sometimes Lucrecia questioned the origin of her birth, but she didn't question who she'd become...She was thirty-six years old and the wife of Chen Pan, the mother of his children. She was Chinese in her liver, Chinese in her heart" (138). Her attitude towards the fatal illness that she develops at age 48 reflects the peace of mind that she has achieved. While Chen Pan mourns, seeing her impending death as "a voyage he was preparing to take to a foreign land," (167) Lucrecia views it as a part of a cycle, requesting that she be buried in the garden to help the vegetables grow and urging Chen Pan to find another wife after she dies. She tells Chen Pan, "More than half my life has been happy...How many people can say that?" (180). The openness and kindness that she and Chen Pan demonstrate towards each other lead to a rewarding and long-lasting relationship, one of the few in the novel.

The tragedies and joys of Chen Pan's family parallel his involvement in Cuban struggles for independence, and the development of nationhood. Shortly after Chen Pan purchases

Lucrecia and Victor, Victor succumbs to yellow fever, and Chen Pan is devastated. Victor's death coincides with the beginning of the Ten Years War (1868-1878), in which Cubans fought for independence from Spain. Chen Pan seeks solace in the revolution, buying fifty machetes and delivering them to Commander Sian, one of the 400 hundred real Chinese who fought in the Ten Years War. Sean Moiles notes, "through the actions and reflections of Chen Pan, García inserts into historical narrative the Chinese contributions to anticolonial struggles in Cuba" (174). After returning from this unsuccessful rebellion, he begins to build a new family with Lucrecia. Thirty years later, once he has formed a family, he longs to join the Cuban War of Independence, in which Cuba finally pushed out the Spanish, but settles for sending money to the rebels.

Ironically, Chen Pan makes his wealth by buying the furniture and goods of the Spaniards who have fallen upon hard times or who are fleeing Cuba, then selling those goods to other foreign clients. He thus supports the Cuban independence movement with money earned from the very people the rebels fight against. This, then, is another example of his pragmatic idealism – Chen Pan burns to aid the nationalist revolution but has the business acumen to take advantage of his opponents' weakness.

In spite of the contributions that he and other Chinese make to Cuban independence, they face racism over and over again. The Hispano-Cubans treat his son, Lorenzo, with respect because of his medical expertise, yet "when the times grew difficult or the jobs grew scarce, he knew well enough that they were just *chinos de porquería*," dirty Chinese (184, emphasis original).³⁵ When World War I begins, the price of sugar increases, and more Chinese immigrants are allowed into Cuba to work the sugarcane fields. However, "Chen Pan knew it was only a matter of time before the Chinese would no longer be welcomed in Cuba. In times of

³⁵ Lorenzo, who is referred to as "el médico chino," may be based on the historical figure of Cham Bom Bia, a Chinese doctor in Cuba who bore the same title. Like Lorenzo, Cham Bom Bia was well-known of treating the poor even if they had no money for payment. See *The Coolie Speaks*, 204.

economic necessity, they were usually the first scapegoats” (246, italics original). Like the racial tensions that Indian laborers faced in other parts of the Caribbean, the scapegoating of the Chinese most likely was the result of several factors. Lisa Yun argues that for the slave-owning class, Chinese laborers acted as a constant reminder of “the pressure to transition from slavery to wage labor or free labor” and thus “represented a new challenge to colonial authority, Catholicism, creole culture, and language, and a race-based hierarchy of slavery” (156). While it is not my intention to ascertain which racial group suffered more, Yun notes that Chinese laborers viewed themselves as having the same or even a lower social status than slaves. One laborer testified, “*People in Cuba already got used to enslaving the black slaves, and they treat Chinese worse than black slaves*” (160-1, italics original). Africans may have viewed indentured laborers as latecomers, and thus not truly belonging in Cuba. In addition, plantation owners and managers played the racial groups against each other in order to undermine solidarity.

In spite of the tensions that Chen Pan experiences in his adopted homeland, he resists the lure of a nostalgic idealization of China. While he longs to see his birth country, he also recognizes the uselessness of trying to find return to home there. One of his friends, Arturo Fu Fon, spends a great deal of time and money on a trip to China, but finds upon arrival that his whole family has died, and he immediately returns to Cuba. This, like the narrator’s visit to India in *Jahajin*, underscores Stuart Hall’s argument in “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” that members of a diaspora can never truly find the home that they left, because these places are constantly changing, not frozen in time.

Lorenzo, like Chen Pan and Lucrecia, finds happiness in cultural syncretism and an acceptance of his past. He embraces his Chinese heritage, visiting China to learn medicine. He begins a family while he is there, but leaves them and returns to Cuba, saying that, “his first wife

was beautiful, but like the stars, she was coldly inhospitable” (187). This abandonment has repercussions for his descendants, as noted below, but Lorenzo finds happiness and love with a new wife, Jinying, in Cuba. Chen Pan notes with approval that “her blood sang with energy and her eyes were bright with life, everything in balance” (186).

Unlike Lorenzo, Desiderio, Chen Pan’s oldest son, rejects his Chinese heritage. He is ashamed of Chen Pan’s clothing and accent, and only lets Chen Pan see his grandchildren for one supervised hour on Christmas Day, as if afraid that Chen Pan’s Chinese-ness will rub off on the children. Furthermore, he has opened a gambling den, a clear contrast to Lorenzo’s choice of a helping profession, and a signal of his interest in monetary profit. Desiderio, it seems, takes after Chen Pan’s mother in his self-interestedness. There is little sense, though, that he has gained happiness from his choices. Lorenzo seems far more content, another indication of the benefits of openness and strong familial ties.

The second storyline of the novel follows Chen Fang, the daughter that Lorenzo had with his first wife in China, and it takes place entirely in China. Chen Fang’s performance of gender simultaneously demonstrates the fluidity of masculinity and femininity and the rigidity of gender roles in 19th century China. Furthermore, her abandonment of her own child and the negative consequences that follow parallel the erasure of the past that occurs under the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Both events emphasize the devastating impact of blinding oneself to the past.

Chen Fang’s narrative is the only one told in first-person, which gives her tale a sense of immediacy and intimacy. She tells her story from prison, a victim of Mao’s attack on intellectuals. The first half, describing her childhood, is in past tense, whereas the second half is in present tense, capturing her miserable days in the jail cell and her reflections on what has

come to pass. Her suffering thus has an endless quality, as though she always has and always will be imprisoned. In addition, we sense that Chen Fang is near death as she tells her story, giving it the feel of a testimonial, that she is bearing witness to the societal strictures that led her to this wretched position.

Chen Fang's mother, distraught at birthing a third daughter, chooses to raise her as a boy, supporting the view of gender as a social construct. Chen Fang's childhood is one of relative freedom. Unlike her sisters, her feet are not bound, she is able to play in the fields instead of helping with domestic tasks like cooking and sewing, and her father, Lorenzo, who lives in Cuba, believes that she is a boy and sends money for her education. She knows little of Cuba, having heard that it is a magical place with "fish that rained down from the sky during thunderstorms," and gold so plentiful it was used for "buttons and broom handles" (92). Included in this list of fantastic tales is that "In Havana, the women choose whom they want to marry and when," indicating that she finds it equally unbelievable that women would have this level of choice as that fish would fall from the skies (92). This emphasizes the binding nature of women's roles in early twentieth century China.

Chen Fang's early happiness and freedom make it all the more painful when she is forced into the constricting role of wife and mother. When she is sixteen, World War I interrupts her father's remittances, and her mother finds a husband for her. Chen Fang says, "It was not easy to become a woman" (96), echoing Simone de Beauvoir's quote, "One is not born, but rather, becomes a woman" (283). Chen Fang cannot cook or sew, and her mother-in-law criticizes her unbound feet, calling them "clumsy hooves" (96). She thus equates Chen Fang with a cow, as Don Joaquin did with Lucrecia; both Don Joaquin and Chen Fang's mother-in-law use insults that reduce women to their breeding capabilities. Chen Fang comes to feel that "There is no

harder work than being a woman. I know this because I pretended to be a boy for so long” (96). Men, she says, hide their weakness, whereas “For women, there are no such blusterings, only work” (96). Years later, she attributes her life’s uncertainty to her existence outside the structures of gender norms: “In China women do not stand alone. They obey fathers, husbands, and their eldest sons. I lived outside the dictates of men, and so my life proved as unsteady as an egg on an ox” (226).

Just as Lorenzo left his first family, Chen Fang ultimately abandons her own child. Once she has given birth to a son, her mother-in-law offers her money to leave the family, and she accepts, taking a job as a teacher at a foreigner’s school in Shanghai. She quickly regrets the decision to leave her son: “I thought I would be pleased to leave him, to seek my freedom. Instead I swallowed my bitter heart again and again.” This decision haunts her later, when she learns that her son has become a leader of the Cultural Revolution that persecutes her.

Like Chen Pan and Lucrecia, Chan Fang finds comfort in a relationship that rejects societal notions of who should love whom. Dauphine, a French woman who is temporarily living in China, connects her, not only to love and joy, but to her family in Cuba, as well. Dauphine has spent time in Havana and has photographs of the city, “including one of an old Chinese man in a doorway smoking an opium pipe,” whom Chen Fang imagines knows her father or grandfather (141). Dauphine tells her of a club in Havana “where women wore men’s evening clothes and kissed each other on the lips” (142). This opens up a world for her that she had not imagined: “I knew, listening to her, that I knew nothing at all” (142).

Chen Fang’s story shares many similarities with that of the main character in Patricia Powell’s *The Pagoda*. This novel, published in 1999, tells the story of Lowe, a girl raised as a boy by her father in China. Powell refers to Lowe as “he” throughout the novel, indicating the

blurriness of gender distinctions. When Lowe reaches adolescence, his father plans to sell him into marriage in order to satisfy debts, so he escapes by smuggling onto a boat filled with indentured laborers bound for Jamaica. Lowe's sexuality is fluid as well, as he is drawn to both women and men. The similarities between Lowe and Chen Fang's stories indicate both authors' interest in challenging the view of gender as biological and drawing attention to the low status of women in 19th century China.

Chen Fang's happiness is short-lived, pointing to the cyclical nature of trauma. Dauphine returns to France, and Chen Fang suffers under Mao's Cultural Revolution, which sought to root out bourgeoisie, traditional, and capitalist influences. García demonstrates the inculcation of the youth and the targeting of educational institutions that occurred as part of the Cultural Revolution. An army official comes into the school once a week and shouts at the students, "You must plant gardens with bayonets!" (227) Chen Fang is accused of being a foreign spy and a capitalist, and her students are encouraged to beat her and make accusations against her. She bemoans the mob mentality of the revolution, that the other teachers and her neighbors are quick to add on accusations. She likens this to the old days, when millers blinded "the mules they used to turn their grindstones. Is this what we have become? A country of blind mules?" (228) Her reference here to blindness echoes the trope of vision that ties together all three storylines. Mao's persecution of the educated is often seen as an attempt to reassert his own waning power. His party's mission to blind the Chinese people to all but his ideology is similar to Chen Pan's mother's selfish admonition to "Avert your eyes to the suffering of others and keep your own plates full."

The Party's attack on tradition also parallels the patterns of abandonment in Chen Fang's family. In the final scenes of the novel, Chen Fang is 72 years old, and she has been in prison for

three years. The theme of sight is repeated: “The guards broke my reading glasses my first day here” (225). Of the dehumanizing treatment she receives, she thinks, “These days, everything old is to be destroyed: old customs, old habits, old culture, old thinking” (228). This cutting of ties to the past echoes her own cutting of ties to her son, which is made explicit when Chen Fang learns that her son has become an important Party member. She has heard that he “made his reputation running an important southern province. A reputation, no doubt, built on corpses” (230). Had she raised her own son, the novel suggests, he would not have turned into such a monster. She considers using his name to escape the physical discomfort of her cell and her brutal interrogations, but fears that the repercussions might be severe. “What would become of him if it were known that his mother was a traitor? Would he have to shoot me to prove his allegiance to the Revolution?” (231) Her son’s cruelty and the Party’s repression are both intrinsically tied to an erasure of the past.

Chen Fang’s story ends with a flicker of hope that points to the importance of uncovering the buried past. She imagines that if she ever gets out of prison, she will travel to Havana and seek out her father. She will find a balcony and watch the rain “splattering the city, replenishing the sea,” and then she will write a letter to her son in Shanghai (233), neither of whom she has met. Her vision of her own replenishing, then, comes from reforming the severed connections with her father and son, connections that were both cut because she was born a woman, not a man.

The story of Domingo Chen, Chen Pan’s great-grandson, demonstrates the cyclical nature of imperialism and the pervasive nature of racism. As Domingo pours sugar into a pot of tea in his apartment in New York City, he contemplates the labor that went into it: “To work the

sugarcane fields, his father had told him, was to go wooing mournful ghosts. The chain gangs of runaway souls, ankles ulcerated and iron-eaten and wrapped in rags. Or the luckier suicide ghosts who'd killed themselves dressed in their Sunday best" (49). The stories that have been passed down to Domingo capture with poetic accuracy Chen Pan's brutal experience of indenture, as depicted in the opening scenes of the novel. While Chen Pan's descendants do not face the same level of physical abuse as the indentured laborers, Domingo and Pipo, Domingo's father, both face racism and oppression in various forms.

Domingo's section of the novel opens with Domingo in his apartment, listening to the radio: "the bad news was blaring – subway decapitations and hijackings to Cuba and all the tragic state of Vietnam" (44). The news thus connects into a web of violence his current city, his homeland, and the nation that he will visit as a member of an invading army. The destructive experiences that Domingo has in each of these places ties them together into a critique of American neo-imperialism, as well as the repression of dissent that occurred during and after the Cuban Revolution.

As Domingo was growing up in Cuba, his mother was a supporter of the Cuban Revolution, while his father was loyal to the Americans. The enmity that developed between his parents acts as a condemnation of both nations. Domingo's mother blamed the Americans for the deformed babies she delivered. She believed that the U.S. Naval Base in Guantánamo Bay "had dumped poisons into the Río Guaso, contaminating the sugar fields, making the coffee trees redden with blight" (206-7), which led to congenitally joined triplets, a baby with an eye in its umbilical cord, and a boy "whose heart had steamed furiously outside his chest. A moment later, his tiny heart had exploded in her face like a grenade" (206). The comparison of the baby's heart to a weapon of warfare emphasizes the constant threat of the American military presence. Pipo

had no such hatred for the Americans and worked as a short order cook in Guantánamo, a position that brought him negative attention from revolutionary leaders after the Cuban Revolution. When Pipo was arrested on charges of anti-revolutionary activity, his wife testified against him. Pipo was placed in an insane asylum, where he was beaten and given electroshock therapy. The United States' aggressive incursion into Cuban affairs and the Cuban government's cruel treatment of American sympathizers are thus equally to blame for the destruction of Domingo's family.

Pipo's connections to the Americans eventually helped Pipo leave Cuba with Domingo, but the United States is no paradise. Domingo works long hours washing dishes in a restaurant, and his father struggles to find his place and overcome the trauma he has experienced. Pipo finally commits suicide one evening by jumping onto the subway tracks, challenging the view of America as a democratic refuge for those fleeing Latin American dictatorships. Domingo joins the American army shortly after his father's suicide, but he faces racial prejudice from the officers as well as the nurses who treat him when he is wounded in Vietnam.

Just as Domingo's childhood in Cuba acts as a critique of American involvement in Cuba, the cruelty and senseless violence that he witnesses in the Vietnam War is a condemnation of that neo-imperial offensive. The irrational, barbaric nature of the war is indicated at several points: a soldier named Lester Gentry machine guns an old woman and two small children, while a lieutenant interrogates a prisoner by "plung[ing] a knife into [his] thigh and slash[ing] him down to his knee" but gets no answers (111). Most of all, the insanity of the war is reflected when Domingo Chen's platoon is attacked by a gang of monkeys who steal his flak jacket and his gun, and bite and scratch him. The monkeys can be seen as a symbol of the Viet Cong fighters who, though fewer in number and less heavily armed than the Americans, used guerilla

warfare tactics and persevered against the Americans in a war of attrition. The American military's blindness to this reality is represented by the major who refuses to believe Domingo's story. Domingo reflects, "What'd happened had nothing to do with reasonable explanations or the military's misplaced trust in precision" (118).

Chen Pan's glasses, a symbol of clear vision, play a key role in this section of the novel. Domingo Chen keeps them in his flak jacket while he is in Vietnam and attributes to them his luck in surviving various close calls. Sean Moiles notes that throughout the novel, physical objects that have been passed down through generations have a positive impact on those who carry them: "García implies that these historical traces invite the imagination to search for possibilities outside the rigidity of top-down political, economic, social, and cultural systems" (173). However, Domingo's luck does not last forever, and he is injured by a land mine. In the recovery ward, he finds himself thinking of the advice of his father, Pipo, advice that had been passed down to him from his grandfather, Chen Pan, "*Don't watch with interest the suffering of others*" (151, italics original). Domingo finds himself struggling with this advice in the hospital ward: "Everywhere he looked, crisply gauzed catastrophes looked back" (151).

Domingo finds consolation with a prostitute named Tham Thanh Lan, but unlike the relationship between Chen Pan and Lucrecia, theirs is not an equal partnership. Tham Thanh Lan, like Lucrecia, is caught in a form of abusive, sexualized slavery. Her body has been colonized by a jealous general in the South Vietnamese army, who tattooed his identity numbers on her thigh, and she is scarred where he penetrated her with his dagger. Domingo cannot fully liberate Tham Thanh Lan from this slavery, though. In part, this is because she depends on Domingo for financial stability, and in part because the American domination of Vietnam seeps into their interactions. Domingo takes over her life, moving into her apartment, sending away her

other clients, and buying her “things she didn’t need: hair curlers and a waffle iron, lemon-cake mix and a brand-new sewing machine” (204). Having impregnated Tham Thanh Lan, he feels tied to her by a mixture of obligation and pleasure. He tells her he will marry her, but feels that he “needed to go away, to leave her like another country” (217).

For him, she is tied to the trauma of the war, trauma that still haunts him. He is obsessed with the story of Saint John, who endured prison and torture. When he thinks about the other members of his platoon, it is with a sense of hopelessness: “He wondered what [they] were all doing back home... What did it matter, anyway? They’d all die sooner or later, slowly or mercifully, emptied of light” (213). He aches to tell her “how he carried the darkness inside him now, how trampling on plants made him cringe” (156). This sense of despair and obsession with death indicate the psychic wounds that he still carries even if his body has healed.

In considering his options, Domingo thinks of the stories he has heard of American soldiers taking home Vietnamese fiancées or wives. He imagines the experiences of these women, who attempted to assimilate by “bleaching their hair, wearing blue jeans and cowboy hats, renaming themselves Delilah,” or, like Bibi in *Those that Be in Bondage*, “dressed up like China dolls at their husbands’ insistence, paraded around small towns in Texas and Mississippi,” (208) or even committed suicide. As he contemplates leaving Tham Thanh Lan, he equates a life with her to a life of bonded labor. He considers that when Chen Pan arrived in Cuba, the cost to buy eight years of bound labor was 150 pesos, and that in twice that time, his son will be grown. He hides \$1,012, all his money, in her apartment and leaves, seemingly justifying his exit by buying his freedom. It is tempting to see similarities between this departure and the United States’ withdrawal from Vietnam, which many South Vietnamese who had fought with the U.S. described as abandonment.

In one of the final sections of the novel, Lorenzo and Chen Pan take a train trip to Havana for the birth of Lorenzo's child, Pipo (who later becomes Domingo's father). The seventeen-hour voyage has a liminal quality, a sense of a time and space apart. The train scenes act as a web, pulling together the present and the past, the three different storylines of the novel, and the ethnic groups that make up Cuba.

Five generations of Chen Pan's family are present in these scenes in one form or another. On the train with him are his son Lorenzo and his grandson Meng, but other family members are in his thoughts. At one point, as Chen Pan contemplates his mortality, he hears "a muted hooting, as if an owl were trapped among the luggage racks" (191). This echoes the nine months he spent in the forest, followed by an owl that he believed to be the ghost of his mother. Chen Pan, unaware that Chen Fang is female, thinks hopefully, "Perhaps one day the boy would come to Cuba and teach them all Chinese" (187), which connects to Chen Fang's own desire to travel to Cuba, meet her father, and learn Spanish. Even the unborn Domingo is present in a sense: Chen Pan falls asleep and dreams of the future, of the train turning into a plane, which can be seen as a premonition of the plane trip that Domingo and his father Pipo take to the United States.

These train scenes also draw together the racial groups of Cuba into a shared history. On the train itself, Chen Pan, Lorenzo, and Meng share a cabin with a Belgian couple and a Spanish bureaucrat, and Chen Pan sees Creole women in other cars. Notably, we do not see any characters of African descent on the train, pointing to the ongoing wealth inequality between the races, a legacy of colonialism and slavery.

The Afro-Cubans certainly have a presence in the train scenes, though, as the trip occurs during the 1912 uprising, alternately called the Race War or the Armed Uprising of the

Independents of Color. The Independent Party of Color (IPC), one of the first black political parties in the Caribbean, formed in 1908 to fight for social and economic equality for blacks. In 1910, the Cuban government passed a law banning political parties based on race, effectively outlawing the IPC. Mass protests against the law turned into an armed rebellion composed mostly, but not entirely, of Afro-Cubans. The protesters attacked primarily foreign sugar mills and plantations. After two months, the Cuban army, bolstered by American marines sent to protect North American property, violently put down the rebellion, killing between 2,000 and 6,000 Afro-Cubans.³⁶ The train ride takes place in the midst of this uprising, and García uses this moment to reflect on both the racialized stereotypes that maintain tensions between races, and the possibility for solidarity between members of oppressed groups.

On the train, the Europeans and Creoles spread exaggerated rumors that the Afro-Cubans are “readying to launch a bloody race war that would leave every criollo dead” (184), and “that a posse of *negros* had raped a schoolteacher in Ramón de las Yaguas and had partially cannibalized her flesh” (186, italics original). García is careful to contrast these reports with Chen Pan’s more tempered view of the events. He dismisses the racist rumors, wondering, “How was it that fear so clotted rational thinking?” (187) He knows that “every man, in his way, was particularly plagued—beset by northern winds, rotting with winter dampness, boiling with summer heat. What did any of it have to do with race?” (188) In response to the violence that they witness outside the train, Chen Pan wants to explain to Meng “that *los negros* were protesting for their rights to form a political party, that they would pay for their protesting with their lives and the lives of many innocent others. What choice did they have? Revolutions never took place sitting quietly under a mango tree” (193-4, italics original).

³⁶ Official Cuban sources put the number at 2,000, but other sources estimate somewhere between 5,000 and 6,000. See *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912*, page 225.

There is also an implied solidarity between the protestors and the Chinese former indentured laborers like Chen Pan. As the train passes fields of sugar cane, Chen Pan thinks, “How inviting they looked from this distance. Who could fathom the mountain of corpses that had made these fields possible?” (190) His greatest fantasy is to buy the plantation where he was a laborer, which parallels the Afro-Cubans’ desire to take over or destroy the plantations.

On this train ride, Chen Pan also reflects on the diasporic quest for belonging. He wonders where his son Lorenzo is truly at home and concludes, “Lorenzo’s skin, Chen Pan supposed, was a home of sorts, with its accommodations to three continents” (192). Just as Lucrecia experiences a sense of Chinese-ness bodily, in her heart and her liver, Lorenzo carries his sense of identity with him, equally Chinese, African and Cuban. Chen Pan, Lucrecia, and Lorenzo are able to find a sense of balance, between the cultures that are a part of them, and between idealism and practicality.

In spite of these hopeful moments, there is an element of bleakness in *Monkey Hunting*. Throughout the novel we see patterns of parents erasing connections with their offspring, or children cutting ties with their parents. Don Joaquin denies that Lucrecia is his daughter, Chen Fang abandons her son, Desiderio cuts ties with his father, and Domingo walks out on Tham Thanh Lan, who is carrying his child. These moves echo the erasures of the past and blindness to the present that occur on a national scale throughout the novel. China purges tradition and history in the Cultural Revolution, and Cuba creates an idealized version of the past in order to build nationalism during the Cuban Revolution. García also warns against the self-interested blindness of neocolonialism in America’s aggressive protection of U.S. financial interests in Cuba and its involvement in and then abandonment of the conflict in Vietnam.

The cycles of trauma and domination that grow out of imperialism repeat throughout the novel, and it is certainly understandable that some characters in the novel, who are, as one critic put it, “beaten up by history” (Schuessler) turn to nostalgia to escape their pain. Yet the characters who find the most happiness in the novel, Chen Pan, Lucrecia, and Lorenzo, are able to escape that nostalgia. They move forward with an open-eyed realism combined with a generous idealism. These characters are able to acknowledge the traumas of the past and the present but hold on to a vision for the future.

Contemporary male authors like Dabydeen and Sharlowe seem to focus on the damages of empire, while female authors writing about imperialism often emphasize the oppression by the colonized upon their own people: culturally sanctioned violence against women, minority ethnic groups, and additional “othered” groups. They point to the ways that these hostilities develop out of or are supported by empire, or are envisioned as part of a patriarchal nationalism, a reaction against empire.

We can see this warning in recent novels that touch on indenture, especially those by Indo-Caribbean women writers. While historians such as Verene Shepherd and Patricia Muhammad have pushed against the silencing of Indian women in Caribbean history, it is only in the last decade or so that female fiction writers have joined in this movement, writing novels that present women’s roles in indenture. These novels include *Jahajin*, but also *The Swinging Bridge* (2003) by Ramabai Espinet, and *A Silent Life* by Ryhaan Shah (2005). The books contain strikingly similar themes, each focusing on a present-day Indo-Caribbean woman uncovering the stories of her female ancestors. The novels are also structured in similar ways. All three move back and forth in time, weaving together stories of the present and stories of the past in order to

demonstrate patterns of patriarchal oppression and the continuing impact of indenture on gender relations in the present. Even Gaitra Bahadur's nonfiction book, *Coolie Woman* (2013), could be included in this category. This book moves back and forth between Bahadur's own experiences of migration, racism, and sexism, and the information she has uncovered about her great-grandmother.

As Chinese women rarely indentured, novels by female authors about Chinese indenture, like *Monkey Hunting* and *The Pagoda*, do not deal directly with women laborers. However, both novels emphasize the restrictive gender roles of traditional Chinese society, and both explore the fluid nature of gender identity. Both also employ fragmented chronology to indicate the repetitive nature of gendered, racialized oppression.

The similarities in the structure and themes of all of these novels point to the necessity of recognizing such patterns, of exploring the past to better understand the present and consider ways to break such cycles in the future.

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Chapter 4

To Have and to Hold: the Role of Marriage in Nonfiction Indenture Narratives

Introduction

During the 1870 Commission of Inquiry into the Treatment of Immigrants in British Guiana, William Frere, the President of the Commission, asked, “With regard to the marriages of Coolies, there is a law prescribing monogamy: is there not, in this Colony?” James Crosby, Immigration Agent-General, responded “The Ordinance governing that is No. 10 of 1860, the Marriage Ordinance” (338). Ordinance 10 of the strikingly named Heathen Marriage Act put forth the terms under which Hindu and Muslim immigrants could register their marriage. Christian marriages were automatically registered, but “heathen immigrants” had to go through a lengthy and costly process: signing a declaration stating that no impediment existed, publishing notice of the intended marriage, waiting for three weeks to ensure that there were no objections, obtaining a certification from the District Magistrate, and taking that certificate to the Immigration Agent in Georgetown, who then issued a marriage registration certificate for two dollars. Although this certificate was necessary for other legislative tasks such as bequeathing property to one’s spouse or children, the process of registering a marriage was so onerous that fewer than 100 couples a year bothered with the procedure (Bahadur 120).

As indicated by Frere’s question, the law was intended to encourage monogamous relationships, and to bolster this purpose, it also set forth punishments for anyone who committed adultery with a married woman. Section 11 states that “If any person shall entice away from her husband any whose marriage shall have been duly registered under this Ordinance, such person

shall be guilty of an offense” and would be either fined twenty-four dollars or serve thirty days of hard labor, or both. During the Commission, Crosby gives an example of what he considers a positive outcome of this law: “in a late case which took place with regard to two parties, and which was likely to lead probably to serious consequences on the *Herstelling* estate...I was enabled to put an end to the dispute in a satisfactory manner under section 11. The woman was restored to her husband” (339). He thus indicates that section 11 was intended not only to encourage monogamy but also to minimize the violence that sometimes erupted when a woman left her spouse, and that the ideal resolution in such situations was the return of the wife to her husband.

The Heathen Marriage Ordinance signifies the level of involvement that British colonizers took in the lives of the immigrants, legislating such issues as marriage in an attempt to impose Victorian values. The outcome of this law also demonstrates the distance between the colonizers’ intended effect and the actual impact of their legislation. The practical result was that Christian immigrants in officially sanctioned, monogamous relationships were rewarded with rights that were nearly inaccessible to other immigrants. The law also seemed to have little effect on the immigrants’ views of marriage. In 1883, H.V.P. Bronkhurst, a Christian missionary wrote of the Ordinance, “The marriage ceremony gone through by them is a perfect farce, and is not calculated to make much impression upon the minds or consciences of the couples who get married by the sub-agents: at least, the coolies have repeatedly told me so” (337). Most disturbingly, women were often forced to remain in abusive relationships with their husbands, as the law prioritized the cohabitation of a married couple over all other concerns. As can be seen from the Heathen Marriage Ordinance and responses to it, marriage, the publicly recognized

institution of a private relationship, was a flashpoint for religious, ethnic, and class tensions in the Caribbean colonies.

We can also see from the statements above that the British views on the role of marriage in the immigrant population were recorded extensively in official documents, letters, and commissions of inquiry. Yet, this is only one half of the story - missing are the laborers' responses to these issues. Even when immigrant advocates like James Crosby testified about the laborers' experiences, they filter those experiences through an imperial lens.

In order to better understand the role that marriage played in conflicts between the colonizers and the colonized, and the impact of colonial legislation around marriage, I turn to nonfiction texts by laborers and their descendants. Unfortunately, few laborers directly recorded their experiences, as those who are focused on survival have little time or energy to devote to education or documenting their experiences. We have even less understanding of how the female laborers viewed migration and indenture. Women were less likely to be literate than men, and in the traditional Indian and Chinese societies, it was not seen as their role to appear in public and give testimony.³⁷

To help fill this gap, I explore the few direct accounts by Caribbean indentured laborers and their descendants. These include two written texts, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Labourer* (1948), by Munshi Rahman Khan,³⁸ a rare firsthand description of Caribbean indenture by a well-educated Indian man who recorded his experiences in Suriname; and *Autobiography of Alice Baghwandy Sital Persaud* (1962), the handwritten diary of the daughter of an indentured

³⁷ In *The Coolie Speaks*, historian Lisa Yun performs an extensive exploration of testimonials given by 3,000 Chinese laborers in Cuba in 1874. She notes that, far from being passive subjects of oppression, the laborers used sabotage and other forms of resistance, and she points to the contradictions in the experiences of the laborers, who were not free yet not slaves, hypermobile yet stuck in place. However, she also observes with regret that there is a large gap in our knowledge, as there were no testimonials given by women.

³⁸ The term "Munshi" is a sign of respect, translated as "teacher."

laborer. I also examine interviews with two female indentured laborers in the Caribbean, Maharani (1985) and Doolarie (1982). These autobiographies and interviews offer critical counter-narratives in a discourse that has generally been dominated by accounts from the colonizers. In these texts, as in the rhetoric from British colonizers, marriage and its legislation emerges as a critical site in the contestations between laborers and colonial officials, and between laborers, particularly around the control of women.

Many postcolonial critics have pointed to the ways that British colonizers legislated the treatment of Indian women as a means of justifying imperialism and maintaining control in the struggle for power with Indian men. Varsha Chitnis and Danaya Wright write that in colonized India, the “tussle over legal and political power was fought on the backs of Indian women because it was the alleged degraded position of Indian women and the barbaric actions of Indian men that justified the colonial mission in the first place” (1318). An early example of this is Britain’s 1861 abolition of sati, the practice in which a widow immolated herself on her husband’s pyre. In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” feminist literary critic Gayatri Spivak explores how the abolition of sati translated the act of widow immolation into an example of the barbaric characteristics of Hindu society, while the Indian nativist response might be that the woman wanted to die. Spivak notes that lost in both of these views of sati is the woman’s voice. She argues that by abolishing the practice, the British continued to limit women’s agency and that, “If, in the contest of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (274).

There has been less critical attention to Britain’s laws regulating the Indian diaspora. Marina Carter, one of the few historians to examine British legislation of indentured immigrants, argues that imperial laws in Mauritius, the first colony to employ Indian indentured labor on a

large scale, created “a united front of men, employers, and officials, against the independent will of women, particularly those who wished to leave unhappy and restrictive relationships” (238).

At various points in this chapter, I refer to legislation or events from Mauritius in order to indicate the scope of the legislative policies of British imperialism in the age of emancipation.

The laws that arose around marriage in the Caribbean colonies and the reactions to this legislation, as illustrated in nonfiction narratives, indicate that here, as in Mauritius, both British and Indians used the mistreatment of colonized women to support imperial or anti-imperial ambitions. One of the major justifications for British colonialism in India was that it would promote the sanctity of the family and that Indian women would be saved from barbaric practices such as child marriages and widow immolation. In fact, many of the laws passed under British colonialism had the opposite effect, forcing women to stay in unhappy, violent relationships. The interviews in particular demonstrate women’s brutal experiences of indenture, challenging the argument that colonialism “saved” Indian women from lives of degradation. Similarly, Indian men often used the treatment of women as an argument against colonization, pointing to the overwork and sexual abuse of women. Yet Indian men also petitioned for (and often gained) laws that would protect their sovereignty over women. This suggests that for both the British and the Indians, attempts to legislate morality were often thinly veiled means of maintaining control of colonized women, and thus maintaining some level of power in the colonial/anti-colonial struggle.

The autobiographies and interviews that I examine reveal another critical and under-explored impact of colonial legislation: the laws, meant to impose Victorian values, in many cases codified existing caste, class, and gender prejudices in the laboring population. The colonizers’ emphasis on recruiting “a better class” of women strengthened the degrading view of

working class women as immoral and uncivilized, while the laws intended to promote monogamy reinforced the supremacy of the husband in the marriage, even in cases where the woman faced deadly violence. These texts demonstrate the complex and often surprising results of colonial legislation around marriage. Through the laborers' accounts of indenture, we see the pressure on both male and female laborers to marry, the ways that laws often allowed or even increased violence against women, and the constant conflict between the colonized and the colonizers over controlling women's sexuality.

Description of the Narratives

The narratives described here take place in two British colonies, Trinidad and British Guiana, as well as Suriname, which was a Dutch colony at the time. Previous chapters have explored the role of indenture in British imperialism, so I would like to briefly consider the Dutch system of indenture, which was closely tied to British imperialism. The slavery trade to Suriname, sometimes known as Dutch Guiana, ended in 1807, when the colony was still under British occupation. The Dutch regained control in 1814, but did not emancipate their slaves until 1863, and imposed an apprenticeship period that lasted another ten years. Searching for alternate forms of labor, the government of Suriname brought in workers from China, Java, Madeira, the Netherlands, and Barbados, but soon struck a deal with the British in which they exchanged old forts in West Africa, remnants of the slave trade, for the right to recruit Indian labor. The first ship carrying Indian indentured laborers arrived in Suriname in 1873, followed by six more ships that year. This kind of imperial bargaining, in which forts, the machinery of war, were traded for the contracted labor of people, indicates the values that drove imperialism – military might, economic strength, and a disregard for human rights.

Indentured labor in Suriname officially ended in 1916, but as late as 1931, laborers who had renewed their contract were still working under indenture. Today, as in Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana, those of Indian descent make up the largest portion of the population – 37%. As in the British colonies, the male to female ratio was approximately five to one, which led to the same issues of violence against women and the fraught negotiation of gender roles. For instance, indentured women in Suriname may have gained some level of freedom to earn wages and choose a mate, but were highly vulnerable to sexual and economic abuse.

Prior to indenture, the primary form of labor in the colonies was slavery. Legislation that codified the brutal treatment of slaves demonstrated the planters' disdain for human rights, a disdain that seeped into laws regarding indentured workers. The Barbados Slave Code of 1661, one of the first sets of laws around slavery in the Caribbean colonies, infamously described its purpose: "To protect slaves as we do men's other goods and Chattels," denying slaves their own humanity or the right to legal protection under English laws. The justification for this was that African slaves were not civilized, and therefore were not fully human.

Slaves generally lacked legal rights to form families and marry, although this varied from colony to colony. In Danish colonies, Christian slaves could marry with their owner's permission, and under a 1755 law, married slaves could not be sold or parted, although this law was not enforced until the 1800s (Hall and Higman 61). By contrast, in the Chesapeake colonies, the law denied slaves the legal rights to marry and forbade interracial marriages.³⁹ Virginia Bernhard suggests that in the English colony of Bermuda, "masters recognized marriage as a binding, if not a legal institution" (42). *The History of Mary Prince*, an account of slavery in Bermuda, offers a harsher view of the subject. Mary Prince reports that when she married, her

³⁹ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese suggests that "as a rule, the greater the ratio of slaves to free people, and the greater the ratio of blacks to whites...the stronger the elements of African culture remained and the greater the opportunities that slaves enjoyed to sustain *de facto* community relations, including marriages" (263).

master became furious, asking her husband, “who gave him a right to marry a slave of his?” (84), while her mistress whipped Mary for marrying. The violence of these responses indicate that Mary’s masters felt threatened by any actions that indicated her sense of agency or her status as a human being with the right to and desire for companionship.

In many ways, indentured laborers had more rights than slaves. One of the most frequently cited differences between the two forms of labor is that under indenture, families were, if at all possible, kept together. Yet the notion that Britain was bringing civilization to a barbaric people remained, and continued to impact policies and legislation around intimate relationships. In particular, Britain argued that they were rescuing colonized women from oppressive, barbaric practices. In 1817, James Mill praised the British Governor-General of Bengal for enacting the abolition of sati when the Indian rulers were too timid to do so: he called sati “a barbarous superstition which had prevailed from antiquity... which, however repugnant to the feelings and creed of the rulers of the country, the tenure by which they held power rendered them for a long time averse and afraid to interfere” (185). Family relationships, and in particular, control over women’s sexuality, became contested ground between the colonizers, who sought to impose Victorian notions of propriety, and the colonized, who struggled to uphold their culture’s norms around intimate relationships. In the Caribbean colonies, legislation around marriage reflected the colonial view of a Christian marriage as the ideal of an intimate relationship and the planters’ anxiety about single female laborers. For example, plantation policies aimed to pair a woman with a husband as rapidly as possible and keep her with him regardless of how happy she was.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ See Marina Carter and Shaheeda Hosein for explorations of these themes.

In order to demonstrate the impact of colonial legislation of migrant laborers in the Caribbean, I focus on two autobiographies as well as interviews with two women, the only known first-hand descriptions of Caribbean indenture. To begin, I would like to give background information on the laborers whose narratives I explore: Munshi Rahman Khan, an educated Muslim man who indentured in Suriname; Alice Singh, who tells the story of her mother, Phularjee, who was an indentured laborer; and Maharani and Doolarie, two uneducated women who labored in Trinidad and were interviewed by scholars at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine.

Munshi Rahman Khan came from a relatively wealthy family in India. Unlike many laborers, he did not indenture because he needed the money – he had a job, as well as a family. He was born in 1874 in the village of Bharkari in Uttar Pradesh, then known as the United Provinces. His father was a landlord of sixty villages, and Rahman Khan received extensive education. He married at age 18, and shortly after, he became a teacher in the Maudha Government School. Although he was Muslim, he lived in a majority Hindu community, so he was very familiar with Hindu teachings.

In 1897, while traveling in Kanpur, he was approached by two *arkatis*,⁴¹ who persuaded him to indenture by telling him stories of the flourishing plantation system in Suriname, and convincing him that a man with an education like his would be put in charge and paid well. He was placed in a sub-depot in Kanpur and then sent to the Calcutta Depot, where he stayed for three months. In January of 1898, his ship left Calcutta for Suriname. After three months, they arrived in New Amsterdam and he was sent to the plantation Lust en Rust,⁴² owned by Rudolf Horst, where he worked as a contract laborer for five years. Against his wishes, he was made a

⁴¹ Recruiter

⁴² Pleasure and Rest

sardar.⁴³ He describes various conflicts with the managers of the plantation over unfair labor practices, but seems to have had a positive relationship with Horst, the plantation owner.

While still under indenture, Rahman Khan married again, and he states that the birth of his first son is the reason he stayed in Suriname after his contract ended. After he completed his five years of contract labor, he was offered a bonus to reenlist for five additional years, but he declined, choosing instead to buy a piece of land and farm it with his family. He did return at various points to help manage the plantation. He and his family experienced poor health at various times, but he lived to the age of 96, dying in 1972.

Rahman Khan was well known throughout Suriname as an educated man and a teacher, and was a prominent figure in the Indo-Surinamese community. In 1951, Queen Juliana of the Netherlands made Rahman Khan a “Companion of the Order of Orange-Nassau” for his accomplishments in literature. In photos, he appears as a slender man, serious but not grim. The photo on the cover of the Dutch version of his book shows him sitting, dressed in white, with his five sons behind him. His hands are on his knees, and he looks straight at the camera, neither smiling nor frowning.

The autobiography, originally titled *Jivan Prakash*, or *Life’s Light*, was completed in 1943, although he later added writings to it, and is based on a day-to-day diary that he kept as a laborer. It is written in four volumes, and it is a mix of genres, including history, memoir, poetry, and political treatise. The first volume begins with his family lineage, including a description of an ancestor who fought tigers with a dagger. Rahman Khan also gives a detailed account of his own education and experience as a teacher before being recruited to migrate to Suriname.

Rahman Khan thus testifies to his authority as a storyteller and man of high standing by

⁴³ A headman or driver

recording his family ancestry and his education, placing his experience of indenture in the context of his status as a scholar. The second volume details his life as a laborer and ends with the death of his close friend Subhan. In this section, he focuses primarily on his interactions with Subhan and his own rise to a position of authority, perhaps wanting to minimize the field labor that he performed. The third volume begins with the end of his contract, and describes his life on his own land and his three different returns to plantation work. The final volume details the conflicts that arose between Hindus and Muslims in the 1930s, his own role in trying to end the conflict, and the conclusion in 1943 of the Hindu boycott of Muslims. The autobiography ends with several of his poems, including one in honor of the Dutch queen, Wilhemina Sahab Bahadur. These poems, and his autobiography as a whole, may be intended to cement Rahman Khan's reputation as a literary figure in Suriname, and his poem to the Dutch Queen aligns him with the educated elite of the colony.

To some extent, the autobiography follows the conventions of slave narratives, in which the author describes being kidnapped, traveling to a distant country, laboring for years, and eventually achieving freedom. However, in writing his autobiography, Rahman Khan does not seek to attack indenture or imperialism. He describes various injustices that he experienced, but does not fault the system as a whole. In fact, he had a positive relationship with the Dutch plantation owners and even served as a success story for indenture, a laborer who rose through the ranks and was able to buy his own land after his indenture period ended. His goal in writing seems to be primarily to memorialize the important moments of his life and to capture the experience of the Indians living in Suriname.

The tone of the book is by turns humble and boastful. When describing his interactions with others, he seems to be self-effacing. When he begins a government job, the Commissioner

says that he has heard Rahman Khan is well read, but he replies ““Sir, I cannot say so”” (128), showing a deference to colonial authority. On the other hand, he has no compunctions about repeating praise that he has received from others. Regarding the plantation owners who are considering hiring him as manager, he writes, “an enquiry had convinced them of my spotless character. I was a unique person, they thought” (141). Rahman Khan states that he wrote the book at the request of his son, but the fact that he sought out translators so that his book could be published in English indicated he wanted as wide an audience for it as possible (Bal and Sinha-Kerkhoff 196).

The autobiography is an important book, offering a rare glimpse into the migrants’ view of their lives as contract laborers. However, it has received relatively little attention, and most of what it has received is fairly recent. It was originally written in Hindi, and Mohan Gautam made the first public presentation on it in 1995 at the seminal ISER-NCIC conference. Gautam sees the autobiography as offering insights into the assimilation of Indians in Suriname: “Knowledge for him was an ongoing process which combined the Indian past of his Indian roots and the unknown future of Suriname. Traditional continuity combined with a proper conscious integration was the only way to survive in an unknown surroundings” (18). In 2003, the autobiography was published in Dutch by Sandrew Hira as part of a commemoration of the 130 years of migration history of Indians to Suriname. The English translation was published in 2005 by Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff, Ellen Bal, and Alok Deo Singh, who also did significant field research into the life of Rahman Khan and his relatives.

In a review of the translated book, R.L. Singal writes, “His narration presents a vivid picture of the social intercourse and ethnic relations that existed in a colonial society among the indentured labourers in Suriname. Both subject matter and style of his narration is quite stirring

and gripping.” By contrast, V.S. Naipaul, himself the descendant of Indian indentured laborers, calls the text “a primitive piece of book making” (85). Naipaul feels that there is an incompleteness in Rahman Khan’s descriptions, suggesting that “he doesn’t have a great deal to say about India outside school and family...He has no feeling for the physical world about him...he has no sense of passing time, or cannot communicate it” (86). Naipaul concedes, “his narrative tools are suited to his vision. His world is full of religious rituals, of vows made and then carried out. He deals in wonders: men who fight tigers, men who suffer from dreadful maladies and are then cured by wise healers” (86-7).

The gender norms depicted in Rahman Khan’s book are indicative of the low status given to women in Rahman Khan’s society. As the translators write in their introduction to the book, “His world was clearly a man’s world” (xxxix). They note that he had no female students, and suggest that “In many ways, the autobiography reflects the unequal gender relations at the time and it teaches us less to nothing about how Hindostani women experienced life on the plantations at the time” (xxxix-xxxix). The autobiography does depict the attitudes that some Indian men held towards women. He does not seem to see women as individuals, indicated by their interchangeable nature in his book; he does not name either his first wife in India or his second wife in Suriname, nor does he mention his daughters, though his autobiography is dedicated to his sons.

There is little illumination of women’s experiences of indenture in Rahman Khan’s autobiography, and so for that we must look to other sources. Feminist critics have noted that, “An extensive literary tradition of [women’s writing] had existed for centuries, especially if one turned to supposedly ‘marginal’ genres – memoir, journal, diary, the many modes of private autobiographical writing” (*Women, Autobiography, Theory* 6). We do not have any published

accounts from women who indentured in the Caribbean, so I turn to a diary by a woman whose grandmother was an indentured laborer.

Unlike Rahman Khan, Alice Bahadur Singh, who was born Alice Bhagwandie Sital Persaud,⁴⁴ wrote an autobiography that was not intended for publication. Her handwritten diary is available at the University of Guyana library, and was typed up and published online by Sushila Patil and Moses Seenarine. Alice lived from 1892 to 1965, and wrote her autobiography in the last decade of her life, between April 1958 and April 1962. Sadly, it is incomplete – the text ends after she describes moving to England with her husband and children as a young woman, and does not detail her return to British Guiana or the active role she or husband took in the Indo-Guyanese community. Alice’s diary was written for her family, reflecting the public/private gender division of traditional Indian culture, in which men were identified with the public sphere, and women with the domestic.

Alice opens the diary with a domestic scene, writing “Today is Sunday the 27th of April, 1958...I am sitting in my chair in my room while the radio is playing pleasant music.” Feminist historian Antoinette Burton notes that “The frequency with which women writers of different nations have made use of home to stage their dramas of remembrance is a sign of how influential the cult of domesticity and its material exigencies has been for inhabitants of structurally gendered locations like the patriarchal household” (6). Alice thus fits into a convention of women writers framing their experiences through their home even when they have led highly public lives. Alice continues, “I am about to start to write about events of my life as far back as I can remember. I trust that my children and their children will at some time, when they have nothing better to do, read through the pages.” Here she articulates her position as a wife and

⁴⁴ Unlike Rahman Khan, I refer to Alice Singh henceforth by her first name in order to distinguish her from her family members, who share her last name.

mother and adopts an unassuming approach to her own experiences. She implies that her recollections will be of little interest to anyone other than her family, and that even they will only bother to read them “when they have nothing better to do.”

As can be seen in these examples, Alice’s diary is very different in tone and subject matter from that of Rahman Khan. It focuses primarily on domestic matters – her parents, her siblings, her husband, and her children, and if one had no knowledge of her role in Indo-Guyanese society, one would think that she had a fairly private life. She, like Rahman Khan, wrote the autobiography at the request of one of her children, Hardutt Singh. She writes that, “For years now he has been reminding me to make a start.” Her purpose seems to have been to share her life with her family, rather than with a wider audience.

The Indo-Caribbean women, including Alice herself, tend to remain invisible in this diary. Feminist critics Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson note that before publishing options were readily available to women writers, they described their lives in diaries and letters, and that even in these seemingly private accounts of their lives “their writing of daily selves reproduced gendered ideologies which they both trouble and reproduce (*Reading Autobiography* 98). Alice does describe her mother and grandmother in some detail, but she says little about her own public life, and when recounting her childhood, she describes her two brothers in depth but makes no mention of her sister. In this way, she seems to minimize the importance of her own contributions and those of her female peers to Indo-Guyanese society. If one were to read only her diary, one would suspect that her adult life consisted primarily of marrying and having children, when in reality she was very engaged in the community, founding several cultural and charity organizations.

While Alice was not a laborer herself, her life and her descriptions of the experiences of her parents and her grandmother, a feisty, outspoken woman, offer a valuable counterpoint to those of Rahman Khan. Alice's grandmother, Phularjee, was originally from Bengal, India, the daughter of a Brahmin priest and the widow of a wealthy landowner, and so she, like Rahman Khan, was not representative of the average indentured laborer. Alice indicates that "her in-laws were just farmers, but they had plenty of land." According to family lore, several members of the family, including Phularjee (Alice's grandmother) and Sital (Alice's father), were traveling together on a pilgrimage. Phularjee, her son, and two others got separated from the rest of the family in a large crowd. After they had been stranded for days, a recruiter promised to help her find her relatives but instead signed her up for indenture on a ship bound for Suriname (Bahadur 38).

In describing Phularjee, Alice writes, "She was a small woman, light red brown complexion, with a straight nose... On the whole, she was a very pretty woman" (2-3). Alice emphasizes the European qualities of her appearance – her light skin, her straight nose. Phularjee was widowed at a young age, but appears to have been quite strong-willed, even difficult. Alice writes, "When I knew Mai she was not young, but even in those days she was very haughty, so I can well imagine what she must have been in her younger days" (3). This description also offers an interesting counterview to depictions of indentured women as subservient wives or immoral prostitutes.

Alice's father grew up in Suriname and married a Christian woman named Mary Dulle, against the protestations of both sets of parents. Alice was born in Suriname on April 22, 1892. She had a sister named Nal and two brothers, Willem and Harry; Willem fell at a young age,

suffered mental damage, and never fully recovered, while Harry became a sailor, but died at sea at the young age of 30.

Alice's husband, Jung Bahadur Singh, was closely connected to the system of indenture, as well. The son of indentured immigrants from India, he also served as a compounder, or ship's doctor on immigrant voyages. As a result, the two were separated for much of the early years of their marriage. He studied medicine at Edinburgh University, then the family returned to Georgetown and set up a practice there. They had seven children, and one of their daughters, Rajkumari Singh, became a poet, one of the first female Indo-Guyanese authors. Rajkumari Singh reportedly mentored contemporary Indo-Caribbean authors like Mahadai Das and Rooplal Monar.

In photos, Alice is round-faced and smiling slightly, her hair pulled back from her face in a bun, her eyes soft and clear. She is described as wearing the traditional peasant dress of East Indian immigrants, from the Central Province of British India, not a sari but skirt and blouse and veil with silver jewelry (Singh).

Alice and her husband were prominent members of the Indo-Caribbean community of Guyana. Alice founded the British Guiana Dramatic Society, which produced plays from Indian culture, and she was also very active in social welfare projects, such as the Red Cross and the YWCA. In 1950, she was awarded the Member of the Order of the British Empire in 1950 for her social welfare work. Her husband was also active in Guyanese politics, serving as President of the British Guiana East Indian Association six times, and working alongside Cheddi Jagan, who later became president of the country. In 1944, Jung was awarded the Commander of the Order of the British Empire for his service to the Guyanese community. Jung ran for president himself in 1953 and though he lost, he headed the All Party Conference to arbitrate between

Jagan and Forbes Burnham. Jung died in 1956, followed by Alice in 1965. Karna Bahadur Singh, a descendant of Alice and Jung writes:

Alice Bhagwandai was of cosmopolitan background from education and experience. Convent educated, open to the varied influences of her mother and father, a gifted linguist...she exerted a strong influence on her husband with her more sophisticated background. She also worked with her father in the Immigration Office, Paramaribo for some time and her developed social consciousness and experience in East Indian affairs was useful when she and he husband began similar work in British Guiana. She was an early type of the East Indian emancipated woman.

This affectionate description suggests that Alice was one of the Indo-Caribbean women who helped shift views on gender roles, taking an active part, not only in her community, but also in her marriage. Thanks in large part to an increased access to education, in the early 20th century, Indo-Caribbean women like Alice began taking on more public roles and shifting views of a woman's place in society.

As noted, Rahman Khan and Phularjee, who were well educated and came from wealth, were atypical of the majority of laborers, most of whom were poor. Unfortunately, because most laborers lacked education, they were unlikely to record their experiences, and so we know little about their lives from their perspective. There are exceptions, such as testimonials and letters written to commissions of inquiry, but these tended to be given by males. Female laborers are even more silenced in colonial documents, as they were less likely to be educated, and, frequently confined to the home, they were unlikely to give testimony in court.

This makes interviews a useful counterpoint to understanding the gender roles under indenture. In this section, I turn to the only known interviews given by two formerly indentured

female laborers in the Caribbean, Maharani and Doolarie. By nature, interviews are more brief than autobiographies, and so these narratives contain less information than the texts by Rahman Khan and Alice Singh. In addition, the answers are shaped by the questioner, and in the case of Doolarie, by the interpreter, as she did not speak fluent English. As a result, the content is filtered somewhat through these other speakers.

At the same time, the act of writing is in itself an interpretation, while the answers given in interviews come out more or less spontaneously. Thus, the interviewees may have been less concerned with crafting their narratives for a particular purpose or a particular audience. Rahman Khan sought to set down his story for a wider audience, perhaps to cement his reputation as an important figure in Suriname, whereas Alice Singh was recording her experiences exclusively for her family, and most likely shaped her writings towards what she thought might interest them. On the other hand, the subjects of interviews were most likely not reflecting as much on how they would be remembered by their family or posterity, and Maharani and Doolarie's responses are often blunt, referencing violence and degradation that is only alluded to by Rahman Khan and Alice.

Maharani describes her experience in oral testimonies. Noor Kumar Mahabir, a scholar of East Indian diaspora in the Caribbean, interviewed five Indian migrants who indentured in Trinidad and Tobago, including Maharani. Without changing the wording, he then shaped the testimonies into a poem in the book *The Still Cry*, published in 1985. Mahabir transcribed the interviews phonetically, capturing the rhythms and syntax of the speakers' Creole. For instance, when Maharani describes her departure from the depot in India, it is recorded as:

when e coming ship
everybody gone inside

an dem people watching an telling me not to go

Kumar thus validates the Creole language as a dialect rather than a “pidgin” form of English.

Maharani was also interviewed by Patricia Mohammed in 1990, and that interview remains unpublished. Born a Brahmin, Maharani was five when she got married, and twelve when she was widowed. Shortly after, her brother-in-law took her to a magistrate’s office to turn over her inheritance to him (Bahadur 48). She cooked and cleaned for her in-laws and suffered many beatings, which finally drove her to run away. At a well, she met a recruiter with one foot who offered her a job sifting sugar, and she accepted. This was a common tactic, to tell potential migrants that they would have a relatively easy job. When she arrived in Trinidad, she was set to much more challenging tasks such as cutting cane and weeding fields. As a Brahmin widow, she would have been of a higher caste than the average laborer, but she did not have the extensive education that Rahman Khan did, and as a young girl, she did not have the familial support or the adult sense of confidence that Phularjee had. As a result, her experience of back-breaking labor was probably more typical of most laborers.

A woman named Doolarie, who was also interviewed by Noor Kumar Mahabir, traveled to Trinidad out of economic necessity. The interview transcript, held by the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, is accompanied by a copy of her Certificate of Exemption from Labour, which she received when she completed her term of indenture. It reports that she served her term at Plantation Brician Castle,⁴⁵ and that her name was Doolarie, of Brickfield Road, Central Trinidad. The certificate does little to distinguish her from other laborers or tell us about her life: her father’s name is listed as “Unknown,” and the only quality that identifies her is the scar on her right knee. We do know that Doolarie began her indenture on August 23, 1913, and

⁴⁵ This is most likely a misspelling of Brechin Castle.

the interview notes that she was 109 when she was interviewed in 1982.⁴⁶ Given these numbers, Doolarie would have been thirty years old when she indentured. She indicates that she indentured with her family because there were no jobs for them in India, and her father died on the journey. Doolarie, unlike the other laborers described here, seems to have been of low caste, and she describes the hand-to-mouth existence that she experienced before, during, and after indenture.

What emerges from these autobiographies and interviews is a striking diversity of experience. Rahman Khan and Phularjee were able to rise through the ranks of the indentured immigrants into positions of relative power and ease, most likely due to their education, caste, and, in the case of Phularjee, the psychological support of indenturing with family members. Rahman Khan rapidly moved from field laborer to overseer, while Phularjee was given a nursing position, indicating that educated, higher class laborers were granted some protections by planters and easier access to higher paying positions. Doolarie, who was of low caste, and Maharani, who traveled alone as a young girl, suffered poverty and violence throughout their lives, suggesting that indenture sustained the caste hierarchy and wealth differential of traditional Indian social structure.

Marriage plays a central role in each of the narratives, indicating the symbolic and practical significance marriage held in the laborers' struggles to maintain control over their own lives. The authors and interviewees also offer a variety of views on marriage, which correspond to each speaker's social status and experience of indenture. Rahman Khan, the independent, educated male, viewed marriage as a trap to avoid – he signed up for indenture in order to escape one wife in India and resisted marrying again in Suriname. He goes so far as to describe a

⁴⁶ The interview is listed as taking place on September 18, 1992. However, as many other interviews in the series took place on September 18, 1982, it is likely that this is a typographic error, and this interview also took place in 1982.

woman who purports to be his wife in Suriname as “the chains that...bound me” (96). He sought a life of freedom and adventure, and indenture was actually a way of expanding his options - to him a wife was a dependent holding him down and limiting his choices.

In Alice’s experiences, marriage was a necessary step for women to take in order to survive, but a positive one, a way of healing community fractures and bringing together people of different religions and backgrounds. An educated woman in a family of educated, wealthy women, she, her mother, and grandmother were nonetheless dependent on marrying well. Her grandparents objected to her mother’s marriage, and her mother objected to her own marriage, on the grounds that the groom was not successful enough to support the bride. In both cases, the groom came from a different religion and social status than the bride, which was a further cause for hesitation from family members, but both couples seem to have bridged the gaps and formed successful, happy unions. Differing from Rahman Khan’s metaphor of marriage as a chain, Alice describes it as “a ship sailing smoothly across the sea.”

By contrast, both Maharani and Doolarie describe marriage as a necessary evil, a relationship they were forced into, either by colonial management or by economic necessity. Maharani explains that she attempted to resist remarrying once she arrived in Trinidad, but was forced into it through the collusion of the manager and the man who wanted to be her husband. Her husband drank frequently and was abusive, but she stayed with him and bore him nine children. When asked about her relationship with her husband, Doolarie says, “the husband bad” and describes the physical abuse she experienced, as when her husband hit her in the head with a hoe for talking to another man. Unfortunately, domestic abuse seems to be the norm for female immigrants, yet, as suggested by these interviews, society dictated a partnership.

The autobiographies and interviews also demonstrate the impact of colonial legislation and policy, particularly around marriage, on the lives of the immigrants. Through colonial legislation, British imperialists attempted to establish their role as morally superior civilizers by “rescuing” Indian women from their own cultural practices, while Indians in their home country and in the Caribbean fought this legislation in order to maintain religious and cultural customs, and in order to maintain patriarchal control.

In one example, the Indian Emigration Act of 1883, which was intended to prevent women from running away from their husbands and leaving India under indenture, required that a married woman have her husband’s permission before emigrating. Section 32 also gave the depot official the authority to determine whether or not she was married: “The Registering Officer may also, in the case of any woman whom he believes to be married, refuse to decide whether he will register until after the expiration of such time, not exceeding ten days, as he thinks fit.” Even the suspicion that a woman was married gave the official the right to detain her in the depot and possibly refuse her emigration. Thus a woman’s ability to emigrate was dependent on the consent of an Indian man (her husband) or a British man (the depot official). Laws such as this and the Age of Consent Act, which made sexual intercourse illegal for any girl under the age of 12, and the Heathen Ordinance Act, which implemented onerous procedures for non-Christian marriages, demonstrate the ways that colonial administrators attempted to impose Victorian notions of family relationships while also granting Indian men some measure of control over Indian women.

The effects of these laws can be seen in the lives of the authors and interviewees. Rahman Khan and Maharani describe plantation managers pressuring single women to partner with a man; Maharani and Doolarie describe domestic violence as commonplace; and Alice

Singh and Rahman Khan mention the religious tensions that arose around marriage. In the remainder of the chapter, I explore colonial legislation and policies around marriage, and the impacts these had on the laborers, as reflected in the indenture narratives described above. In particular, I note the ways that Indian women were at the center of cultural clashes and struggles for power between the colonizers and the colonized, and the ways that this legislation tended to concretize existing prejudices around gender, class, and religion in the laboring population.

Runaway Wives and Husbands

Some colonial laws regarding marriage were designed to appease Indian men by upholding their sovereignty over their wives. The 1883 Indian Emigration Act stated that no married woman could migrate without her husband's permission, which was intended to stop women from running away from their husbands and posing as widows or single women.

Robert Mitchell, the colonial administrator responsible for gathering immigrants for British Guiana, strenuously objected to these rules on the grounds that they prevented working class women from escaping terrible situations: "The Magistrate...has advanced as his reason for these detentions that the female emigrants are so immoral that they would desert their husband for a 'sari'...worth a shilling...The fact is that the unfortunate women of the peasant class in this country are hardly removed from ordinary beasts of burden" (as qtd in Bahadur 27).

In 1881, 274 Indians signed a petition, witnessed by Canadian missionary Reverend Morton, requesting that colonial officials in Trinidad recognize Indian marriages. The purpose of this was to enable "any person...[to] prosecute an unfaithful spouse and their partner in guilt...for the imprisonment of the wife if she refused to return to her husband, and also for the continued prosecution of the parties if the offence be persisted in" (as qtd in Weller 74). This

petition thus requested that a woman's option be marriage or prison. The 1881 Ordinance, which extended the rights of marriage registration, which already applied to Christian marriages, to Muslim and Hindu marriages, was a direct response to these petitions.

Marina Carter points to a similar petition of Telegu men to the Governor of Mauritius requesting that authority be returned to them, specifically by "establishing the legitimacy of Indian marriages and punishing abductors" (237). The government officials responded by passing the Indian marriage regulations of the 1850s, which "placed immigrant women under the legal authority of their spouses, effectively marshalling the forces of the state against runaway or adulterers, and criminalising disobedient or disaffected wives" (9).

Under these laws, runaway wives were often returned to their husbands even when the husbands had threatened or injured them. In at least one case, this led to the wife's death. A woman named Podoo sought refuge in her neighbor's hut when her husband turned violent, but the overseer ordered her to return to her husband, who then gouged out her eyes and strangled her (Carter 77). This extreme violence is by no means an isolated incident and demonstrates the disregard for women's lives that permeated the system.⁴⁷

Maharani's story indicates the level of familial and societal oppression that many women attempted to escape by migrating. Living with the family of her deceased husband, she had no wealth, little status, and few options. Running away, in spite of the laws against such behavior, seemed to be her only way to escape the endless beatings:

i say dem go beat me

well i run

i no tell nobody i leaving

⁴⁷ See Carter, Bahadur.

only me modder-in-law (79)

Contrasting the stereotype of the Indian mother-in-law as cruel and controlling, Maharani's mother-in-law seems to be the only person she trusted.

The legislation and rhetoric around indentured women suggests that Maharani's story of running away from an abusive relationship is a typical one, an image that persists today.

Rosemarijn Hoefte writes that women "often gave the same motives for leaving: Flight from justice, breaking of social or moral codes, forbidden love affairs, and adventurism, while economic reasons were rarely given" ("Female Indentured Labor" 58). Marina Carter offers another reason that women migrated, noting that in Mauritius, "a significant number of female migrants came to rejoin male family members... They were not 'escaping' from oppressive family life, nor were they social marginals, but were migrating to re-enter established family relationships!" (36-7)

Doolarie is an example of a woman who migrated with her family, and for economic reasons. While some women, like Maharani, were certainly escaping their relatives, Doolarie reports coming to Trinidad because she had no way of supporting herself. In the interview, she says of her family, "Everybody came Trinidad... and my father died," later clarifying that he died on the voyage from India to Trinidad. The translator says, "They gave her hard work but she worked it and then came home." She also indicates that her reasons for migrating were primarily out of economic need: "[I] had nobody to take care of [me] in India... I didn't have anybody to stay with... In India it didn't have any food."⁴⁸ Though many women certainly migrated to escape a marriage, the persistence of this image indicates that the runaway wife was a useful symbol for both imperialists and anti-colonialists; the British could claim that they were offering

⁴⁸ Some of the interview is directly from Doolarie, while some is through a translator. For the sake of clarity, I have combined the two, changing pronouns when the translator is speaking on Doolarie's behalf.

women an escape from their brutal marriages, while Indian men decried the erosion of the sanctity of their home.

Not surprisingly, no law existed to prevent husbands from running away from their wives. Rahman Khan, like Maharani, entered an arranged marriage when he was young, though he was 18 years old as opposed to 5. When he was 17, Rahman Khan reports, he ran away and attempted to start a new life in the city of Charkhari. After he was forced to return home, his father “decided to chain me. He hoped that my marriage would prevent me from leaving home to seek greener pastures in the future” (46). The marriage itself is described briefly: “my wedding was finalized and was scheduled for the next month. I was 18 years old then. After the marriage ceremony and holiday, I returned to school and resumed my studies in a sincere way” (46). We learn nothing about his wife – her age, her name, her background, or even whether they had any children together.

His father’s attempts to “chain” him with marriage fail, and Rahman Khan runs away again, this time emigrating to Suriname. Though he describes being deceived by the recruiters, it is clear that he is partially willing – he writes a letter to his father from the depot but does not say where he is, afraid that his father will come and take him back.

Upon arriving in Suriname, Rahman Khan is frustrated to learn that there are rooms with provisions for a married couple. “Had I known about such a possibility, I would have brought with me a beautiful young Brahmin or kshtriya girl from Kanpur of my own choice” (91). He does not seem to have considered bringing his own wife. Mohan Gautum reports from correspondence that when Rahman Khan told his father of his second marriage, “all sorts of questions were asked and he was also told that his first wife is still waiting for him in India” (12). Women like Rahman Khan’s wife, whose husbands left them to indenture, most likely suffered

more economically than men whose wives left them, as women were generally dependent on their husbands for subsistence. Yet there was no legislation in place to prevent such migration, indicating the control that Indian men had over choices in their own life, a control that many women did not share.

Vying for Control

The controversy over the Age of Consent Act of 1891 can be seen as an example of British and Indian men struggling over the control of women's sexuality. This colonial legislation was spurred by the disturbing death of an 11-year old Indian girl named Phulomnee after forced intercourse with her 35-year old husband. The law aimed to reduce child marriages by raising the age of consent for sexual intercourse from 10 to 12 for all girls, married or unmarried, meaning that sexual activity with a girl younger than 12 was considered rape and could be prosecuted as such. Dutch imperialists enforced Age of Consent limits as well - according to an ordinance passed in 1907, the minimum age for an "Asiatic" groom was 15, and 13 for the bride. ("Female Indentured Labor" 65).

The Age of Consent Act was seen by Indian men as an incursion into their rights to do what was best for their family. In Indian culture, child marriages were a means of limiting sexual experimentation and minimizing the possibility that a girl would become pregnant before marriage, which would make her unmarriageable and bring shame to her family. In the colonies, the frustration with the Age of Consent Act was exacerbated by the fear that Indian women would choose a mate of a different race and thus dilute Indian culture, a fear that child marriages helped assuage.

Indian men sometimes reversed the British justification that they were rescuing Indian women from barbaric treatment, arguing that colonialism and indenture led to the abuse of Indian women. Yet in doing so, they often relied on the gender norms that a woman's role is to maintain her virtue for her husband, and a man's role is to protect women. *My Twenty-One Years in the Fiji Islands* is a passionate tract against indenture by Totaram Sanadhya, a formerly indentured laborer, and it played a large role in the campaign to end it. The mistreatment of female laborers is one of Sanadhya's earliest and most repeated arguments against the system. He tells the story of Kunti, a married woman who jumped into a river and almost drowned in order to escape being sexually assaulted by an overseer. He notes, "With great difficulty, Kunti was able to protect her virtue for four years. Then a sardar and an overseer began a great effort to destroy her virtue" (44-5). The book's editors note that, "This 'virtue' is her sativa, the total devotion of a wife to her husband" (43).

Kunti's story became a famous one in India and was cited again and again by abolitionists seeking to rally their countrymen against indenture. Thus, one of the most powerful arguments used against indenture was that it was a threat to a woman's devotion to her husband. Sanadhya also indicates that the treatment of these women brings shame to India in the eyes of other men. According to him, Fijian natives say, "India is a bad country... If the outrages which are done to your women were done to our women, then we would destroy to the roots the ones responsible" (61-2). The suggestion is that the men of India are not truly men unless they protect the virtue of their women and punish those who seek to harm that virtue.

Such arguments were made by Indian men in the Caribbean, as well. In one of many letters that Mohammed Ofry wrote "on behalf of destitute Indian men of Trinidad" to the colonial officials and the Indian government, he argued:

Another most disgraceful concern...is the high percentage of immoral lives led by the female section of our community. They are enticed, seduced, and frightened into becoming concubines, and paramours to satisfy the greed and lust of the male section of quite a different race to theirs...They have absolutely no knowledge whatever of the value of being in virginhood and become most shameless and a perfect menace to the Indian gentry. (Cited in Reddock 44)

The men of other races described here refer to the plantation officials who may have forced or pressured Indian women into sexual relationships.

Cultural clashes over the control of women's sexuality are often a way of acting out larger conflicts. This can be seen in the final section of Rahman Khan's autobiography, which focuses on a religious conflict that erupted between Hindus and Muslims in Suriname in the 1930s. These tensions arose as a result of rising Hindu nationalism in India and the growth in Suriname of Arya Samaj, a Hindu movement that rejected caste and challenged the idea that Brahmins held the key to spiritual enlightenment. This conflict led to a ten-year boycott by Hindus of Muslims in Suriname.

Rahman Khan's strident objections to Arya Samaj most likely stemmed in part from a sense of class-consciousness. He expresses dismay at the Brahmins who easily give up their caste when they arrive at the depot:

The government did not interfere with anyone's religion...the culprits were the Hindus themselves who discarded their sacred belongings and practices after arriving here. On the ship, it would have been difficult to observe these practices but in the depot at Calcutta it could have been done. These uppercaste Hindus should have reserved their religion up to Calcutta at least. I was offended by their attitude. (80)

Some aspect of this was certainly related to his respect for Hindu religion, but he may have felt that an erasure of caste was a threat to his own status as an educated man. The editors of the book suggest that he “gets somewhat used to being admired, loved and respected...by the 1930s, Rahman Khan’s privileged position is undermined” (xxxviii-xxxix).

In the final section of his autobiography, Rahman Khan includes correspondence between himself and Hindu leaders on these topics. While women do not appear directly in this conflict, their role as a site of contestation is evident. One of the points of contention is that Hindu pandits converted six Muslims to Hinduism by way of a cleansing. Rahman Khan is “astounded” in part because “one of the converts was a sex worker...while another was a pimp” (213). He writes in a letter, “Are you not ashamed?/By narrating kathas of gods to polluted, a religious deed is achieved/By giving it to the untouchables, the Sanatan Religion is being deceived” (214). This indicates a belief in the caste system’s merits, and a sense that converting sex workers taints the religion.

More tellingly, one of the major insults in the letters between Rahman Khan and Ramnarayan Mishra is the accusation of having unclean women in their family. Maulvi Sahib denounces Rahman Khan for hypocrisy because he objected to the cleansing of sex workers: “Why did you not complain, when one of your relatives was cleansed?” (228) Rahman Khan explains the meaning of this taunt:

One of my son’s sisters-in-law (on of Nihru’s daughters) was characterless and unpopular since her adolescence. Though Nihru (son’s father-in-law) had married her off, she had continued her illicit love affairs and finally ran away with a Hindu boy. She got married in the Arya Samaj mandir and was there ‘purified.’ Nihru could not be blamed.

From that day onward, Nihru and the rest of the family debarred her from entering the house and she was treated as dead. (233)

This suggests that Rahman Khan sees the behavior of Nihru and the rest of the family in disowning her as the correct course of action, absolving them of blame.

In addition, he argues with Ramnarayan's insult on technical grounds, writing, "After marriage, the woman belongs to another family/The lineage line is through sons and not influenced by daughters/You have wrongly stated that there is an adulterous woman in my family" (232).

Rahman Khan then returns the insult: "And if there would not be a bad Muslim woman in your family/Who then would look after you?/Such a woman lives in your family / Do you not feel ashamed to write about her?" (232) He explains to his readers:

In my answer, I referred to the fact that during the boycott, a Muslim widow lived in Poelepantje with her disabled son. Ramnarayan's elder brother, Shivnarayan had developed illicit relations with her and had annexed all her property and had put it in his name. He then brought her to his house in Dijkveld where she died and after some time, her son also expired. By referring to her I could beat Ramnarayan with his own weapons. (233)

He faults Ramnarayan's brother, not for taking advantage of a widow with a disabled son, who may have been struggling to survive, but for having immoral relations with such a woman.

The tensions between the Hindu and Muslim communities of Suriname, which in part reflected anti-colonial movements and tensions between Hindus and Muslims in India, is acted out through Rahman Khan and Ramnarayan's attacks on each other's integrity. This, in turn, comes out in the barbs directed at the sexual behavior of women in their families. If a man

cannot even control his wife and his daughters, the scholars seem to suggest, he has no right to be a religious or cultural leader. This indicates the connection that was seen between a man's integrity and the control he maintains over the women in his family.

Forced into Marriage

There was no official legislation forcing the laborers into partnerships. However, Rahman Khan's autobiography and the interviews with Maharani and Doolarie indicate that the colonizers' policy was that single women created conflicts between the male laborers, and so these women were paired off as quickly as possible. The female laborers were often forced to seek a mate out of economic necessity. Rosemarijn Hoefte indicates that in Suriname, as in many cultures, women earned half to two-thirds what men received, justifying this "by assuming that a woman was dependent on her husband, who was the main bread-winner" ("Female Indentured Labor" 59-60). Rhoda Reddock notes that even when women did heavy, "men's tasks" like loading sugarcane onto carts or trucks, they were paid the same as other women (37). Marina Carter even suggests that in Mauritius, planters deliberately kept women on lower wages so that the women were dependent on their employers and the indentured males (121).

Even when women attempted to remain self-sufficient, they were often forced into partnerships against their will. Maharani, possibly influenced by her first oppressive marriage, maintained an independent spirit, resisting the manager's attempts to marry her off. He argues:

maharani you want de man

...

when you fall sick an ting

you have nobody

you have to take somebody (84)

But she replies: “i no want nobody/...i stop alone,” arguing that she doesn’t need anyone to take care of her. She wants to return to India, and if she marries, she will have to stay (84).

Although she tells Ramgolam, her proposed husband, “me nuh like you” (85), she finds herself wedded to him against her consent. She is unsure of how it happened, and accuses Ramgolam of drugging her (Bahadur 85). She says of the experience:

me eh know what happen
an e take me
me eh know how I take im
... god alone know (85)

This description sounds disturbingly similar to a report of a sexual assault.

Doolarie, like Maharani, seems to have had little choice in her partnership, and suffered an equally violent experience of marriage. When asked whether her husband ever beat her, she initially evades the question, answering with resignation, “Husband and wife must marry.”

The pressure to pair single woman meant that men, too, were sometimes unwilling partners, as in the case of Rahman Khan. He manages to escape the “chain” of his first marriage when he leaves India under indenture, but is shackled by another woman soon after his arrival in Suriname. He is assigned to Plantation Lust en Rust along with four other men and one woman. The manager assumed that the woman was married and asked who her husband was. In response, “she alleged that I was her husband. (Maybe she found me more youthful and handsome than the others)” (91). Gauitra Bahadur writes of this moment:

This much is clear: briefly, she had her pick of men, trading up to an educated man who regarded himself as high caste. This much is also clear and equally significant: she didn’t

think she could support herself and her possibly imaginary child, although indentured women worked and earned wages in every colony that imported them, except Mauritius.

(86)

Despite Rahman Khan's protestations, the manager threatened to punish him if he did not live with the woman, indicating the colonizers' desire to have single women accounted for.

This circumstance was not unusual. A Javanese worker in Suriname reported that, "'You were allotted a room. Everybody also received a woman to share the room with. If no women were left you got a man. I got a woman, but didn't want her. A week later a man came who wanted a woman but hadn't received one. I gave her away. I didn't ask anything for her'" (Qtd in "Female Indentured Labor" 63). Speaking on this tendency, Rosmarijn Hoefte notes, "Women were often regarded as property to be sold, given, or gambled away" ("Female Indentured Labor" 63).

The next and last time we see Rahman Khan's reputed wife (who, like his official wives, remains nameless), is when he separates himself from her. Four weeks into his indenture, Rahman Khan pays off the money he owes to the government (an initial allowance offered to new laborers for the first three months while they become acclimated) and moves out of the room he shares with this woman. He divides his allowance and gives the woman half, but she resists. "She began to scream loudly, shouting: 'What will I eat now? How will I survive?'" (96). He gives her his half of the allowance, too, but this does not seem to satisfy her.

She goes to the manager and complains that her husband has deserted her, and alleges that she is pregnant with Rahman Khan's child. The manager orders Rahman Khan to give her one fifth of his earnings until her "expected son" is six months old. As the woman never gives birth, he never pays. Again, he refers to this woman as a shackle: "The chains that had bound me

broke and I was set free” (96). The phrasing here is particularly interesting, as he is under indenture, a state often referred to as “bound labor,” yet he sees the woman who attaches herself to him as his form of bondage.

While he may have seen marriage as confining, Rahman Khan found an alternative familial relationship in his friendship with another male laborer, Subhan, whom he calls “my dear brother and friend” (109). They meet in the depot, when Subhan borrows a *lota*,⁴⁹ and develop a fast friendship. After Rahman Khan leaves his residence with the woman who claims to be his wife, he moves into a room with Subhan. They divide the domestic tasks along traditional male/female lines: Rahman Khan takes charge of their finances and Subhan does the cleaning and cooking, making “nice and soft roti, good enough to shame many ladies” (113). Rahman Khan even describes him in terms that are often attributed to women, depicting him as silly and overly trusting: “He was so simple that he would believe anyone and not think of the consequences of doing so” (112). Rahman Khan seems to feel it is his job to protect and instruct Subhan, describing with amusement times that he tricked Subhan to try to teach him common sense. He often gives him incomplete or incorrect directions to make food, such as telling him to add water to cook a pumpkin when no water is needed, in order to show him that he should not take everything people say at face value.

The friendship between these two men seems to fit the traditional view of spouses more than either of the relationships that Rahman Khan had with his wives, indicating that the laborers did not strictly follow societal or colonial definitions of marriage or gender roles. When Subhan falls ill, Rahman Khan takes tender care of him, washing his soiled clothes, bathing him, and feeding him until he dies. The intensity of their friendship may have come in part because they

⁴⁹ A small vessel that holds liquids, usually water; used for cleaning or ritual purification

are geographically distant from their blood relatives. It may also be a result of the scarcity of women in their world and the desire to find other relationships to fill the role of a spouse, although Rahman Khan at least seems to have preferred this friendship to marriage. Rahman Khan is shaken by his friend's death and realizes the role that Subhan played in his life: "Subhan was my right hand in an alien land. Due to him I had feared nobody. I did not have to worry about my chores and household tasks...all my problems seemed small in Subhan's company" (119). The comfort and stability that their friendship brings him is remarkably similar to the arguments that his peers use to pressure him to marry.

A fellow laborer named Ashraf is in charge of the fourteen-year old daughter of a friend who has died, and three times proposes that Rahman Khan marry her. He resists, arguing that he intends to return to India, but finally gives in to the argument of "the necessity of marriage while staying in another country, which would give some stability to my life" (99). While Indian women were heavily criticized for trading one partner for another, it is culturally acceptable, and even expected, for Rahman Khan to leave his wife in India and marry again in Suriname. He also indicates that he intended to return to India, until the birth of his first son. "Truly speaking, it was this boy who prevented me from returning to Hindustan when my contract was over...[his] affection has till today made me breath the air of Surinam" (100).

Similarly, Maharani indicates that her marriage and children changed her mind about returning to India. At the end of the interview, she indicates that her father asked her to return to India, but she said "no/ I studying dem cheren" (88). She had become a mother herself and was committed to staying in Guyana to care for her children. Like Rahman Khan, the recruiter brought her to the Caribbean, but her new family convinced her to stay. This suggests that, whether deliberately or not, the colonial and societal pressures to partner and have children led to

a higher number of immigrants settling in the Caribbean, effectively changing the ethnic make up of the colonies.

Arranged marriages in the Indo-Caribbean community remained the norm well into the 20th century. When describing her family's process of finding her a husband, Alice's tone is light. She writes that "Pa used to get photographs from his Aunt in Jyrabad, from eligible young men – who if Pa agreed, I was going to go to India to marry." She does not seem especially intimidated by this prospect – she says "I used to be so amused at these pictures...One fellow had a striped blazer. How I laughed. You see, in our country men did not wear such things."

She does not marry any of these men, as her marriage had been set for years with the nephew of her father's close friend, Babu Ramprasad. Babu's brother, Babir Dhan Singh was also indentured, from Nepal, meaning that Alice and her husband were both the children of indentured laborers. Babir worked as a compounder, or pharmacist, on the ships that brought indentured immigrants to India, and Alice describes him as "very wealthy." She first met Jung when she was fifteen, working as a secretary in the immigration office. He entered with several members of his family, apparently to meet Alice, and she describes him as "quite smart, well-dressed," even "overdressed, since we in British Guiana dressed simply."

Alice's mother was unhappy with the proposed match, "as this young man had no special qualification and in her opinion, a compounder was only a dispenser. She had such hopes that I should be well settled in life, through a good marriage." Her mother, who herself eloped to marry a man who was not seen as good enough, and who advocated for Alice to get an education, still pinned her hopes on Persaud's success in life to her making a good marriage.

After Alice and Jung were married, he made trips to Fiji, Natal, Jamaica, Suriname and Trinidad, transporting laborers from India and China to the Caribbean, and transporting laborers

back to India once their period of indenture had been completed. In 1920, he was the medical superintendent on the SS Madian, and in 1938 he was the surgeon superintendent on SS Ganges. They spent much of their early life separated, as he was traveling back and forth to India, and she returned to Dutch Guiana to stay with her family. She bore him three children during the years that he was traveling, and though she hoped to see her husband more frequently, she became resigned to the fact that she most likely would not: “I made up my mind that life was so full of disappointments and uncertainty that it was truly not worthwhile to hope and wish for things to go the way you would like.” In this sense, she does somewhat fit the stereotype of the traditional Indian woman, waiting patiently for her husband and bearing her hardships in silence.

Religion and Marriage

The colonial authorities in the Caribbean colonies also developed legislation around marriage, seeking to impose Victorian norms of intimate relationships and Christianity. As noted earlier, under the Heathen Marriage Ordinance 10 of 1860, Christian marriages were automatically registered, but weddings performed by Hindu pandits or Muslim maulvis were not. Immigrants, regardless of where they lived, had to obtain a certificate from their local magistrate stating that no impediment existed, then travel to Georgetown and pay a fee of two dollars for a marriage certificate from the Immigration Agent. Basdeo Mangru notes that, “Indians regarded a marriage celebrated with due publicity and performed according to established rights and customs legal whether registered or not” (214). In this case, native customs generally won out over colonial bureaucracy, as few couples bothered with the burdensome process.

Unofficial marriages led to other bureaucratic problems for the laborers. Partners could not inherit their spouse’s money or land, and the children of such unions were considered

illegitimate and also could not inherit. Additionally, families sometimes sold girls into one unofficial marriage after another in order to get several bride prices. This could lead to disastrous consequences, as in the case of a woman named Goirapa, who was married to Yadakana in a traditional Indian wedding. Yadakana began to suspect that her family was going to sell her again, and, realizing that he had no legal recourse to stop them, he killed Goirapa (Mangreo 226). In 1894, the law was revised, lowering fees and authorizing any sub-agent to provide a marriage certificate, which meant that Indians did not need to travel as far, but this did not dramatically increase the number of marriages registered.

The Dutch legislated marriage in a similar manner to the British. Suriname did not officially recognize Muslim and Hindu marriages, and over 90% of Indian children were considered illegitimate (*Suriname* 65). In 1913, The Suriname Immigrant's Association (SIV) requested that weddings performed by Muslim and Hindu religious officials be recognized by the state, but such a law wasn't passed until 1941 (*Suriname* 65).

Alice's wedding is a striking example of the negotiations that Indo-Caribbeans made to accommodate colonial law and religious frictions. She had three wedding ceremonies: "I had my civil marriage, so this complied with law of the land, [and] my church blessing for Ma. But the real thing was in the evening my hindu marriage. This was a brilliant affair." In theory, marriage was a private, personal act, the joining together of two people amidst friends and families. Yet, within that frame, for the Indo-Caribbeans, it was a highly symbolic act, often binding together different groups of people, as can be seen in the Hindu and Christian ceremonies. The civil ceremony points to the lasting impact of colonial attempts to shape the behavior of the indentured laborers by legislating marriage.

This wedding was a source of tension between various religious groups: “All the pundits in the land took part to show their approval between a Brahmin girl and a Singh. At first the situation bordered to sin and scandal. Pa somehow was able to overcome this, and in the end all was peace.” Religious tensions certainly existed in India before colonization, but the nature of indenture thrust together groups of people from different religions who might not otherwise have much contact, and marriage seems to have been a flashpoint for these tensions.

Rahman Khan’s autobiography also describes religious conflicts flaring up around marriages, and weddings in particular. For example, the ten-year conflict between Hindus and Muslims in Suriname was sparked at the wedding of Rahman Khan’s youngest daughter. A Muslim imam, Kallan Mian, began arguing with a Hindu man named Babu Puroshottam Singh, and four people left the celebration in anger. Rahman Khan tried to smooth the event over, acknowledging that Kallan Mian was at fault, and encouraging him to apologize. Kallan Mian did so, but this was not enough to calm tempers, and events began to spiral. Hindus began a boycott of Muslim events, and if a Hindu did attend a Muslim event, he was forced to atone. It is significant that this event occurred at the wedding of the daughter of Rahman Khan, a leader of the Muslim community – perhaps the public nature of the event and the complex religious and cultural associations that are attached to a wedding ceremony brought simmering conflicts to the surface.

Similarly, the courtship of Sital and Mary, Alice’s parents, highlights the tensions that fractured the Indo-Caribbean community, including religious conflicts, and conflicts between those who wished to adopt the culture of the colonizers and those who wished to maintain traditional Indian values and culture. Both Sital and Mary’s parents were against the marriage, because Mary came from a wealthy Christian family that had integrated into colonial society,

while her father Sital was from a Hindu family who family valued Indian culture and had traveled to Suriname under indenture.

Mary was the daughter of a scholar from the Kshatriya caste in Bengal⁵⁰ who had traveled to the Caribbean as an interpreter for colonial governments. He worked in this capacity in various parts of the Caribbean and finally settled in Nickerie, Suriname, where he became Chief Interpreter of Indian Languages. Mary's father "was an ardent admirer of all things 'European and civilized' with a righteous contempt of all things 'Hindu and infidel'" (Singh). He did not think that Sital, whom he saw as "an ordinary coolie, heathen boy who had dared to aspire to his daughter's hand," deserved Mary (Persaud).

On the other hand, Phularjee, Sital's mother, held on to her Indian culture and insisted that Sital do the same: "She would not allow her son to be taught Hollandish. She taught him hindi instead with the result that Papa became became a fine hindi scholar, and though he spoke Dutch well and read a little, he was a poor Dutch scholar" (Persaud). Mary and Sital, in love, ignored their parents' concerns and eloped, which Alice found very romantic. She admired her mother's decision to run away with her father: "There was the case of a well brought up young woman with the teaching to be a devout Christian like her father, who accepted for love, another way of thinking and an entirely different mode of living from the one she was accustomed to." She writes, too, "Ma gave up all for love and eventual happiness. Pa went through much insults, hardships, and danger for her too." Unlike Rahman Khan, who married for practical reasons and saw marriage as a chain, Alice idealizes her parents' love marriage and admires the sacrifices they suffered.

⁵⁰ The second highest caste in Hindu society; traditionally, the military or ruling caste.

She emphasizes that her parents' marriage was so successful because they managed to compromise on religious issues. The family, including the father, went to church with their mother, although her father often slept through the services, while her mother helped with the Katha, a Hindu ceremony, every year to honor Phularjee after she died. Interestingly, after Sital died, Alice's mother stopped attending church and did pujas, Hindu rituals, "that she knew would please Pa." Alice notes that with this level of compromise "Pa and Ma sailed smoothly over the years." Her metaphor of their marriage as a ship sailing smoothly contrasts sharply with Rahman Khan's view of it as chains that bound him. This may indicate a difference in gendered views of marriage or simply that Alice had a happier experience of wedded life than Rahman Khan.

Violence against Women

Another impetus for colonial legislation in the Caribbean was the high incidence of men mutilating or killing women who they suspected of involvement with another man. In Trinidad between 1872 and 1900, 87 murders of Indian women were reported, 65 of which resulted from suspected infidelity (Mohammed 45). In British Guiana, between 1859 and 1907, 87 Indian women were killed by a spouse or partner (Mangru 217). The rate of murder of women was 6 to 7 times higher in British Guiana than in India ("Female Indentured Labor" 64). Colonial officials tried to blame this on the gender disparity, on the low quality and promiscuity of the women who were migrating, or on the innate barbaric, violent tendencies of Indian men. However, Joseph Beaumont points out that violent crime was virtually non-existent in the free, unindentured Indians of British Guiana (qtd in Faruqee 69). This violence was most likely a

response to the brutal oppression that the male laborers faced, as well as a sense that far from home, their honor and ethnicity was vested in these women.⁵¹

Yet in order to demonstrate that they were in fact bringing civilization to Indians, the European colonizers needed to prevent these attacks. Ordinance 10, passed in 1860, was intended to curtail the high rate of “wife murder,” in which a man attacked or killed his wife for suspected involvement with another man. It called for a \$24 fine or three months in jail the first time a man seduced another man’s wife, and a \$100 fine or one year in jail for each offense after. The ordinance was limited, as it applied only to officially sanctioned, Christian weddings, and, as noted, few immigrants bothered with these ceremonies. H.V.P. Bronkhurst called for an amendment to the law, arguing that, “provision should be made also to recognize the marriages celebrated in the Colony by the Hindu Priests” (338).

Furthermore, authorities often valued keeping married couples together over the wishes or safety of the woman. Ordinance 4 of 1864 in British Guiana, which was initially meant to protect women, stated that if a man threatened an unfaithful wife or “reputed” wife, the magistrate had the power to transfer the husband, the wife, or the wife’s lover. Ashrufa Faruqee notes that “Because of the colonial plantocracy’s concern with ‘marital stability’, the government favoured the transfer of the paramour, although he may not have been threatening the woman” (70), meaning that a woman was often left in the hands of a violent, jealous husband.

Maharani’s husband was reportedly violent and controlling, and slept with other men’s wives. She stayed with him and bore him nine children, but she was not totally subservient. Though rum was generally the purview of men, she tried it one day, and seems to have enjoyed it, reporting how she laughed and laughed.

⁵¹ See Mohammed, *Gender Negotiations Among Indians in Trinidad: 1917 -1947*.

The interviewer asks Doolarie if she could have stayed home while her husband worked, she says, “The husband bad. They beat me...[He] hit [me] with the hoe, [I have] a big cut in [my] head.” When asked why, she answers simply, “For talking to another man.” She says that she reported it to the police, but her husband was not locked up. These experiences demonstrate the pervasiveness of such violence, as well as the cultural acceptance of it.

Caste and Class

Finally, it is important to note the intertwining of colonial views on gender and class, how that intertwining shaped policy, and how it supported traditional Indian views on gender and class. There was an irony in that the women who were willing to indenture were generally low-caste and independent, often having run away from unhappy marriages. Colonial authorities judged these women unfit to emigrate, considering them “immoral” or “indecent,” and labeling them as prostitutes. On this topic, in 1915 the Emigration Agent wrote:

In considering this matter it must be borne in mind that genuine field labourers such as the planters require can be obtained only from the lower castes, i.e. from among the non-moral class of population. A more moral type is found higher in the social scale but such women would be useless in the fields. (Cited in Reddock 30).

The higher class women, who the authorities preferred, were unlikely to indenture because of the social stigma associated with females engaging in public labor.

Colonizers blamed the low class of the indentured women for the conflicts between men and even the violence the women themselves experienced. A missionary in British Guiana wrote, “The great majority of women imported from Calcutta are very loose in their habits. They were bad in Calcutta and so they will...remain in Demerara” (qtd in Bahadur 118). The quota system,

in which ships were required to include a certain proportion of women to men before they could sail from India to the colonies, was impacted by this debate. The government of India tried to set the ratio at 1:2, but emigration officials argued that this would only worsen the problem by bringing in more immoral women, and so the ration shifted from 1:3 in 1857 to 1:2 in 1868, then 1:4 in 1878-79 (Reddock 28-29).

In an attempt to recruit a “better class” of women, the colonial authorities of Mauritius instituted a bounty system, under which men received a reward for bringing their wife with them when they indentured. It is striking that the women did not receive the bounty themselves; this policy led to many men bringing several “wives” with them to Mauritius and then selling or transferring them to other men shortly after arrival (Carter 69). In these cases, the system not only failed to bring more married women to the colony, it encouraged the treatment of women, particularly low-class women, as property to be bought and sold.

Doolarie, who was lower class, and Maharani, who was a young widow traveling alone and therefore had roughly the same social status as a lower class woman, had a significantly more brutal experience of indenture than Rahman Khan and Phularjee. Doolarie describes the degradation of the laborers after they arrived in Port of Spain: “They brought [us] up in truck like bags...flour bag.” She says that “In India if you sang or danced they called you bad people,” most likely referring to the fact that in India, courtesans were often trained as entertainers, to sing and dance, and were given some degree of respect, but British colonizers imposed puritanical Victorian values and decried all forms of prostitution as sinful and immoral.

Once Maharani arrived in Trinidad, she was given work that was too difficult for her:

...i cyan wuk

i cyan weed

i cyan do nutting

i crying

but still i try (83)

Though women were supposedly given lighter work such as weeding, Maharani describes endless hard labor such as cutting cane: “what wuk estate tell e to do/ have to do” (83). By contrast, the experiences of Phularjee, Alice’s grandmother, suggest that higher-class women may have had an easier experience of indenture.

Phularjee, who was probably accustomed to a fairly high standard of living, seems to have been dissatisfied with many aspects of the indenture experience. Alice writes, “Papa said that he was in fear about the ship because Mai always made trouble as she was not satisfied with life on board the ship” (3). Like Rahman Khan, she was given a leadership role, perhaps because of her high caste status: “she was made responsible for all the unmarried women. Knowing Mai as I did, those women must have had a hard time!”

Upon arrival, she was shocked by the small quarters that were assigned to her and her son, and when she was asked to perform field labor, she refused: “When she was told to go and work in the fields and was handed a cutlass, she showed her soft small hands. She there and then sat down and refused to move” (3). Luckily for her, her employers responded indulgently: “Because she was young, pretty and a fighter, the Barnett Lyon family were very lenient with her. She was made an assistant nurse in the estate’s hospital” (3). It is difficult to imagine the same circumstances occurring for someone who had been low caste. In other ways, her experience was fairly conventional. During her indentureship period, for example, she “was married according to the law of the land, that is, she made a legal marriage” (3).

The majority of the women in Rahman Khan's book are either invisible, like his two wives, or are burdensome troublemakers, like the woman who attaches herself to him upon arrival in Suriname. There are a few women for whom Rahman Khan expresses admiration. However, he seems to have accepted colonial views of racial hierarchy and Hindu views of caste, as the women he describes with respect are primarily European, and exclusively wealthy. He shows particular regard for those women who demonstrate generosity and selflessness, ideals of Indian womanhood.

Rahman Khan tells the story of Rajkunwari, a woman from his home town in India, who inherited a great deal of wealth and spent it all on charity and projects that would better the community, such as a village well. He also had a positive relationship with Mrs. Horst, the wife of the plantation owner Dolf Horst. Rahman Khan's daughter Mariyam was named after her, and he writes that Mrs. Horst treated Mariyam like a daughter, giving her clothing and a gold necklace (137). He describes her as "a real Dutch lady...very considerate" (135).

This is seen even further in his honorary poem to Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, whom he calls "Maharani Queen Wilhelmina Sahab Bahadur"⁵² (237). In a poem at the end of the book, he admires her intelligence and her kindness: "You are most loveable, caring and god loving/...We Hindostanis look upon you for your kindness and blessings./You are a storehouse of knowledge, brains and strength/...Be kind to the people of your Kingdom" (237). V.S. Naipaul writes of this poem, "Rahman is a complete colonial, loyal always to the ruler...if Rahman had stayed in British India something as loyal to the British sovereign, and as fulsome, might have come from his pen" (85-6).

⁵² He mixes western and Hindi terms of admiration ("Queen," as well as "Maharani," meaning princess, "Bahadur," a title conferred on Indians by the British to indicate respect, and "Sahab," perhaps a feminized form of the respectful term "sahib.")

This is indicative of the general attitude in Suriname towards the Netherlands.

Rosemarijn Hoefte notes that in spite of economic instability and political unrest in Suriname in the early twentieth century, “neither the lower-class unions and organizations nor the dissatisfied middle class, hardly ever blamed the colonial status for Suriname’s precarious state of affairs” (*Suriname* 86). She notes that the monarchy was much beloved – the king was given direct credit for positive developments, such as the end of slavery, whereas it was assumed that the only reason he had not interceded to end other abuses was because he did not know about them. All groups in Suriname, including the Creole population and those of Indian descent, saw the queen as “a protective mediator...the one person who transcended ethnic, class, and gender differences” (*Suriname* 89).

By contrast, Rahman Khan shows little regard for non-European woman, especially those of low caste. He describes in detail the Creole mistress of the American man who owns the plantation after the Horsts, during Rahman Khan’s second tenure there. While Rahman Khan has a great deal of respect for the American man’s intelligence and work ethic, he blames the mistress’ spendthrift ways for the failure of the plantation. He notes, “I have seen many big landlords falling prey to such acts of the fairer sex, rather the darker in this case” (186). This comment suggests that Rahman Khan objects to the American man choosing a Creole mistress.

Rahman Khan also recounts the story of his close friend Subhan and Subhan’s wife. In India, Subhan was so religious that he would spend all of his hours in the mosque, and was not earning any money. When his wife told him that his family was starving, he went to the mosque and prayed, and was rewarded by finding a coin on the floor. He returned to the mosque every day and found a coin, although in a dream he was warned not to reveal to anyone where the money was coming from. His wife grew suspicious and demanded to know the source of the

money. She pestered him day after day until he finally gave in and told her, and sure enough, the next day there was no coin waiting for him in the mosque. Although Subhan's wife's concerns about supporting their family seem reasonable, in this fable-like story, she is depicted as a nag and a burden, a test of Subhan's faith and resolve.

After indenture ended, one of the key reasons that Indo-Caribbean women were able to escape poverty and overcome caste and class barriers was increased access to education. In the 1940s and 50s, more and more girls schools opened in Guyana, Trinidad, and Suriname, and the education the women received helped them enter the workplace and eroded caste and class barriers. Yet education was a point of contention, as many families felt that educating girls ruined them for marriage. Interestingly, both Alice's father and grandmother objected to Alice attending school. She did not attend until she was seven and a half years old, and "Ma had to actually smuggle me out by a kind neighbor to the Louise convent in Gravenstaat." Alice does not explain exactly why her father and grandmother object, but they seemed to believe it would prevent her from becoming the ideal Indian woman, modest and obedient:

When my poor Pa heard that I had my first day at school, he was left with his mouth open. But when Mai heard, she did behave badly and she 'knew' this was a very bad beginning for me. And my poor Ma had a very bad time of it, but as I was her child, Mai could not dictate.

It is worth noting that both her grandmother and her father came from India, whereas her mother grew up in Suriname, which may suggest that traditional gender roles had shifted in the Caribbean.

Conclusion

Rahman Khan, Doolarie, Maharani, Alice Singh, and Phularjee's experiences of marriage were incredibly diverse, reflecting the diversity of their indenture experience. While Rahman Khan, Phularjee, and Alice were expected to marry, none were physically forced into it, as Maharani was, and Alice does not report the domestic violence that both Maharani and Doolarie experienced. (Although, given that she wrote the diary for her family, it is certainly possible that she experienced abuse and did not report it.) Lacking education or high social status, Maharani and Doolarie were not lucky enough to be given nursing or managerial positions and performed the same hard labor as most indentures. Yet these women also report resisting colonial and patriarchal forms of oppression – Maharani refuses to marry and pushes against gender roles by drinking rum, while Doolarie reports her husband for his abuse.

These experiences help form a view of the impact of British legislation around marriage. To justify slavery and indenture, British imperialists developed a teleological view of labor that was linked to hierarchical views of civilization and race. African, Asian and European nations represented stages in a progression of civilization; in the same way, slavery, indentured labor and wage labor were depicted as progressive steps necessary to civilize undeveloped races. Similarly, colonizers held a hierarchical view of family structures and personal relationships. The Victorian, nuclear family with a husband, wife and children in one household, was seen as the height of civilization, and Christian marriage as the height of intimate relationships, followed by “heathen” Muslim and Hindu marriages, then partnerings that were not officially recognized and polygamous relationships.

Colonial views of marriage and contract labor were both used to maintain a sense of European superiority and justify imperialism. Lisa Lowe argues that, “the colonial

powers...sought to indoctrinate the newly freed into forms of Christian marriage and family” (195), and that as part of Britain’s emancipation of slaves in 1838, slaves would have access to “this set of institutions constituting ‘freedom’:...wage labor, contract, marriage, and family would be formal institutions through which modern freedom could be obtained and the condition of slavery overcome” (201). The colonizers viewed marriage and wage labor as indicators of civilization, and the institutionalization of both in the lives of the colonized was an indication that Britain had successfully brought progress to the natives.

The autobiographies and interviews indicate that the British legislation of marriage, meant to impose Victorian ideals and justify imperialism, tended instead to support the view of women as contested property, and to solidify existing class and racial hierarchies in both the colonizers and the colonized. At times, measures meant to protect women actually increased domestic violence. It is ironic that Rahman Khan described his purported wife in Suriname as “the chains that...bound me” (96), because for many laborers, particularly women, colonial legislation around marriage made it one more knot that bound them into constrictive gendered, classed, and racialized roles.

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Conclusion

Lingering Thoughts

May 30, 2015 will mark the 170th anniversary of the arrival of the *Fatel Razack*, the first boat to bring Indian indentured laborers to Trinidad. Each year, Trinidad celebrates this day as Indian Arrival Day, marked by religious ceremonies, speeches from prominent Indo-Trinidadians, and street parades that include floats modeled after the *Fatal Razack*. Similar holidays exist throughout the Caribbean: in Guyana, May 8 marks the beginning of Indian immigration in 1838, while in Suriname, June 5 commemorates the 1873 arrival of Indians.

Chaman Lal, a Hindi professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University in India, suggests that these colonies should be placing more emphasis on Deliverance Day, January 1, 1920. This was the day that indentured labor came to a complete stop, and Lal equates it with Emancipation Day for African slaves. He writes: “Indians in these countries never focused upon Deliverance Day, which is [a] much more historic day of their life...than so called Indian Arrival Day, which is the day to mark the beginning of untold sufferings, deceit.”

Lal does not speculate on possible reasons for this focus on Indian Arrival Day as opposed to Deliverance Day, but I would argue that celebrating Arrival Day serves a few important functions. If we focus, as Lal does, on the fact that May 30 marked the beginning of seventy-five years of exploitation and suffering, then all the more reason to remember this moment in order to prevent similar forms of abuse. At the same time, celebrating the arrival of Indians, as well as laborers from other nations, emphasizes their own agency in the story of indenture and highlights their contributions to Trinidad, Guyana, Suriname, and other former colonies, contributions that are often overlooked in the history of the Caribbean. Deliverance

Day, by memorializing the end of British Imperial indentured labor, emphasizes the system that denigrated the laborers, rather than the laborers themselves - the choice they made to undertake a life-changing journey, the suffering they experienced, and the role they played in shaping the societies that they joined.

The narratives discussed in this dissertation, like the observance of Arrival Day, act as a reminder of the abuses of empire and a testament to the suffering of the laborers, but also a celebration of their lives and stories. While Sharlow's novel *The Promise* offers a stark tale of the sexual assault against Indian women on estates, it also depicts a sustaining solidarity forming between two Indian women and a woman of African descent. In an interview, Maharani tells of the field labor that was too much for her and of the pressure to marry and give up her independence, but also of how she resisted that pressure. We see examples in these narratives of laborers fighting against racialized, gendered forms of oppression in highly public ways such as strikes and lawsuits against employers, and in more individualized acts, such as women leaving abusive husbands.

The issues raised in these narratives are strikingly relevant today. Journalist Cynthia Gorney notes that, "Migration for better opportunity is as old as human history, but today it's likely that more people are living outside their countries of birth than ever before." Within this massive labor migration, indentured servitude persists in various forms around the globe. While contemporary institutions of human trafficking are not state-sponsored in the same way as British imperial indenture, many governments facilitate such practices. In the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.), the working conditions of migrants, who come mostly from India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, resemble indenture. In May of 2014, *The New York Times* published an article about the exploitation of the migrant laborers who built the Abu Dhabi campus of New

York University (N.Y.U.). The workers went on strike in October of 2013 to protest unfair employment practices, including working twelve-hour days for low pay, having their passports confiscated, and having paid recruitment fees for which they were never reimbursed. The U.A.E. government discourages such dissent - strikes are illegal and there is little legal recourse to laborers for contract violations. In response to the strike, the police arrested, beat, and then deported the strikers. While N.Y.U. had set forth a “statement of fair labor values” in order to protect the workers who built the Abu Dhabi campus, they did not monitor the pay or the conditions of the laborers (Kaminer and O’Driscoll), and so both the United Arab Emirates and the United States are complicit in the mistreatment of these workers.

The novels, autobiographies, and interviews that record the experiences of indentured laborers in the Caribbean help shed light on how such systems develop and the rhetoric that perpetuates them. For instance, these indenture narratives dramatically illustrate the sharp contrast in the views of the colonizers, the laborers, and the descendants of laborers. Earlier authors, even when criticizing aspects of indenture, lay the blame on certain characteristics of the system rather than the practice of bonded labor. In *Those that Be in Bondage*, Webber rails against the dearth of women and the limitations placed on overseers, particularly those of mixed heritage, while in *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, Jenkins faults the greed of individual recruiters and overseers for the mistreatment of laborers. By contrast, contemporary authors Dabydeen and Sharlow openly criticize imperialism and indenture as exploitive systems, drawing attention to the vulnerability of the laborers and the wealth that colonizers gained from the immigrants’ toil in the name of civilizing barbaric races. While Dabydeen and Sharlow are concerned with sexualized form of exploitation that women laborers experienced, they do little to challenge the

patriarchal assumptions that lead to such exploitation, such as the view of women as representatives of nationhood.

Female authors García and Mohan further expand fictional representations of indenture, depicting aspects of the system that have previously received little attention. These include women traveling alone, Chinese laborers, and the impact of indenture on generations of Caribbean men and women. The autobiographies of Munshi Rahman Khan and Alice Singh, and the interviews with Maharani and Doolarie, highlight the extent to which a laborer's class and gender shaped his or her experiences and perceptions of indenture. Rahman Khan and Phularjee, upper class immigrants, had a significantly more positive view of imperialism and seemed to have suffered far less under indenture than Maharani and Doolarie, who had little wealth or status.

It is not surprising that there should be drastic differences between authors writing from such varying times and subject positions, but what is startling is the similarities of the authors' concerns. All of the texts emphasize the suffering that the laborers experienced, including those works by writers who supported empire, such as Jenkins and Rahman Khan. The narratives detail crushing hours and work tasks, substandard living conditions, deceptive labor practices, managers abusing their power, corporal punishment, and the generally precarious existence of the laborers, particularly women. The recognition of these circumstances even in texts that supported empire underscores the severity of conditions that many of the laborers experienced.

Gender also emerges as a central issue in each of the indenture narratives, as authors explore the ways that the gender disparity both improved and inhibited women's lives. Jenkins and Dabydeen portray the domestic abuse that was distressingly prevalent among the laborers, while Mohan shows that women immigrants may have gained some agency, traveling alone,

earning wages, and supporting themselves and their family. The interviews and autobiographies demonstrate the ways that women's metaphoric role shapes their material existence, as in extensive legislation around immigrants' marriages. Colonial officials viewed the high rates of violence against women in the immigrant population as primarily resulting from men's jealousy, which they saw arising because of the scarcity of women and the infidelity of female migrants. These officials put in place laws to punish anyone who tempted a woman away from her husband, but the primary effect of these laws was that women were forced to stay in violent, unhappy relationships.

Equally vital to these narratives are issues of race and class. Interestingly, all of the fictional texts feature interracial, inter-class relationships. The first two chapters of my dissertation examine a relationship forming between a British manager and an Indian woman, but similar interactions appear in the other novels, as well. *Jahajin* depicts a Canadian woman from a wealthy family becoming involved with a working class Indian man, while *Monkey Hunting* describes a Chinese man marrying a former African slave woman. Even the nonfiction texts include examples of such relationships. The persistence of this trope suggests that these relationships were and continue to be a source of tension for citizens of the Caribbean. At the same time, images of such relationships may offer a ray of hope, the promise of solidarity between people of different race and class.

It is my hope that the themes I discuss in this dissertation will open up other areas for further exploration. There are many questions yet to be answered in the study of gender and race in indenture. For example, what does the changing role of the women who migrated teach us about how gender relations were influenced by colonialism, and how rapidly gender roles are

shaped by societal factors? What do family and intimate metaphors mean for those who were in the periphery of empire versus those who were in power? How do the performance of masculinity and femininity manifest at different points in indenture narratives, and how do these performances intersect with race and class? What is the role of fiction in understanding the abuses of the past and trying to prevent such abuses in the present?

My dissertation focuses on texts dealing directly with Caribbean indentured labor, but broader exploration of indenture narratives may help us to answer these questions. For instance, there have been no comprehensive studies of the literature of indenture in other British colonies. This literature includes Totaram Sanadhya's 1919 indenture autobiography, *My Twenty-One Years in Fiji*, and several novels about contract labor in Mauritius, such as Deepchand Beeharry's *That Others Might Live* (1976) and the more recent Ibis trilogy by Amitav Ghosh. An examination of these texts and the characteristics of the locations that produced them would lead to a deeper understanding of the function of gender and race within empire, and the impact of indenture across the British colonies. For instance, Fiji did not have the same history of imported slave labor as the Caribbean, as British rule in Fiji began in 1874, forty years after Britain abolished slavery in its colonies. Native Fijians refused to work on cotton and sugar cane estates, and so indentured laborers were brought in, first from nearby islands such as the New Hebrides, and then from India. With these historical differences in mind, it would be interesting to consider how representations of interactions between native Fijians and indentured laborers differed from representations of former slaves and indentured laborers in Caribbean colonies.

Furthermore, it would be worthwhile to compare the literature of British Imperial indenture to texts about other indenture systems. William Morelay's autobiography, *The Infourtunate*, published in 1743, chronicles the experience of an Englishman indenturing in

Pennsylvania and challenges the view of bound labor as an exclusively nineteenth century system of Indian and Chinese migration. Laure Moutoussamy's 2007 novel *Le "Kooli" de morne Cabri*, which tells the story of Indian indenture in Martinique, a French colony, could offer insights into how European imperial systems of indenture overlapped and differed.

Finally, there is an extensive body of literature that touches on indenture indirectly. This includes novels focusing on second-generation Indo-Caribbeans, such as Edgar Mittelholzer's *Corentyne Thunder* (1970) and Sam Selvon's *A Brighter Sun* (1987), and novels that feature indenture as a background to the plot, such as Patricia Powell's *The Pagoda* (1999), about a Chinese woman who stows away on a ship carrying indentured Chinese laborers to Jamaica, and Roy Heath's *The Shadow Bride* (1996), which tells the story of an Indian doctor on an estate. Several novels by female Caribbean authors briefly address women's experience of indenture and its aftereffects, as in Ramabai Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge* (2003) and Ryhaan Shah's *A Silent Life* (2005). Scholars of Indian and Chinese diasporic literature, such as Mariam Pirbhai, have explored many of these texts. However, there has been little close examination of the role of indenture in these narratives, and how these texts extend the themes discussed in this dissertation, such as the hierarchies of labor and the metaphoric role of women.

This dissertation has focused on the extent to which British Imperialism rested on hierarchies of labor, of race, of gender, and of class. The intimate relationships in the narratives of indenture act as a window into the political views of the time and reveal the insidiousness of these hierarchies in rhetoric by both the dominant and oppressed groups. I focus on these hierarchies in the hopes that drawing attention to them will help to challenge remnants of imperial and indenture ideology in the Caribbean. These include the societal acceptance of

domestic abuse, the assumption of a link between class and character, and tensions between Caribbean citizens of African, Indian, and Chinese descent. As I note in my second chapter, racial tensions still infiltrate political discourse in the Caribbean, and violence against women is disturbingly common.

We also see lingering attitudes of empire in contemporary rhetoric about indentured labor. In 1987, the historian Basdeo Mangru published an essay titled “The Problem of Indian Wife Murders,” in which he argues that British Imperial indenture led to the high rates of Indian women killed by their partners on the estates. Yet, by focusing on certain aspects of the system, he supports the view that women, either by their presence or their absence, were the source of the problem. For example, he writes that the few Indian women who indentured often formed connections with British managers, which incited jealousy in Indian men. He in turn blames this on the (lack of) Indian women’s clothing: “One could hardly fail to visualize the problems inherent in a situation where Indian women, by their mode of dress, seemed to reveal to estate subordinates ‘more physical charm’ than what they had been accustomed to in Britain” (36). He also seems to suggest that Indian women were prone to be unfaithful, and that if colonial officials had recognized immigrant marriages, potentially disloyal women would have been forced to stay with their husbands: “The refusal to recognize the validity of Indian marriages solemnized in accordance with custom and religion tended to weaken the marriage ties and facilitate the desertion of unfaithful wives to form new matrimonial connections” (35). These statements ignore the colonizers’ brutalizing treatment of both male and female laborers, which modeled relationships of dominance and violence, as well as the very valid reasons women may have had for leaving their husbands, such as physical abuse. That a scholar working seventy years after the end of indenture would make such arguments suggests that imperial rhetoric, such

as the scapegoating of women in discussions of contract labor, may be harder to escape than we imagine.

Similarly, this dissertation has demonstrated that contemporary indenture narratives often replicate repressive imperial views of class and gender. In *The Promise* (1995), Sharlow associates Rati's beauty, morality, and intelligence with her high caste status as a Brahmin. This echoes Webber's indication in *Those That Be in Bondage* (1917) that it is only because Bibi, an Indian woman, is of royal blood, that she is worthy of the white overseer Edwin. David Dabydeen's 1996 novel *The Counting House* depicts Rohini as the bearer of Indian culture, just as Lutchmee is in Jenkins' 1877 novel *Lutchmee and Dilloo*.

Examining how language and narratives reflect the assumptions, stereotypes, and political views of the time may help us question our own assumptions, stereotypes and political views. As I wrote this dissertation, I found myself wondering how the language and narratives that we are creating today will be considered in one hundred years. What will scholars a century from now think of our literature and literary criticism? What gaps, assumptions, and prejudices will they reveal?

Contemporary forms of indenture continue to rely on racialized and gendered views of labor. Journalist John Bowe tells the story of a Thai man named Intajak (named changed) who paid a recruitment fee of \$11,700 in exchange for a three-year contracted job in the United States. After Intajak arrived in the U.S., a representative of Global Horizons, the company that recruited him, took him to an apple orchard, where his passport was confiscated. Over a few months of working in this orchard, Intajak came to realize that, while he was paid minimum wage, there was no guarantee of steady hours, and he could be sent back to Thailand if his

employers were unhappy with him. Bowe writes, “if the work ran out, or if he did anything to displease his bosses, he'd have no way to pay off the \$11,700 he'd borrowed. Ever.”

Intajak was then sent to a pineapple plantation in Hawaii, where the pay was better, but the conditions were more brutal. A Global Horizons agent carried a gun, a knife, or a baseball bat; beat one of Intajak's coworkers; and threatened to deport the workers if they didn't meet their quota. The workers slept in the dirt next to the parking lot in order to meet the van that would take them to work at 4:30 A.M., and their food rations were often insufficient or of poor quality. Intajak eventually ran away through the cane fields in a dramatic escape akin to Chen Pan's flight from the plantation in *Monkey Hunting*. Intajak says: “I was sweating like crazy, and it was muddy and slippery...I really had no idea what was going to happen, or if I'd make it, or what would happen if I got caught.” He managed to escape to Los Angeles, where he lives under an assumed name for fear of reprisal.

On March 19, 2014, a federal judge found Global Horizons liable for the abuse of its workers. In her decision, Judge Kobayashi said that, “Global Horizons exploited the enormous debts the Thai workers incurred to pay the recruitment fees...Global Horizons specifically chose Thai workers based on a stereotype that Thai workers would be more compliant and less likely to escape or cause other problems” (EEOC 13-14). The mistreatment and racialized views of these workers is remarkably similar to the mistreatment and racialized views faced by Chinese and Indian laborers under the British imperial system of indenture, suggesting that we have not escaped these abusive labor practices and stereotypes.

Women, especially those in poverty, are particularly vulnerable to systems of human trafficking and sexual exploitation, as they were under the institution of British indenture. Author and activist Siddharth Kara interviewed Maya, a Nepalese woman whose parents, desperate for

money, sold her to an agent on the promise that she would get a good job. The agent then sold her to a *dalal* (trafficker) who took her and another girl to India. In Mumbai, Maya says, “the *dalal* sold me to a *malik* [brothel boss] in Kamathipura. The *malik* told me I owed him thirty-five thousand rupees [\$780], and I must have sex with any man who chooses me until this debt is repaid” (19). She eventually escaped, and at a shelter, learned that she had contracted HIV. When the shelter contacted her father, he told her not to come home: “He said I can never be married and because I have HIV, I can only bring shame” (20). The combination of Maya’s gender and economic destitution made her a prime target for the sex trade, while her father’s emphasis on honor and the implied blame that he places upon her indicate that women continue to be held responsible for the ills that befall them, particularly those related to sexual assault.

Intajak and Maya’s stories echo in troubling ways the narratives of indenture described in this dissertation. The systems of migrant labor that exist today continue to exploit workers in many of the same ways as imperial indenture: utilizing debt bondage, taking advantage of those in economic need, incorporating racialized and gendered notions of labor, and even relying on technically legal but highly deceptive contracts and recruitment practices, as Global Horizons did. As in many forms of abuse, understanding and awareness have been crucial to the abolition of these kinds of labor abuses. It was through the reports of men like Intajak that Global Horizons was held accountable for its crimes, just as the testimonials of laborers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries helped bring to an end the imperial systems of indenture.

Intajak and Maya’s experiences indicate that such hierarchies are not limited to British Imperialism, and in fact shape many exploitative systems of labor. It is my hope that focusing on the rhetoric around Caribbean indenture will help us recognize the ongoing effects of indenture

in that region but also the exploitative nature of various modern day forms of labor around the globe.

It is critical that we pay attention to these stories. Qatar, the 2022 host of the World Cup, is infamous for its institution of *kefala* labor, a system of sponsored migration that shares many similarities with indenture. Speaking about the intense pace of construction required to build the stadiums before 2022, and seeming to disregard concerns that have been raised about violations of the workers' human rights, Albert Speer Jr. said, "Major events like the Olympics or the World Cup make the unthinkable thinkable. There are no taboos" (Smolczyk). Fictional and nonfiction narratives of indenture, such as the ones explored in this dissertation, help us to understand how these abusive systems of labor develop and are perpetuated, and help make such practices taboo.

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