ABSTRACT

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This dissertation investigates the ways in which East Indian Caribbean (Indo-Caribbean) writers negotiate history, identity, and belonging. Nineteenth-century government officials and plantation owners described Indian indentureship (1838-1917) in the British West Indies as a contractual system of employment implemented after abolition and as a civilizing mechanism aimed at reforming heathen laborers. Challenging these accounts, historians have shown that the system was a new mode of exploitation. Colonial administrators used coercive tactics to control workers and implemented strategic laws to confine Indians to the plantation. These policies constructed Indians as foreigners and interlopers in colonial society, perceptions that have significantly impacted the formation of Indo-Caribbean subjectivities and Indo-Caribbean claims to postcolonial citizenship in the region. Reading both canonical and lesser known texts, my project argues that Indo-Caribbean writers frequently

engage with indentureship as a means to come to terms with this history of oppression and as a way to contest their elision in Anglophone Caribbean culture more widely.

Drawing on postcolonial theory, I examine works published from 1960 to the present by authors from Guyana and Trinidad, countries where Indians constitute a significant portion of the population. My analysis begins in the 1960s because it was at this time that literary and political debates began to focus on decolonization and on defining a culture distinct from Britain. Given that Indian indentures were unable to record their own experiences, their perspectives are largely omitted from the Caribbean historiography. Moreover, as Indians moved off the plantation and gained socio-economic mobility, they often viewed indenture as a shameful part of their heritage that was best forgotten. By examining V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*, Peter Kempadoo's *Guyana Boy*, Harold Ladoo's *No Pain Like This Body*, Ramabai Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge,* the novels of Shani Mootoo, and the poetry of Rajkumari Singh, Rooplall Monar, and Mahadai Das, "Unhomely Stirrings" traces the processes by which indenture has been subjected to willful acts of forgetting within Indo-Caribbean communities and in larger national histories. These texts engage the ways in which the legacy of indentureship continues to shape the contemporary lives and identities of Indo-Caribbean people at home and in the diaspora.

UNHOMELY STIRRINGS: REPRESENTATIONS OF INDENTURESHIP IN INDO-CARIBBEAN LITERATURE FROM 1960 TO THE PRESENT

By

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Chapter 1: Introduction

> When I was a little boy growing up in San Fernando, there was a dark old Indian named Sammy who came around to our street selling fish. He was partly paralyzed and walked with a limp [...] we teased and jeered at him whenever he came. One day he turned up with a white man toting the fish for him: I learnt afterwards that he was an escaped convict from Devil's Island whom Sammy had come across on the beach and took in hand to be his assistant. I was furious with the old man for putting the white man in such a humiliating position. My heart went out in a wave of sympathy and dismay for him in a way it never did for the poor crippled Indian struggling to earn an honest living.
>
> ---Samuel Selvon 1979

Despite being the son of a mixed Scottish and Indian mother and Madrassi Indian father, as a child, Samuel Selvon viewed Indians as backward, poor peasants; images that starkly contrasted to the mixture of races and American cinema that was part of his everyday reality in "cosmopolitan" San Fernando. In his keynote address at the second East Indians in the Caribbean Conference in 1979, Selvon spoke of his early perceptions of East Indians in Trinidad:

> To me, the Indian was relegated to the countryside. When I went to spend the holidays in Princes Town or Gasparillo, I saw workers in the canefields, or that sold nuts along the roadside and brown children bathing under the stand pipe, or else there was the occasional 'country bookie' who came to town, or the vendors and the beggars who migrated to the pavement in the high street" ("Three" 15).

For Selvon, his lack of knowledge of his Indian background stemmed from his experience growing up "Trinidadian": "I was one of the boys, doing jump-up at Carnival time, giving and taking picong [….] eating a late night roti down St. James" (15). Thus, "Indian" and "Trinidadian" were antithetical, an idea reflected most aptly in the title of Selvon's talk, "Three Into One Can't Go –East Indian, Trinidadian, Westindian." What is most interesting about Selvon's recounting of these memories – such as those I present in the above epigraph – is that while he recognizes that his early perceptions about race in Trinidad were linked to colonial hierarchies, he fails to articulate how his early view of Indians specifically reflect derogatory stereotypes of this group that derive from indentureship; stereotypes that had been ingrained into his consciousness. Selvon's speech raises important questions about the place of indentureship in dominant constructions of communal, regional, and world history.

"Unhomely Stirrings" investigates the ways in which East Indian Caribbean (Indo-Caribbean) writers negotiate history, identity, and belonging. In the nineteenth-century, government officials and plantation owners described Indian indentureship (1838-1917) as a contractual system of employment. After the abolition of slavery in the British West Indies, indentured Indians voluntarily committed to work in the British plantation colonies in the New World for a set period of time and for a set wage. Additionally, colonial discourse presented the system as a civilizing mechanism aimed at reforming heathen laborers. Challenging these accounts, historians such as Walter Rodney and Mahadavi Kale have shown that the system was a new mode of human exploitation, citing such evidence as the dubious practices used to recruit workers, the coercive tactics used to control them, including imprisonment and corporal punishment, and the inhumane living conditions indentures endured. Moreover, colonial administrators implemented strategic laws that confined Indians to the plantation. These policies constructed East Indians as foreigners and interlopers in colonial society. Moreover, Indians spoke non-English languages (Hindi and Urdu), practiced non-Christian worship, and wore non-Western clothing, differences that further alienated them from the emerging Afro-Creole[1] culture of colonial West Indian society. These negative perceptions of Indians have significantly impacted the formation of Indo-Caribbean subjectivities, (we particularly see this idea in Selvon's speech), and Indo-Caribbean claims to postcolonial citizenship in the region.

As scholars such as Viranjini Munasinghe and Shalini Puri have shown, popular and national conceptions of cultural hybridity in the Caribbean often privilege some groups over others. In places with East Indian populations, like Trinidad and Guyana, the synthesis of African and European influences is frequently emphasized while East Indians are linked to a fixed notion of identity based on their Indian ancestry, which, within this framework, presumably has remained immutable across time and space. Since Indo-Caribbean writers represent a heterogeneous group based on gender, class, sexuality, caste, religious affiliation, and language practices, their unique worldviews enrich Caribbean literature, history, and politics. "Unhomely Stirrings" moves away from essential notions of culture by arguing that Indo-Caribbean identity and claims to citizenship are best understood within a specific model of social and cultural praxis that is rooted in the history of indentureship.

Reading both canonical and lesser known texts across various genres, my project asserts that Indo-Caribbean writers frequently engage with indentureship as a means to come to terms with this history of oppression and as a way to contest their elision in Caribbean culture more widely. I examine works published from 1960 to the present by authors from Guyana and Trinidad, countries where Indians constitute a significant portion of the population as well as texts by authors who have migrated to Britain and North America. I begin my analysis in the 1960s because it was at this time that literary and political debates began to focus on decolonization and on defining a culture distinct from Britain, discussions that continue into the present. Not coincidentally, Indo-Caribbean writers also began publishing full-length creative works around this same time, exploring Indo-Caribbean subject constitution, the relationship of Indians in the Caribbean to India, the place of Indians within emerging Caribbean nation-states, and the connections between Indo-Caribbeans and indentureship.

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[1] Rhoda Reddock points out that the term "Creole" in Trinidad is used 1) to denote a minority of people of European descent who control the economy, 2) primarily by East Indians to describe people of African descent, and 3) to refer to the dominant culture, such as Creole food ("Culture" 114). In this dissertation, I employ the third definition of the term, to describe the dominant culture that is often associated with Afro-Caribbean traditions.

My dissertation argues that indentureship surfaces as what Homi Bhabha terms an *"unhomely stirring"* or a haunting of history with which Indo-Caribbean writers must contend. Most of what we know about indentureship comes from colonial documents, missionary accounts, and travel writings written by Europeans. Given that Indian indentures were often illiterate in English, Hindi, and Urdu, they could not record their own experiences. Moreover, as Indians moved off the plantation, became educated, and gained socio-economic mobility, they often viewed indenture as a shameful part of their heritage that was best forgotten. As they became more a part of Creole society, they did not want to be associated with *coolie* identity. Originated in India as a label for cheap unskilled laborers who occupied the lowest class and caste, the term *coolie* was appropriated by the British during colonialism to describe indentured servants from India and China who were transported to the Caribbean, South Africa, and the Islands of the Pacific and the Indian Oceans. The physical and psychological movement away from indentureship by the Indian middle class further compounded the erasure of indenture from communal narratives. By investigating the effect of this historical erasure on the development of Indo-Caribbean writing and collective identity, “Unhomely Stirrings” brings to light “the un-spoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present” (Bhabha, “The World” 146).

Indenture: A New System of Slavery

Indian indentured laborers migrated to British West Indian plantation colonies after the official end of slavery and the short-lived apprenticeship system.[2] Between 1838 and 1917, over half a million Indians arrived in the British Caribbean, and were dispersed in large numbers to Guyana (238, 909) and Trinidad (143,939), and in smaller numbers to Jamaica, Grenada, St. Vincent, and St. Lucia. Planters turned to indentureship, a scheme that was already in place in Mauritius since 1834, as a temporary system to alleviate the alleged labor shortage that resulted post-emancipation. Historians have contested the idea that a labor shortage was the primary reason for the implementation of indentureship. They posit that plantation owners wanted a new source of labor to offset the cost of paying fair wages to the former enslaved population and to have a supply of labor that they could easily control.[3] Thus, indentureship allowed the plantocracy to have a readily available labor force that could be mandated to work by colonial law; in this way wages could remain low and fixed, and could be disseminated at the discretion of the plantation owner. While indentured laborers were also brought from Portugal and China, Indians proved to be the most desirable workers because many were skilled agriculturalists and were used to working in tropical climates.

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[2] Indian migration to Caribbean plantations was part of a larger dispersal of South Asian peoples who sought to fill demands for laborers in colonies across the world, including those in Southeast Asia, East and South Africa, and the islands of Mauritius and Fiji. From the 1830s to 1920s, South Asian laborers were recruited to work on sugar, tea, rubber, and coffee plantations, to build railroads in East Africa, and to serve as administrators, merchants and servicemen/women across the Empire (Pirbhai, “Mythologies” 1).

[3] Historian Mahadavi Kale insightfully argues that the reliance on official documents by historians often reproduced planter and other colonial elite discourses as historical facts: ‘The conventions and standards of evidence that govern historians’ constructions of arguments and narratives have contributed to enhancing the authority and value of these official sources. These methodological biases have also contributed to naturalizing the labor shortage that allegedly threatened British Caribbean sugar industries and the economies and societies that allegedly depended on them” (7).

The conditions that lead to the exodus of Indians from India to the Caribbean are largely linked to effects of colonial rule in India (Pirbhai, “Mythologies” 6). The peasantry, from which most immigrants derived, was ravaged by the oppressive taxation system of the British Raj.[4] Moreover, the anticolonial resistance of Indian soldiers in 1857, what British historians have commonly referred to as a mutiny, lead many to flee the persecution and increased militarization that resulted. While a vast majority of Indian immigrants came from the densely populated central plains of the Ganges (including the United Provinces and Bihar), a significant minority originated from the Tamil or Tegalu areas of South India. For instance, Madrassis composed less than 5% of the 239,000 Indian indentures that migrated to British Guiana (Nagamootoo 6). To date, Peter Kempadoo’s *Guyana Boy* (1960) and Moses Nagamootoo’s *Hendree’s Cure* (2000) appear to be the only two creative works that address the Madrassi Indian experience in the Anglophone Caribbean. Most Indo-Caribbean creative texts depict the dominant Hindu scope; this scope, however, is slowly expanding as evident by the works of such writers as Ramabai Espinet, Sharlow Mohammed, and Shani Mootoo, who bring to light the history of the Indian Christian community in Trinidad, and Ryhann Shah whose fiction gives insight into the Indian Muslim perspective in Guyana. Consequently, as time passes and more Indo-Caribbean creative writers emerge, a more textured perspective of Indian experience in the Caribbean also emerges.

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[4] Ron Ramdin states that the new land revenue system or the Zamindary System, an outcome of British colonialism introduced in India in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, dramatically altered the old village community system leaving thousands of peasants without adequate means of survival; this feudal system ended communal ownership of land by granting large farmers and revenue collectors ownership of the land who would then collect revenue from peasants. Moreover, the change in crop cultivation to commercial agriculture that produced jute, peanuts, sugar, cane, and tobacco left peasant farmers landless and unable to pay debts (11-12).

Indentured laborers held contract agreements that required them to work for an allotted period, usually two to five years, for a colonial landowner in exchange for passage to the colony. The contract not only laid out the terms and conditions of employment, but also stipulated restrictions on the laborer's movement within and outside of the plantation. About 75 % of these immigrants remained in the Caribbean for various reasons. Whereas some could not afford the passage home or were cheated out of the return trip promised upon recruitment, others took advantage of the short-lived scheme that offered small land grants in lieu of return passage. Other indentures willfully stayed, refusing to repatriate because they feared the consequences of the dreadful journey back to India or of re-encountering the circumstances they escaped in the first place.[5]

Since most indentured immigrants could not record their perspectives and experiences first hand, their perspectives are largely omitted from the archives. While archival documents suggest that not all indentured came from the uneducated, lower castes, those from higher castes were often perceived to be a threat to colonial authority and, therefore, could not always disclose their true identities. For instance, in 1898 the exceptional indentured immigrant Bechu frequently wrote letters to the British Guiana newspaper, *The Demerara Daily Chronicle*, exposing the ill treatment of indentured men and women on plantations. Bechu questioned if justice for immigrants was even possible in a plantation economy where biases against them existed at multiple levels. His letters represent one of the few existing historical documents written from the perspective of an Indian indentured. Given that authoritative modes of documentation such as court cases, ships' logs, medical reports, and census reports were produced for imperial interests, the perspectives of Indian indentured immigrants remain largely written out of Caribbean historiography. Indo-Caribbean writing attempts to fill gaps in our knowledge by imagining the lived realities of indentured immigrants and their progeny. Cultural critic Ann Cvetkovich's work on trauma and lesbian public culture gives insight to this process:

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[5] On the topic of indenture return narratives, see Bahadur 163-177.

> Unlike more recent trauma histories where there are still living survivors, the history of slavery presents the challenge of a missing archive, not only because of its generational distances but also because even in its time it was inadequately documented given restrictions on literacy for slaves, and governed subsequently by racisms that have suppressed subaltern knowledges. This traumatic history necessarily demands unusual strategies of representation. (38)

While Cvetkovich speaks here specifically about slavery, her statement also clearly applies to indentureship. Indo-Caribbean writers indicate through their role as writers and often through their portrayals of characters and poetic speakers that the descendants of indentures must reconstruct, preserve, and make public these histories and stories. Thus, indentureship is deployed in this literature as a supplement to official modes of history, such as those encapsulated in archives, as a means to articulate individual and collective identities, and as a way to assert Indo-Caribbean claims to community and national belonging. Ironically, the dehumanizing system that exploited Indian indentures becomes the mode through which their descendants often assert rights to cultural and political citizenship.

“Unhomely Stirrings:” Confronting the Trauma of Indenture

In order to theorize Indo-Caribbean literary engagements with indentureship, my dissertation draws on postcolonial theory and specifically employs Homi Bhabha’s notion of the *unhomely* as a methodological framework. In his postcolonial reformulation of Freud’s *uncanny* (*unheimlich*), Bhabha offers the *unhomely* as a way to describe “the literary and social effects of enforced social accommodation, or historical migrations and cultural relocations” (“The World” 141). In his essay, *The Uncanny*, Freud reveals that the German term *heimlich* and its opposite *unheimlich* actually share a common meaning. On one level, *heimlich* means “that which is familiar and congenial,” on another level, it means “that which is concealed and kept out of site;’” *unheimlich* is the opposite of the first definition, but strangely, not of the second. The slippage between the two terms leads Freud to conclude that the “uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something that has been estranged only by the process of repression” (Freud 166). Thus, the *uncanny* describes the recurrence of a repressed image, event, or affect that is transformed through the process of repression into “morbid anxiety” (Freud 166). Bhabha extends what Freud views as an individual occurrence in a child’s psyche to the collective memory of historical trauma, suggesting that the *unhomely* in the postcolonial context can be read as that which is repressed in individual, communal, and national imaginaries (Bhabha, *The Location* 15). In this way, the *unhomely* becomes what Toni Morrison terms ‘the fully realized presence of haunting of history’ and manifests in art as “the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present" (qtd. in Bhabha, "The World" 147).

Drawing on Bhabha's *unhomely*, I examine the social and aesthetic processes by which Indo-Caribbeans negotiate displacement, colonial exploitation, their multicultural Caribbean environments, and, ultimately, the trauma of indenture: the historical event itself, the forgetting of indenture, and the trauma of its remembering. Signs of this historical trauma can be seen in the lives of Indo-Caribbean writers: in Selvon's hesitation to trace his childhood perceptions of Indianness to historical constructions of race, in V.S. Naipaul's paralysis as a young writer, struggling to find his voice as an Indian Trinidadian who had few literary models that specifically spoke to his experience,[6] and in Shani Mootoo's admission that "[w]ithin the walls of [her] family there are no traces of an indentured heritage" ("This is").

"Unhomely Stirrings" traces the processes by which indenture has been subjected to willful acts of forgetting within Indo-Caribbean families and communities as well as in larger national histories. Several factors seem to influence the oral and written transference of indentureship history within Indo-Caribbean families; as the literature and the writers themselves suggest, this transference appears to be tied to caste, class, and environment. For instance, many of the Guyanese writers whose families remained on or near plantation estates represent elements of plantation history and life more prominently than Indo-Trinidadian writers, who often derive from a middle-class background. The fact that a larger number of Indians remained on estates after the end of indentureship in

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[6] See my discussion of Naipaul's process as a writer on page 24. Ironically, Naipaul becomes that model for many Indian Caribbean writers, including Lakshmi Persaud. Ramabai Espinet, and Shani Mootoo. For a more on this topic, see pages 44 and 45 of this dissertation.

Guyana than in Trinidad partially explains this difference.[7] Additionally, Guyana's socialist political environment has also contributed to the strong interest in workers and working class history that we see in Indo-Guyanese literature. As the literature examined indicates, the activities of colonial schools and missionaries that devalued Indians, their culture, and indentureship further compounded this erasure.

In Indo-Caribbean literary production, the trauma of indenture plays out in "surprising forms, appearing in textures of everyday emotional life that don't necessarily seem traumatic" (Cvektovich 6). Indo-Caribbean writers frequently employ the ways in which the legacy of indenture continues to haunt the everyday lives of Indo-Caribbean subjects as an entry point into this history. Moreover, indenture history is presented as one that can be reimagined through ceremonies and oral practices, such as the *Matikor*,[8] chutney, bhajans, and folk songs; through alternative modes of written documentation, such as family histories, personal diaries, and letters; through physical structures that bare the marks of indenture, such as plantations and barracks; and through bodies and social relations between individuals and groups. As Lisa Lowe argues in her work on Asian American cultural politics, "Forms of individual and collective narratives are not merely representations disconnected from 'real' political life; nor are these expressions 'transparent' records of histories of struggle. Rather, these forms –life stories, oral histories, histories of community and literature –are crucial media that connect subjects to social relations" (qtd. in Cvetkovich 123-124).

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[7] The development of Indo-Guyanese literature has been slow in comparison to its Indo-Trinidadian counterpart. This situation is tied to later access to education for Indians in British Guiana and to the larger political and economic differences of the two nations. However, while the novels of Indo-Trinidadian writers are more well-known than those of Indo-Guyanese writers, the latter has a long-standing tradition of poetry including such poets as David Dabydeen, Cyril Dabydeen, Mahadai Das, Rajkumari Singh, Rooplall Monar, and Sasenarine Persaud.

[8] A female centered ceremony that occurs the night before a Hindu wedding. For a more comprehensive discussion of the term, see pages 191-192 of this dissertation.

Theorizing Indo-Caribbean Literature and Experience

Migration has been an integral part of the development of Indo-Caribbean literature. Like other Caribbean male writers at the time, early Indo-Caribbean male writers such as V.S. Naipaul, Samuel Selvon, and Peter Kempadoo emigrated to Britain to pursue educational, economic, and publication opportunities in the 1950s; critics of Caribbean literature have widely viewed this period as a genesis moment in the Caribbean literary tradition since much of Caribbean writing of this period came out of London.[9] The 1970s and 1980s also witnessed the exodus of large groups of Indians from the Caribbean to Britain and North America, a condition that Stuart Hall has called being "twice diasporized" (6). Factors that lead to this wave of Indo-Caribbean migration include economic hardship, perceptions of cultural alienation as ethnic minorities in Creole dominated societies, and the outbreak of racial and political tensions, as in the case of the 1964 Wismar riots in Guyana. Guyanese novelist Ryhann Shah's *A Silent Life* (2005) vividly depicts the daily struggles of life under an oppressive postcolonial regime and a society marked by racial strife; this theme recurs in Narmala Shewcharan's *Tomorrow is Another Day* (2004), Oonya Kempadoo's *Buxton Spice* (1999), and Harischandra Khemraj's *Cosmic Dance* (1994), signaling the desire of Indo-Guyanese writers to understand the psychosocial processes that feed into the racial politics that continues to polarize their nation of origin.

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[9] See Ramchand's *The West Indian Novel* and Donnell's *Twentieth-Century*.

Through its examination of Indo-Caribbean writing, “Unhomely Stirrings” brings to light a corpus of works that has been understudied in both South Asian diasporic studies and Anglophone Caribbean literary studies. Research on the South Asian diaspora often foregrounds the experiences of and literature by writers from the subcontinent who migrated to Britain, the United States, and Canada after decolonization and post-World War II as well as those of South Asian descent born in the West. Between the 1960s and 1980s, South Asian migration to Britain and the United States substantially increased as the result of a need for skilled and professional laborers; circumstances that led to reforms in the exclusionary immigration policies of these countries.[10] Additionally, Indians who migrated out of India after its independence, what Vijay Mishra terms the “new” Indian diaspora, are viewed in a more favorable light by the Indian subcontinent - a sentiment embodied in the creation of the category Non-Resident Indian (NRI) - than Indians who migrated during the colonial period to be indentured laborers, what Mishra terms the “old diaspora” and Veronique Bragard terms the “coolie diaspora.” Work on the Indian diaspora has tended to perpetuate conservative and essentialist notions of Indian culture; thereby, eschewing hybridity and often overlooking the ways in which Indians and their cultural practice has been influenced by other cultural groups (Puri 14).

In response to this critical gap, several recent studies have attempted to place Indo-Caribbean writing at the center of discussions on the South Asian or the Indian Diaspora; these include Marina Carter and Khal Torabully’s *Coolitude: An Anthology of the Indian Diaspora* (2002), Vijay Mishra’s *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary* (2007), Veronique Bragard’s *Transoceanic*

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[10] For instance, the United States lifted restrictions against Asian immigration through the passing of the 1965 Immigration and Nationalization Act.

Dialogues: Coolitude in Caribbean and Indian Ocean Literatures (2008), and Mariam Pirbhai's *Mythologies of Migration, Vocabularies of Indenture: Novels of the South Asian Diaspora in Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia-Pacific* (2009). These diasporic projects move away from purist notions of Indianness and diaspora by reading Indo-Caribbean literature as part of a larger corpus of South Asian diasporic writing. Following these works, "Unhomely Stirrings" also offers a broader perspective on South Asian diasporic studies by focusing on the ways in which Indian cultural and literary forms have been transformed by cultural exchanges within the Caribbean's multicultural environment and identifies indentureship as a crucial component that has engendered this hybridization. Moreover, through its focus on literature from a specific section of the "old diaspora," this dissertation challenges us to reconsider how terms such as Indian, South Asian, and diaspora are defined.

In the Anglophone Caribbean context (and the Americas more generally), literary and critical works dealing with colonialism often focus on slavery, the experiences of people of African descent, and their relations with Europeans. My study adds to scholarship that explores the contributions of indigenous and immigrant groups to colonial and postcolonial Caribbean culture and society. As literary critics Joy Mahabir and Mariam Pirbhai argue, while "Caribbean scholarship and publication has necessarily widened its lens, now engaging in more inclusive gestures of representation," the Indo-Caribbean perspective "remains underrepresented or at least disproportionate to the increased and substantial level of activity, in the form of both creative and scholarly publication, by this community" (4).

Researchers such as Frank Birbalsingh, Ramabai Espinet, Rosanne Kanhai, Jeremy Poynting, and Kenneth Ramchand have been publishing critical articles on Indo-Caribbean texts in academic journals and interdisciplinary anthologies since the 1980s. It is not until the twenty-first century, however, that critical works dealing principally with Indo-Caribbean literature have emerged.[11] Brinda Mehta's groundbreaking *Diasporic Dislocations: Indo-Caribbean Women Writers Negotiate the Kala Pani* (2004) is the first monograph to take Indo-Caribbean women's writing as its primary concern. Krishna Sarbadhikary's much overlooked study, *Surviving the Fracture: Writers of the Indo-Caribbean Diaspora* (2007), mainly treats Indo-Caribbean Canadian writers, despite its title. Most recently, Joy Mahabir and Miriam Pirbhai's *Critical Perspective on Indo-Caribbean Literature* (2013) marks a significant moment in Caribbean literary history as it is the first critical collection of essays specifically devoted to Indo-Caribbean women's literature.

"Unhomely Stirrings" compliments these previous studies, and pushes beyond them to fill gaps in scholarship by providing a sustained analysis of Indo-Caribbean literature by both male and female authors, who write from within and outside of the Caribbean region. While my dissertation does not claim to offer an exhaustive study of Indo-Caribbean writers and texts, it does attempt to outline a broad Indo-Caribbean literary history through discussions of selected authors and their creative works. Examining works by Indo-Caribbean writers who have gained international recognition such as V.S. Naipaul and Shani Mootoo, my project also brings to light texts that have been understudied, including those by Rajkumari Singh, Peter Kempadoo, and Harold Ladoo. Importantly, by situating Indo-Caribbean writing specifically in the context of Anglophone Caribbean literature, “Unhomely Stirrings” makes apparent how Indo-Caribbean fictional works are shaped by and respond to major concerns in Caribbean literary history.

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[11] Literary scholar Allison Donnell has long argued for the importance of recognizing Indo-Caribbean writers. Donnell made early effort towards this goal as an editor of *The Routledge Reader of Caribbean Literature* (1996) by including key pieces by Rajkumari Singh and Mahadai Das in the anthology, and later devotes substantial sections of her book, *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature: Critical Moments on Anglophone Literary History* (2006), to this subject.

Scholars have sought to employ concepts that emerge organically from the Indo-Caribbean experience to characterize Indo-Caribbean negotiations with cultural and gendered identities, national politics, and feminist practice. Some critics view the notion of the *dougla*, the offspring of Indian and African parentage, as having much positive potential in uniting competing groups and movements. For example, Shalini Puri has posited the theory, *dougla poetics*: a hybrid form that incorporates Indian, African, and European cultural traditions, as a way to discuss the specificities of cultural hybridity in the Caribbean context. As an alternative to creolization, *dougla poetics,* Puri suggests, provides a means for articulating “potentially progressive cultural projects” and a political identity, rather than a biological one, that take into account both the dominant Afro-Creole culture and Indian culture in the Caribbean (221). Yet, Puri herself admits that *dougla poetics* has its limitations in discussions of other groups in the Caribbean including Chinese, Jewish, and Middle Eastern. Furthermore, this theory has “often glossed over engagements with the specificity of biological *douglas*, who are, ironically, still fighting for national visibility in a very multi-ethnic social milieu” (Mehta, *Diasporic* 15). Following Puri, Rosanne Kanhai has put forth the notion of a *dougla* feminist space that would be more inclusive of groups who have been marginally represented in

Caribbean feminist discourse.[12] In their use of the concept of the *dougla,* both Puri and Kanhai attempt to engender dialogue between African and Indian groups in political and feminist discourses.

Other critics have attempted similar projects, but have sought to circumvent the problems inherent in locating Indo-Caribbean experience in discourses that have historically created binaries between African and Indian groups by focusing instead on a shared past of oceanic journeys and/or the common experience of planation exploitation. For instance, Mehta's "*kala pani* discourse," posits that Indo-Caribbean women's crossing of the *kala pani* (dark waters) resulted in their ability to renegotiate patriarchal and imperial marginalization and foregrounds the multi-ethnic, historical connections of women in the New World. For Mehta, *kala pani* discourse holds the potential to unite Caribbean women who may not necessarily identify with *dougla* aesthetics by emphasizing a shared heritage of oceanic crossings "in the form of Asian indenture, African slavery, and Middle Eastern commercial enterprise" (*Diasporic* 15). Mahabir and Pirbhai depart from Mehta's assertion in their claim that Indo-Caribbean feminism is best understood within a specific model of social and cultural praxis that is directly rooted in the history of female indentureship. The editors identify the paradigm of *jahaji*-hood as a useful concept through which representations of women's histories and identities can be reclaimed. They offer *Jahajin-bhain,* a feminization of the more common Hindi/Urdu term *jahaji-bhai* (ship-brother); translated as 'ship-sister,' *Jahajin-bhain* describes the bonds forged by young girls and women traveling alone across the *kala pani* as indentured labor to the British Caribbean and other plantation colonies, relationships that intensified on the plantation. Lastly, Indo-Mauritius poet and scholar Khal Torabully's

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[12] See Kanhai, *Matikor: The Politics of Identity for Indo-Caribbean Women*.

coolitude is inspired by the *Negritude* movement's celebration of Pan-Africanism and rejection of black oppression; however, as Torabully argues, it seeks to transcend the essentialism of *Negritude* since *coolitude* does not refer "to one people, or race, or religion. It springs in fact, from a word (coolie/indentured), which in the beginning, designated an economic status, and has been broadened to encompass a human situation" (144). Pointing out that originally the term *coolie* was employed by imperialists as a derogatory term for laborers from India, China, and Africa, among other places, Torabully envisions *coolitude* as a theory to describe the cultural encounters and exchanges between Indians of the indentured labor diaspora and other peoples of the host countries (such as Mauritius, Fiji, and the Caribbean) in which Indians settled. Like the work of these previous critics, "Unhomely Stirrings" also draws on the history of Indians in the Caribbean as a way to understand Indo-Caribbean culture, identity, and literature, but offers a more sustained analysis of this body of work. Building on this previous scholarship, my project examines the ways in which indentureship "history continues to have a legacy in the present and grapple[s] also with an equally powerful legacy of its forgetting" (Cvektovich 38).

In addition to this introduction, this dissertation comprises five chapters, each dealing with a specific aspect of indentureship and its impact on Indo-Caribbean individual and collective identities in regard to race, class, gender, and sexuality. The chapters foreground the economic, political, and cultural influences that have informed Indo-Caribbean lives and the publication of Indo-Caribbean texts in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Some questions that this project seeks to explore include: How do Indo-Caribbean writers imagine indentureship? What narrative strategies are employed to unearth this historical phenomenon? In what ways does indentureship inform constructions of colonial and postcolonial cultural, gendered, caste, classed, and sexual identities? How are narratives of indenture drawn upon and revised at particular historical moments to fit particular colonial and postcolonial projects? Within this history, which perspectives are validated and which remain invisible?

The second and third chapters theorize how the *unhomely* can be employed to read indentureship as a historical haunting and as an aesthetic mode that authors employ to negotiate the multiple influences of their multicultural Caribbean environment. I begin by investigating how colonial law and cultural difference prevented Indians from assimilating into colonial British society. I assert that negative perceptions of Indians as interlopers and outsiders have frequently led Indo-Caribbeans to repress indentureship in communal narratives of the past. For instance, Nobel Prize winning-author V.S. Naipaul admits that he knew little of his family's origins and that he used writing as a way to work through this historical loss. Reading Naipaul's autobiographical writings alongside his 1961 novel, *A House for Mr. Biswas,* I argue that indentureship emerges as an "unhomely stirring" in the experience of the author and in the everyday life of his fictional protagonist. By considering the author and his fiction as products of the legacy of Indian indentureship in the Caribbean, I challenge critical views that read Naipaul mainly as complacent English writer, one whose work is opposed to the sense of Caribbean nationalism that existed during the decolonization debates of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

Anglophone Caribbean countries began to legally acquire independent status in 1962, with the independence of Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica. During the 1960s and

1970s, Caribbean critics and writers responded to decolonization by attempting to create a Caribbean literary aesthetic that was indigenous to the region. Integral to this tradition was a notion of the "folk," rooted in peasant and working class communities. In chapter three, I show how Indo-Guyanese writer Peter Kempadoo's *Guyana Boy* (1960) and Indo-Trinidadian writer Harold Ladoo's *No Pain Like This Body* (1972) attempt to expand the folk paradigm that is almost always conceived of as Afro-Caribbean to include Indo-Caribbean perspectives. Drawing on Indian folk beliefs, Afro-Caribbean folk traditions, and Indian mythology, Kempadoo and Ladoo produce hybridized literary forms that reflect a distinct Indo-Caribbean folk aesthetic.

In the fourth chapter, my study examines the Guyanese nationalist movement and decolonization process through analysis of Indo-Guyanese poets of the 1960s and 1970s, including Rajkumari Singh, Rooplall Monar, and Mahadai Das. In a polemical political climate, these poets deployed indentureship history and images of indentured workers to insert the contributions of East Indians into the emerging Guyanese national culture that was based on a socialist consciousness. As part of the ethnic group that was the political minority, but the demographic majority, Singh, Monar, and Das advocated for working class unity across racial lines while at the same time highlighting the particular perspectives of the Indo-Guyanese working class and women.

The final two chapters investigate the relationship between indentureship history and authoritative modes of documentation such as those encapsulated in the imperial archives. Chapter five draws on the work of Gayatri Spivak to argue that subalterns are not represented by the archive given the processes by which colonial records were produced. In my reading of Indo-Trinidadian Canadian writer Ramabai Espinet's novel, *The Swinging Bridge* (2003), I argue that the text responds to colonial and missionary accounts that present indentured Indian women as promiscuous and to Indo-Caribbean male writers who portray these women as docile and passive. Espinet challenges these misrepresentations by foregrounding how they are shaped by imperial and patriarchal interests that sought to manage the sexuality of Indian women.

The final chapter returns to the notion of the archive in its engagement with the fiction of Irish born, Indo-Trinidadian Canadian writer Shani Mootoo. While archival manuscripts underscore how colonial law was employed to manage colonial bodies, I assert that Mootoo's novels, *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996), *He Drown She in the Sea* (2005), and *Valmiki's Daughter* (2008), vividly portray the socio-cultural effects of such laws, perspectives that are unavailable in census reports, ships' logs, and medical records. By presenting sexuality as an important component of indentureship history, Mootoo's fiction gives insight into the attitudes towards sexual violence, women's sexual desire, and nonheteronormative sexualities that such laws engendered as well as demonstrates how the legacy of restrictive laws and policies continue to be felt in the contemporary lives of Caribbean people. Crucially, through her focus on relations of intimacy and kinship and how these relations respond to and disrupt colonial ideologies of difference, Mootoo charts alternative models that unsettle imperial and nationalist prescriptions for appropriate affect.

Through the critical lens provided by the work of Bhabha, Spivak, and others, this dissertation explicitly links Indo-Caribbean writers to the story of indentureship. Unlike most previous studies that take a gendered or national approach, or that devote small sections of a larger study to Indo-Caribbean writing, "Unhomely Stirrings" offers a sustained analysis of the literature by both men and women writers from the Caribbean and its diaspora. Thus, this study provides new perspectives on Caribbean literature, Caribbean literary history, and plantation history. As Indo-Caribbean creative texts frequently illustrate, in order to transcend the oppressive ideologies upon which the indentureship system was built and the sense of shame that resulted, Indo-Caribbean subjects must first come to terms with this historical trauma, recognize how it continues to shape Indo-Caribbean material and affect lives, and claim it as an essential part of Indo-Caribbean heritage and identity. The selected Indo-Caribbean authors and this project more broadly have begun to do.

Chapter 2: An Unhomely Stirring: Indentureship, Trauma, and Memory in V. S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*

More than a century after the arrival of Indians in the Caribbean, at the 1975 Symposium on East Indians in the Caribbean at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad, V.S. Naipaul lamented the widespread lack of knowledge regarding the history of Indians in the Caribbean. Describing them as "a people without a past," he stated

> One of the difficulties I have is that when I read about Indians in the Caribbean I seldom recognize them. There are so many kinds of truth. There is the truth that deals with facts –economic facts, or facts the outsider sees but which somehow miss the essence of a situation, and I think there has been a lot of that. There is the picturesque tourist truth […] it reduces Indians to what's picturesque about them – their food and their jewelry.
>
> This way about writing about Indians does distort and trivialise. But it doesn't trivialise only one section of the community. I think it trivialises everybody here, because it indicates a special attitude towards [Indians]: it says [….] that the place [Indians] inhabit is only a kind of bongo paradise. So, even with their food and jewelry, I think that Indians remain fairly unknown, even to the Indians themselves. ("A Plea" 1)

Here, Naipaul calls attention to the ways in which East Indians in the Caribbean had been misrepresented and exoticized in tourist materials, suggests how difficult it then was to trace an Indo-Caribbean literary tradition, and more generally speaks to a need to map an Indo-Caribbean history. Naipaul also suggests that the misinterpretations of Indians by outsiders is partly the fault of Indians themselves, because most of the indentured who migrated to the New World from India were uneducated, illiterate peasants who came from a “closed culture” that did not encourage enlightenment and change, a condition that was exacerbated by the “equally imprisoning” plantation. Despite Naipaul’s homogenization of the Indian indentured population and his negative view of the Indian peasant in both India and the Caribbean, he offers some important points regarding the culture and history of East Indians in the New World. At the time of the conference, little scholarship had been produced regarding indentureship history and the contributions of Indians to Anglophone Caribbean society.[13] Since then historians and cultural critics have contested the erasure of indentureship from Caribbean historiography and that of the Americas.[14] For instance, Lisa Lowe reads “the loss” of Asian indentureship in the early Americas as a “sign of the more extensive forgetting of social violence and forms of domination that include but are not limited to indentureship: that reaches back into the slave trade and the extermination of native peoples that founded the conditions of possibility for indentureship” (205-206). Given the inability of subalterns to record their own history and shape public memory, the absence of a sense of historical continuity for Indo-Caribbeans has led to the lack of a sense of collective identity and collective memory.

For Naipaul, his lack of knowledge regarding his ancestral past manifests as a problem for the Indo-Caribbean writer:

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[13] The conference marks a crucial moment in the Indo-Caribbean story as it is the first of a series of its kind that would explore this experience and would contribute to the development of what some have termed Indo-Caribbean Studies.

[14] For more on Indian indenture in the British West Indies, see Kale and Look Lai.

> Unlike the metropolitan writer, I had no knowledge of my past. The past of our community ended, for most of us, with our grandfathers; beyond that we could not see. And the plantation colony, as the humourous guide books said, was a place where almost nothing had happened. So the fiction that one did, about one's immediate circumstances, hung in a void, without a context, without the larger self-knowledge that was always implied in a metropolitan novel. ("Reading" 15-16)

In this passage Naipaul suggests that in contrast to the English writer, he (and Caribbean writers in general) did not have the anchor of a foundational national history and literary tradition that spoke directly to his experience as an East Indian Trinidadian. This absence of a sense of ancestral past and the particular experience of Indian indenture that is presented as a void in history–a period of time (1838-1917) in which "almost nothing had happened"- manifests in Naipaul's fiction as the diasporic subject's obsession with origins and roots. How does an author write without having literary models that speak to his experience? How does he account for a people whose past can be described as what Edouard Glissant terms a "nonhistory"? (*Caribbean* 62).

This chapter investigates, to borrow Lowe's term, "*the politics of [a] lack of knowledge*"[15] about indentureship within the Indo-Caribbean imagination by reading Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) alongside his autobiographical writings; specifically, it examines the ways in which the author confronts the loss of familial and communal history through fiction. Set in the early part of the twentieth century, just following the official end of Indian indentureship in 1917, *A House for Mr. Biswas* conveys the life of its East Indian male protagonist, Mohun Biswas (identified throughout the novel as *Mr. Biswas*), and, as the title suggests, his attempt to obtain a house in colonial Trinidad. Biswas' search for a home can be read as an allegory of the attempt of Indians to find a homespace within the Caribbean. In this way, Naipaul deals with the important themes of the history of Indians in Trinidad, the movement of Indians from rural village life to a Creole[16] urban space, and the transformation of Hindu religion and Indian culture in the Caribbean context. In this long epic-style narrative, Biswas' relationship with his upper-caste Brahmin in-laws dominates the novel and tends to be the focus of critical discussions of the text; little attention has been given to his peasant origins that are directly rooted in indentureship. The protagonist's relations to indentureship and the Indian peasantry are detailed early in the novel through descriptions of Biswas' early life and continue to surface throughout the narrative despite Biswas' attempt to escape them. I argue that Biswas' contentious relationship with plantation labor as well as the history and lifestyle that it represents can be read as symbolic of the larger Indo-Caribbean community's perceptions of indentureship.

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[15] Lowe 206

Homi Bhabha's notion of the *unhomely* provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding Naipaul's engagements with indentureship (141). Bhabha arrives at the *unhomely* after realizing that he "couldn't fit the political, cultural or chronological experience" of Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* "into the tradition of Anglo-American liberal novel criticism. *Biswas* presents a "form of realism that is unable to contain the anguish of cultural and diasporic movement" (142). As laid out in the introduction of the dissertation, Freud's concept of the *uncanny* is integral to Bhabha's theory. According to Freud, the *uncanny* (*unheimlich*) draws attention to an event, image, or memory "that ought to have remained secret or hidden but has come to light" (Freud 156). It is "nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old […] that has been estranged only by the process of repression" (Freud 166). Interweaving the feminist declaration of the "personal is political" into Freud's concept, Bhabha links this process of repression particularly to history and collective memory and suggests that the *unhomely* characterizes that which is repressed in individual, communal, and national imaginaries (*The Location* 15).[17] Drawing on Bhabha's *unhomely,* this chapter demonstrates the ways in which indentureship surfaces as a historical trauma in Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* and gets reenacted physically and psychologically in the lives of successive generations despite the fact that the novel focuses on a period after the official end of the system. Moreover, by reading Naipaul's essays in conjunction with the novel, I argue that the legacy of indenture haunts the author himself who employs writing as a means to negotiate this trauma.

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[16] In this dissertation, I use Creole to refer the dominant Anglophone-Caribbean culture, which is often associated with Afro-Caribbean traditions. For a more detailed discussion of the term, see page 3 of my introduction.

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[17] In her consideration of the *unhomely* as a lens to discuss Edouard Glissant's novel *La case du commander*, Celia M. Britton claims that Bhabha overlooks Freud's argument that the uncanny is something *familiar* and *old* that has been repressed (121). Her reading comes from a section, titled "Unhomely Lives: The Literature of Recognition," that appears in Bhabha's *The Location of Culture;* however, in his article "The World and the Home," Bhabha explores the idea in more depth and hints that the element that is repressed can also be one that is familiar as Freud states in his original essay. In reference to "124" the house in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Bhabha writes: "124' is the *unhomely*, haunted site of the circulation of an event not as fact or as fiction but as an 'enunciation,' a discourse of 'unspeakable thoughts unspoken." He goes on to write "To 'un'-speak is both to release from erasure and repression, and to reconstruct, reinscribe the elements of the *known* [italics mine]. . . we may say with Freud, 'the *Umheimlich* is what was once *Heimlich*, home-like, familiar: the pre-fix 'un' is the token of repression" ("The World" 146-147).

Reassessing Naipaul

My consideration of Naipaul follows in the tradition of scholars who resist trends in critical scholarship that read the author as a canonical English writer who consistently defends the autonomy of art and the writer's choice to develop his individual talent.[18] In discussions of the colonial and postcolonial Caribbean, Naipaul is often heralded as being antithetical to notions of creolization and nationalism.[19] For instance, in his contemporaneous review of *Biswas*, George Lamming states that despite the cosmopolitan nature of Trinidad's population, "Chinese, Indians, Negroes, Portuguese" the world Naipaul creates in his novel "leaves us with the impression of one race surviving in isolation; insulated, as it were, within a familiar landscape." He goes on to say that Naipaul is "careful to avoid that total encounter which is the experience of any Trinidadian, whatever his race may be" ("A Trinidadian" 1657). Lamming's critique suggests that all novels depicting Trinidad and Trinidadians should focus on creolization or Trinidad's cosmopolitanism. In *An Area of Darkness*, Naipaul provides the following reply: "The confrontation of different communities, [Lamming] said, was the fundamental West Indian experience. So indeed it is, and increasingly. But to see the attenuation of the culture of my childhood as the result of a dramatic confrontation of opposed worlds would be to distort the reality. To me the worlds were juxtaposed and mutually exclusive" (30). As this response suggests, Lamming fails to consider the specific setting of Naipaul's creative work, and that of his formative years that profoundly shaped his literature, and the context of Indian immigration to early twentieth century Trinidad. Moreover, Lamming's perception that Naipaul willfully chooses not to portray the quintessential Caribbean experience of cultural hybridity is reflective of the general critical attitude that Naipaul eschews creolization, and therefore nationalism, given that creolization was integral to notions of West Indian nationalism at this moment in Caribbean literary history; an idea that will be taken up in more detail in chapter three.

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[18] For scholars who suggest that critical views of Naipaul must be reconsidered, see Outar, Mishra, and O'Calloghan.

[19] See Lamming "A Trinidadian Experience" and *The Pleasures of Exile* 224-225.

Critics often present Naipaul's disillusion with Caribbean nationalism as the result of his colonial education and the time he spent as an adult in England, suggesting that these experiences have led to his internalization of English prejudices. What these critiques fail to recognize is the ways in which Naipaul's position as an East Indian from Trinidad has contributed to his worldview. Scholar Lisa Outar argues that these scholars "pay too little attention to how Caribbean Indianness shifts and morphs in Naipaul's writing and how it relates to Naipaul's changing ideas about the possibilities of nationalism and creolization" (128). Outar locates Naipaul's denouncement of "all forms of collective identity in his melancholic approach" to notions of Caribbean Indianness that are the result of his "encounters in India and London," specifically the Notting Hill race riots of 1958 and his journey to India in 1962 (128). It is after these events, Outar argues, that Naipaul delivers "his most famously pessimistic pronouncements. As his understanding of himself as a wounded ethnic subject in the context of those two events emerges, his view of the possibilities for nationalism and creolization wane" (128-129).

In his study on Indian diasporic writing, Vijay Mishra also characterizes Naipaul's worldview as being linked to melancholia, but suggests that this despair is particularly rooted in the history of Indian indenture. Drawing on Freud, Mishra affirms that the plantation Indian diaspora "lives out its trauma through a constant return to an original moment that is in the habit of re-wounding the subject. It is as if the moment itself has the ‘unspeakable’ feature of trauma and can be glimpsed only through its re-inscription in a narrative of departure and loss” (107). Despite his admission that “in *Biswas*, we get a fuller sense of the plantation diaspora,” for Mishra the trauma of indenture gets reenacted in Naipaul’s travel writings and autobiographical pieces that “are marked by moments of aporia that signal ways in which the originary moment is recalled through deferred action” (120) This “repetition takes the form of the writing out of both [Naipaul’s] departure and his family genealogy” (120). In Mishra’s account it is ultimately Naipaul’s return to his ancestral homeland, India, the original source of trauma that triggers a “sense of being ‘untimely ripp’d’ from the mother’s womb” (131).

My study engages with and extends this critical turn to read Naipaul’s writings as products of the “East Indian West Indian” experience; however, it departs from previous scholars in specific ways. Unlike Outar and Mishra, my own project does not characterize Naipaul’s engagement with indentureship and Indianness as melancholia. Moreover, I identify *A House for Mr. Biswas* as the narrative in which the reenactment of the trauma of indenture is most acutely played out. Thus, this chapter will demonstrate that for the Indo-Caribbean author the “loss” that must be reckoned with is not India as motherland per se, but the historical event of indentureship itself; the “history of [its] forgetting,” “the experience of that forgetting” and the various ways in which it recurs in Naipaul’s novel (Mishra 114). This is not to say that India does not arise as a significant figure in the literature of Naipaul (and Indo-Caribbean writers more generally), but progressively, especially in light of Caribbean independence, the issue of the position of Indians in conceptions of Caribbean national and regional culture and identity becomes a central concern of this literature. As Lamming's review demonstrates, *A House for Mr. Biswas* was published during a crucial moment in the development of West Indian literature and decolonization. In this chapter, I choose to read the novel in the context of these debates. Moreover, while Naipaul's, and therefore Indo-Caribbean writing's, engagements with indentureship is often associated with "departure," "loss," and "impossible mourning," this chapter conceptualizes these engagements with "reconstruction," "roots," and "belonging." As Bhabha insists, "to be unhomed is not to be homeless;" the concept, he explains, characterizes that which cannot "be easily accommodated" ("The World" 141).

Coolie Amnesia

Before proceeding to a reading of *A House for Mr. Biswas,* it is important to outline the circumstances that have led to Naipaul's 1975 comment that Indo-Caribbeans were "a people without a past." Socially, occupationally, and legally East Indians were largely seen to be separate from and incongruous to the norms of colonial West Indian society. At the time of Indian arrival in the New World in the mid-nineteenth century, colonial society was perceived to be the product of European and African exchange where European cultural values were viewed as the norm to be adopted by those of African descent; Amerindians, the colony's indigenous population whose numbers substantially decreased as a result of the violent colonial encounter and who retreated into the hinterland as in the case of Guyana, were relegated to the fringes of colonial society and were not perceived to be part of creolization processes. Perhaps the fact that Amerindians were on their land, and they, unlike the Africans, had tangible evidence of and connections with their own cultures also contributed to their marginalization from discourses on creolization. Late-comers to this already creolized and complex system of ordering peoples of different ancestries, East Indians seemed to lay outside of the classic three-tier social structure based on race and color that generally categorized Caribbean societies: Africans and their locally born descendants, the majority population, formed the base; people of mixed descent comprised the middle tier; and elites primarily of European decent (British, French, and Spanish) were at the apex (Brereton, "Social" 36).

Some of the earliest accounts that give insight into colonial attitudes towards Indians in the Caribbean are the travelogues of European travelers. For example, in his 1871 travelogue, *At Last! A Christmas in the West Indies,* Charles Kingsley describes *coolies*[20] in Trinidad as heathen and uncivilized beings, possessing oriental instincts (124, 230). Moreover, he quotes a colonial report to support his assertions about the group: 'Indian habits have been fixed in special grooves for tens of centuries' (121). Here, Kingsley employs Oriental discourse to characterize Indian identity as primitive, sedimentary, and static, suggesting that it is foreign to and unable to mesh with the existing Eurocentric Christianized social milieu of West Indian Creole society. The cultural differences of Indians including those in language practices (most Indians spoke Hindi-Bhojpuri or Urdu), their non-Christian religious beliefs (majority were Hindu but a significant minority were Muslim), and their non-Western style attire (by the time of Indian arrival, Western clothing had become the norm) further added to notions of Indians as outsiders.[21] While on the one hand colonial discourse deemed Indians as being culturally impermeable, on the other, they were lauded for their work ethic. European

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[20] See my discussion of this term in the introduction on page 5.

[21] According to Munasinghe, "[t]he outsider status of East Indians is powerfully conveyed by [Lloyd] Brathwaite in his seminal 1953 study, *Social Stratification in Trinidad and Tobago*. In his diagram depicting social stratification in Trinidad, Indians are located outside the pyramid incorporating the White, Colored, and Black populations even though East Indians constituted 35.09 percent of the total population and had been resident in the colony for well over a century at that time" (78 note 22).

American travel writer William Agnew Paton's *Down the Islands: A Voyage to the Caribbees* (1888) is instructive here; Paton states that coolies were "labor-saving beings labor-saving beings cheaper to operate than machinery" (167) and "by inheritance" were "industrious" (193). Additionally, in *The English in the West Indies* (1888), James Anthony Froude affirms that "the coolies are useful creatures. Without them sugar cultivation in Trinidad and Demerara would cease altogether" (67).

The notion that East Indian labor saved the sugar industry in Trinidad and British Guiana was read inversely by African free laborers as robbing the former enslaved of bargaining power and enabling the continuation of unfair economic conditions in the colonies. Given that the introduction of indentured workers prevented the newly freed black population from negotiating fair wages and work conditions, Indians were viewed as scabs. Moreover, open lands in which squatters were allowed to occupy were reclaimed in order to expand the plantation enterprise for the indentureship system. Thus, in economic terms, Indians were largely seen as interlopers who enabled the continuation of colonialism. Consequently, from the beginning of Indian arrival into the region, Indians were perceived as a threat to the economic prosperity of people of African descent and were even used as strike breakers at certain moments in colonial history (Rodney 33).

The institutional status of Indians as indentured laborers also served to isolate this population legally and spatially from other groups in colonial British Guiana and Trinidad. Since indentureship contracts granted laborers permission to work for a fixed period and sometimes promised return passage to India, Indians were viewed and often viewed themselves as temporary residents. Despite claims by colonial authorities that indentureship was a free system of employment, scholars have contested this idea since indentures were paid less than free laborers, were denied the right to seek out other employment opportunities, were confined to the boundaries of the plantation, and were severely punished through imprisonment and corporeal punishment. Legal regulations restricted the mobility of both Indians under agreement and those whose contracts had expired. An official pass from plantation authorities was required for indentures to leave the plantation and "free" Indians were required to bear residency certificates. Additionally, the homes of indentures could be raided and laborers could be forced to work at any time. The fact that Indians "voluntarily" committed to work and live in the dehumanizing conditions that the ex-slaves endured under coercion further gave the perception that Indians were inferior. While indentures did have access to the legal system to voice their grievances, their lack of understanding of the law and court system as well as their inability to afford legal aid often prevented them from exercising their legal rights. Furthermore, courts were often in favor of the plantocracy and colonial officials, who employed the legal system as a means to control the laboring population. According to historian Bridget Brereton, between 1898 and 1905, 11,149 indentured Indians (about 15 percent of the total indentured population at that time) were brought to court for "absence, desertion, vagrancy, or idleness" (qtd. in Munasinghe 75).

Scholars differ in their perceptions of the place East Indians occupied in the West Indian social structure. Kelvin Singh suggests that East Indians initially occupied the lowest rung of the social ladder. This inclusion, however, was nominal, a recognition of their physical presence in the island. According to Brereton, although their economic and class position would have categorized Indians in the third tier of the colonial hierarchy, the differences between them and the descendants of ex-slaves were too great. Brereton argues that “Indians constituted a fourth distinct tier in the social structure” in places such as Trinidad, Guyana, and Surinam (“The Experience” 24). Despite the fact that both East Indians and Blacks were relegated to a subordinate status vis-à-vis Whites in the colonial hierarchy “the principles of subordination differed for the two groups. This difference in turn shaped notions of who could and could not be considered ‘native’ (Munasinghe 80-81).

Given the construction of Indians as cultural others to Creole society, as interlopers and scabs, and as primarily associated with the dehumanizing work and living conditions of plantation capitalism, the emerging Indian middle class sought to socially and economically distance themselves from this past and the stereotypes associated with it. For many East Indians who attained education, property, and middle class status, indentureship became a shameful part of their heritage that they tried to wipe out of their psyche. The example of Joseph Ruhomon, arguably the first Indo-Guyanese intellectual, speaks to this point. In his 1894 essay, “India and the Progress of her People at Home and Abroad, and How Those in British Guiana May Improve Themselves,” Ruhomon states:

> We have done nothing in the Colony that has redounded to our credit . . . The great majority of our people are weak and ignorant … the East Indian race in British Guiana has not yet begun its history as a race. Its past has been chaos and darkness. (qtd. in Seecharan, “India” 23)

More than half a century later, Naipaul would echo Ruhomon’s sentiments by describing the past of Indians in Trinidad as a “historical darkness” (“Prologue” 89). Ruhomon sympathized with the plight of East Indians who were “very little cared for” and who simply served as “tools” to their employers, but the quote above also demonstrates his negative perceptions of East Indian peasants and their origins (48). Clem Seecharan argues that Ruhomon’s “harsh, self deprecating tenor must be seen as the impetuous lamentations of an impatient native son, anxious to accelerate the pace of change” and “to erase the ‘coolie’ shame” (“India” 23). Ruhomon’s Christian background no doubt contributed to these perceptions, since the majority of Indian arrivals were Hindu. Given that Christian schools were the only available educational opportunity for Indians during this early period, many Indians converted as a means for entering into teaching and other professions. Despite their educational and professional achievements as civil servants, doctors, and lawyers, colonial society still categorized all Indians as *coolies*. After colonialism it remained a derogatory term, and became associated with backwardness and other negative stereotypes of Indians rooted in indentureship. When read against the background of perceptions such as these, *A House for Mr. Biswas* is certainly rooted in a story of indenture and might be read as a movement away from the darkness and shame of indenture to the beginnings of the construction of a foundation, however shaky, in a creolized world.

Spatial isolation on plantation estates encouraged group insularity among East Indians. Indians also clung to the cultures with which they arrived in the Caribbean as a means of survival in an alien and, often, hostile land. For educated Indian elites, such as Ruhomon, cultural pride took the form of celebrating the literary and philosophical traditions of ancient India and contemporaneous achievements of Indian intellectuals. Ironically, it is through the work of Orientalist scholars at the Asiatic Society of Bengal established in 1784 which translated important Sanskrit literary works into English including the Sanskrit dramas, religious texts and the well-known book of Manu, *Institutes of Hindoo Law* (1794) that Ruhomon and other Indo-Caribbeans gained access to the traditions of India (Seecharan, "India" 12). Moreover, the work of German born, Oxford scholar Freidrich Max Muller that praised Sanskrit and argued that the ancient Aryans in India and their language Sanskrit, were related to European peoples and their original languages, Greek and Latin, thus, indicating that Indians and Europeans were descended from a common race, was seen by Ruhomon as a source of honor. This particular link of Indians to Aryanism influenced East Indian loyalty to Empire. Indians often saw themselves simultaneously as sons of India and subjects of Empire.

The complex relationship of early East Indians to their current place of residence (the British West Indies), to their motherland (India), and to the British Empire is typified in the following statement from an 1898 editorial of the first Indian Trinidadian newspaper the *Koh-i-noor* (translated mountain of light):[22] "The time has come for our Indian population, Hindu and Musellman, to assert and prove to be good citizens, and faithful subjects, proud to be under the 'Raj' of the beloved Queen and Empress" (qtd. in Rampersad 86). The establishment of this short-lived Hindi and English periodical, which began publication in October 1898 and ended after six months in March 1899, serves as evidence of the ways in which Indians (both Hindu and Muslim) saw themselves as permanent settlers in colonial Trinidad; a point further evident by the fact that many accepted land grants or bought land on their own rather than repatriate to India. This first editorial, however, also indicates how Indians saw themselves as "good citizens" and "faithful subjects" not to Trinidad per se, but to India and the British Empire. In her research on the *Koh-i-noor*, Kris Rampersad notes, that even as the newspaper “praised the British and identified with their political prowess, it maintained and often exhibited unapologetic pride in its Indian roots” (91). British aggression against Mahatma Gandhi and the Amritsar massacre in 1919 contributed to the slow refraction of Indo-Caribbean loyalty to Empire. But as Caribbean literature and history has shown us, the legacy of Empire, and the complex and often ambiguous relationship of formerly colonized individuals and nations to Empire continue to haunt the present in myriad forms.

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[22] *Koh-i-noor* was named after the prized 186-carat diamond of the same name that the British Crown obtained after the 1850 Sikh Mutiny.

The on-going allegiance to India and the sense of India as motherland among Indo-Caribbeans in the early to mid-twentieth century is ubiquitously seen in their civic and cultural activities. Religious and political speakers from India made frequent visits to British Guiana and Trinidad. Additionally, Indians in the New World followed the Indian nationalist movement closely, perceiving the struggle in India as their own. In this context, Gandhi took on a divine like quality evident in the widespread practice of placing his portrait in Indian homes alongside religious iconography. Indo-Caribbeans particularly admired Gandhi for his advocacy of Indian workers in Africa, whose situation they saw as similar to their own. Moreover, the clamoring for the abolition of indentureship by Indian nationalists had a profound impact on the abolition of the system in 1917.[23] Consistent requests to the Indian government to intervene on legal issues on behalf of Indian laborers in the West Indies, and a short-lived proposal for the establishment of an Indian colony in British Guiana in 1919 put forth by British Guiana’s first legislator of Indian descent, J.A. Luckoo, are further instances that reflect the admiration that Indians in the Caribbean held for India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[24] By the 1950s, particularly after India gains independence, a sense of belonging to the emerging West Indian nation becomes more apparent among East Indians; this idea is evident in their role in the Guyanese nationalist movement (which I highlight in chapter four), and on the pages of the Trinidadian *Observer*, ‘a monthly organ of Indian opinion’ where debates on West Indian nationalism and the Indo-Trinidadian community are prevalent.[25]

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[23] See chapter five, pages 180 to 182, for a discussion of how the figure of the indentured woman was taken up a symbol by Indian nationalists in their crusade to end indentureship.

In *A House for Mr. Biswas*, Mr. Biswas’ in-laws change their opinions of India and of Indians from South Asia when his brother-in-law, Owad, returns from studying in London with a rather disparaging opinion of Indians from India. Owad is disturbed by the perceptions of sub-continent Indians that “colonial Indians” were inferior. Additionally, he views their liaisons with “nurses and other women of the lower classes” and their eating of meat and drinking of alcohol “to prove their modernity” as inauthentic Indian behavior (517). His experience leads his sisters in Trinidad to conclude that they are the “last representatives of Hindu culture” (517). In this humorous and satiric episode, Naipaul nuances the relationship between Indians in the Caribbean to India and questions the notion of authenticity. While we might expect Owad’s observations of the ways of Indian Indians in London to lead the Tulsis to think that their own Indian cultural practices are watered down or symptomatic of an outmoded idea of “Indianness,” it actually strengthens their hold on Indian traditions and their belief that these practices are authentically tied to India. In a sense, they become more “Indian” than Indians in the subcontinent. The episode also demonstrates an indirect sense of belonging to Trinidad.

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[24] In chapter four, I will discuss how this turn to India by the Indian Caribbean middle class can be read as an engagement with Oriental discourse and an attempt to reconstruct a positive Indian identity, see pages 121 to 122.

[25] See Rampersad 205-229.

By differentiating themselves from Indians from India, the Tulsi's are gaining a sense of themselves as Indians in Trinidad, despite their fear of relations with other Trinidadian cultural groups.

In his essay "Three Into One Can't Go –East Indian, Trinidadian, West Indian," Samuel Selvon relates a similar idea in his telling of a significant moment in Indo-Caribbean history when Indians in Trinidad were offered the opportunity to repatriate to India after it gained independence. In spite of Indian nationalist leader Jawaharlal Nehru's encouragement that Indians in Trinidad remain in the region and help to build the country in which they had settled, a number of people did in fact return to India. Many who repatriated, however, returned to Trinidad "with stories of hardships and inability to reorganize their lives in the mother country" (16).[26] This latter group must have come to the painful realization that India was no longer their homeland, and that despite their position as colonial subjects and ethnic others in British controlled Trinidad, the West Indies was more their home than India would ever be. While the allegiance of Indians in the Caribbean to India was partly an attempt to disregard indentureship (as we see in the case of Ruhoman), I argue the valorization of India marked a crucial, and necessary, step in the formation of postcolonial Indo-Caribbean literary, cultural, and national identities; in order to move forward as West Indian citizens, East Indians had to gain an understanding of the imagined mother culture that they had left behind before acknowledging the hybrid culture of their Caribbean present and future.

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[26] Ramabai Espinet in her novel, *The Swinging Bridge*, relays a somewhat similar episode of a character (Uncle Peter) who journeys to India hoping to mend the missing link in his family circle by connecting with relatives there. Peter returns to Trinidad feeling more fractured and more confused than before he left, because the relatives he connects with in India, despite being initially happy to meet him, did not offer Peter the bond he anticipated; "They simply wanted their lives to continue as usual" (91).

The apparatus of colonial education that worked in the service of producing proper colonial subjects, further compounded what I describe here as the erasure of indenture from collective memory. In Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*, while working as a journalist for a Trinidadian newspaper, Mr. Biswas reflects that he "had thought of all writers as dead and associated the production of books not only with distant lands, but with distant ages" (313). Naipaul uses the thoughts of his fictional character to explore the idea that to the Caribbean people to whom English Literature was being introduced in the colonial education system, writers *were* dead and were white. Moreover, there were few complex and realistic Indo-Caribbean figures in the Caribbean literature that existed at the time the novel is situated (between the two world wars) and at the time of its publication (1961).

Given that indentured laborers (like the enslaved Africans before them) were not in a position to record their own experiences in written form, the few existing literary portrayals of early indentureship come from Europeans. We have already seen some of the negative stereotypes of Indians perpetuated in European travelogues. Early literary representations of indentureship were often directed to European audiences in an effort to reform the system. Noteworthy examples include Edward Jenkins' *Lutchmee and Dilloo* (1877) and A. R. F. Webber's *Those That Be in Bondage: A Tale of Indian Indentures and Sunlit Western Waters* (1917). Written by an Englishman who is born in India and travels to British Guiana to investigate the atrocities of indentureship in an effort to reform (rather than eradicate) the system, *Lutchmee and Dilloo* is particularly valuable for its portrayals of Indian recruitment in India and arrival into the region. Yet, the novel is steeped in the colonial stereotypes of its day. Writing in the 1800's, Jenkins creates exceptional characters to appeal to a British readership, particularly given the lack of an Indian or more generally Caribbean literate public.[27] A. R. F. Webber's status as a middle class colored man from Tobago who also lived and worked in British Guiana may have granted him a wider perspective than Jenkins. Rather than foreground the impact of indentureship on Indians in particular, *Those That Be in Bondage* depicts the ways in which indentureship negatively affected all groups involved including white overseers, Indian indentures, and free colored. Given the call for colonial reform in both of these fictions and the lack of a general West Indian readership during this early period of West Indian literary history, it is hardly surprising that these texts went out of print.[28]

We see the lack of transference of indentureship history among the Indian middle class in Naipaul's own socialization as a young man who grew up in colonial Trinidad. Naipaul suggests that his lack of engagement with a sense of the historical past outlined above is partly the result of having spent his early years within a close knit extended Hindu family, "who lived in its own fading India" ("Twin" 187). In his 2001 Nobel Prize speech, he says:

> My grandmother's home was full of religion; there were many ceremonies and readings […] But no one explained or translated for us who could no longer follow the language. So our ancestral faith receded, became mysterious, not pertinent to our day-to-day life.

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[27] The novel presents the findings of Jenkins' 1871 report *The Coolie, His Rights and Wrongs* in literary form, suggesting a desire to reach and convince a broader British audience to reform indentureship.

[28] In his introduction to the second edition of *Those That Be in Bondage* (1988), Selwyn Cudjoe laments that there were only two copies of the original published book in existence; one owned by Webber's granddaughter and the other in the National Library of Guyana.

> We made no inquiries about India or about the families' people left behind. When our ways of thinking had changed, and we wished to know, it was too late. I know nothing of the people on my father's side. ("Twin" 188-189)

As immigrants, his family members attempted to hold on to and recreate their traditional Indian lifestyle in Trinidad; however, as it became apparent that education and relocation from their rural village to the creolized city were necessary in order to achieve social mobility in the emerging independent nation, their connection to a collective ancestral past began to wither with each successive generation. Of his experience living in the more creolized urban areas of Trinidad, Naipaul says, "I had no proper understanding of where I was, and really never had the time to find out: all but nineteen months of these twelve years were spent in a blind, driven kind of colonial studying" ("Reading" 9).We see this process play out in *A House for Mr. Biswas* when segments of the extended family move into the city and each nuclear family focuses on its own interest, such as educating its children, rather than on the well-being of the larger family (419).

When speaking of his early literary influences and formal education, Naipaul makes no mention of the literature that addresses early indentureship. He does, however, identify the writing of his father, Seepersad Naipaul, as being highly influential to his informal education: "If it were not for the short stories that my father wrote I would have known almost nothing about the general life of our Indian community" ("Twin Worlds" 188). Seepersad Naipaul's *Gurudeva and Other Indian Tales* (1943) was published and successfully sold locally in Trinidad. Yet, even in Trinidad few copies existed until 1988 when V.S. Naipaul put forth a collection for publication in London.[29] His father's stories "created [his] background," V.S. Naipaul admits, and are a "unique record of the life of the Indian or Hindu community in Trinidad in the first fifty years of the century" ("Foreword to *The Adventures*" 120, 124). Thus, Seepersad Naipaul's creative works (like those of V.S. Naipaul), hold immense value not only for himself and his family, but for the entire region as it provides insight into a community that was fairly unknown and that was scarcely represented in literature.

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[29] When it was republished in 1988, the text was renamed *The Adventures of Gurudeva*.

The devaluing of indenture in dominant narratives of Caribbean history and literature is intricately linked to the ways in which East Indians were constructed in colonial discourse, their responses to these perceptions, and institutions of colonial indoctrination, including colonial schools and the Presbyterian Church, that devalued the experiences and histories of colonized subjects. As emergent East Indian intellectuals reached back to a glorified past for a sense of assurance about questions of identity, they ignored the experience of indenture, considering it demeaning and avoiding an assessment of it within a system of colonial economic and social relations. I argue that in order to fully understand indentureship and appreciate its place in the development of Caribbean literature and a Caribbean literary tradition, it has to be *valued* as a system of relations that contributed to Indo-Caribbean understandings of imperial economic and social systems and their place within them. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* opens a space within which we can begin to unpack these complex relations.

Confronting Indentureship: *A House for Mr. Biswas*

I now turn to an analysis of *A House for Mr. Biswas* as an instantiation of how indentureship arises as a site of historical trauma in Indo-Caribbean writing. *A House for Mr. Biswas* has had considerable recognition and commendation from other writers and critics. It was contemporaneously praised by Kamau Brathwaite as the first text that gave "the West Indian East Indian" "form, features [and] voice" since it provided insight into the realities of this ethnic community (*Roots* 42). As recently as 2004, Kenneth Ramchand lauds it as "by far the most important book by an Indo-Caribbean author" ("Literature" 12). Moreover, Amitav Ghosh and Vijay Mishra, among others, have argued for the prominent place of Naipaul's work in consideration of Indian diasporic writing. A number of Indo-Caribbean writers have also identified Naipaul as a central figure in their own development as writers.[30] For instance, Ramabai Espinet admits, "[Naipaul] has told me more about myself than almost any other writer I can think of. He has also, by gaps in his writing, pointed me to areas concerning my own sense of self that force investigation" ("Interview" 111).

Early in the chronology of *A House for Mr. Biswas*, the relationship between Mr. Biswas and the plantation is established. The third person omniscient narrator tells us that "[l]ater [Biswas] would move to the cane fields, to weed and clean and plant and reap; he would be paid by the task and his tasks would be measured out by a driver or a weigher because he wouldn't be able to read" (23). The fact that his grandparents, the original ancestors who came from India, his father and his brothers (who were only 9 and 11, but "[cooperated] with the estates in breaking the law about the employment of children") toiled in the fields, preordains Biswas' fate (22). The prophetic use of "would" in the above quote emphasizes the cycle of poverty and illiteracy created and reinforced by indentureship as plantation work becomes the inheritance of each successive generation despite the official eradication of the system. While the narrator suggests that the plight of the indentured worker and his descendants is intrinsically tied to "fate," the novel illustrates how improper labor and living conditions, a lack of fair wages, and the absence of public education ensure the unofficial continuation of the system.

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[30] Lakshmi Persaud credits Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* as a novel that made her "realize that [she] also had material" to draw upon for her writing; "We all have material for we are individuals with unique experiences" ("Compelled to Write"). One of the most nuanced ways in which Naipaul's influence on other Indo-Caribbean writers has been made apparent is in Shani Mootoo's *Valmiki's Daughter,* in which one the main characters, Viveka, aspires to be "Naipaul scholar" (263).

Gayatri Gopinath insightfully argues that in *Biswas* the "traumas of diasporic displacement are figured through the trope of patrilineality, or what gets passed on from the father to the son" (71). Following Gopinath, we can think of the family structure, and the disintegration of that structure, as representing the colonial Indian diasporic community's condition as a whole. In this reading, Raghu's untimely death that results in the breaking up of the family can be viewed as a symbolic severing of the tie between East Indians and indentureship history. If we accept this analogy, then Biswas' mother, Bipti, figures as the memory of indentureship. Forced to live in the home of others and "in one room of a mud hut in the back trace" with Bipti, Biswas grows to be ashamed of his meager living situation; the narrator tells us that ["it] would have pained Mr. Biswas if anyone from the school saw where he lived, in one room of a mud hut in the back trace" (46). Frustrated and humiliated by their destitution, Mr. Biswas lashes out at his mother: "You have never done a thing for me. You are a pauper" (63). Unable to recognize that their poverty is the product of the colonial plantation economy and the lack of opportunities available to impoverished Indian widows within this society (a subject that I take up in chapter five), Biswas blames Bipti for their misery. Bipti is then written out of the novel once Biswas grows away from her: "broken, [she] became increasingly useless and impenetrable" to him (39). The dynamic between son and mother becomes representative of the relationship between the Indian community and indentureship. Given the absence of the father, Biswas must account for what’s left behind: his mother and the memory of indentureship that she embodies. Biswas’ aversion to plantation work (and his recognition of its lowly status on the social scale) is further apparent when he becomes a parent and his occupation is listed as “labourer” on his daughter’s birth certificate (156). He immediately replaces “labourer” with “Proprietor” despite the fact that he had no business or property to call his own. Given the socio-economic organization of the plantation system that relegated Biswas and his family to a perpetual state of poverty, his aversion and his desire to break away from these circumstances are understandable. Achieving this goal, however, requires a disavowal of his ancestral origins in Trinidad, and ultimately, of his mother who embodies in the psyche of the protagonist this painful past and the possibility of a morbid future.

In spite of his detestation of the cane fields, Biswas is forced to confront them in the novel’s “Green Vale” section, where indentureship arises most acutely in the setting of the text. Naipaul reimagines the detrimental physical and psychological effects of the plantation economy through Mr. Biswas’ experience. The author’s depiction of Biswas as a driver rather than a field worker serves several significant purposes. First, the term “driver” calls attention to the hierarchy of the plantation economy which the novel outlines. We get a glimpse of this system when we see the workers line up for their pay and Biswas sits with the moneybags, calling out the names of laborers. In this moment the narrator points out that “Biswas didn’t know the admiration and respect” his father had for these bags and for drivers (199). These narrative details emphasize how the plantation economy works and the demeaning position of the estate worker. Here, we also see the fracture in Biswas' memory of his paternal heritage, a fracture that occurs in V.S. Naipaul's own connection to his paternal ancestry. The author has admitted on numerous occasions that his fictional protagonist is fashioned after his father; V.S. Naipaul knew little about his familial past beyond Seepersad Naipaul's history, and suggests that Seepersad himself, like Mr. Biswas, knew little about his own father ("Foreword to *A House*" 132-133). This severing of patrilineal history in the fictional world of Mr. Biswas and in the real world of the Naipauls demonstrates the process through which not only familial histories are buried but also the communal history of indentureship is lost.

Secondly, Biswas' position as a driver also illustrates the novel's recurring engagement with the idea of fate since, as noted earlier, when Biswas was a child, it was expected that he "would" never be a driver because he would not be able to read.[31] Having escaped that destiny because of his father's death, here, Biswas is able to read and is a driver, illustrating that, in this instance, he has defeated Fate. [32] In the larger context of the novel, this victory suggests a change in mental attitude between the first generation of indentures and their children. While Raghu believed that Fate had brought him to Trinidad as if the matter was totally out of his control, Biswas recognizes that he has some agency in determining his future; his sense of agency grows as the novel progresses.

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[31] The novel first connects Biswas to the idea of fate at birth when the Hindu Pandit marks him as having an "unlucky sneeze" and of being "[b]orn in the wrong way" (16-17).

[32] This example of the novel's portrayal of Fate is typical of Naipaul's satirical engagements with Hinduism throughout the novel. Additionally, it brings to mind, Bharti Mukherjee's novel, *Jasmine*, in which her protagonist, whose name is also that of the book's title, continually struggles against a sage's prediction that she will be a widow and exile. Throughout Mukherjee's narrative, the more Jasmine attempts to fight against this prophecy the more it seems to become reality.

Lastly, and most importantly for our discussion, Naipaul's choice to place Biswas in the position as driver allows the narrative to spend little time detailing the actual experience of toiling in the fields; instead our attention is drawn to the setting of the plantation and the debilitating repercussions of inhabiting such a space. Far removed from the villages and urban areas of Trinidad, the narrator's description of Green Vale conveys a journey back in time to a dark unknown place: "Green Vale was damp and shadowed and close. The trees darkened the road […] The trees surrounded the barracks" (197). Despite the constant regeneration of the trees, there was "no freshness to the [leaves]; they came into the world old, without a shine, and only grew longer before they too died" (197). Separated from mainstream colonial society, the plantation becomes, as Guyanese political leader Cheddi Jagan has commented, "a world of its own" (18). In the novel's description, the trees mimic the life cycle of the cane worker who is born on and dies on the plantation. Confined to this space, there is no "freshness" to the mundane lived reality of this existence. New life quickly becomes "old" as a result of back breaking labor, long hours in the sun, and improper health care. Moreover, each generation replicates the cycle of the previous one.

A lack of change over time makes the plantation a relic belonging to a primitive era; a point that is echoed in the narrative's depiction of the barracks:

> The barracks gave one room to one family, and sheltered twelve families in one long room divided into twelve. This long room was built of wood and stood on low concrete pillars. The whitewash on the walls turned to dust, leaving stains […]; and these stains were mildewed and sweated and freckled with grey and green and black. The corrugated iron roof projected on one side to make a

> long gallery, divided by rough partitions into twelve kitchen spaces, so open that when it rained hard twelve cooks had to take twelve coal-pots to twelve rooms. (197)

It is hard to imagine that the temporality of this scene occurs during the period between the two world wars, since the dire living conditions described are the same as those encountered by the early indentured in 1838. The fact that the "whitewash on the walls turned to dust" and that the stains on the walls were "mildewed and sweated and freckled with grey and green and black" points to the antiquity of the barracks. Similar to the ticks on a wall that are often used by prisoners to mark the time of their incarceration, each color and layer of corrosion on the walls of the barracks represents the time in which each oppressed group has occupied these living quarters: the enslaved, the indentured, and in the contemporary moment of the novel, descendants of the indentured. These cramped, crumbling, unsanitary living and cooking facilities are much like the trees surrounding Green Vale; "there is no freshness" to the recycled quarters or the exploitative systems to which they are linked, despite new legal codes that outlawed slavery and then indentureship. Shalini Puri points out two significant differences between the two systems: 1) indentured laborers were never considered property, and 2) theoretically, their bondage was contractual and for a specific amount of time. However, "the legal obligation to work, the promotion of indebtedness through unmeetable workloads, and the requirement that [laborers] fulfill the purposes of the employer during the period of indentureship in order to secure their freedom" served to make Indians captive labor (Puri 171). Naipaul employs the setting of the barracks to indicate that these multiple dehumanizing systems of plantation capitalism were in fact very much the same.

Even though Biswas, as a driver, is symbolically in a superior position to the field laborers, he embodies the lived experience of the plantation since he resides there and his situation is not far removed from that of those he supposedly supervises: “He bathed incessantly. The barracks had no bathroom but at the back there were water barrels under the spouts which drained off the water from the roof. However quickly the water was used, there were always larvae of some sort on its surface, jumpy jellylike whiskery things” (200). In this passage, Biswas’ relationship to the plantation is established. His obsession with cleanliness can be read as an attempt to wash off the realities of living in the barracks that include his alienation from the laborers whom he oversees and the history that this space encapsulates. His inability to do so, is represented by the larva on the water whose residue can never be completely washed from his body because it is always lingering on the surface of the water. It is here that we see Biswas undergo his most severe spells of gastrointestinal pain: “The barrackyard, with its mud, animal droppings and the quick slime on stale puddles, gave him nausea” (200).

The physical and psychological effects of working and living on the estate become more pronounced later in the text in a scene in which Mr. Biswas attempts to flee from the plantation. It is here that the trauma of indenture is most acutely played out in the novel:

> Every man and woman he saw, even at a distance, gave him a twist of panic. But he had already grown used to that; it had become part of the pain of living. Then, as he cycled, he discovered a new depth to his pain. Every object he had not seen for twenty-four hours was part of his whole and happy past. Everything he now saw became sullied by his fear, every field, every house, every tree, every turn in

> the road, every bump and subsidence. So that, by merely looking at the world, he was progressively destroying his present and his past [. . .] He turned and cycled past the fields whose terror was already familiar, [back] to Green Vale. (257-258)

The "twist of panic" Biswas undergoes is a repetition of the earlier destitution he experiences as a child that is associated with poverty and his mother; his time in the single barrack room causes the repressed childhood memory of living in "one room of a mud hut" (46) to resurface in his unconscious as what Freud terms a "morbid anxiety." The repetition of the word "every" in the passage indicates the pervasiveness of this trauma that surfaces in every aspect of Biswas' mundane life. Moreover, these two moments of trauma are linked to the trauma of indenture; the history of that experience, its forgetting, and its resurrection. Thus in the above passage from the novel, the "fields whose terror was already familiar" takes on a double meaning: first, it represents Biswas' own experience on the plantation; and, secondly, it represents the historical experience of indentureship, "something familiar and old" that has been estranged only by the process of repression" (Freud 166). In this way, the trauma of indenture gets reenacted on the psyche and body of the colonial Indian Caribbean male.

Despite his lack of knowledge of his familial history, Biswas embodies the trauma felt by his indentured ancestors by living in the very space and conditions in which they lived. Mishra's questions help us to contextualize the ways in which the trauma of indentureship is aesthetically represented in *A House for Mr. Biswas*:

> What if the [traumatic] experience exists not as historical fact alone but as a memory that affects later lives, and is in turn charged by the latter; what if the aesthetic itself 'bears' the marks of the trauma in its very language without ever

> representing it fully or acknowledging its source? The wound of indenture predates Indian diasporic representation; it haunts it but has to be repeated (my brackets 120).

Despite the fact that Biswas' father and brother were field workers, the novel suggests that he knew little about these experiences (199). Yet, as the above scene suggests, the memory of indentureship profoundly affects Mr. Biswas; it haunts his unconscious. After all, no one is able to diagnose Biswas' ailment; his in-laws describe him being "not right in the head" (281), and he himself attempts to "somehow exorcize the thing that had fallen on him" (256). In this way, the narrative aesthetically conveys "the marks of the trauma in its very language without ever representing it fully or acknowledging its source."

In speaking of the *unhomely* as an aesthetic process, Bhabha goes on to say:

> In order to appear as material or empirical reality, the historical or social process must pass through an "aesthetic" alienation […] The discourse of "the social" then finds its means of representation in a kind of unconsciousness that obscures the immediacy of meaning, darkens the public event with an "unhomely" glow. There is, I want to hazard, an incommunicability that shapes the public moment; a psychic obscurity that is formative for public memory. Then the house of fiction speaks in tongues; in those undecipherable mumbling enunciations that emanate from Beloved's "124," or the strange still silence that surrounds Nadine Gordimer's Aila whether she inhabits a house in the colored ghetto of Benoni (son of sorrow), or in a "grey area" of the Cape. ("The World" 143)

In Naipaul's text, the space that parallels the houses seen in the literatures of Morrison and Gordimer is the barrack itself; it is here that the house of fiction "speaks in tongues," or where Biswas is haunted by unexplained fears, hallucinations, and paranoia. As I previously mentioned, early in the novel we are told that Fate had taken Raghu from India and deposited him in the cane fields of rural Trinidad. Yet, probably not fully making sense of this event and the ruptures that it caused, Raghu spoke of Fate often and affectionately. It is Raghu's descendants, as we see with Biswas, who will confront and challenge Fate. Through Biswas' trauma we begin to see a wider understanding of indenture that his father was unable to comprehend. Biswas' limited understanding of his trauma, however, suggests that it is the task of his descendants, like his son Anand, to further unpack the trauma of indenture.

I want to suggest that Biswas' experience and Naipaul's fragmented literary representation of it reflects the author's reckoning with his own personal and familial past that is rooted in Indian indenture. Of all his works, Naipaul has commented that *Biswas* is the closest to him, the most personal; however, it was also the most painful and exhausting to write because it required him to revisit his childhood ("Foreword to *A House*" 132-133) and the life and background of his father. For Naipaul then, the construction of the novel caused repressed memories to surface, memories that were integral to his identity and familial history; he had to confront the buried memories of his childhood and perhaps those memories of ancestry that he was unable to reconcile, intelligibly reconstruct, or wholly understand. Literary language allows Naipaul to delve into this past and "allows memory to speak" (Bhabha, "The World" 145).

Reading trauma through a psychoanalytic lens, Cathy Caruth posits that it is not the direct experience itself that produces traumatic effects, but rather one's remembrance of it. During a period of "latency," Caruth argues, a passing of time between the actual event and that of the experience of trauma, forgetting occurs (6). Thus, trauma is belated and according to Ron Eyerman, it "need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a community or experienced directly by any or all. While it may be necessary to establish some event as the significant 'cause,' its traumatic meaning must be established and accepted, a process which requires time, as well as mediation and representation" (2). *A House for Mr. Biswas* (and the work of the other Indo-Caribbean writers considered in this dissertation) suggests that mediation and representation occurs through the work of present and future generations, who must articulate the trauma of indenture and contest its erasure from public memory through aesthetic representation.[33] Through his literary presentation of Biswas' individual experience of trauma, Naipaul brings to the forefront the repression of indentureship in collective memory and initiates a process to negotiate the "tear in the social fabric" of Indo-Caribbean collective identity and history that indentureship engendered (Eyerman 1).

As Biswas attempts to escape a "terror" that "was already familiar," or what I identify as the legacy of indentureship, by literally riding away from the plantation towards the archaic fortress of his Brahmin Hindu in-laws, the Tulsis, he discovers that he cannot escape his heritage (257). The movement back and forth between the barracks and the Tulsi home (Hanuman House) symbolizes Biswas' ambivalence towards indentureship and Indianness. If we consider Hanuman House as representing India and a notion of authentic Indianness as transplanted to and transformed in the Caribbean, what Naipaul has described as "the disintegrating world of a remembered India," Biswas' retreat to the barracks suggests a recognition that he cannot overcome the pain of his plantation existence by returning to an already sullied and 'inauthentic' whole ancestral past ("Reading" 8). Bhabha goes on to say, Naipaul's characters "forebear their despair, […] work through their anxieties and alienations towards a life that may be radically incomplete," but this life shows "signs of a culture of survival that emerges from the other side of colonial enterprise, the darker side (*The Location* xiii).

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[33] As we will see as this project progresses, the trope of the present generation excavating the past of indentureship surfaces more overtly later in Indo-Caribbean writing, particularly in creative literature by women. This trope often appears in two forms in Indo-Caribbean women's literature. First, in the poetry of women writers such as Mahadai Das and Rajkumari Singh, the poet herself or the speaker of the poet often connects with the ancestral mother figure, which gives the poet authority to pen elements of indenture history. Second, in novels such as those by Ramabai Espinet and Ryhann Shah, as a young woman reconstructs the history of a grandmother figure from fragments, dreams and memories, a history that is intricately tied to indentureship history.

Even though the world of the Tulsis becomes a sanctuary for his recuperation, Biswas ultimately leaves both the Tulsi home and the barracks to travel to Port-of-Spain where he gets a journalist position. Nevertheless, Green Vale represents a significant moment in Biswas' journey as an East Indian Trinidadian as it enables him to confront the legacy of indentureship and recognize the importance of both Indianness and indentureship in constructions of the Indian Trinidadian reality; however, it also allows him to acknowledge, even if through a sense of panic, that one must not be confined to these entities. It is at Green Vale, when Biswas first lived in the barracks, that he "decided that the time had come for him to build his own house, by whatever means" (197); "He wanted, not the depressing and traumatic experience of the barracks, but a real house, made with real materials. He didn't want mud for walls, earth for floor, tree branches for rafters and grass for roof." (201). Rather than being a narrative of departure and loss as Mishra's theorization might suggest, as this passage shows, *A House for Mr. Biswas* can be read as a narrative of a journey toward a sense of roots and belonging.

In his reading of the novel, Brathwaite describes it as one whose central character "is really trying to get *in* rather than get *out*" (*Roots* 42).[34] In his pathbreaking study, *The West Indian Novel and its Background*, Ramchand engages with Brathwaite's reading, arguing that *A House for Mr. Biswas* is the West Indian novel of rootlessness *par excellence"* (160). According to Ramchand, Biswas grapples between the "decaying culture" of the Tulsis and "the void of a half-made colonial society" (160). Ramchand makes an important effort early in Caribbean literary history to read the novel in the context of the history of Indians in Trinidad. However, since the novel is published in 1961 a year before Trinidad gains independence and it ends with Biswas having bought a house (even though it's imperfect), I read *A House for Mr. Biswas* in light of Brathwaite's assertion that Biswas "is really trying to get *in* rather than get *out.*" Conscious of the sense of fear and powerlessness when confronted with the legacy of indentureship, Biwas decides to create roots, to claim a house, however rickety, in a contemporary Trinidadian space.

This reading is further validated by the way in which Biswas reconstructs his memories of his mother after her death in a more positive way:

> He thought of one moment in particular. The ground in front of the house had been only partly cleared, and one afternoon [...] he saw that part of the ground, which he left that morning cumbered and unbroken, had been cleared and leveled

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[34] Brathwaite is most likely reading the novel in relation to others of its time, such as Lamming's *Age of Innocence* and even Naipaul's *Miguel Street*, that depict characters who are detached from their Caribbean island communities primarily through their colonial education and middle class sensibility, and embark to England as a way "out." While in *A House for Mr. Biswas*, Biswas' son Anand does follow that trajectory, the main concern of the novel is Biswas' struggle to become part of colonial Trinidad.

> and forked [...] In the setting sun, the sad dusk, with Bipti working in a garden that looked for a moment, like a garden he had known a dark time ages ago, the intervening years fell away. Thereafter the mark of a fork in earth made him think of that moment at the top of the hill, and of Bipti. (409-410)

In this passage, rather than focusing on his mother's poverty as he did as a child, Biswas recollects a more tender memory of Bipti tilling his garden. Here, the image of the "garden he had known a dark time ages ago" suggests the memory of a childhood closely linked to the legacy of indentureship that Biswas attempts to repress but that remains eternally in his psyche, and, like Bipti, that reemerges continuously in myriad forms. Thus, the novel suggests the difficulty of accepting – but need to accept – those traumatic beginnings of the Indo-Caribbean experience that are rooted in poverty, dehumanization, exploitation, and the grim realities of indenture. If in *Biswas* the trauma of diasporic displacement is figured through the trope of "what gets 'passed' on from the father to the son," as Gopinath suggests, or more accurately what *doesn't* get passed on from the father to the son given the father's absence (in our case the history of indentureship), then negotiating and perhaps overcoming this trauma requires reconciliation with the mother, or the memory of indentureship. In this way, the novel suggests that East Indians must come to terms with the legacy of poverty and indentureship, if Biswas and Indians in general are to survive as displaced diasporic subjects in the novel's colonial setting and the emerging postcolonial Creole nation.

The above passage foregrounds the psychological association Biswas makes between Bipti and the land that further solidifies her as a symbol of the memory of indentureship. In addition, it points to a noteworthy difference between the way land was perceived by the first few generations of Indians and subsequent ones. Kris Persad argues that for early generations of Indians in the Caribbean land ownership in Trinidad equaled freedom, and “was literally in exchange for one’s Indian birthright, since the return passage was given up in return for the ownership of land” (88). In addition to securing a living space for one’s family, owning one’s own plot allowed indentures and former indentures to grow their own crops, and, thus, provided them with some economic security and freedom. However, *A House for Mr. Biswas* indicates that for successive generations of Indians, house ownership becomes more of a concern. Whereas Bipti is rooted in the land and becomes eternally associated with it in Biswas’ imagination, he is extremely uncomfortable with it. We have already discussed the way in which his aversion to toiling the fields is directly linked to the historical oppression of field workers and the cycle of poverty that this system engenders and maintains. But Biswas’ inexperience with and detachment from the land seen in Green Vale is repeated in the Shorthills section of the novel, when his attempt to clear the area around his house almost leads to its burning and to the demise of his family. In contrast to the previous generations of Indians who came from India and settled in the New World holding on to their reverence for the land, for Biswas the land becomes associated with a painful history. Thus, his accommodation into colonial society is not solidified through land ownership per se, but through owning a real house in Port of Spain: “at the end, he found himself in his own house, on his own half-lot of land, his own portion of the earth” (6). Whereas this change in attitude is partly the result of Biswas’ movement away from rural to urban areas of Trinidad, it also represents a general shift in Indian attitudes towards working and living on the land.

As will be demonstrated, the trope of land recurs in Indo-Caribbean writing; in chapter four East Indian ties to land is imagined as integral to East Indian claims to Guyanese national citizenship and to the construction of a unified working class consciousness. Likewise, the image of the house and its ownership will also be revisited particularly by Indo-Caribbean women writers Ramabai Espinet and Shani Mootoo whose depiction of houses can be read not only as a reclaiming of the domestic, but also a claiming of literary space for Indo-Caribbean women given their peripheral treatment in male centered narratives such as Naipaul's.

This first chapter has traced the circumstances that led to the erasure of indentureship history in the Indo-Caribbean imaginary and argues that Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* dramatizes the contentious relationship of the Indo-Caribbean community and indentureship. Drawing on Bhabha's *unhomely*, it examined the way in which indentureship surfaces as a historical trauma in the novel that gets reenacted physically and psychologically in the lives of successive generations despite the fact that the novel is set after the official end of the system. By reading the novel alongside Naipaul's comments about ancestral history and his creative process as a writer, it also offers a reconsideration of the dominant view of Naipaul as being antithetical to notions of Caribbean nationalism and community. Naipaul believed that it is only "through scholarship and intelligent enquiry," not sentiment, that Indo-Caribbeans could "understand more about the past and more about the culture of [their] grandfathers" ("A Plea" 6). Thus, for him, writing is about reconstructing his own individual and familial past; this endeavor, however, inevitably leads to an engagement with and reconstruction of communal and national narratives.

The following chapter continues to examine Indo-Caribbean literary engagements with indentureship, but in a different way; rather than characterize the *unhomely* as a haunting of indentureship history, chapter three explores the *unhomely* as an aesthetic mode. In other words, it investigates how the experience of indentureship has engendered cultural exchange and the development of hybrid literary forms through analyses of two overlooked novels, Peter Kempadoo's *Guiana Boy* (1960) and Harold Ladoo's *No Pain Like This Body* (1971).

Chapter 3: Reconsidering the Folk in Peter Kempadoo's Guyana Boy and Harold Ladoo's *No Pain Like This Body*

The 1971 conference of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS) at the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies (UWI) in Jamaica marked a seminal moment in Caribbean literary history.[35] The conference was the first in which West Indian literature by West Indians was presented and critically discussed in the West Indies before an informed and diverse regional audience. For many key scholars the conference articulated the cultural and aesthetic standards to which Anglophone Caribbean literature would be held. Barbadian poet and critic Edward (Kamau) Brathwaite[36] gave a keynote address for a panel titled, "The Function of the Writer in Society," in which he responded to the question, "how does the writer develop a new sense of community for a multi-directional culture with a history of slavery, colonialism, and uncertain independence?" (Breiner1). Brathwaite argued that the answer lay in the "submerged continuity of the culture of ordinary people" or the "Little Tradition" versus European cultural standards and forms or the "Great Tradition" (Breiner 1). The use of the "Little Tradition" would allow writers to delve into the past in an effort to work towards a truly multicultural, creole society. Importantly, Brathwaite was attempting to formulate a distinct West Indian aesthetic. Given the significance of the venue, which allowed him to reach such a large influential audience, the lecture had a greater impact than if it had been published in a journal or given at a small meeting in either the Caribbean or England. Influenced by the Black Power movement and Pan-Africanism world-wide, Brathwaite further identified "the matrix of folk culture specifically with the African heritage" (Breiner 2).[37] In his 1974 text, *Contradictory Omens*, Brathwaite offered a more detailed account of his understanding of the folk: "[b]y a long process of biological mixture and culture contact (mainly with Europeans), this group may now be subdivided into coloured, Afro-Saxon and Afro-Caribbean (the folk). These last are in most direct line of decent from Africa, and it is from writers and the few intellectuals interested in their tradition that knowledge of this sector has mainly come" (38-39). In both his essay and conference response, Brathwaite sought to elevate the despised African traditions of the enslaved that colonialism denigrated and attempted to annihilate. Nevertheless, by associating the folk specifically with African traditions, he symbolically devalued the contribution of other groups to Caribbean culture and society.

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[35] Alison Donnell points out that with the exception of Lawrence Breiner's *An Introduction to West Indian Poetry,* this conference has received little critical attention (*Twentieth-Century* 29).

[36] Brathwaite had joined the History Department at the University in 1962; he would soon change his name to Kamau Brathwaite as he is now known.

At the conference, V.S. Naipaul was chosen as Brathwaite's respondent. Rather than point to indentureship and the idea of the Indo-Caribbean folk to parallel Brathwaite's construction of Caribbean folk culture, Naipaul countered Brathwaite's view by suggesting that a writer's primary function is "self-cultivation," a task impossible in a "destitute" society such as the Caribbean. Speaking to the title of the panel, Naipaul questioned whether a writer can *have* a function in West Indian Society (Breiner 2). Critics have widely discussed Naipaul's negative perceptions of the Caribbean,[38] often citing his rearticulation of 19th century English historian James

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[37] According to Breiner, Brathwaite indicates that "the West Indian writer must help to recover […] 'the true self which the colonized African exercised in the task of survival' (2). For more detailed accounts of the conference and this particular panel, see Narasimhaiah and "Statement of Position to the Commonwealth Literature and Language Conference – Mona, January, 1971" by an anonymous author.

[38] See Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* 224-225 and Puri's *The Caribbean Postcolonial* 172-173.

Anthony Froude's pessimistic view of the area: "History is built around achievement and creation; nothing was created in the West Indies" (*The Middle* 29).[39] However, in this instance Breiner interprets Naipaul's response as a legitimate question of a novelist "who [was] somewhat more practical than the poet" in seeking an audience that was more responsive to his work specifically in terms of financial support, even if this audience was outside the region. While this reading may be partially valid, it fails to consider Naipaul's position as an Indian Trinidadian writer and the possibility that his response reflected a rejection of the cultural nationalism being solidified during that time period. Writer and scholar Ramabai Espinet's evaluation of Naipaul's outlook on the Caribbean proves valuable in understanding his comments at the 1971 ACLALS. Espinet eschews the commonly held belief that "Naipaul bought into the white man's agenda by disdaining his Caribbean roots;" instead she argues that Naipaul "was registering accurately his deep sense of outsiderhood from that notion of community that was developing in the Caribbean without reference to its Indian population." This, she assesses, is an outsiderhood that he "was unwilling (or unable) to contest" ("Interview" 114). Read in light of Espinet's analysis, we might read Naipaul's choice to focus on the writer's individual growth rather than his function in Caribbean society at the ACLALS conference as partly the result of his perception of his outsider status (and the outsider status of Indian communities in the Caribbean).[40]

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[39] For a critique of Naipaul's invocation of Froude, see Puri 44 and 173.

[40] At this time Naipaul was one of the few Indo-Caribbean writers who had gained national and international recognition; the only other well-known Indo-Caribbean writer at the time was Sam Selvon. Selvon's fiction, when it explores themes that deal with the theme of Indians in the Caribbean, often promotes assimilation and creolization. While Naipaul's *Miguel Street* (1959) addresses creolization, his other early fictional works, including *Mystic Masseur* (1957) and the acclaimed *A House for Mr. Biswas*, take up Indianness in Trinidad as their central focus. Critics and writers like George Lamming and Kamau Brathwaite have taken Naipaul's focus on the isolated Indian community paired with his pejorative

When read in light of my discussion in the previous chapter of indentureship as a historical trauma both in Naipaul's own experience and in the collective experience of Indo-Caribbeans that gets played out in *A House for Mr. Biswas*, an understanding of Naipaul's silence around notions of Indian folk (traditions of the Indian peasantry and working class that are rooted in indentureship) to parallel Brathwaite's assertion of African folk heritage becomes more apparent. Given that post-indenture the emerging Indian middle class focused more on their ties to India in an attempt to erase the trauma associated with indentureship, there could be little argument for an Indian folk tradition *within* the Caribbean at this early stage in the Caribbean literary and critical tradition. Since the 1930s, the African Caribbean and Portuguese Caribbean middle class writers had already had a sense of research and writing among "the folk." The Portuguese, of course, also arrived in the Caribbean post-emancipation. However, since their close approximation to whiteness allowed them to move off the plantation quickly, they were not associated with the stigma of indentureship and its association with plantation agriculture in the same way that Indians were. The ACLALS took place in 1971, just over 50 years after the official end of Indentureship and 133 years after the official end of slavery. It was also the period when Black Power ideology was leading African people in the Americas (including the Caribbean) to greater self-assertion. Within this context, Afro-Caribbean writers and scholars were considering how to articulate that aesthetic. Indo-Caribbean writers were just beginning tentative explorations of various experiences

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comments regarding the Caribbean as evidence of Naipaul's anti-nationalist position. As a result Selvon is arguably a more favored Caribbean writer than Naipaul. In her analysis of Naipaul's early writing, Lisa Outar offers a similar view of Naipaul's position in the late 1960's and early 1970's; she states: "Selvon and Naipaul are opposite ends of an ideological divide: Indianness, so integral a part of Creole nation for Selvon, is that which makes one forever an outsider to Naipaul" (103).

of the Indo-Caribbean communities. In retrospect, it could be argued that as a body they were not then ready to claim a collective and enter the debates about form and tradition.[41]

This is not to say that there had not been explorations of the Indo-Caribbean experience previous to the 1971 conference; as mentioned in the previous chapter, articulations of this experience are apparent in the fictions of Seepersad Naipaul and of the more well-known Samuel Selvon as well as in the long tradition of Indo-Trinidadian newspapers that date back to 1898. In these literary explorations, however, little attention had been paid to plantation experience and how the legacy of indentureship informed notions of Indian Caribbean culture, identity, and community. Not yet confident enough of an Indo-Caribbean national or literary presence, or of the value of an inheritance of indentureship to claim agency as Indo-Caribbean folk, those at the forefront of Indo-Caribbean letters, such as Naipaul, may have felt too vulnerable to assert a community claim.

Drawing upon essays by Caribbean literary figures, including Kamau Brathwaite and George Lamming, and Homi Bhabha's concept of the *unhomely*, this chapter interrogates the ways in which early Indo-Caribbean literary works complicate the notion of the folk that is almost always conceived of as Creole or Afro-Caribbean, particularly in this early stage of Caribbean literary history. The previous chapter demonstrates how the legacy of indentureship arises in *A House for Mr. Biswas* as part of a past life from which the protagonist tries to flee, but with which he is forced to contend; in contrast, the novels examined in this chapter, Kempadoo's *Guyana Boy* (1960) and Ladoo's *No Pain Like This Body* (1971) more candidly engage with the plantation experience since indentureship implicitly surfaces in each through their historical settings and through their representations of peasant and working class (those termed "the folk"[42] at the 1971 conference) lifestyles and cultural practices. Kempadoo sets his tale of a third generation Madrassi Indian boy on a plantation estate in rural British Guiana in the 1940s and Ladoo depicts the story of a Indian family living in a village near the plantation in the early 1900s. Examining these texts in the context of early debates on West Indian literature and culture, this chapter explores how an emergent Indo-Caribbean literature, ambivalent about its own valuation of indentureship and a folk aesthetic, struggles for accommodation within the formation of an African Caribbean literary tradition. Reading these novels in this way helps to understand why, in 1971, the terms of the debate were what they were as well as offers an opportunity to rethink dominant notions of creolization, nationalism, and the folk.

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[41] It is important to note, however, that decade of the 1970s does represent a watershed moment in the development of scholarship and criticism on Indo-Caribbeans and their cultural productions as it is during that decade that the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus would host two significant conferences on the themes of Indians in the Caribbean: in 1975, a conference titled "East Indians in the Caribbean: Colonialism and the Struggle for Identity" and in 1979, one entitled, "East Indians in the Caribbean: a Focus on Contemporary Issues." These conferences resulted in the publication of anthologies documenting some of the first critical interventions regarding Indians in the Caribbean in such fields as Caribbean literature, history, political science, and sociology.

Additionally, my examination of these two understudied novels considers how the experience of indentureship has engendered cultural exchange and the development of hybrid literary forms, expanding my interpretation of Bhabha's *unhomely* to consider it not only as a haunting of history (as discussed in the last chapter), but also as an aesthetic mode. The aesthetic outcome of narratives that "negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of historical conditions and social contradictions" is what Bhabha characterizes as the *unhomely* in today's "House of Fiction" (141). As Caribbean literary critic Jennifer Rahim notes,

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[42] See, for example Gordon Rohler's "The Folk in Caribbean Literature."

> New World writers have always searched for aesthetic strategies to represent the complexities of their diverse, diasporic societies given their long histories of anti-imperial struggle as inheritors of multiple, though not always equally valued knowledge systems and cultural traditions. In the process of developing a literature of their own, the creative turn of the writers from subject societies to the belief systems, myths, and folk narratives of their various ancestral pasts has been pivotal in asserting cultural agency against oppressive regimes, as well as for articulating the emergence of new identity spaces formed by cross cultural contact. (2)[43]

The diverse cultural inheritance of Indo-Caribbean writers: the European tradition of their formal colonial education, the folk traditions of the Caribbean, and the literatures and mythologies of their Indian (most often Hindu) ancestral past and upbringing, have required them to search for new narrative techniques given that none of these genres alone could adequately represent their diasporic experiences. In various ways, the *unhomely* manifests aesthetically in the fictions of Kempadoo and Ladoo as a result of their literary engagements with the multiple cultural influences of New World societies. Drawing on Indian mythology and other folk traditions to construct their depictions of Indo-Caribbean peasant and working class experiences, Kempadoo and Ladoo produce hybrid literary forms. Thus, through their portrayals of Indian folk communities and their diasporic transformations of Indian mythology, Kempadoo and Ladoo attempt to insert Indo-Caribbean literature into the emerging Caribbean literary tradition and by extension insert Indians into conceptions of Caribbean culture and nationhood.

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[43] In her interesting article, Rahim employs Bhabha's *unhomely* to read V.S. Naipaul's portrayals of the monkey figure in *A House for Mr. Biswas* and *The Mystic Masseur*.

Before proceeding to readings of the novels, I begin more broadly with a discussion of the pertinent cultural work of national literatures, which will suggest reasons why Caribbean literature was constructed and read in this way in the 1960s and 1970s. Additionally, I briefly analyze the formation of the Caribbean literary canon, and the significance of the folk within this process. Finally, I turn to *Guyana Boy* and *No Pain like This Body* in order to examine the ways in which indentureship, the folk, and folk belief systems are constructed in each.

Decolonization and the West Indian Canon

According to Pascale Casanova, national literatures were formed based on a model established and advanced by Germany at the close of the 18th century. The creation of national literatures which concurred with the "formation of Europe's political spaces from the beginning of the 19th century, led to an essentialization of the literary categories and the belief that the frontiers of literary space necessarily coincided with national borders" (78). Literature was understood as a way to express the unique characteristics, common images, and experiences of a nation as well as employed as a tool to symbolically unify divergent populace since it created and sustained a sense of community that did not rely on direct human relationships (Corse 23). As Benedict Anderson has argued, through the shared act of reading, citizens in different locations and of different political, socio-economic, and cultural backgrounds become part of an "imagined community" (6). In this way, literature not only aids in the construction of the national character, but also in the production of proper national subjects by presenting a common set of values and beliefs to which all citizens can emotionally connect.

Additionally, on the world stage, political and military independence were not enough to claim nationhood; cultural independence also had to be proven and national literature became a standard method for accomplishing this goal (Corse 24). Given the important cultural work national literatures perform, literary texts have been traditionally judged by their portrayals of nationalism and have also become an important vehicle for emerging nations to explore questions of culture, nationhood, and citizenship.

In the Caribbean, the manifestation of a national literature was twofold: the development of the literature of individual countries as well as that of a regional literature. The desire to develop a regional political and cultural identity in the Anglophone Caribbean is particularly evident in the failed attempt at a West Indian Federation (1958-1962). While this unity did not materialize politically, politicians, writers, and scholars continued to work closely, as seen in the activities of the University of the West Indies. For instance, when Lamming wrote his well-known *The Pleasures of Exile* in 1960, he did not direct it to Barbadian writers or to Caribbean writers in London but to his "generation throughout the Caribbean, irrespective of language, race or political status. Our situation is deeply lacking both in political unity and creative pride. We are not alone, but we are too small to encourage such a burden of chaos" (225). Lamming, like other writers and critics, viewed himself as part of a political and literary community and considered literature as integral to the political project of nation building. On a more practical level, at this early stage of Anglophone Caribbean literary history no single country had a significant number of authors to claim a national literature per se; nor was there a significant readership in the region of Caribbean texts. The formation of a regional literature was crucial for an area whose history included conquest, genocide, slavery, indentureship, and colonialism, and whose present was threatened by neo-colonialism, specifically American imperialism. Integral to the decolonization project, a regional literature would engage and combat centuries of European discourse that had deemed the Caribbean and its people archaic and uncivilized, the antithesis of all elements associated with a modern nation as well as allow the emerging and new nation-states to define their culture and identity in relation to other Hemispheric and world traditions. Lastly, a national literature would express a shared collective system of beliefs, values, and myths that would articulate a regional character as well as construct regional citizens and engender a regional readership. Numerous West Indian writers have commented on the lack of a readership at home and the need to look to the metropolis for an audience.[44] In this way, Caribbean literary works simultaneously constructed and were constructed by the nation.

Given that during this period much of West Indian literature was being produced by writers in exile in the metropolis, writers participated in the nationalist project in several significant ways. Firstly, Caribbean writers constructed an image of the region and its people for those abroad, especially those in the "motherland" England, where at that time Caribbean novels were primarily being published and read.[45] As they constructed an image of the Caribbean for outside, Caribbean writers increasingly turned toward thinking of notions of home and examination of cultural realities for the Caribbean itself. Additionally, the migration of these writers, who encountered other

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[44] See Lamming *The Pleasures of Exile* 43, Kempadoo "Interview with Franks Birbalsingh" 40, and V.S. Naipaul's "A Plea for Rationality" 8, and "Prologue to an Autobiography" 66-67.

[45] See, for example, the list at the back of Ramchand's *West Indian Novel and its Background*, which provides the year and place of publication for West Indian texts published from 1854 to 2001.

Caribbean people in foreign spaces, fostered a sense of regional unity. We see this idea depicted in Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) where by the end of the novel, the male immigrants begin to see themselves as "West Indian," emphasizing a shared regional identity, rather than national ones (i.e. Guyanese or Jamaican). From a position in which they were in touch with people from various Caribbean countries, Caribbean writers in England suggested the standards for a shared regional Caribbean literature and culture. The BBC Caribbean Voices weekly radio program, based in London, greatly facilitated (particularly through the work of its Irish editor Henry Swanzy[46]) this process since it connected Caribbean writers from the metropolis to those from the region as well as those from various islands within the Caribbean to each other.

Writers at home and abroad further contributed to the process canon formation through essays and interviews that discussed not only their own life experiences and creative fiction but also the works of their contemporaries. The work of Kamau Brathwaite provides insight into the tenets to which West Indian literature was held. He infamously denies the fiction of Jean Rhys as relevant to the Caribbean experience because of its failure to portray an African centered experience, but argues that "the literary expression which came out of [the] white creoles and (mulattoes) was black based; they recognized that the only form of expression which could be used as a protest, or an authentic *alter/native* was African" (*Roots* 209). Ironically, Brathwaite praises *A House for Mr. Biswas*, arguing that with its focus on an East Indian minority, "*A House for Mr. Biswas* could have turned out to be [. . .] a brilliant but irrelevant novel within the West Indian context. But with Biswas as outsider, though simply seeking to establish his identity within the group, Naipaul was able to create a situation which is recognizable to us all" (52). For Brathwaite, *Biswas* represents the "Everyman" as he embodies universal characteristics of alienation from and perseverance to fit into Caribbean society. This critique, however, also demonstrates that Brathwaite viewed the Indian experience as a minority one, despite the fact that Indians represented an equal or almost equal proportion of the populations of Guyana and Trinidad. In Brathwaite's view, West Indian literature had to embody a black consciousness that appealed to the masses "who feel the burden of non-possession" and "who carried the full brunt of exploitation with slavery" ("Foreword" 8). Although he speaks of the "West Indies," Brathwaite's sensibility appears here to be shaped by a Barbadian experience. Indians do not comprise a significant percentage of the population of Brathwaite's native Barbados. Therefore, Brathwaite's comments also speak to the fractured nature of supposedly "Caribbean" national identities.

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[46] Critics have suggested that Swanzy's Irish nationality lead him to see beyond the demands of a British imperial project to facilitate the development of Caribbean literature. See Griffith.

Given that specific political criteria are often utilized in the processes of canon formation, national literatures do not serve as representations of the scope of national experience, but often give a sense of national experience through the particular perspectives of the critics, academics, writers, and publishers who choose and assess the texts. Ideological notions do not inhere in creative texts themselves but are, as John Guillory argues, products of the "context of their institutional presentation, or more simply, in the way in which they are taught" and read (ix). I argue that much of Indo-Caribbean literature has remained unread because at first glance these writings do not appear to reflect the major concerns of the emerging Caribbean canon at this moment in Caribbean literary history. The role of the academy is also important here. The

University College of the West Indies established in 1948 (and its journal *Caribbean Quarterly*) also played a significant role in the formation of an Anglophone Caribbean canon through its engagement with and publication of regional critics and writers,[47] and by providing a communal space for critical debates, as evident in the 1971 ACLALS conference. Because it was (and generally still is) comprised largely of African Caribbean scholars more interested in exploring the African experience, the Indian experience and contribution to Caribbean life tended to be marginalized, in spite of the fact that Indian and other experiences could also help, to borrow Merle Hodge's words, "present the Caribbean to itself" (Hodge 206).

West Indian Literature and the Folk

For writers and critics, peasant and working class communities, what has commonly been called the folk in this context, became a crucial component to developing a sense of West Indian cultural identity and a regional literature. In a much quoted passage on this topic, George Lamming states:

> Unlike the previous governments and departments of educators, unlike the business man importing commodities, the West Indian novelist did not look out across the sea to another source. He looked in and down at what had traditionally been ignored. For the first time the West Indian peasant became other than a cheap source of labour. He became, through the novelist's eye, a living existence, living in silence and joy and fear, involved in riot and carnival. It is the West

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[47] Researchers have contested the notion that canons are natural formations in which "great works of literature transcend time and space to become classics" (Corse 15) and identify educational institutions as integral to processes in which works initially become recognized and elevated.

> Indian novel that has restored the West Indian peasant to his true and original status of personality. (*The Pleasures of Exile* 38-39)

Here, Lamming grants the West Indian novelist immense power by suggesting that he restores life and affect to the West Indian peasant. Despite Lamming's construction of the West Indian peasant that privileges the position of the novelist and his middle class background over the peasant (he states that the novelist looks "down" to the peasant), like Brathwaite, his statement reflects an attempt to discover an indigenous resource to establish literary origins that were distinct from the English tradition. His impetus to look inward for a cultural resource sought to combat the tendency of the West Indian middle class to adopt English mannerisms and to lean toward imported commodities that were considered to hold more value specifically because they were foreign. Moreover, this turn to folk origins and traditions exemplified the desire for writers to return to cultural traditions that were seemingly untainted by colonialism; since peasant and working class communities were the groups that were least formally educated and the least acculturated of the Caribbean population, their culture was deemed to be more authentically Caribbean than that of the middle class, who had been indoctrinated with a colonial education and, as Lamming suggests, had largely adopted English attitudes and lifestyles. Edmondson insightfully points out that "[t]his authentic culture came thus to be identified to a great extent with the vilified African-based customs of peasant society, such that blackness became reified into a restructuring oppositional ideology, the antithesis of Englishness" (*Making* 59). In this way, writers sought to rescue the peasant from the horrors of her colonial past by recreating and glorifying folk traditions and language practices; particularly since the peasant was unable to represent herself or provide a critique of colonial domination.

Even though Lamming valorizes the West Indian novelist's depiction of the folk, writers often constructed the folk from a distance given that many were removed from peasant and working class communities by their middle class sensibility; this idea is apparent in CLR James' *Minty* Alley (1936) and Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (1970). In James' text, the narrator operates as a peeping Tom figure whose middle class background sets him apart from the other boarders, who are of a working class background. In Lamming's novel, the narrative perspective privileges the middle class intellectual and his alienation from his folk origins.

In his important essay, "The Folk in Caribbean Literature," Gordon Rohlehr astutely argues, constructions of the folk that ground the peasant in the soil, such as those of Lamming, are limiting as they do not take into account the spectrum of groups that encompass the notion of the folk.[48] He proposes a folk-urban continuum that can "accommodate the interplay between country, town and big city, between peasant, artisan and city slicker or factory worker, and between the ill-defined classes of the West Indies" as well as one that takes into account the multicultural milieu of such places as Trinidad (28). Here, Rohlehr draws on Robert Redfield, who posits that societies can be categorized along a continuum which extends from rural to urban; within this framework, the most isolated rural communities come closest to approximating a definition of the folk (Smith 37-38).[49] Rohlehr makes an important intervention in debates surrounding "the folk" and peasant sensibilities by calling attention to the instability of the term and the need for writers and scholars to qualify their use of it.

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[48] This essay comes from a paper given by Rohlehr at the ACLALS 1971 conference, titled "Literature and the Folk."

For Rohlehr, the oeuvre of Samuel Selvon best illustrates the idea of a folk continuum.[50] Selvon's pioneering novels, especially his early novels that are set in Trinidad: *A Brighter Sun* (1952) and *Turn Again Tiger* (1958), are often lauded for depicting folk figures as central characters, often relaying their movement from rural to semi-urban and urban spaces.[51] While both James and Lamming employ folk language, or Anglophone Creole, as the voice of the dialogue and rely on Standard British English for the narrative, Selvon progressively erases this gap in his fiction. For instance, in *The Lonely Londoners* Selvon creates a folk world through his depictions of the struggles of working class West Indians in London and through his employment of Anglophone Creole as the voice of both the narrator and the characters. Despite Selvon's treatment of East Indian rural and semi-rural characters and his recordings of their language practices in his early fiction, the author does not directly engage with indentureship, Indian mythology, or Indian folk traditions. Thus, Kempadoo's and Ladoo's treatments of these topics are important contributions that enrich discussions of the folk and folk traditions in Caribbean literary studies.

Edmondson posits that for West Indian writers, "[a] return to authentic Caribbeanness […] must fulfill two contradictory principles: it must posit folk culture as whole and unsullied by the taint of colonial hegemony- the prelapsarian image of the nation- *even as* it must contain a critique of colonial domination in its very essence" (*Making* 60). For Caribbean writers of Indian descent, the process of representing the folk is complicated by the fact that their culture is presumed to be linked to India and not considered "authentic" to the Caribbean as are the African-based customs of the majority of the region's black peasantry. Granted that for both -Africans and Indians – it is impossible to argue effectively for a prelapsarian model. Both are products of migration and insertion into Caribbean spaces – both, then, are postcolonial, fractured, transformed, and must recognize their Caribbean uniqueness in order to exist comfortably together; however, by the time Indians arrived into the New World in 1838 the African based customs of the majority had already been established as the major cultural force in opposition to that of the European overlords. African Caribbeans could therefore (as in the case of Brathwaite) look abroad to other similar African cultures and claim a united Pan-African cultural strength in the face of the European hegemony. Indians, regarded as those who came after and inserted into the culture to undercut African labor, were considered interlopers, so they would have to establish their belonging and claim cultural space as they asserted their presence in the region. Additionally, while the region spoke of itself as a unit, there were separate "national" realities and Indians formed a significant part of the population in only two "nations"- Trinidad and Guyana.

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[49] Redford formulated his theory based on his work on Yucatan, Mexico, in which he compared three rural Maya communities to an important urban center, Merida (Smith 37).

[50] See Lamming *The Pleasure of Exile* 224-225 and Ramchand's *The West Indian Novel* 90-102.

[51] This is not to suggest that Selvon was the first to portray the folk in an objective or celebratory fashion. Engagements with folk language and characters can be seen in the novels of Claude MacKay and in the poetry of Una Marson and oral poetry Louise Bennett.

Rather than posit folk culture as whole, as Edmondson suggests the Caribbean writer sought to accomplish, I argue that early Indo-Caribbean writers had to demonstrate the ways in which Indian folk culture had been fractured, reconstructed, and insinuated into Caribbean folk culture, in order to prove the legitimacy of Indians as Caribbean subjects. Peter Kempadoo and Harold Ladoo present hybridized literary forms that depict the ways in which Indian cultural practices and beliefs transformed in the diaspora as a result of the indentureship experience. To illustrate this argument and other claims of this chapter, I now turn to an analysis of early Indo-Caribbean literary productions.

Peter Kempadoo's Madrassi Folk World

In his 2005 interview with pioneering critic of Indo-Caribbean Studies Frank Birbalsingh, Peter Kempadoo admits that he stopped writing when he discovered that "the books we were publishing in London were not being enjoyed by people at home. Books were too expensive, and I didn't want to write just for a small coterie of readers" (41). Like many West Indian writers of his day, Peter Kempadoo[52] emigrated to England in 1953, where he became a BBC Broadcaster, a position that gave him the opportunity to interact with prominent writers including Naipaul, Selvon, and Lamming. In England, Kempadoo published two novels, *Guyana Boy* (1960) and *Old Thom's Harvest* (1965). Not unlike other early West Indian writers, Kempadoo shared an interest in the key questions being explored by writers and critics of the period: What was the role of the writer in the community? What should be the thematic and structural concerns of West Indian literature? What cultural work should literature perform? Some scholars have argued that since *Guyana Boy* was published in England and written primarily in Standard English, Kempadoo was writing mainly for a British audience.[53] However, the author’s use of Standard English, Anglophone Creole, and Hindi in narration and his sole use of Anglophone Creole in dialogue suggests that Kempadoo was writing primarily for a West Indian audience; furthermore there is no accompanying glossary to define these terms. As his comments above reveal, for Kempadoo, writing was supposed to serve a very public purpose. The lack of a readership at home and the inaccessibility of his work to this intended audience lead Kempadoo to concentrate his creative efforts on other community-based projects. Subsequently, he traveled across the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia facilitating rural development work and educational workshops among grass-roots communities; part of which included his position as director of a Folk Arts division in Guyana, which dramatized and recorded folk music and stories.[54]

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[52] Father of emerging Caribbean writer Oonya Kempadoo.

[53] O.R. Dathorne's comment that "The use of dialect words give a certain amount of authenticity to the writing but in the absence of any explanation it would most likely be lost on an English reading public, for whom after all the book is primarily intended (71).

Kempadoo’s activist background provides insight into the structure and content of *Guyana Boy*. Arguably the first full-length Indo-Guyanese novel to be published, to date *Guyana Boy* has received little critical attention apart from a few reviews[55] and brief discussions in critical essays.[56] Derek Walcott’s 1960 review of the novel helps us to understand this critical oversight. Walcott states that *Guyana Boy* “is neither literary nor symbolic, yet it is much more than the journal of a Guiana boy childhood [….] the writer achieves a lyric atmosphere that comes through accurate observation and simple affection for all his characters” (“Review” 5). The documentary like style and tone Kempadoo employs to craft his fiction can be read as an attempt to capture the folk “authentically” without the prejudices of the European traveler or those of middle class West Indian writers. Thus, the novel can be read in line with Kempadoo's other community projects as one that seeks to preserve Guyanese folk forms in its depiction of a Guyanese rural Indian working class community: documenting food, clothing, religious beliefs, exchanges between different racial groups, the formal, and informal education of the protagonist, and the lifestyles of the Indian folk: as estate laborers and as fishermen.

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[54] In a footnote, Brathwaite points out Kempadoo’s important work in the Folk Arts unit outside of Georgetown (*Roots* 29).

[55] See Walcott “Review” and Dathorne.

[56] See the works of Seymour and Sparer. Additionally, in his essay *Roots* Brathwaite includes Kempadoo in a list of writers who have returned home from being in exile (29). With the exception of brief engagements such as the above, there appears to be no full-length critical articles published on *Guyana Boy*.

Before proceeding to a reading of *Guyana Boy*, I briefly situate the text in Caribbean literary history. *Guyana Boy*'s focus on East Indian plantation communities marks an important contribution to Caribbean literary studies. Before Kempadoo, few Guyanese writers had made Indians in the Caribbean their primary concern. John Edward Jenkins' *Lutchmee and Dilloo* (1877) and Edgar Mittelholzer's *Corentyne Thunder* (1941) are among the few. Given Jenkins' intended British audience and his attempt to affect indentureship reform, *Lutchmee and Dilloo* portrays characters that are more mythic than real. For example, Lutchmee is depicted as the most beautiful indentured woman on the plantation and Dilloo is given features and physical strength similar to those attributed to Lord Ram, the hero of the *Ramayana*.[57] Furthermore, the dark skin and animalesque qualities of the villain, Hunoomaun (ironically named after the monkey-God, Hanuman, who rescues Ram), closely resemble Ravana, Ram's enemy. Rather than employ the *Ramayana* to address the realities of indentureship as Indo-Caribbean authors often do (the next section discusses Ladoo's engagement with the epic), Jenkins creates exceptional characters to appeal to his nineteenth century British readership, particularly given the lack of an Indo-Caribbean (then characterized as

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[57] Believed to be one of the epics that recounts the origins of contemporary Hindu society, the *Ramayana* centers on the life of Lord Ram.

"Indian") or a more general Caribbean literate public. Set in 1930s rural British Guiana, *Corentyne Thunder* addresses the important themes of poverty, interracial relationships, the strife for economic mobility, and the difficulty of surviving in rural colonial society; however, the novel portrays Indians as naïve, tightfisted, and primitive. Despite their idiosyncrasies, both Jenkins and Mittelholzer present significant literary representations of a group that had remained largely invisible in colonial accounts.

In a broader and more contemporary context, *Guyana Boy* has themes very much attuned to Seepersad Naipaul's *The Adventures of Gurudeva* (1943) and Selvon's *A Brighter Sun* (1952), both coming out of Trinidad; however, while all three narrate East Indian peasant sensibilities through Indian male protagonists, *Guyana Boy* diverges from these texts in significant ways. *The Adventures of Gurudeva* satirizes an isolated upper-caste Brahmin community and *A Brighter Sun* portrays the protagonist's move from rural to semi-urban locales which requires the protagonist to assimilate to creole society. *Guyana Boy* departs from these texts through its focus on the specificities of a marginalized Madrassi community in rural Guyana. Lilboy's Christianized Indian perspective further represents a minority view in Indian Caribbean literature.[58] *Guyana Boy* might also be read as a literary precursor to a number of Indo-Caribbean fictional productions including Harold Ladoo's *No Pain Like This Body*, Rooplall Monar's *Backdam People* (1987) and *Janjhat* (2003), Janice Shinebourne's *The Last English Plantation* (1988), and most recently Moses Nagamootoo's *Hendree's Cure* (2000). These fictions all take up the everyday occurrences of peasant and working class Indian communities on plantation and village settlements as their concern, focusing on such themes as the transition of Indians from estate to village life, religious syncretism, language use, and cultural loss. In a manner similar to *Guyana Boy*, the latter two creative texts make unity and strong communal ties between Asian and African groups a central theme and *Hendree's Cure* shares Kempadoo's text in its concern with the marginalized Madrassi experience.

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[58] Ramabai Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge*, Sharlow Mohammed's *The Elect*, and Joy Mahabir's *Jouvet* present more contemporary engagements with Indian Christian communities and experiences.

Set in the 1940s on a British Guiana sugar estate, Kempadoo's semi-autobiographical novel relays the tale of a young Madrassi East Indian boy who attempts to understand and negotiate the various cultural heritages and power structures that exist in his colonial society. The name of the protagonist and the first person narrator, Lilboy or "little boy," symbolizes his birth order among the children of his family, but more importantly draws attention to the author's choice to create a novel of childhood; a familiar form inherited from European literary traditions and seen in numerous Caribbean novels.[59] Positioned as part of the folk community depicted, the protagonist does not feel wholly alienated from it like we see in Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* or Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*.

In his novel, Kempadoo brings to light the Madrassi Indian experience. Madrassis composed less than 5% of the 239,000 Indian indentures that migrated to British Guiana (Nagamootoo 6). Because they migrated from the Tamil or Tegalu areas of South India, rather than northern areas of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar where the majority of indentured laborers originated, British colonial authority termed this small minority "Madrassi," after the port from which they boarded ships bound for the New World. Even before crossing the *kala pani*,[60] North Indians viewed non-Aryan religious and social systems as primitive and culturally inferior. Despite being considered as the indigenous inhabitants of India, Tamils were regarded as less Indian and less Hindu by North Indians because of their dark skin and curly hair as well as their practices of meat eating and sacrificing of small animals.[61] Within the context of colonial British Guiana, Madrassis were ostracized on multiple levels from within their own Indian community and by colonial domination. Since colonial officials often perceived them to be unruly and less industrious than their North Indian countrymen, Madrassi recruitment for indentureship was strongly discouraged. Consequently, in colonial British society Madrassis were “subjected to the dual hegemony of racialized and ethnic difference that reinforced their minority status” (Mehta, “Kali” 542).

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[59] See George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (1970), Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack, Monkey* (1970), and Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* (1985). For more on West Indian "novels of childhood," see Ramchand's *The West Indian Novel and its Background* 187-202.

Kempadoo inverts the perceived inferior status of Madrassis through the protagonist’s own perceptions of himself. Early in the chronology of *Guyana Boy,* Lilboy tells us that “[m]y mother combed my sisters’ hair into hundreds of curls [. . .] they had curlier hair than the other children on the estate and this was because we were Madrassees and most everybody else on the estate were Calcuttis” (Kempadoo 10-11). Here, Kempadoo establishes the location of his young protagonist as *within* the community, a participant, rather than an outside research eye describing his experience. Moreover, in this moment, our young protagonist recognizes his difference from other estate Indians through the physical appearance of his sisters who in turn are mirror images of himself. Lilboy's use of this term "Calcutti" rather than terms such as upper-caste Hindus, Brahmins, or other labels, which suggest dominance or superiority, signals his sense of equality with fellow Indians despite caste hierarchy. In this way, from its outset the novel presents the narrator's own pride in his ethnic heritage and positions Madrassis on the same level as their North Indian peers, pointing to the ways in which migration out of India presented the *possibility* of shedding discriminatory categories based on skin color, religious and cultural practices, and caste, but at the same time set up other discriminatory labels such as "Calcutti" and "Madrassi." These labels were put in place by the British, who commonly named Africans and Indians after the port from which they were taken rather than consider the ethnic identification of these groups or the region of their origins in Africa or India. In the novel's 1940s setting, these supposed Indian identifications are postcolonial national formations. New World Indian identity is shaped by the colonial experience and departure port of previous generations, demonstrating the way in which individual and groups are "reading themselves" as the colonial overlords "read" them.

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[60] *Kala pani* means dark waters in Hindi.

[61] In a relatively recent play depicting various mythical and folk spirits of the Caribbean, titled *Chupucabra* (2004), Paloma Mohamed makes reference to this notion of the dominance and superior cultural contribution of Northern Indians to the Caribbean by having one of the visiting spirit characters, Vetala, insist that he is not just from India, but from *Northern* India in particular (emphasis in original 27).

The reevaluation of the Madrassi community and its insertion into conceptions of Caribbean cultural identity is particularly illustrated in the novel's interweaving of Indian mythology into the text. Lilboy juxtaposes tales from the Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*, to those from the Macmillan reader, part of the curriculum of his formal colonial education. These stories

> were not exciting like those which my Uncle Doray knew from the Indian Mahabharat book…. my mother had allowed us to stay up till Uncle Doray had finished his stories and then you couldn't go to sleep alone after that for fear that

> some of the gods he told us about might be hiding behind the dark doors. Talk about good at storytelling! Mr. Cort's bad fairies didn't even want to cut animal's throats and suck their blood like some of Uncle Doray's Kali gods. (100)

The quoted excerpt illustrates the way colonial education emphasized European mythologies, attempting in this way to have them as a focal point in the psyche of the colonized, who would then in Bhabha's terms become "white but not quite." The failure of European fairytales to come alive in the mind of the protagonist, a point that is further emphasized by Lilboy's omission of the name of particular fairytale characters, is perhaps due to the disconnect between the landscape of his Caribbean reality and that of the European imagination; as a result the power of Indian mythology, particularly those of the dark-skinned blood drinking Goddess Kali, is reinforced. Despite his Christian worldview, Lilboy is familiar with the more popular figures of "East Indian" or Hindu Divinity, such as the "eight-armed" goddess Lakshmi and the "monkey-face" Hanuman. Significantly, however, the Goddess Kali resonates most powerfully in his consciousness (20). Kali and her sentinel Madurai Veeran, or hero of Madurai, have been prominent figures in South Asian mythological and folk traditions (Bassier 280). In British Guiana, Kali Mai (translated mother Kali) worship is particularly prevalent in the rural Corentyne village from which Kempadoo originates. Often depicted with a garland of skulls around her neck and standing on a slain demon, Kali is said to be a pre-Aryan Goddess who defies prescriptions of Indian womanhood laid out in Hindu Vedic texts. Despite her position as one of the most powerful Goddesses in the Hindu Pantheon, Kali is often vilified for her dark skin, like her Tamil worshippers, making her the appropriate avatar of the outcast community. Significantly, in *Guyana Boy*, Lilboy's perception of Kali does not derive from religious worship or scripture, but from the oral mode of storytelling. Preserved in the memory of Indian diasporic subjects, rather than in written form like Cort's fairytales, Kali becomes a powerful mythic folk figure that is transmitted through orality and inscribed into the Caribbean cultural landscape. As the protagonist's experience illustrates, in this process of transference the Goddess is associated with her divine qualities rather than with particular religious scriptures or tales. In this way, the Goddess becomes akin to other blood sucking folk spirits, such as Old Higue in Guyana or Soucuyant in Trinidad. Despite formal institutions and literacy practices that seek to devalue these figures, their extraterrestrial powers ensure their survival in the minds of Caribbean people and in the region's rich oral traditions, legitimating the cultural belief systems and practices to which they are linked.

The diasporic transformation of Indian folk traditions further arises in the novel in the image of Kali's warrior, Madurai Veeran. Sitting in Mr. Cort's chair, Lilboy creates a drawing of "a big-muscled horse, prancing with one foot in the air, with the Madrasee god, Madivereen, sitting straight up and proud on it just like how Uncle Doray had told us Madivereen looked to fisher-people when he appeared to them on the fore-day morning guarding the sea-beach" (101). Here, again, is an instance where folktales are passed down through storytelling and preserved in the memories of the fisher-people for whose daily lives literacy is insignificant. In this context, Madurai represents not only the guardian of Kali but also becomes that of the fisher-people, whose lives are threatened daily by the treacherous waters of the Atlantic. Kempadoo's portrayal of the Madrassi fisher peoples claiming of Madurai as protector is not unlike the recurring trope we see in other Indo-Caribbean literary texts, including Ladoo's *No Pain Like this Body* and *A House for Mr. Biswas*, in which Ram's exile in the forest is seen as a metaphor of the Indo-Caribbean subject's exile in the New World. In contrast to the fisher people, for Lilboy, a third generation Indo-Guyanese, the warrior figure loses its religious power. The local deity of the Tamil people, Madurai Veeran is abbreviated to "Madivereen" in the novel's diasporic translation.

Additionally, the image of the warrior is further transformed in the diasporic context when the deity's horse is revised into a donkey. Lilboy tell us that

> Jiggertoe looked at my drawing of Madivereen on his horse and thought it wasn't nice and we rubbed off parts of it and turned it into a donkey standing with its mouth open and his tail sticking straight up in the air like a cat's when you run your hand along its back (101).

We can view Lilboy's revision of the warrior's image as the product of the protagonist's multicultural milieu. The young boys transform the horse to an animal that is more prevalent in their everyday reality; its braying sounds also make it one that could be easily ridiculed. It is no accident that Lilboy is sitting in the chair of the colonial stooge, Mr. Cort, and is encouraged by his friend, Jiggertoe, to revise the image. In fact, Lilboy's closest friends are not Calcutti or even fellow Madrassi East Indian boys, but are of African descent or are biracial; Jiggertoe is a *dougla*, the offspring of an African and Indian union. These combined influences that encourage Lilboy to defile the warrior's image can be read as agents that lead Lilboy to move away from or disrespect Indian traditions; however, a more nuanced reading suggests that the protagonist's Indian cultural heritage is being molded by his working-class background and the many cultural influences he encounters in his lived reality. In this way, the author subtly illuminates how the various cultural heritages of Guyanese society contribute to the hybridization of Indian cultural forms and the process by which Indo-Guyanese and their folk traditions become more embedded in the Caribbean landscape with each successive generation.

Throughout the novel, Kempadoo uses Lilboy's interactions with other schoolchildren to symbolize the cultural exchanges that occur between the various racial groups in Guiana, especially Madrassis and Africans, groups that share a subordinate status in the eyes of Brahmins and colonial authority. The alliances Lilboy forms with school boys of other races suggests the need for Indians and Africans to unite against their shared oppressor, challenging the divide and conquer strategies of British colonial rule that were employed towards Indian and African groups in order to thwart political rebellion. These policies encouraged Africans and Indians to express hostility horizontally at each other rather than vertically at their common oppressor. In the novel's 1940s setting, these strategies reemerge through the school's registry, which categorizes students by race and gender; signifying "East Indian girls," "East Indian boys," "Other girls," and "Other boys." The label *Other* encompassed all non-Indian, or "Negroes," "Chinese and mixtures" (95). The stratification of the society is further demonstrated by the fact that "not one Portuguese boy or girl from the estate potage and santantone quarters was among them, for they were all Roman Catholics and their church-father never allowed any of them to go any other school but R.C. school" (95). In other words, the formal institutional structure and division of colonial education indoctrinates students into the existing hierarchy of colonial society, based on race, class, and gender; a stratification in which the churches appear to be passive or willing participants. *Guyana Boy* presents the possibility of transcending these divisive colonial practices by suggesting that the close living and working conditions on plantation estates engenders unity across racial lines through a working class consciousness; an idea that has been crucial to Guyanese nationalist movement, as shown by my analysis of Indo-Guyanese poetry of the 1960s and 1970s in the following chapter.

While the novel might not appear to be interested in political commentary, its title, *Guyana Boy*, invites us to read Lilboy as an embodiment of the emerging Guyanese nation. In this context, the protagonist's knowledge of various folk traditions and his interaction with other racial groups become especially significant in several important ways. Firstly, the novel is set in the 1940s, a time of widespread coalition building between working class Indian and African groups that was integral to the movement towards British Guiana's independence.[62] Secondly, the novel is published in 1960 after the nationalist movement splits along lines of race, class, and ideology, and on the eve of independence. Read in light of these two significant historical moments, the novel becomes a call for racial and ethnic unity among working class peoples.[63]

Additionally, in its concern with the everyday interactions between various racial groups and the hybrid cultural forms that such relations engender, Kempadoo engages with the two dominant models with which Anglophone Caribbean society has been analyzed: the plural society thesis and creolization. Based on an earlier work of the Dutch economist, J.S. Furnivall, the plural society theory was developed in 1959 by Jamaican sociologist M.G. Smith as a way to characterize Caribbean societies that had populations consisting of different cultural traditions. For Smith, plural societies were political units distinguished by “cultural plurality” in relation to their social institutions, including “marriage, family, property, religion, economic institutions, language and folklore.” Different “sections of the total population practice different forms of these common institutions; and […] differ in their internal social organization, their institutional activities, and their system of belief and value” (qtd. in Reddock, “Culture” 112). The plural society theory is characterized by its essentialism; given that it posits that the cultural identities of the various groups in Guyanese society are based on places of ancestral origin, that these cultures remained fixed through time and space, and that each group holds a completely separate culture despite the inevitability of cultural exchange; thus, ethnic groups are presented as diametrically opposed and innately antagonistic. Kempadoo subverts this theory by mobilizing Lilboy’s interactions with other children of multicultural backgrounds (Africans and whites) to depict the small seemingly unimportant ways in which different racial groups connect and how these relations result in the transformation of the individuals themselves and their cultural heritages.

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[62] These labor coalitions would eventually lead to the establishment of Peoples Progressive Party (P.P.P.) in 1950, under the dual leadership of Cheddi Jagan and Forbes Burnham; chapter four of this dissertation outlines this historical context.

[63] Importantly, Kempadoo departs from other Caribbean writers including Lamming and Naipaul whose characters go abroad, most often to England, in pursuit of personal, educational, and vocational development by illustrating Lilboy's move from a rural to urban space; in this way, Lilboy is reminiscent of Selvon's character, Tiger.

Moreover, the work of Kempadoo (and other Indo-Caribbean writers) disrupts articulations of Caribbean creolization that does not overtly account for the Indian contribution such as those presented by Brathwaite. Brathwaite conceptualizes creolization as the result of slavery and the interculturation of Europeans and Africans in a fixed superior/inferior relationship.[64] Within this formulation, blacks acculturated to white norms. Scholars have critiqued Brathwaite’s under theorizing of the existence of other cultural groups in Caribbean society, including Amerindians and East Indians. East Indians and other immigrants, Brathwaite argues “had to adjust themselves to the existing creole synthesis and the new landscape” (*Contradictory* 11). Shalini Puri insightfully examines Brathwaite’s particular treatment of East Indians, arguing that in his categorizing of Indians as “immigrants” he does not give their subordinate position as indentures careful attention. Moreover, his discussion of Indians in Trinidad reveals three contradictory claims: “that Indians are simply ‘assimilated’ into Creole society, that they are creolized (although they do not thereby become Creoles), and that with their advent the Caribbean became a ‘plural’ society” (Puri 65). Puri presents the notion of a *dougla poetics*, based on the disavowed figure of the *dougla* as an alternative to creolization.[65] *Dougla poetics*, Puri argues, provides a means for articulating “potentially progressive cultural projects” and a political identity, rather than a biological one, that take into account both the dominant Afro-Creole culture and Indian culture in the Caribbean (221). Yet, Puri herself admits that *dougla poetics* has its limitations in discussions of other populations in the Caribbean, including Chinese, Jewish, and Middle Eastern groups.

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[64] For more on Brathwaite’s discussion of creolization, see *Contradictory Omens*.

Whilst Kempadoo’s and Ladoo’s fictions reflect a *dougla poetics* in myriad ways, as a corpus of writing, Indo-Caribbean literature embraces a more fluid notion of Caribbean identity and poetics given its attention to the cultural contributions of other groups. For instance, Janice Shinebourne’s *The Last English Plantation* depicts characters of partial Chinese background and both Rajkumari Singh and Cyril Dabydeen include elements of Amerindian traditions in their poetry. Thus, I find Edouard Glissant’s conceptualization of creolization a useful methodology for thinking through Indo-

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[65] Also see my discussion of *dougla poetics* in my introduction on page 16.

Caribbean writing's engagements with cultural hybridity.[66] Glissant defines creolization as "the incredible explosions of cultures. But the explosion of culture does not mean they are scattered or mutually diluted. It is the violent sign of their consensual, not imposed, sharing." This cultural hybridity is "not merely an encounter, a *métissage*, but a new and original dimension" (*Poetics* 34). Constructing identity in *relation to* rather than in *opposition to* the other, this formulation rejects essentialism or assimilation, and allows the acknowledgement of the influence of European colonizers, Africans, Indians, and others. Whereas, in Glissant's analysis, a rooted identity seeks to impose itself on others, a rhizomatic one spreads in unexpected ways, rejecting the idea of pure origins. Glissant does not overlook the possibility of uneven power relations between these groups, acknowledging that force and violence often contribute to these processes Thus, Glissant's presentation of Caribbean identity as opaque, volatile, and constantly in flux provides a broader and more inclusive way of understanding hybridity in the Caribbean context. I will return to a discussion of Indo-Caribbean identity based on *a poetics of relation* in chapter six of this study, where I examine Shani Mootoo's work.

Through its depiction of the ways in which Madrassi deities are modified within the Caribbean context from one generation to another and through the protagonist's interactions with other cultural groups that shape his understanding of identity and culture, *Guyana Boy* rejects notions of pure heritages and reflects the *unhomely* as an aesthetic mode. By not valuing one cultural or literary tradition over another, in his novel,

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[66] Here, Glissant turns to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's skepticism of the root and their concept of the rhizome**.** Deleuze and Guattari reject the idea of the root because it is "a stock" which absorbs all into itself and exterminates all around it. In opposition they offer the rhizome, "an enmeshed root system, a network spreading either in the ground or in the air, with no predatory rootstock taking over permanently" *(Poetics of Relation* 11). While the rhizome preserves the idea of "rootedness," it challenges that of a totalitarian root.**"** Rhizomatic thought serves as the foundation of Glissant's theory of poetics of relation.

Kempadoo creates an interstitial space “between fixed identifications [that] opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (Bhabha, *The Location* 5). As we will see in the next section, we can also view *No Pain Like this Body* in relation to *unhomely* since Ladoo interweaves modes of orality not only into the content of his narrative, but also into its structural elements. Thus, these Indo-Caribbean writers transform a literary tradition inherited from Europe by drawing on Afro-Caribbean and Indo-Caribbean traditions**.**

Harold Ladoo’s Reconstruction of the Folk through Content and Form

Harold Ladoo’s *No Pain Like This Body* fills an important gap in Caribbean literature in its concern with first and second-generation Indo-Trinidadian laborers, an element of folk experience that has been largely invisible in the fiction of the English-Speaking Caribbean (even today). In 1972 when the novel was published, no other Indo-Caribbean novelist had set their fiction directly during the indentureship period.[67] While at first glance *No Pain Like This Body* seems to be concerned solely with an Indian enclave that eschews creolization by not interacting with the diverse peoples of colonial Trinidad, a closer examination suggests that the novel’s form and content contain elements of the rich and various mythological traditions that exist in the multicultural milieu of its Caribbean setting. How does a writer with few predecessors represent in literary form the traditions of a displaced peasant Indian community whose experiences remain silent in dominant representations of Caribbean literature and history, and for which the literary holds little practical value? Ladoo rejects the conventional structure of the nineteenth century European realist novel used by many Caribbean writers. Instead, he employs techniques associated with the performance of oral literature (storytelling as well as the performance of folktales, poetry, riddles, and proverbs) to infuse the narrative with folk elements, producing what I have been interpreting as the aesthetic component of Bhabha's concept, the *unhomely*. While the act of storytelling, meaning characters verbally relaying narrative, appears in several moments within the text, my interest lies primarily in the structure of the narration. Specifically, I am interested in the ways in which the stylistic devices of oral literature are mobilized to infuse elements of the Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*, as well as qualities of African and Caribbean folktales into the novel. These strategies enhance the oral qualities of the narrative and further detail the traditions and beliefs of the folk community depicted.

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[67] More recent novels that take the indentureship period as their setting are David Dabydeen’s *The Counting House* (1997) and Peggy Mohan’s *Jahajin* (2007).

Ladoo has admitted that Anansi Press required that he "chop" many sections from *No Pain Like this Body* that "included the folk lore of the people" to make it more accessible for a Canadian audience (qtd. in Questel). Thus, "rhythm and texture [were often] sacrificed for easy comprehension" (Such, "Review" 78). These comments further illuminate the pressures facing early Caribbean writers especially in the diasporic context. In contrast to earlier generations of Caribbean authors who migrated to England for publication opportunities and an interested readership, as Ladoo's experience shows, later Caribbean writers also chose Canada as a destination to explore these opportunities. North America has particularly been the destination for Caribbean women writers, as Carole Boyce Davies has argued.[68] Since the 1970s, Canada (Toronto specifically) has been a hub of Indo-Caribbean literature and criticism. The pioneering work of Frank

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[68] See Davies, *Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*.

Birbalsingh, the 1988 conference on Indo-Caribbean Studies held in Toronto, and the numerous Indo-Caribbean writers who have made Canada their primary home speak to this point.[69] Bissoondath, Espinet, and Mootoo have taken up the Indo-Caribbean diasporic experience as primary concerns of their fiction. The history of Presbyterian education for Indians in Trinidad[70] and the invitation put forth by the Canadian government in the 1970s for immigrants from the Caribbean has also contributed to the flourishing of Indo-Caribbean literature and scholarship in Canada.

As Ladoo's remarks indicate, questions of audience and form significantly contributed to the construction of his literature and its reception. While both of Ladoo's fictional productions, *No Pain Like This Body* (1972) and *Yesterdays* (1974), are set in the Caribbean, they have been better received in Canada.[71] Ladoo was awarded a writing bursary from the Canada Council in 1973 and was well known among immigrant and emerging writers in Canada, who often empathized with his experience as an immigrant and the working class struggles portrayed in his work.[72] Born in 1945 in the predominantly Indian plantation area of Couva, Trinidad, Ladoo immigrated to Canada. There, he attended college during the day and was employed as a dishwasher at night in order to support his wife and children. In 1974, during a return trip to Trinidad to rescue his mother from homelessness, Ladoo was brutally murdered at the tender age of 28. His fiction, like his own life as a struggling immigrant, speaks of poverty, displacement, and the hardships of existing in an uncertain reality.

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[69] Neil Bissoondath, Cyril Dabydeen, Ramabai Espinet, and Shani Mootoo all live in Canada, and Sasenarine Persaud and Samuel Selvon both lived there for short periods.

[70] My analyses of Ramabai Espinet's and Shani Mootoo's novels, in chapters four and five respectively, show how these writers critique the activities of the Presbyterian Church among Indians in Trinidad.

[71] Little has been published in Caribbean periodicals about Ladoo's work. For early reviews of his work, see Questel and Such.

[72] This point is evident in Dionne Brand's introduction of the 2003 reprinting of *No Pain Like This Body,* where she speaks of being his classmate, and the twenty-four page poem, "The Death of Harold Ladoo," written by Dennis Lee, Toronto's first Poet Laureate. Lee held the position of editor at House of Anansi Press, which published both of Ladoo's novels.

Ladoo's texts have received little critical attention from Caribbean scholars. The fact that his books were not available in Caribbean bookstores after their first publications and the lack of a general Caribbean readership may partly account for this oversight. While some critics have argued that Ladoo's fiction deserves a prominent place in Caribbean literary studies,[73] others have branded the works as inferior or believe that the paucity of his publications does not warrant such a place. Other possibilities that may account for why his work has been overlooked are his depictions of sexuality and homosexuality as well as his consistent critique of the hypocrisy prevalent in East Indian communities in Trinidad. It is my contention that the novel has also been overlooked because at first glance it does appear to engage creolization and nationalism.

Set in 1905 in Tola Trace, Carib Island, a thinly disguised fictitious version of a plantation village in Trinidad, *No Pain Like This Body* depicts a few days in the life of an Indian Trinidadian working class family that consists of Ma, Pa, and their children: twelve-year-old Balraj, ten-year-old Sunaree, and eight year old twin boys Panday and Rama. Although the novel is set during indenture, the characters appear to be free laborers since they do not live in the barracks. The plot occurs during the rainy season when, much like life on the plantation, the weather becomes unpredictable and often unbearable.[74] The backdrop interchanges between violent rain and peaceful sunshine; the insects and animals hide and become visible without warning; and the poison of the scorpion that contributes to the death of one child, supposedly saves his twin brother. Like a scientist who places his subject in a petri dish for close examination, Ladoo zooms in on his characters and their environment, positioning the reader at the other end of the microscope. The first five chapters of the narrative narrow in on the family; however, its scope broadens midway when Rama dies and we get a glimpse of the larger Indo-Trinidadian community gathered at the wake. The three final chapters return to focus on the family once more. The entire narrative relays a few days of the family's daily activities: planting rice; Pa's consistent verbal and physical abuse of his children and wife; his laziness and drunkenness; Ma's attempt to protect and provide for her family; the children's effort to simultaneously embody their roles as children (by playing with insects and tadpoles) and those of adults (by performing plantation work and caring for each other); Rama's death; and finally Ma's inability to overcome the loss of her child and the hardships of plantation existence. The novel ends with the children and their grandparents roaming the wilderness in search of Ma, who has run off into the night. *No Pain Like This Body*'s honest treatment of Indian village life in the early twentieth century: the poverty, lack of medical care, domestic abuse, and other horrors of working and living under these conditions, powerfully disrupts colonial narratives of the plantation as a civilizing mechanism and indentureship as a beneficial system that aimed to better heathen *coolies* morally and financially.

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[73] Christopher Laird and Kenneth Ramchand both identify Ladoo's work as a significant contribution to Caribbean literary studies. In his preface to the second edition of *The West Indian Novel and its Background* published in 1983, Ramchand laments Ladoo's death and identifies him as an artist whose work showed "great promise" (x).

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[74] In the novel, the environment emerges as an antagonist with which the character must constantly battle. The tropical Caribbean landscape of unique and exotic flora and fauna, and clear skies and blue waters pictured in tourist brochures and European travel narratives become unfamiliar and perilous in Ladoo's account**.**

In *No Pain Like this Body*, Hindu mythology manifests as an important element of this imagined Indo-Trinidadian folk community. Direct references to such scriptures as the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas* exist within the novel. The *Ramayana*, however, is the master text with which Ladoo primarily engages. Translated "Ram's Journey," it relays the story of Lord Ram's exile from his home, Ajodhya, into the forest for fourteen years. He is permitted to return once he has rescued his wife, Sita, from the demon King, Ravana. Recorded in Sanskrit before 300 B.C., this epic and others have been rerecorded, translated, reinterpreted, and retold ever since. Brought over to the New World by indentured laborers, the epics are recounted by pundits during Hindu prayer meetings as well as performed in community events such as the *Ramleela*[75] festival in the context of the Caribbean. Indo-Caribbean writers, like Ladoo, participate in this long-standing tradition of transference through their inclusion of these mythic elements in their fiction.

Ladoo is not the only Indo-Caribbean writer to incorporate the *Ramayana* into fiction. References to the *Ramayana* appear throughout Indo-Caribbean literature; in the works of such writers as Lakshmi Persaud, Janice Shinebourne, and Ramabai Espinet. Given Ram's condition of exile and his search for self in an unknown land, themes that acutely resonate with the Indo-Caribbean experience, the epic serves as an apt master text with which Indo-Caribbean writers engage. Perhaps the most well-known occurrence of the *Ramayana* in Caribbean fiction is that seen in *A House for Mr. Biswas*. Selwyn Cudjoe cleverly reads *Biswas* as a "creative transformation" that "inverts and distorts the *Ramayana*," to express the "historical reality" of Biswas' New World experience (64). For example, Lord Ram and Mr. Biswas are diametrical opposites; whereas Ram embodies courage and strength, Naipaul's protagonist is often portrayed as weak and cowardly. Moreover, Hanuman is presented as a whitewashed, sinister statue on the top of the Tulsi home. Through the use of satire and humor, Naipaul effectively alters the Hindu epic to fit the postcolonial Caribbean reality of his Indo-Trinidadian characters.

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[75] The dramatization of the story of Lord Ram from the *Ramayana*.

In a somewhat similar fashion to Naipaul, Ladoo also chooses to integrate the epic to fit the themes of his novel rather than overtly relay whole or partial accounts of it by interweaving the *Ramayana* into Indian peasant life and inverting its end to reveal the morose reality of this existence. In the Sanskrit tale, Ram overcomes his exile and returns home. Given that few indentured laborers repatriated, *No Pain Like this Body* suggests that there is no returning home for the indentured to escape this New World exile; instead death is presented as one of the few ways to escape. In her introduction of the novel, Dionne Brand keenly observes that "no garland of lights precedes or follows Ladoo's Rama" (xiii). Instead Ladoo's character dies from pneumonia or as his grandfather says, "umonia fever" (62). Rama becomes ill after working and playing in the incessant rain, but his condition is further exacerbated by a scorpion bite. Lord Ram's name becomes the residue that remains of the epic for these first and second generation Indo-Trinidadians whose Indian heritage transforms and fades with each successive generation;[76] as one character brutally laments, "Dese young modderass people runnin away from Indian ways" (70). Their plantation reality is ambivalently positioned between a distant and unknown India and a strange and somewhat inaccessible[77] Creole urban society. The novel's juxtaposition of the child character Ram and the powerful Lord from whom he gets his name calls attention to the grim realities of indentureship; the images that recruiters of indentureship painted of easy work, wealth, and land to convince laborers to enlist are unraveled and the idea that indentureship was a "free" system of labor that largely benefitted Indians as colonial accounts often suggest are staunchly opposed. Moreover, the novel indicates that the epic cannot be transferred to the Caribbean in its whole form, but, must be unhoused from its original Indian context to accommodate the Indo-Caribbean experience; as the transference history of the epic demonstrates, the *Ramayana* must be fractured and revised in order to maintain its relevance in this diasporic context. The *unhomely* aesthetic outcome that is produced moves "in-between cultural traditions and hybrid forms of life and art that do not have a prior existence within the discrete world of any single culture or language" (Bhabha, *The Location* xiii).

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[76] We also see this idea in *A House Mr. Biswas* when at a moment of psychic trauma Biswas and his son Anand repeat "Rama Ram Sita Rama," as a mantra against perceived evils. While Biswas is not particularly religious and is certainly not passing on a notion of organized religion to his children, the epic provides solace at a moment of crisis (270).

The author's creative presentation of the Hindu figure Ram is further complemented by the infusion of other Caribbean folk figures that derive from various origins. For instance, at one moment of the text Panday is afraid to cross a bridge because his Nanna (maternal grandfather) once told him a story of a *jables*. All "a corruption of the French term diabless or female devil," *jables* describes a witch that shapeshifts as a beautiful woman (128). According to Nanna, on one occasion a *jables* told a *duennes* (a spirit of African origin considered to be a child who dies before he is born) that children were crossing the bridge, at which point the *duennes* captured and took a little boy away

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[77] Here the term "inaccessible" means far in distance, since during this time period most Indians lived on plantation estates that were far removed from urban areas, and difficult to gain acceptance into since assimilation often meant devaluing and rejecting one's Indian ancestry.

(114). Nanna most likely tells this story to his grandchildren in order to keep them safely on one side of the bridge. The tale powerfully remains in the fragile mind of his young grandson. The Indian characters' expert knowledge of these folk spirits from different cultural traditions, including *jumbies*[78] (Caribbean), *lagahus*[79] (French orthography / African Caribbean culture) and *churails*[80] (Indian), challenge the wide spread idea that during this period Indians remained within their ethnic enclave unwilling to interact with others. Despite the presence of few racially diverse characters within the novel, [81] and the historical reality that the mainly Indian populated plantations were far removed from multicultural urban spaces, the characters' familiarity with the various folk spirits of their Caribbean environment suggests the existence of cultural exchange between Indians and the other cultural groups within colonial Trinidadian society. Furthermore, in its alignment of Indian folk characters alongside Caribbean folk spirits who derive from other origins, but who are considered unique to the Caribbean region, *No Pain Like this Body* suggests that Indian folk figures, as they have been modified in the diaspora, are an integral part of Caribbean folk traditions. Crucially, the novel indicates that these accommodations are being made by "the folk" who have to co-exist in a postcolonial Caribbean environment.

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[78] According the novel's glossary, a *jumbie* is the term for a spirit that is used across the Caribbean region (Ladoo 128).

[79] "A corruption of the French term loup garou, or werewolf," a *lagahu* is a human being who has a relationship with the devil and becomes an animal at the night. In this form, the *lagahu* carries the devil through the village in return for payment (Ladoo 128).

[80] A spirit of Indian origin that is believed to be that of a woman who died while pregnant or during childbirth, and who has returned to haunt her husband, his wife and his children.

[81] Non-Indian characters, including a white overseer and a Creole woman, appear in the stories told during the wake.

In contrast to Kempadoo, Ladoo provides descriptions of folk figures in a glossary that functions both as a vehicle that disseminates knowledge and as a repository of knowledge. While the glossary may have been inserted to appeal to Canadian audiences, it grants audiences outside of the Caribbean as well as those inside the region access to unfamiliar terms. On another level, the glossary functions as an archive that formally records and preserves Indian and other folk traditions in Caribbean history and culture as well as demonstrates how Indian-Caribbean and African-Caribbean folk traditions co-exist. As Edouard Glissant argues, "what is [being] attacked is from the outset the sacred status of the written word. The Caribbean folktale focuses on an experience suppressed by decree or the law. It is antidecree and antilaw, that is to say antiwriting" (*Caribbean* 84). Although Glissant specifically speaks of the folktale, his comments are applicable to folk practices more generally. Unlike African slaves, Indian indentures were allowed to practice their own languages, customs, and religions to some extent; however, as I have been arguing throughout this project, colonial discourses and institutions devalued these practices in various ways. Given that during colonialism all oral and folk traditions were vilified in favor of European literary and cultural traditions, a view that was often accepted by the Indian middle class (and by an Afro-Caribbean middle class, as Lamming argues), Ladoo's novel and its glossary challenge these oppressive systems and become significant methods for revaluing and asserting folk beliefs and practices.

In his depiction of the Indian folk community of Tola, Ladoo also uses the conventions of the folktale to enhance the formal qualities of the novel's narrative structure. Speaking of the Caribbean folktale, Glissant points out that the

> fragmented nature of the Caribbean folktale is such that no chronology can emerge, that time cannot be conceived as a basic dimension of human experience. Its most used measure of time is the change from day to night […] The rhythm of night and day is the only measure of time for the slave, the peasant, the agricultural worker. (84)

In *No Pain Like This Body* the fragmented nature of the folktale of which Glissant speaks is employed to signal the progression of time in the narrative. For example, the narrator tells us: "The sun jumped inside the sea to sleep and night crawled as a fat worm over the face of Tola" (63). Here, the "rhythm of night and day" manifests as the sun's descent into the sea and the night's slow emergence; this natural process indicates the passing of time within the novel's chronology to both the peasants within the plot and to the reader. While the month, year (August 1905), and location of the setting (Tola Trace, Carib Island) are provided on a single page in the beginning of the book, throughout its structure there exist few markers of linear calendric time. The tale begins with the simultaneous arrival of Pa and of the rain; insignificant occurrences in the colonial context of the novel, but life altering events for Ma, the children, and the peasant laborers. Whereas for the family, Pa's arrival signals a lack of freedom and unpredictable violence, for the laboring population (of which the family is a microcosm), the rainy season represents constraint and brutality since it is a time of continuous rice planting in the fields. The tensions set up at the beginning of the novel never get resolved. At the end, we are unsure if Ma will be found and if she will ever overcome her grief. Thus, the author uses the chronology of the folktale to illustrate the way in which the peasant characters, whose lifestyles lie outside the official historical discourse and temporality of the colonial state, utilize their own daily activities, as well as meteorological and agricultural patterns as chronological signposts.

Moreover, the above passage shows the way in which Ladoo crafts his novel using other conventional elements of the folktale including personification and animal imagery. In fact, throughout the novel, nature's elements and animals are given human qualities:

> The rain didn't care about the Tola. Rain was pounding on the earth. Ma and Balraj saw the drops; they looked like fat white worms invading the earth from above. God was trying to tie the earth and sky with the raindrops. The whole of Tola was dark and dismal.
>
> The wind didn't care about Tola. The wind was beating the rain and the rain was pounding the earth. There were no lights in the sky; all that Ma and Balraj saw were layers and layers of blackness and rage. The choking sound of the thunder came from the sky *zip zip zip crash doom doomm doomed*! Then the lightening moved as a gold cutlass and swiped an immortelle tree beyond the river. (italics in original 19)

Here, the wind and rain are personified as heartless, vindictive antagonists battling against the people of Tola; the environment emerges as a trickster figure with which the family must continuously battle. We also see the reappearance of the "fat worm" metaphor; utilized to describe the moon in the previous passage, here, it is a descriptor of the rain calling our attention to the author's use of repetition. Given that oral literature makes its appeal primarily to the sound of words, repetition and onomatopoeia are integral components of the storytelling process. Aesthetically, they create a song-like quality that appeals to the ear of the audience/reader and allows the audience/reader to connect to familiar threads throughout the narrative (Okpewho 71). Repetition in particular is often employed to intensify emotion. For example, the author repeats the phrases "The rain didn't care about Tola. Rain was pounding on the earth" and "The wind didn't care about Tola. The wind was beating the rain and the rain was pounding the earth" to express the violence inflicted by the rain and wind, which seem to have willfully conspired against the community. Harsh verbs such as "beating" and "pounding," whose sounds mimic their meaning, confirm this reading. The use of onomatopoeia in the final section further emphasizes the sensual experience of the elements; the elongation of the second "*doomm*" which has an extra "m" produces an echoing effect that emphasizes the loud noise of thunder.

Critics have often cited the text's lean prose and its stylistic devices such as onomatopoeia as evidence that the narrative voice reflects a child's point of view,[82] even suggesting Rama as a possible storyteller; however, I read the inclusion of these elements as part of the author's attempt to incorporate the diverse folk traditions of the Caribbean- with its mix of African and Indian oral traditions- into his fiction. While personification, animal imagery, repetition, and onomatopoeia are also considered to be literary devices, in oral literature they are specifically used to appeal to the sensual experience of the audience and emphasize the significant themes of the narrative. In fact what we are encountering is not "orality" per se, but the "literary," the way in which oral traditions cross over into literary traditions; exemplifying what Ngugi wa Thiongo has called "orature" and Kenneath Ramchand has called "literary orality" ("West Indian Literary"

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[82] See Such, "The Short Life of Harold Ladoo" and Early.

110).

Ladoo's creative mobilization of techniques of orality once again gestures to questions about audience and readership. The form of his text allows him to accomplish two important goals. Firstly, it allows him to incorporate folk tradition without relying solely on Anglophone Creole as the language of narration and dialogue, a choice that would risk alienating Canadian audiences and may have ultimately resulted in his work not being published in Canada. Secondly, through his careful attention to the oral qualities of the story, Ladoo makes his work accessible to and appealing to Caribbean audiences, perhaps even gesturing to performances and oral readings of it. *No Pain Like This Body* appeals to both a middle class readership interested in the development of West Indian identity and culture and the importance of the folk in such processes, as well as to the peasantry and working class, who more often than not do not read Caribbean literature but would listen to performances of it. Commenting on the issue of Caribbean literature and readership, Merle Hodge proposes "developing a modern tradition of popular literature" and "a strong popular theater" that would "counterbalance the easily accessible paperback novel" and television soap operas that have infiltrated the Caribbean from the United States, Canada, England, and Australia ("The Challenges" 207). *No Pain Like This Body* indicates that Ladoo had similar concerns to Hodge about creating literature that had value for and appealed to mass audiences, not simply the middle class elite.

Read side by side, *Guyana Boy* and *No Pain Like This Body* reclaim Indo-Caribbean traditions that have been devalued by formal educational and cultural practices imposed by the colonizers and by Indo-Caribbean communal attempts to transcend the shame of indenture. Moreover, they prevent these traditions from being eclipsed in critical paradigms more attuned to the dominant Afro-Creole culture. Importantly, Kempadoo's and Ladoo's depictions of Indian peasant and working class communities and their engagements with folk belief systems expand the folk paradigm and notions of creolization that often overlook Indo-Caribbean experiences. *Guyana Boy* not only expands the notion of the folk to include the East Indian peasant and working class, but importantly further complicates this category by demonstrating the heterogeneous composition of East Indian folk communities in its foregrounding of Madrassis, who distinctly differ from the dominant Hindu community. Perhaps if *Guyana Boy* (*No Pain Like this Body* was published later) and its exploration of indenture and Indian folk life had been given proper critical evaluation in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there may have been no question about the place of Indo-Caribbean literature in the development of what was then seen as a "folk" ethos in a Caribbean literary tradition. Certainly some re-evaluation was warranted after the 1972 publication of Ladoo's *No Pain Like this Body.* At this juncture, however, Indo-Caribbean literature was still in the process of development and the emergent Indo-Caribbean middle class was still not comfortable with the idea of claiming an indentureship experience. Crucially, writers like Kempadoo and Ladoo as well as the Guyanese poets discussed in the next chapter laid a foundation for and provide models for future generations of Indo-Caribbean writers to explore indentureship, Indo-Caribbean folk practices, and the ways in which aspects of these traditions continue to shape Indo-Caribbean realities.

Moreover, these novels draw attention to the way in which cultural exchange between African and Indian working class groups as well as the transference of folk beliefs and traditions to successive generations within Indian communities required the transformation of Indian mythology to fit the New World landscape. The insertion of Indian folk figures into the realist novel form seen in both novels transcends multiple generic borders and illustrates the ways in which the selected Indo-Caribbean writers find new modes of literary representation to articulate their postcolonial Caribbean experiences. In this way, Kempadoo's and Ladoo's fiction represent the "aesthetic outcome" of displacement and the "creative possibilities of the transnational, 'unhomely' imagination" (Rahim 10). Recognizing the impossibility of returning to "old identities and cultural spaces," these writers demonstrate the ways in which Indian indentures and their descendants struggle to make "a place for [themselves] in an uncertain world" as the writers themselves struggle to find appropriate literary forms to record these experiences (Rahim 10).

Through their emphasis on Indo-Caribbean peasant and working class communities that derive from indentureship, the fictions of Kempadoo and Ladoo invite the reader to more carefully examine notions of the Caribbean, a space with multi-layered and highly differentiated realities. Guyana and Trinidad, in particular, and to a lesser extent, Jamaica, offer opportunities for exploration of the Indian dimension of Caribbean experience. Some parts of the Caribbean may indeed emphasize an Afro-Caribbean reality because of demographics, but across the Caribbean, demographics insist on differentiation. By highlighting the contributions of Indians to Caribbean hybridity and challenging stereotypes of Indians as being a monolithic group that eschew creolization, Kempadoo and Ladoo legitimate Indian claims to cultural space within the region; and, thus, insert Indians into the emerging Caribbean nation and Caribbean literary canon.

The next chapter continues to examine Indo-Caribbean literature from the 1960s and 1970s and its engagement with indentureship and the folk, by focusing on Indo-Guyanese poetry. In this third chapter, I examine the Guyanese nationalist movement and decolonization process through an analysis of Indo-Guyanese poets: Rajkumari Singh, Rooplall Monar, and Mahadai Das. In a polemic political climate, these poets deploy indentureship history and images of indentured workers to insert the contributions of East Indians into the emerging Guyanese socialist national culture. As part of the ethnic group that was the political minority, but the demographic majority, Singh, Monar, and Das advocate for working class unity across racial lines while at the same time they highlight the particular perspectives of the Indo-Guyanese working class and women.

Chapter 4: "Days of the Sahib Are Over:" Nationalist Thoughts and Socialist Politics in Indo-Guyanese Poetry

> The plantation was indeed a world of its own. Or rather it was two worlds: the world of the exploiters and the world of the exploited; the world of whites and the world of nonwhites. One was the world of the managers and the European staff in their splendid mansions; the other world of the labourers in their logies in the 'niggeryard' and the 'bound-coolie-yard.'
>
> ---Cheddi Jagan

Despite colonial discourses that presented African and Indian groups as competitors for economic resources, political power, and geographic space, in his memoir, *The West On Trial: My Fight for Guyana's Freedom*, nationalist leader Cheddi Jagan suggests that the most significant lines within colonial Guianese[83] society did not exist between subordinate groups, but between whites and non-white ethnic groups.[84] Through references to the 'nigger-yard' and the 'bound-coolie-yard,' the living quarters of the enslaved that the indentured inherited, Jagan draws on Asian indentureship and African slavery as well as the continued exploitation of the working class by white capitalism as a means to transcend racial divisions among the two largest Guianese ethnic groups (Africans and Indians) and to promote a working class national consciousness. The second chapter of his memoir further solidifies these connections by detailing British Guiana's past of conquest, genocide, slavery, and indentureship. In this way, Jagan employs a shared history of oppression and the resulting cycle of poverty, dehumanizing living standards, and poor health conditions that marginalized the working class as a means to incite Guyanese people to demand freedom from British imperialism.

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[83] I use Guianese to connote pre-independent British Guiana and Guyanese in reference to post-independent Guyana.

[84] Some historians, including Walter Rodney and Dale Bisnauth, have argued that Indians and Africans have worked with and lived amongst each other since the moment of Indian arrival.

Trained as a dentist in the United States, Jagan became involved in politics upon his return to British Guiana in 1946 and helped to form the nationalist party, the People's Progressive Party (P.P.P) in 1950.[85] Fashioning itself based on Henry Wallace's Progressive party in the U.S. and Norman Manley's People's National party in Jamaica, the P.P.P was a highly organized multi-racial political machine with Jagan as leader and Forbes Burnham as chairman.[86] The Party organized locally through union and community leaders. Establishing cells throughout British Guiana, it drew a majority of its support from industrial workers and agricultural laborers. As Jagan's comments indicate, nationalist politicians mobilized the common history of colonial oppression through slavery and indentureship as well as the continued exploitation of the rural sugar laborers and urban proletariat by the British to unite the Guianese people based on a working class consciousness that elided racial difference. This fragile unity, however, was short-lived. On the eve of independence, the United States and Britain were able to manipulate racial and class tensions within the nationalist movement to cause a split in the P.P.P. between Jagan and Burnham in 1955 and to disempower Jagan's communist government in the early 1960s. The distrust, instability, racism, and classism that resulted continue to plague

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[85] The P.P.P. grew out of the Political Affairs Committee (P.A.C.), which was founded in 1946 by Jagan and others. P.A.C. aimed "to assist the growth and development of Labour and Progressive Movements of British Guiana to the end of establishing a strong, disciplined and enlightened Party, equipped with theory of Scientific Socialism" (qtd. in Spinner 24).

[86] In 1949 Burnham returned to British Guiana from England; although he was absent when most of the groundwork was laid for the rise of the P.P.P., he was granted the prestigious post of chairman due to his scholastic record (Spinner 29).

Guyana's socio-political landscape today. Guyanese writers have long employed literature as a means to work through Guyana's volatile political history. Perhaps the most well-known example of the marriage of literature and politics in this context is the poetry of Martin Carter, who devoted his life and creative work to Guyana's independence, socialist revolution, and struggle for racial harmony.[87]

Arguing that an appreciation of Caribbean literature, especially early Caribbean literature, demands a consideration of Caribbean historical processes, this chapter examines the ways in which Indo-Caribbean literary productions participate in Guyanese national politics. Regional critiques of Caribbean literature de-emphasize the impact of national politics on the development of the Guyanese literary imagination; even Lawrence A. Breiner's important work, *An Introduction to West Indian Poetry,* which offers an overview of Guyanese poetry, does not address the influence of Marxist thought on the nation's poetic tradition.[88] Well before any other Anglophone Caribbean country, in both government and opposition, Guyana had political parties that claimed to espouse Marxism, a political choice that directly influenced the construction of its literature. Focusing on Indo-Guyanese poetry of the 1960s and 1970s, I examine how the works of Rajkumari Singh, Rooplal Monar, and Mahadai Das are shaped by and respond to Guyanese national politics. These creative works demonstrate literature's engagement in the emergence of the postcolonial nation and in the growing self-awareness of individuals and groups within the nation.

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[87] Carter's imprisonment during the 1953 British invasion of British Guiana can be read as a recognition of the link between literature and politics and the importance of literary voices in the articulation of national identity. In prison, Carter composed some of his most political verse. British soldiers seized some of these poems, most likely due to their subversive nature. His imprisonment was most likely brought about not only because he was a key leader of the P.P.P. but because Carter employed literature as a vehicle for social criticism and protest, a point most evident in his public readings of poetry on the streets of Georgetown. Thus, Carter's incarceration demonstrates the immense role writers played in the nationalist movement.

[88] See Breiner 76-81.

Employing their poetry as "cultural weapons of resistance and revolution,"[89] Singh, Monar, and Das attempted to achieve two seemingly paradoxical goals. On the one hand, writing immediately post-independence in the 1960s and 70s when the formation of a national culture was a primary concern, they sought to invoke and re-create the working class nonracial, anti-capitalist sentiments of the nationalist movement of the 1950s, deploying a socialist ethos to present a nationalism that was inclusive of all working class peoples of Guyana. On the other hand, since at this time Indians were the political minority, but the demographic majority, Singh, Monar, and Das foreground race by specifically highlighting Indo-Guyanese contributions to nation building through their portrayals of indentureship history, and indentured and working class Indo-Guyanese figures. In this way, these authors significantly depart from nationalist thought through their direct emphasis on race. Moreover, Singh and Das underscore gender, an issue that was largely omitted from the nationalist rhetoric of male political leaders and male writers of the time. We see a foregrounding of indentureship in Jagan's comments in which he constructs indentureship as an integral part of Guyanese working class history. According to Percy Hinzten, Jagan's brand of Guyanese nationalism "brought the Asian Indian into the coherent peoplehood of an independent nation" (113). Hinzten points out that "In British Guiana, the discourse of purity served historically, until well into the twentieth century, to confine Asian Indians to rural agriculture and to justify their semi-servile status" (110); thus, Jagan's appeal to the shared history of Asian indenture and African slavery and his focus on class consciousness aimed to indirectly legitimate East

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[89] Mahabir "Miraculous Weapons" 1; Mahabir uses this phrase in a different context.

Indian claims to citizenship in the emerging Guyanese nation and to validate his own position as a nationalist leader. Like Jagan, the selected Indo-Guyanese poets establish indentureship as a beginning narrative for the construction of Indian experience within the national cultures of the Caribbean.

My interest in Monar, Singh, and Das stems from their participation in an organization of East Indian creative writers (the Messenger Group) that attempted to employ art for political and social change.[90] In existence from 1973 to 1978, with Singh's home as their headquarters, the literary circle aimed to reclaim and promote *coolie* art forms, or the aspects of Indo-Guyanese culture specifically associated with indentureship and peasant and working class communities, from which many upper-class Indians sought to disassociate themselves. The Group reclaimed the term *coolie* as a way of elevating and celebrating the devalued cultural forms and history it represented. Through their poetic imagining of indentureship and Indian workers toiling the fields, Singh, Monar, and Das countered sections of the ruling party (the People's National Congress) that believed Afro-Creole culture was authentically Guyanese[91] whereas Indo-Guyanese culture was foreign. Additionally they responded to facets of the Indian community that sought the revival of "authentic" Indian culture through such activities as inviting guest dancers and speakers from India and endorsing the Indian film industry instead of recognizing the rich heritage of Indo-Guyanese folk culture.[92] These writers confronted the fractured sense of belonging that was the result of their ancestors' crossing of the *kala pani*.[93] In other words, in their determinedly Indo-Guyanese imaginative constructs, Monar, Singh, and Das highlight the emergence of a postcolonial imaginative Indo-Caribbean reality belonging neither to Britain, the Caribbean, nor India, but influenced and nourished by all three. The group's aims were timely and urgent in a racially polarized postcolonial society. Moreover, as part of compulsory service to the nation, Singh and Das served as active members of the Guyana National Service's cultural wing. While much research still remains to be conducted regarding the group's activities, the poetry of Singh, Monar, and Das serves as evidence of the impact of Guyana's socio-political situation on the shaping of the (Indo)Guyanese imagination. Perhaps their strong commitment to political and social change is most evident in the fact that all three authors (with the exception of Das for a short period) remained in Guyana despite political and social turmoil, lack of significant readership and limited publication opportunities.[94]

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[90] Henry Muttoo, Guska Kissoon, and Gora Singh were also members of the Messenger Group.

[91] These factions included the African Society for Cultural Relations with Independent Africa (ASCRIA) who positioned themselves strategically in the late 1950's and early 1960's in the People's National Congress. Supporting a doctrine of African purity, ASCRIA remained skeptical of cultural hybridity and attempted to produce a Guyanese nationalism that was centered on Africa (Hintzen 116).

[92] Benjamin, Kallicharan, McDonald, and Searwar 42.

Chapter three of this dissertation discussed how former colonized nations attempted to construct a distinct national culture in order to differentiate themselves from the colonizer, to combat the long history of cultural and political domination in the region, and to create an imagined national community among people of difference races, ethnicities, classes, and political affiliations. Frederic Jameson, in an interview, argues that the most “intense moments” of American literature “have always turned around the agonizing problem of what an American culture could possibly be in the first place, and what it might mean to “be” an American – questions which no European would ever have thought of raising in the context of the nation-state” (73-74). Jameson’s statement suggests that unlike European nations whose national culture and national canons legitimate the framework of the classical nation-state, in formerly colonized territories (albeit colonial histories of the United States and of the nations of the Caribbean are very different) questions of what constitutes a national culture and who constitutes a national citizen are consistently being debated. Here I argue that Guyanese literature and the imagination of Guyanese (and Caribbean) writers, particularly in early and mid-twentieth century, are preoccupied by what it means to be a nation-state. I read the rise of Indo-Caribbean literary production of the 1960s and 1970s as a direct result of decolonization and the project of forming a Guyanese national culture based on socialist politics.

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[93] For a detailed discussion on India and the formation of an Indo-Guyanese identity, see Clem Seecharan's *India and the Shaping of the Indo-Guyanese Imagination* and Jeremy Poynting's, "At Homes, Tagore and Jive: Ethnic Identity and the British Guiana Dramatic Society 1936-1948."

[94] The careers of Indo-Guyanese poets who migrate abroad, David Dabydeen (Britain), Sasenarain Persaud (Canada and the U.S.) and Cyril Dabydeen (Canada) have been more lucrative than the poets discussed in this chapter given that historically migration has provided Caribbean and other postcolonial writers with more publication opportunities and broader readerships. It is not until the 1980s, and then progressively from that point, that Indo-Caribbean poetry began to be anthologized and published commercially. *Kyk-Over-Al* (where much of the early works of these writers were published), Guyanese national literary prizes and the independent British publisher, Peepal Tree Press, have all been crucial in promoting their writing (and Indo-Caribbean writing in general). In fact, Monar's *Backdam People* (1985) was the Peepal Tree's first publication.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first focusses on Rajkumari Singh’s literary and political career. Drawing broadly on Partha Chatterjee’s work on nationalism to read Guyana’s turbulent nationalist movement, I demonstrate how nationalist thought profoundly impacts Singh’s ideas on Indianness and culture. This history is pertinent to a general understanding of Guyanese literature; since Guyanese writers frequently refer to the names “Burnham” or “Jagan” or to the P.P.P. (Jagan) or the P.N.C. (Burnham) in their texts, it is important to understand the context for these references and particular perspectives on politics and society that these references assume. A chronological examination of Singh's creative writings illustrates how her perceptions of Indianness transform from essentialism to hybridity and grows to include perspectives on the working class and gender. The final two sections of this chapter address Monar's and Das' engagements with indentureship history and the Indian working class, which both poets construct as integral components of Guyanese national culture. Importantly, my analysis of these two younger poets shows Singh's immense impact on Indo-Guyanese literary production. In each section, I also analyze the myriad ways in which each writer engages with the trope of woman as land seen throughout colonial and postcolonial writings as a metaphor to represent ownership of and belonging to Caribbean territory and nation.

Rajkumari Singh: Negotiating Race, Class, and Gender in Politics and Literature

In this section, I trace the ways in which Singh's political career and civic activities influenced her development as a writer. Since Guyanese nationalist thought profoundly shaped Singh's politics and literature, I outline the events of the independence movement, drawing on Partha Chatterjee's work on Third World nationalism. In her twin roles as Cultural Coordinator of the Guyanese National Service (1973-1978) and as leader of the Messenger Group, Singh significantly impacted the development of Guyanese national culture and Indo-Guyanese literary production; the latter will become more apparent in my analyses of Monar and Das' poetry, which share common thematic concerns. Yet, her literary and political contributions have been largely understudied. Reading her nonfiction and literary pieces alongside her political activities, I argue that Singh's career emblematizes the contradictions facing the (female) Indo-Caribbean author. A chronological approach to Singh's work shows how her perceptions of Indianness and national culture transform from essentialism to hybridity as well as how her preoccupation with race expands to include class and gender.

Arguably the first published Indo-Caribbean female poet, Rajkumari Singh was born in 1923 in British Guiana. Diagnosed with polio at age 6, her condition did not impede her from being a mother of six, a cultural activist, a political leader, and an artist. Singh's first substantial participation in the arts and social activism came through her involvement in the British Guiana Dramatic Society (B.G.D.S.),[95] founded by her mother, Alice Bhagwandai Singh. Rajkumari Singh became an integral member of the B.G.D.S as a teenager in 1940 and held several positions in the association until 1957, including that of President. The B.G.D.S. significantly shaped Singh's ideas on literature and culture, and served as a catalyst for her later literary and political accomplishments.[96] Her submission to the June 1948 edition of *Kyk-over-Al* regarding the organization demonstrates her own investment in preserving ancient Indian cultural forms in her early career:

> Therefore members are striving, in their little way, to acquaint their sister communities in British Guiana with the customs, traditions and beliefs of the Indian community. Why should there be a hotch-potch of the cultures of the Guianese communities to form a Guianese Culture? Let us strive to uphold the

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[95] For more information on the British Guiana Dramatic Society, see Poynting's "At Homes, Tagore and Jive: Ethnic Identity and the British Guiana Dramatic Society 1936-1948."

[96] The B.G.D.S. also considerably impacted the development of a distinct Indo-Guyanese cultural identity. Inaugurated in 1937, the organization served as a space for Indians of various religious backgrounds to unite based on a shared, albeit constructed, sense of ethnic identity. Consequently, membership was limited to Indians and the non-Indian spouses of its members; a practice that was characteristic of the cultural climate of the time as the British Guiana Literary Circle and the Georgetown Dramatic Club were both solely composed of Creoles.

> cultures of our own races and we shall live in peace and harmony- mutually respecting each other's ways and means of life. (40)

At this juncture, Indianness and its preservation appear to be Singh's primary concern. She does not acknowledge that the culture of the colony is the product of the cultural mixing of various groups. Instead she insists that Indian culture (like African culture) exists in its whole, untainted form, exemplifying her belief in one of the dominant paradigms used to analyze Caribbean society: the plural society thesis. As explained in the previous chapter, this theory posits that while different cultural groups share similar types of institutions (i.e. marriage, family, property, religion, economic institutions, language and folklore), these common social institutions "differ in their internal social organization, their institutional activities, and their system of belief and value" (qtd. in Reddock, "Culture" 112); resulting in "cultural plurality."[97] Singh's affirmation that Guianese "strive to uphold the cultures of [their] own races" and her suggestion that these different races respect "each other's ways and means of life," demonstrate the essentialism inherent in the plural society thesis. Within this construction Indian culture and lifestyle (and the other traditions in British Guiana) are figured as homogenous and uncontaminated by other cultural traditions.

The B.D.G.S. represented a particular ethnic and class perspective. Membership was composed of Indian middle class who did not represent the large portion of the Indian population still living on the estates; as late as 1950, this number totaled 43.7 percent of Indians (Poynting, "East Indian" 234). For many elite Indians, persons who had moved up in the society by acquiring property, education, and wealth, the lifestyles of the peasantry and working class populations served as evidence of the history of indentureship that they perceived as a shameful past to be repressed. While estate Indians were of interest to the Guianese Indian elite for political reasons, "they had not yet begun to make any kind of imaginative identification with their lives, such as was made with Seepersad Naipaul's collection of short stories *Gurudeva and other Indian Tales,"* published in 1943 in Trinidad (Poynting, "At Homes" 95).[98] It is not until 1960, as discussed in the previous chapter, that Peter Kempadoo's *Guyana Boy* would offer an imaginative perspective of estate life. The B.D.G.S.'s mission reveals the way in which this outsider status was partly self-imposed by Indians themselves, but also strategically employed to challenge colonial Orientalist discourse and emergent perceptions of an undifferentiated Indian *coolie* identity. The group's appropriation of Indian mythology and literature was in part an attempt by the society's Indian middle class elite membership to prove its distance from the culture and lifestyle of the plantation Indians and to connect to a glorious, ancient Indian heritage that was disrupted by the *kala pani* crossing and the degrading plantation experience.

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[97] See page 89 of this dissertation for more on Smith's plural society thesis.

Partha Chatterjee's work on the emergence of nationalist thought in colonized territories is useful here for understanding the process by which Indian elites internalized the view promoted by colonial authorities and Orientalist discourse that *coolie* culture was debased and backward. Chatterjee argues that cultural consciousness manifests in the first moment of nationalist ideology and becomes in the second moment the discursive foundation for anticolonial nationalist leaders to assemble the people against colonial rule. Taking India as his case study, Chatterjee asserts that this cultural consciousness is usually based on ideas of pre-colonial culture. It is impossible to revert to an imaginary pre-colonial culture to construct a sense of national identity in the Guianese colonial context given the relatively small number of Amerindians and the multiplicity of peoples that have been transplanted and settled in the area, presumably without material culture. The B.D.G.S. attempts to revert to an imagined pre-colonial Indian culture that had a long literary tradition and practiced civic living for four thousand years. In light of Chatterjee, this appropriation of Indian drama can be read as a positive reconstruction of Indian identity in the Caribbean since it directly counters the negative stereotypes associated with the Indian indenture experience and perceptions of Indians as foreign to colonial Creole society; this "positive' rearticulation of identity" "denies colonial pronouncements about the eternal stagnancy and backwardness about the colonized, even as it maintains the cultural dichotomies of the discourse of Orientalism through its mythologization of origins and reifications of tradition" (Persram 85). Rather than adapt the culture of the colonizer wholesale or attempt to assimilate into the emerging African-based Creole culture, the B.G.D.S. resisted European and Afro-Creole cultural forms in their glorifying of ancient India. In this way, the organization marked a significant and, I argue, necessary, step in the formation of postcolonial Indo-Guyanese literary, cultural and national identities; in order to move forward as Guyanese citizens, East Indians had to look back to the imagined mother culture that they had left behind and gain an understanding of it before acknowledging the hybrid culture of their Caribbean present and future.[99] This process is most evident in Rajkumari Singh's own nonfiction and fiction essays.

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[98] While Indo-Trinidadian novelists are more widely published and read than their Indo-Guyanese counterparts, the latter arguably have been more visible and share a more extensive history in regard to poetry.

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[99] This looking back to India is not unlike the travelling voice of Kamau Brathwaite's *The Arrivants,* which suggests go to Africa not to stay, but to return to the Caribbean with a better understanding of its African elements.

To fully appreciate Singh's early conceptualization of Indian culture in pre-independent Guiana and the larger importance of cultural consciousness in nationalist movements, as indicated by Chatterjee, it is important to situate Singh's article in the political climate in which it is written. The *Kyk-over-al* article was written in 1948, only two years before the rise of the nationalist party, the People's Progressive Party (P.P.P). The Party's mission marked an important shift in the development of Guyanese nationalist thought since it was the first time in which the masses became a central concern to politicians. Jagan admits, "I brought a new dimension to the politics of protest, a continuity between the legislature and the street-corner; the legislature was brought to the 'streets' and the 'streets' to the legislature […] The legislature at last became part and parcel of the struggle of the people" (95). Jagan employed his vision of what he termed a Leninist world economy to differentiate himself from previous nationalist politicians, bridging the gap between the masses and elite politicians that spoke *for* but not *to* the majority of the population. Consequently, in the case of British Guiana, there was no unifying principle to nationalist ideology except for the "Marxist-Orientalist" identification of the common experience of the working classes under racist and economic exploitation. Jagan refused to engage "with the sociological consequences of creolization and the political effects of racialized interest" (Persram 92). Thus, despite the fact that his well-known attacks on colonialism reiterated "the politicization of race," "there were no effective policies designed to confront and deal with the social consequences of this politicization" (Persram 92 note 52). This lack of attention to the deep racial biases ingrained in colonial Guianese society ultimately contributed to the failure of Jagan's nationalist vision. Outside forces (Britain and the United States) were able to manipulate racial and class differences to change the trajectory of the independence movement.

While Singh's focus on culture might suggest that she was removed from the politics of the late 1940s and early 1950s, after independence in the 1960s this interest proves crucial to her understanding of the emergent Guyanese national culture and the importance of taking into account both race and class; a position that starkly contrasts to Jagan's vision. Thus, Indo-Guyanese writers of the Messenger Group attempted to employ poetry to bridge the gap between culture and socialist ideology by insinuating Indian Guyanese culture and history into a hybridized Guyanese national culture and composite working class history.

A chronological examination of Singh's creative writing illustrates how her ideas about cultural exchange between the various ethnic groups in Guyana transform from the plural society theory to one of cultural hybridity and unity among working class peoples. We begin to see this change in consciousness in the author's short story, "Karma and the Kaieteur." Published in her 1960 short story compilation, *A Garland of Stories*, the tale depicts the life of Prithvi Rao, a young man from India with a "luxurious life" who "hears the call from Guiana" and embarks on an adventure to the "land of the mighty Kaieteur" (31). The story turns the well-known narrative of the European explorer on its head by depicting the Indian protagonist as a wealthy male adventurer who is mysteriously lured to Guiana rather than the common image of a disenfranchised contract laborer who is duped into traveling to the New World under false pretenses of gaining property and wealth. It further engages with colonial discourse by presenting Guiana as a "hallucination" and "phantasy" (31); Prithvi falls in love with Tara, a "guileless woodland nymph," who lives in the hinterland near Kaieteur Falls (34). By exoticizing and feminizing the Guianese landscape, Singh presents Tara as the land that the male traveler must conquer. Called back to India by a letter from his mother, Prithvi is torn between his duty to his mother and his love for Tara. Further solidifying the metaphor of woman as land, the mother becomes emblematic of India.

The story's construction of India as mother and the Caribbean as lover replicates a literary trope seen in the early Caribbean poetry of white Creoles.[100] For instance, Tom Redcam's 1929 "O, Little Green Island Far Over the Sea" describes England as "brave, patient and true" (14), one who "mothers" the "soul" (11). In contrast, Jamaica is associated with emotion and the heart: "My heart growth tender, dear, far away land" (8). Additionally, H.S. Bunberry's "The Spell of the Tropics," also written in 1929, depicts the Caribbean landscape as "subtle and sweet" (6); a "mistress" (9) who exudes her spell over her "northern lover" (11). Like Redcam and Bunberry, Singh presents her subject as a privileged traveler who engages with the Caribbean landscape primarily for pleasure, unlike the dominant experience of Indian immigrants who were bonded to it through legal obligation and/or economic necessity. Of the Indians who migrated to the New World, few were of upper-class or high-caste background. For instance, the 1892 Annual Report of Emigration from the Port of Calcutta documents that of the 4719 immigrants leaving this port, 189 were "Brahmins and high castes" as opposed to 2118 agriculturalist and 1502 low castes (Bisnauth 46). Singh's protagonist represents this minority, but is also fashioned much more like the English colonial adventurer. On the one hand, Prithvi's position as a free man of privilege grants him mobility between multiple spaces:

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[100] In this case, Creole means a person of European decent born in the West Indies.

between India and Guiana as well as between the coastland and the hinterland within British Guiana. His status allows Singh to explore a plot that would be almost impossible if the protagonist was bonded a plantation laborer. On another level, the narrative perspective demonstrates the influence of English literature and colonial travel writing on Singh's work. I will return to discuss the trope of woman as land seen throughout Caribbean literature later in the Monar section of this chapter.

The protagonist's internal struggle between India and Guiana raises interesting questions regarding home. The powerful lure of Guiana ultimately succeeds in severing Prithvi's ties to India, but he returns to a lonely landscape and a broken heart. The tale ends when his mother dies and he returns to Guiana. Unfortunately, when he returns, he finds that Tara and her father have committed suicide by diving into Kaieteur Falls as a result of Prithvi's absence. What, then, is Singh's message regarding the position of the Indian (male) subject in Guiana? Perhaps Prithvi's failure to unite with his lover suggests the desire, but inability of the East Indian male to fully possess the Guianese landscape. In this early Indo-Caribbean exploration of home, the narrative suggests that in order to be at home in Guiana, Indians must break ties with the motherland, but also recognizes that the process of finding a home space in the New World will be a complex and difficult one.

"Karma and Kaieteur" also raises interesting questions regarding race and cultural belonging. Significantly, Tara's racial background remains ambiguous for most of the story. At first glance, the setting of her home in the hinterland, rather than the typical area of East Indian settlement, the coastland, and the fact that "the wind, the birds, the animals, [and] the trees" are her companions suggests that Tara is of Amerindian descent.

However, her “Brahmin” father discloses her Hindu background, indicating that she, like her male lover, is most likely of East Indian descent. Nonetheless, the narrative ends with references to Amerindian mythological figures Makonima: “the great Spirit of the Fall” and Old Man Kaie “Chief of the Indian tribe in Guiana;” legend has it that the Chief sacrificed himself to Makonima (39). Singh indirectly advocates for cultural hybridity and cultural awareness of Guianese folk traditions by revising the Amerindian legend to portray the story of Indo-Guianese lovers. Since “Karma” describes the Hindu notion of fate and “Kaieteur” refers to an area of the Guyanese landscape primarily inhabited by Amerindians, the story’s title words aptly illustrate this point. The author’s choice to set her fiction in Amerindian territory and her engagement with this mythology gesture to the existence of a creolized environment, but also indigenizes East Indians into the Guianese landscape. The significant themes presented in this early work - Guianese cultural identity and Indianness - become more pronounced as Singh’s involvement in politics increases, and are expanded to include an exploration of indentureship, a keen awareness of women’s oppression, and working class struggles.

Singh becomes involved in politics in the early 1960s, but transfers parties mid-decade from the P.P.P. to the P.N.C. Jeremy Poynting credits this move to her recognizing the need for racial integration in Guyana (“East Indian” 251); however, it can also be read in part as the result of a difference in the ideological approaches of the parties, differences that came to the forefront when the P.P.P. split in 1955. Dominant discourse has characterized the split, which resulted in the creation of P.N.C. under Burnham’s leadership while the P.P.P. remained under Jagan, as one based on racial difference since Jagan drew his support mainly from the predominantly Indian agricultural sector and Burnham from the predominantly African urban proletariat. Since Jagan was promoting African/Indian unity, the P.P.P. schism was mostly likely the result of as an ideological difference in the nationalist thought of the two leaders. Whereas Jagan remained faithful to his communist vision as a strategy for liberation and the reorganization of society, Burnham acutely recognized the danger of Jagan's communist connections and how unpopular it would be with Western leaders; the latter was painfully seen in 1953 when the British sent troops into the colony to suppress Jagan's communist government. Consequently, Burnham carefully cultivated a moderate image in the form of "cooperative socialism," presenting an alternative to Jagan's orthodox communism and the capitalism of the Portuguese candidate Peter d'Aguiar. Leader of the United Forces party (U.F.), d'Aguiar represented the Portuguese, Chinese, and black elite who wanted to protect national and international capital and favored Western political interests (Hinzten 115).

The P.N.C.'s cooperative socialism required a "properly planned program of industrial development" that would focus on the establishment of producer and consumer cooperatives and grant "social size to the little man" ("Extracts" 10). This carefully crafted plan reflects what Chatterjee terms a *passive revolution* that attempts to neutralize "opponents, converting sections of the former ruling classes into allies in a partially reorganized system of government, undertaking economic reforms on a limited scale so as to appropriate the support of the popular masses but keeping them out of any form of direct participation in the processes of governance" (45). Through this plan, Burnham (and the P.N.C.) attempted to gain support from multiple fronts. He emphasized social justice and equal opportunity regardless of race or class, appealing to urban Africans and rural working class Indians. He promised to implement economic reform on a limited scale, such as the P.N.C.'s policy to encourage private enterprise and foreign investment, appealing to the middle class of all ethnic groups. Also, his strategic rhetorical move of espousing socialism rather than communism courted the British government. Since at this time the Labor Party was in office, this calculated strategy gained British approval. The Party's fear of communism made it hesitant to relinquish colonies that would fall under the control of the Soviet Union. Jagan's assertion of Marxist-Leninist ideology no doubt fueled this fear.

When the colony gained partial independence in 1961, Jagan became Prime Minister, overlooking internal affairs, but defense and external matters were still in the hands of the British. From 1962 to 1964, disturbances instigated by outside forces: the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and the British, and by internal opposition of Burnham and d'Aguiar supporters, succeeded in ousting Jagan and the P.P.P. from power in 1964. Burnham's strategy reflects Chatterjee's idea of a *passive revolution* in that the rallying of the masses through the original P.P.P. positioned the colony to demand independence, to the dismay of the elite and colonial forces; but once that moment materialized, Burnham aligned himself with the elite and colonial state, partially distancing himself from the masses in order to achieve the political goal of independence. This move is apparent when, at the recommendation of the British government, Burnham forms a coalition government with d'Aguiar in order to become Premier of British Guiana in December 1964, betraying the socialist foundation of the P.N.C. and the working class constituents who played a major role in the struggle for liberation. Granted on May 26, 1966, independence brought to the Guyanese people disorder and distrust rather than the freedom, racial unity, and equal opportunity that the nationalist movement of the 1950s had promised. State power was (and still is) perceived as belonging to one ethnic group, illustrating the "us versus them" mentality that developed as a result of the combined backhanded practices and policies of British colonialism and American imperialism. In this turbulent socio-political climate Singh, Monar, and Das call for working class coalition across racial lines based on the shared experience of colonial exploitation, common ties to land, and the unified struggle for independence; in doing so, however, they almost always foreground indentureship and Indian working class figures in their literature, gesturing to an acute awareness of race.

Singh's keen understanding of the issues facing post-independent Guyana and the crucial need for harmony among its people is most apparent in her 1968 poem, "Days of the Sahib," part of a self-published collection of the same name (1971):

> Days of the Sahib
> are over
> or should be,
> now that our land is free of the overlord's yoke, - (1-4)

In this first verse, the poem appears to be a universal celebration of the end of colonialism as the first two lines distinctly call attention to Indian linguistic and cultural influences in the use of the Hindi term "Sahib"[101] to represent the colonizer. However, its tone subtly transforms in the third line from one of certainty of the end of oppression to ambivalence. Sandwiched between lines affirming the end of colonial rule, the insertion of "or should be" indicates the notion that there may be a new Sahib. Given the political context in which the poem is written, this line can be read as Singh's subtle indication that the days of tyranny, particularly for Indians but also for the working class and poor in general, might not be over. In this context, "the new Sahib" might be interpreted as a reference to the middle class. Poynting believes that Singh is indicating the black middle class in particular ("East Indian" 251). However, the phrase may gesture to the middle class in general given the (then) recent 1964 coalition between the P.N.C. and the U.F. to overthrow the P.P.P. Additionally, the phrase can also be viewed as a reference to the threat of neo-colonialism in the region as seen locally in the British American invasion of Guyana in 1953, the CIA's involvement in assisting the trade unions to undermine the P.P.P. government in the early 1960s, and Burnham's policy to support foreign investment and aid. Regionally, too, the West Indies dependence on the U.S. increased, notable examples being the significant mining investment capital present in Trinidad (oil) and Jamaica (bauxite) (Hintzen 111). In this context, the poem appears as a subversive critique of Burnham's leadership and his employment of what Chatterjee terms a *passive revolution* to achieve independence. On the one hand, the P.N.C.'s political rhetoric vowed to represent the interests of the working people, but on the other, its political alliances with the British government and elite Guyanese groups contradicted this promise. The poet expresses skepticism and fear of the consequences of such policies.

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[101] The term *sahib* derives from the Hindi word meaning "master" that was commonly used in colonial India (and brought to the New World by East Indians) to refer to a European male.

As the new nation creates its own historical past, presenting alternative histories to colonial narratives, Singh asserts the need to document the struggles of working class people to ensure their preservation in communal and national imaginaries:

> pen the atrocities, o brown offspring's of a brown

people, for posterity needs must be told
that they too have known frustrations! (18-20)

In the poem, Singh's recurring use of the term "brown" rather than designate "Indian" or "African" indicates the inclusion of both groups and their shared experience of colonial tyranny (16 and 18). Significantly, Singh assigns the task of cultural transference to women as the "word" (14) "passe[s] from mother to child" (15); a trope seen in much of Caribbean writing. Moreover, Singh legitimates her own poetic voice as a woman; since she is a descendant of "the brown women" "ravaged" in "the sugarcane" (16). Through the female ancestor's working of the land and the sexual abuse faced in the "shadow of the swaying sugar-cane," the poet gains strength to "pen" this invisible history and to claim Guyana as her own. The concern with women's oppression and resistance established here will become more pronounced in her later work "Per Ajie," which I will return to shortly. Similar to Walcott who warns that New World poets should not limit their poetry "to phonetic pain, the groan of suffering, the curse of revenge,"[102] Singh asserts that this literature should "inspire, rather than burden down/ with complexities of inferiority and hate-" (31-32). In other words, it should celebrate the victory of the oppressed people over colonialism, of the proletariat over capitalism.

The poet employs the language of post-Enlightenment thought to demand that the "rights of men are for all men!" (35), which includes "The right to live,/to love, to stride/ with gait erect" (36-38). Arguing for universal values for all humans across lines of race and class, and perhaps gender, the poem's message comes full circle as the penultimate stanza presents a more unitary working class sensibility than we saw in the first two lines of the poem:

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[102] Walcott, "The Muse of History" 38-39.

> for no force on earth, no, no violence, no terror
> can ever still the spirit of a people
> bred to sacrifice and to achieve! (40-42)

Invoking the nationalist sentiments of the early P.P.P.'s mission through its use of revolutionary language, this verse celebrates the perseverance and hard work of the former indentured and enslaved whose shared experience on the plantation "bred" them to "sacrifice" for and to "achieve" emancipation and independence from their exploiters. In the spirit of Carter, whose poems often called upon its audience for action,[103] by employing such techniques as the repetition of the term "no," Singh encourages the Guyanese people to maintain their revolutionary spirit and continue to resist new forms of internal and external domination. In so doing, Singh derives power from a common colonial history of oppression to promote a unitary vision of Guyanese national identity based on a working class consciousness.

Singh's poem "Per Ajie" (1971) from the same collection, *Days of the Sahib are Over*, shows a preoccupation with working class concerns, but also illustrates a growing awareness of Indianness and gender. The poem demonstrates the poet's stronger sense of ethnic, gender, and poetic identities. From the onset, the title of the national award winning poem, "Per Ajie: A Tribute to the First Immigrant Woman," valorizes the first Indian female indenture who is addressed throughout the piece as "Per Ajie;" "Ajie" is the term used by Indo-Guyanese Hindus for paternal grandmother. Critic Brenda Mehta reveals the significant role Ajie figures play in Indo-Caribbean women's writings. They move “beyond mere archetype to indicate their importance as socio-cultural and historical interpreters who initiate transformative re-evaluations of women’s history and cultural resistance” (Mehta, *Diasporic* 138). While Mehta identifies Singh’s poem as an important work that explores this figure, she focuses her study primarily on novels.[104] The poet imagines Per Ajie as a pioneer figure who braves the *kala pani*. The journey from India to the Caribbean represented a paradox for Hindu migrants. Initially associated with the purging of low castes, convicts and other outcast individuals from society, exiling them from the mainland to surrounding territories, those who traversed the *kala pani* risked contaminating their Hinduness (Mehta, *Diasporic* 5). At the same time, for Hindu women who made up a significant number of the migrants, indentureship presented the possibility for transgressing rigid Hindu patriarchal structures that confined them to abusive familial and communal traditions. This is a concern I will take up in more detail in the next chapter.

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[103] For example, see the poem "All Are Involved" in Carter 104.

The poem challenges colonial construction of Indian women as being powerless objects for male consumption. While the New World grants Per Ajie possibilities of liberation and economic improvement, her status as a single woman leaves her susceptible not only to colonial exploitation but also to sexual abuse. In a dream, a vision of Per Ajie appears to the speaker as the indentured female approaches the shores of Guyana, “Thy dark eyes/ Peering to penetrate/ The misty haze/ Veiling the coast/ of Guyana” (4-8). A dream presents the perfect realm for remembering an apparition that history has forgotten. Per Ajie first views the coastline from a distance as her passage across the *kala pani* concludes. Colonial and male gazes are appropriated by a disenfranchised woman in the poem's positioning of her as the viewer, effectively inverting the typical trope of the Indian woman as the object that is being gazed upon. The figure of the Indian woman is further transformed in the piece's description of the Guyanese land as being "veiled" by a "misty haze." Usurped from the face of the Indian female, the veil is transposed onto the foreign land, calling attention away from the woman's body as sexual object to be conquered. Furthermore, we again encounter the tendency to link woman and land, prevalent in male colonial and postcolonial works and replicated in Singh's own "Karma and the Kaieteur," but, here, the relations of power are revised. As Per Ajie "penetrates" the land with her eyes, she challenges male power over the female body and the New World landscape. The relationship that is established in this first stanza between woman and land will be further developed as the poem progresses. In this manner, Singh's poem situates East Indians in an ancient historical past, particularly revisioning Indian women as the adventurous, strong beings that they were, rather than the exoticized, docile creatures colonial and Indian male centered narratives often represent them to be.[105]

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[104] Ajie figures appear throughout Indo-Caribbean women’s writing including such works as Janice Shinebourne’s *The Last English* Plantation, Lakshmi Persaud’s *Butterfly in the Wind*, Narmala Seecharan’s Tomorrow *is Another Day*, Ryhann Shah’s *The Silent Life,* and Ramabai Espinet’s *The Swinging Bridge*.

Through field work and biological reproduction, Per Ajie further solidifies her connection to the New World as well as legitimates future claims to Guyanese land for her descendants. Per Ajie connects with the strange land of the New World as she sows and cultivates cane: "Guyana's soil/ Two blades you caused / To grow where first /'Twas /But only one" (50-55). By giving life to the cane plant, she simultaneously claims reproductive agency. The poem emphasizes this idea later when it establishes an overt connection between the fruits of the land and her descendants: “Per Ajie, / Couldst thou but see/ The land’s abundance/ Of growing things/ And thy offsprings/ Steeped in thy Philosophy” (66-71). The masculine end rhyme linking the “growing of things” with “thy offspring’s” indicates Per Ajie’s active role in the planting of cane and the birthing of future generations of East Indians who are tied to the land through her cultivation of it. The cane multiplies as a result of her labor and “tears” (59) which “watered/ The blades/ Thou didst sow/ In my land” (62-65). Here, the speaker claims land through the possessive pronoun “my” as an inheritance of Ajie’s physical labor, emotional suffering, and marginalization. In this way, the cane field transforms from a place of inequality where “Sahib’s gaze” (20) violates the “Chastity” of the indentured woman, to a site of belonging and rootedness for the female indenture and for future generations of Indians (26). Additionally, in her construction of Per Ajie’s experience, the poet effectively expands common images of the proletarian to include women and uncovers the multiple layers of exploitation based on race, class, and gender this group suffered under colonialism.

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[105] Researchers have shown that as early as the time of indentureship, Indian women have played an important role in society and have not been the shy, obedient beings that some literature seems to suggest. See Shepherd and the works of Reddock.

At first glance, Singh’s use of archaic language in such phrases as “coudst thou” (67) and “thy,” can be read as colonial mimicry. Yet, given the colonial context of the poem, the language usage exemplifies Singh’s colonial education as well as her appropriation and revision of the language of English poetry. The sporadic infusion of Hindi words including “kismet,” meaning fate (15), and “malas,” meaning garlands made of flowers (5), is typical of Singh’s work that is often composed primarily in Standard English, but includes Indian names and Hindi terms. Although the Hindu sensibility of her literature reflects the dominant Indian in the Caribbean experience, Singh's linguistic choice can be read as an attempt to preserve Indian culture since Indians often to moved away from Indianness as they converted to Christianity and adopted middle class English language and values to pursue educational and professional opportunities. Since the Indian languages of the first Indian arrivals - Urdu and Hindi (mainly Bhojpuri) - are increasingly forgotten by successive generations, the literary recording of elements of these languages becomes a mode of cultural preservation.[106] In this manner, Singh's language preferences can be viewed as a subversive act in a society that devalues Indian language and cultural practices.

Singh's poetry and political career display the tensions facing Indo-Guyanese writers as political and ethnic minorities (albeit they were often the majority demographically), who deploy their creative writing towards establishing a more diverse national cultural landscape. In this regard, Singh appears to have embodied contradictory roles in her literary and political activities. On the one hand, she publicly praised the party's endeavors, especially its efforts to transform Guyanese culture. For instance, in her article "PPP Stumbling Block to Progress," printed on July 14, 1973 in the P.N.C.'s official media, *The New Nation*, Singh argues that the P.P.P. and other ethnically based organizations "were formed to divide the nation along racial lines" (21). Ultimately Singh affirmed that all Guyanese must vote for the People's National Congress; a message further underscored a few pages later with Singh's picture imbedded in a collage of other party supporters under the headline "ALL THESE PEOPLE CAN'T BE WRONG" (28).

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[106] Janice Shinebourne's 1989 novel *The Last English Plantation* explicitly explores the relationship between language and identity in the Guyanese context as each female character's mode of communication strongly ties to sense of self. For a more detailed discussion, see Baksh.

In this way, Singh became visible evidence of the regime's inclusion of non-Afro-Guyanese and women.

On the other hand, she privately and indirectly critiqued the domination of the P.N.C. and its biases as well as avidly promoted Indo-Caribbean culture in her creative writing, as subtly seen in "Days of the Sahib" and as will become more apparent in my discussion of "Per Ajie." Although her commitment to developing Guyanese culture remained constant, her emphasis on Indianness and gender, invisible in the highly censored government newspaper, became more apparent in her creative pieces. In a well-known 1973 essay, "Coolie," published in the *Heritage,* the organ of Singh's literary circle the Messenger Group, the author elevates the term *coolie* from a derogatory one that signifies backwardness and low-class status to a "beautiful" one that represents the "poignancy, tears, defeats, achievements" (87) of "our hard-working, economy-building forefathers" (86). Her essay ends with the proclamation: "I AM COOLIE," affirming a heritage tied to indentureship and peasant and working class people that had been officially and unofficially denied. Moreover, her founding the Messenger Group demonstrates her dedication to Indian ethnic identity and significant contribution to the development of Indo-Guyanese poetry.

In an article titled, "The Cultural Revolution is on . . . National Service," published on June, 15 1974 in *The New Nation*, Singh bluntly stated her position on the role of art in society: "ART FOR ARTS SAKE is a decadent imperialist attitude that cannot be tolerated in Third World and emergent countries. Art has got to be a part of the machinery that moves the Nation forward, and art is irrelevant if it is not related to agriculture –the Mother culture, to industry and to the Ethos of the people" (2). Without directly naming the genre, Singh identifies socialist realism, the primary mode of literature sponsored by the Soviet State in the 1930s, as a major concern of her own writing and prescribes it for other Guyanese artists. According to the 1934 Congress of Soviet Writers, socialist realism "demands of the sincere writer a historically concrete presentation of reality in its revolutionary development. Thus, the veracity and the historically concrete aspect of the artistic representation of reality have to be allied to the task of ideological change and the education of the workers in the spirit of socialism" (qtd. in Robin 11). Within this genre, artists were encouraged to present typical characters in typical situations in a language that was accessible to the working class. In other words, art should be *focused on* the working class and its victorious history against capitalism and should be *for* the working class, to educate the masses on the glories of socialism.

Given the socialist political tradition in both government and opposition, Indo-Guyanese poetry's emphasis on working class figures and working class history can be read as reflecting some aspects of socialist realism. Though socialist realism is never officially mandated as a generic mode by either party, the P.N.C. promoted and politicized art in two significant ways: by hosting Carifesta in 1972,[107] and by establishing the Guyana National Service's cultural wing. In his Carifesta address, Prime Minister Burnham stressed the need for other Caribbean governments to support artists at home in order to discourage expatriation and for them to purchase books for education that reflected "poetry written in the Caribbean and by Caribbean students, Caribbean artists.” He also asserted that this art should “tell us about outstanding events in our own history” and the theme of the artist should be “the artist in society with special reference to the third world” (“Address” iv). While these prescriptions deeply resonated with the post-independent and nation building sentiments across the region (and other newly independent nations in the world), they are also the product of Burnham’s particular avowedly socialist vision. In “Days of the Sahib” and “Per Ajie,” Singh accomplishes this task by carving a space for art and the artist in Guyanese society; Singh depicts the poet as the individual who must record and disseminate counter-histories that challenge colonial and neo-colonial narratives that marginalize the stories of working class people.

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[107] Discussions to hold a Caribbean festival of art took place a few years earlier during Guyanese post-Independence celebrations among key intellectuals such as C.L.R. James, A.J. Seymour, George Lamming and Martin Carter (as Burnham himself acknowledges in his address). Burnham agreed to hold the conference, Carifesta, in Guyana.

As leader of the cultural wing of the Guyana National Service and as founder of the Messenger Group, Singh’s promotion of art in the service of working class struggle strongly influenced Guyanese artists; the impact of these ideas on Monar and Das will certainly become apparent in the later sections of this chapter. In this way, Singh’s work becomes important to an appreciation of the development of perspectives not only on Indo-Guyanese literature, but Indo-Caribbean literature generally. By this time, Singh’s work suggests not an attempt to escape the legacy of indenture, but to claim and explain its importance in the development of political thought and literary expression. Other writers were also important in this regard; as the following sections illustrate, Monar and Das also depict indentureship and the plight of the Indian worker as integral to narratives of Guyanese history, national culture, and literature.

Recognizing Unsung Working Class Heroes

Growing up on a sugar estate has profoundly shaped Rooplall Monar's literary oeuvre. Born in 1945, in East Coast Demerara, colonial British Guiana, Rooplal Monar's poetry and prose primarily focus on the daily-lived realities of Indian working class people. In the previous chapter, I discuss how some Caribbean writers at particular periods in the development of Caribbean writing constructed working class images from a distance, removed mainly by their middle class sensibility. In contrast, Monar's familiarity with estate life places him in a privileged position to record the intimacies of this experience as a participant observer. I situate the writer and his work in the context of Guyanese literature of the period that emphasized notions of socialist realism and asserted that literature should be written in the interests of national development and with a focus on the working people.

His early poems were published in various anthologies, including *New World*, *Kaie* and *Voices*. His first two collections, *Meanings* (1972) and *Patterns* (1983), are currently inaccessible. Based on hours of real-life interviews with elderly Indian sugar estate workers, his short story collection, *Backdam People* (1987), fictionalizes Indo-Guyanese sugar estate communities of the 1930s and 1950s. Deploying the distinctive Creole of the Indo-Guyanese estates, a mixture of rural Guyanese Creole with Creolized Hindi elements, as a mode of narration and dialogue, these Anansi style tales provide a glimpse into marginalized Indian estate villages by recording the linguistic practices, mythologies, and everyday experiences of its inhabitants. Monar's subsequent publications, *Janjhat* (1989) and *High House and Radio* (1992), both chronicle the movement of Indo-Guyanese off the sugar estates, and the loss of community that is the inevitable byproduct of such relocation. Praised as “perhaps the first novel to employ Indo-Guyanese Creole as the language of dialogue and narration” (Pirbhai, *Mythologies* 112), *Janjhat* may also be the first text by a male Indo-Caribbean writer to center on female characters and grant them interiority.[108]

This section examines pieces from Monar’s poetry collection *Koker* (1987), which includes Guyana National Service prize[109] winning poem “The Creole Gang.” Images of motherlessness, unnamed birthplaces, and “forsaken god[s]” of “another horizon” are ubiquitous in these poems, signaling a profound disconnection from India and Indian cultural and religious practices. As Poynting tells us in his introduction to Monar’s collection, the koker, “the Dutch device for controlling the flow of water in and out of the sugar estate, is a perfect image for the boundary point at which Rooplall Monar conducts his deeply felt exploration of the Indo-Caribbean condition” (2-3). This metaphor aptly describes a collection that juxtaposes themes of roots and lineage with those of barrenness and unknown origins, suggesting the fluidity and ambiguity of Indo-Caribbean identity and culture. Moreover, the Guyanese landscape and working class people are integral components of the collection’s thematic concerns; for instance, references to national sites including Chateau Margot,[110] Kykoveral,[111] and Fort

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[108] Harold Ladoo’s *No Pain Like This Body* (discussed in chapter three) is arguably the first Indo-Caribbean novel to place a female character at the center of its narrative though it does not grant her interiority.

[109] In my research, this award is the only evidence linking Monar to the Guyana National Service; since service was compulsory, he may not have been as visibly active in the P.N.C. in the same way that Singh and Das were.

[110] Chateau Margot is a village on the East Coast of Demerara, about six miles from the capital, Georgetown. Once a sugar estate, it is currently the site of an old factory chimney.

[111] Kyk-Over-Al was a Dutch fort in the colony of Essequibo in Guyana. It was constructed in 1616 on an islet in the mouth of the Mazaruni River, and once served as the centre for the Dutch administration of the county. With a name that derives from the Dutch for "see over all," Kyk-Over-Al is now a ruin that is considered a national historic monument.

Nassau[112] as well as images of cane workers, fishermen, “a Brahmin Girl,” and an obeah man saturate *Koker*.

Monar’s general commitment to recognizing the working class is apparent in “The Chimney at Chateau Margot.” While the poem begins with a celebration of the “antique ingenuity” of the landmark from which it draws its title (1), its subject quickly transitions to the plight of the workers who constructed the Chimney. The piece contextualizes the building of the monument in the larger history of colonialism and resistance. The second stanza opens by looking back to Guyana’s pre-British colonial history: “As Dutch masters ravished black virgins/ awaiting the next arrival of the fleet/ to ship hogs-heads and rum” (12-14). Calling attention to the global trade of bodies, animals, and goods, these lines identify black virgins as a commodity in the Dutch commercial capitalist enterprise. In the same stanza the poem moves forward to British colonialism through references to the slave “Quamina” (15) and the English reverend “John Smith” (16), who together led a slave revolt of nearly twelve thousand against the British in Demerara, Guyana in 1823.[113] The revolt was a crucial event in the abolitionist movement. Here, Monar echoes Carter’s celebration of Quamina “who will be a hero when the new freedom comes to Guiana.”[114] Monar’s inclusion of Quamina and John Smith attests to the historical longevity and resilience of the Guyanese people of which the Chateau Margot site is emblematic. In this way, the anti-colonial and anti-capitalist sentiments of the poet’s vision elevate the workers to match the towering figure of the monument.

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[112] Constructed on the eastern bank of the Berbice River circa 1627, the fort was the seat of Government in Berbice prior to the unification of the three colonies Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice in 1831. Built to house about sixty soldiers at a time, the fort was demolished in 1712, rebuilt and destroyed once again in the slave revolt of 1763 to prevent the enslaved from acquiring it.

[113] For more on this subject, see Viotti de Costa.

[114] See “Like the Blood of Quamina” in Carter 68.

Echoing the Marxist societal analysis of Guyana’s political situation, the poem demonstrates a concern more with a working class reality than a distinct Afro-Guyanese or Indo-Guyanese one. Employing simile to compare the Chimney with “the pyramids” (2), the poem inverts this metaphor as it progresses; while the pyramids are designed to be the tombs of pharaohs, Monar imagines the Chimney at Chateau Margot as the tomb of “the builders it has slain” (25) rather than that of the overlord that commissioned its creation: “they walled themselves to create history/ as blood and tears mettled this monument/ that now towers three centuries old/ brooding upon the builders it has slain” (22-25). As the guide in Edwidge Danticat’s *The Farming of Bones* says after showing people the monument built by Henri Cristophe, “Famous men never truly die … It is only those nameless and faceless who vanish like smoke into the early morning air” (280). In a capitalist society, the product of the worker’s labor, the monument, is valued and remembered as “history” while the worker remains forgotten. Synecdoche is deployed to represent the invisibility of the laborers; they are first introduced as the “hands” (8) that “mortared” the form of the monument (7) and later through use of the pronoun “they” (22). The Chimney was built on a sugar estate in 1889, post-emancipation and during the indentureship period, which indicates that it was most likely constructed by a combination of former enslaved or free laborers and indentured workers, groups for whom historically the New World was an “alien land” (4). By connecting the shared experiences of importation and exploitation that Africans and Indians endured as colonial subjects and by portraying the laborers as active agents who “create history” (22), the poet effectively writes indentured and free laborers back into world history. Through its allusions to pivotal moments and key figures in Guyanese history that are often overlooked, the poem ambivalently portrays the monument as a symbol of “saddened moments” (6) as well as one of “triumph” (18) and hope for “another tomorrow” (17). In this way, the site represents the achievement of the worker on one hand and a relic of his exploitation under colonialism on the other.

Whereas the poem “Ko-Ko Moore (B.A),” also explores the emergence of a Guyanese national culture based on working class unity, here, Monar foregrounds the everyday lived realities of working class communities. This one hundred and two line poem foregrounds the life and death of “de best obeah man/ From country village up to town” (4-5); chronicling the religious sycreticism and cultural exchanges between Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese that Ko-Ko’s art engenders (18-21). The speaker relays a vivid episode in the witch doctor's practice: Ko-Ko “lash-out de jumbie/ outa Maacoon […] head” (20-21). In the authoritative voice of an evangelical priest, Ko-Ko performs an exorcism combining the various religious practices of his multi-racial, multi-religious community: ‘In de name a’ Jesus an Maha Kali/ release dis prisoner now or neva/ else me Ko-Ko Moore put yuh in grave for eva” (85-87). A practitioner of “bush medicine” (37), Moore is able to “conqua science medicine” through his employment of “obeah” (56), possessing a “Bachelor of all Black Art” (17); hence the title of the poem, Ko-Ko Moore (B.A). Monar’s portrayal of Moore’s black art reevaluates the indigenous folk knowledge of various Guyanese traditions, illustrating that not only did these practices resist annihilation, but were creolized and continue to transform as interactions between different groups persist. In this way, the poem foregrounds peasant and working class cultural practices that were devalued by British and middle class cultural systems, but were reclaimed as the foundation of literary and political notions of Caribbean national culture, and Guyanese national culture in particular at this political moment. In other words, the poem delineates Indo-Guyanese participation in the vibrant *creolized* folk traditions of the Caribbean.

"Ko-Ko Moore (B.A)." is one of the few poems in the collection that employs Anglophone Creole as its primary mode. Merle Hodge discloses the political implications of Creole as a linguistic medium:

> Ninety-nine percent of Caribbean people, for 99 percent of their waking hours, communicate in a Creole language that is a fusion of West African syntax and the modified vocabulary of one or another European tongue [as well as indigenous Amerindian language]. These languages have stubbornly survived generations of disrespect and active suppression in the home and in the education system. Possibly they have survived because they express *our* personality, our reality, our worldview in a way no other language can. (italics in original 204)

Here Hodge emphasizes the African Caribbean reality, (and its association with Europe and Native America), it is clear from reading Monar's work that Indian Caribbean expression also contributes to the development of a syncretized Creole. Given the socialist national context in which the poem was produced, Monar's use of Creole can be read as a political act that seeks to create literature *about* the masses *for* the masses; in other words, literature that is accessible to the majority non-middle class Guyanese populace. Much like Carter's public readings in the nation's urban capital, Georgetown, Monar's literature was primarily disseminated through public performances in estate communities prior to the publication of *Backdam People* (Lee). Creole allowed the poet to perform his works in the primary language of his audience, making it accessible and relevant to their everyday lives.

The poem eulogizes Ko-Ko's life and the hope of unity among Guyanese that his work embodied. The third stanza laments that "him a gone and dead" (10) "an was not one ahwe pay respc' (12) "so him soul can rest in peace" (14). The poet writes/rights this wrong through his celebration of Ko-Ko, declaring in the last line of the poem "Peace unto him O fadda" (102). In this way, Monar imagines Moore as an influential communal figure who is able to unite diverse constituencies across racial, religious, and geographic lines, transcending the plantocracy's divide and conquer policy that was perpetuated by the British-American invasion; thus, the poet promotes racial unity based on a common working class experience at a time in Guyanese history when politicians were consistently being accused of appealing to a certain race for support and dominant discourse characterized Africans and Indians as being diametrically opposed; as seen in Singh's critique of the P.P.P in the *New Nation*.

The working class impulse of Monar's poetry is also apparent in his poem, "Babu;" but here, East Indian contributions to nation building are underscored:

> Huddled by the front door
> of a decayed, rat-infested logie,
> victim of rain and sun
> Babu's eyes scan the cane field horizon . . . (1-4)

This poem echoes the sentiments of Carter's "I Come from the Nigger Yard" where slavery and the physical spaces of oppression, the barracks and the plantation, are reimagined (Carter 101). For Carter, Guyanese identity is rooted in these past locations:

“It was an aching floor on which I crept/ on my knees/ searching for dust for the trace of a root” (13-15). Making use of the lyrical “I” to represent a collective and to embody the anguish of the slave, Carter imagines the “long days of cruelty and the long nights of pain” (6). Nonetheless, the suffering of the past is channeled into a positive message for the future. The last two lines of Carter’s poem read: “From the nigger yard of yesterday I come with my burden./To the world of to-morrow I turn with my strength.” In a similar manner to the speaker of Carter’s poem that does not look back to Africa, the subject of Monar’s poem, Babu, focuses his eyes on the cane fields before him rather than look beyond the horizon to his ancestral homeland India. From the very beginning of the poem, Monar destabilizes colonial ownership of Guyanese land by appropriating the cane fields as the realm of the Indian indentured laborer. Rather than confine Babu to the “rat-infested logie” at the edges of the plantation where the poem begins, Babu branches out into the cane fields, claiming them as his own. This depiction starkly contrasts to V.S. Naipaul’s confinement of Biswas to the barracks in *A House for Mr. Biswas,* as I discussed in chapter two.

Whereas for Carter the realities of the “nigger yard” are depicted as the past, in Monar’s case the plantation experience is rendered in the present tense, signaling the continuity of Indian exploitation by plantation capitalism from the indentureship period to the poet’s post-independent present. The social relations of the plantation economy are subtly revealed in the poet’s use of synecdoche and metaphor to describe the presence of the overlord: “Whiplash explodes from sunburnt hands/ leering blue eyes in hardened faces/ a jingling of copper coins” (5-7). The poem effectively inverts capitalist colonial narratives that relegate the cane cutter to the margins by focusing primarily on the proletariat in his working environment and by reducing the plantocracy to body parts: "sunburnt hands," "leering eyes" and "hardened faces," and through the material artifacts of capital. "[C]opper coins" represents the system of capitalism that dictates the exploitation of the worker. Far from avoiding discussion of the plantation experience of indentureship, Monar takes it on and accuses the perpetrators.

Stanza four further situates the cane fields as a repository of the history of Indians in Guyana through its use of imagery:

> images of immigrant ships
> barrack confinements
> cutlasses, decapitated women
> dance in the rhythm of seasons

The images of the history of Indians in Guyana presented here haunt Babu as he attempts to connect with land. On the one hand, they represent the struggles of the indentured: the journey across the *kala pani* as "immigrants," the poor condition of the barracks, the brutality of plantation labor as symbolized by the "cutlass," and the "decapitated women." This last image might read as a reference to indentured women who were tragically murdered as the result of the disproportionate numbers of indentured male to indentured women in the early years of the system (see my detailed treatment of this topic in the next chapter). On the other hand, these symbols of indentureship signify elements that have historically hindered Indians from being integrated into Creole society: their status as immigrants and temporary residents, their spatial confinement on the estate, their position as indentured laborers whose primary purpose in the colony was to work the plantation, and perceptions of them as wife-beaters and murderers that perpetuated the images of Indians as uncivilized heathens. The poet's use of enjambment in these lines emphasizes the continuity of this history and its significance in the present and future of Indians in the region. While indentureship constructed Indians as outsiders, paradoxically, it is also the medium through which post-independent claims to national belonging for Indians are articulated.

Monar employs the figure of the cane cutter to challenge images of East Indians as immigrants and transient laborers who worked the Guyanese land, but did not have legitimate claims to it given the plantocracy's ownership of the plantations and British Guiana's position as a colony. The cane cutter thwarts the overseer's attempts to interrupt his vision of and connection to the land as he reappears in the fifth stanza: "In heave of impatience/Babu swirled like a ballet dancer/ strong and flexible" (17-18). Here, the concentration on the body of the proletariat starkly juxtaposes the poet's earlier use of synecdoche to depict the overseer. Babu's "strong and flexible" body that is not disabled by the overseers whiplash or gaze, mimics the movement of the cane that sways in the wind as he becomes one with the plant through his labor; the alignment of body and land becomes particularly significant at the end of the poem where the last line reads, "This land is ours [too][115]" (my brackets 25). He asserts the role of the Indian worker / folk in the construction of Caribbean experience and a Caribbean literary narrative.

Socialist realism demands that the literary piece portray the proletariat's victory over capitalism. In Monar's poem we see this victory play out as Babu triumphs over the colonial overlord in his claiming of land in the temporality of the poem. At the same time, socialism triumphs over capitalism in the poet's reality as Guyana gains independence and embarks on a socialist path. Given the position of Indians as political minorities during the Burnham regime, however, the poem can be read in a different way: as a powerful affirmation of Indian claims to Guyanese national citizenship. Problematically, but consonant with early African Caribbean literary and political representations of national identity, these assertions of national belonging are constructed in gendered terms.

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[115] Interestingly, in *Koker* (1987) the last line in the poem does not include "too," but the version printed in the anthology *They Came in Ships* does.

Monar paints the indentured laborer who will claim national space as specifically male in the sixth (and final) stanza:

> Generations nurtured from my seeds
> will clasp their hands and say
> our ancestors carve those fields
> which have given us meanings
> meanings to stand tall
> This land is ours [too].[116]

Within this literary realm, Monar participates in an important national debate. Much like Burnham's construction of Cuffy as Guyana's national hero, Monar presents Babu as a universal Indian ancestral male figure who is neither tied to religion, caste, nor region. Babu, in a similar fashion to Singh's Per Ajie, sets roots in Guyana in two ways: through his fertilizing and harvesting of the land, *and* through procreation. Patricia Mohammed argues that the recurrent symbol of seed and earth has been transmitted for centuries in

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[116] There are two versions of "Babu": one published in *Koker* in which the word "too" is omitted and another published in the anthology, *They Came in Ships: An Anthology of Guyanese Prose and Poetry*, in which "too" is included. "Too" adds emphasis to the last line of the poem and suggests a more overt claiming of nation and land for Indians in Guyana. It is unclear, however, whether or not this emphasis was included in the original poem and whether or not it was the poet's decision to include or omit the term or that of the editors'.

Indian culture, “the former provided by the male, the latter representing womanhood.” Since the seed establishes the identity of the offspring it was viewed as more significant than the earth in the act of reproduction; the woman “represented by the earth, simply received the seed and provided the warmth and nourishment it needed for growth” (Mohammed, “From Myth” 64). We see this trope manifest in Monar’s poem as a desire of the Indian male psyche to fertilize the land with his seeds in an attempt to both nurture succeeding generations through the bounty of his labor and through parentage; but the poem’s conflation of land and the woman’s womb is indirect, presenting the woman as being less significant in the process of reproduction. In fact, the only reference made to women in Monar’s reconstruction of indentureship history and imagining of Babu’s plantation experience is the reference to “decapitated women;” an image that represents women as passive receptors of violence and one that contrasts to the images of women we see in Das, Singh, and more contemporary Indo-Caribbean women’s writing. Thus, the poem renders invisible the labor relations that insert women into indentureship history and validate their claims to Guyanese land.

In this way, Monar replicates the tendency to present the Caribbean land as the particular possession of the male subject that originated in colonial discourse but surfaces as a recurring trope in postcolonial Caribbean writing; we have already seen the ways in which Singh both appropriates and inverts this trope, but a more detailed treatment is warranted here. In colonial discourse, the land of the New World was typically presented as a virgin to be penetrated and conquered by the European male explorer. Peter Hulme argues that “the relationship between European, native, and land,” was symbolized in the figure of America as woman; within this metaphor native and land were conflated into the likeness of an accessible woman's body (qtd. in Deloughrey, Gosson and Handley 11). Similarly, Carolyn Merchant claims that once the ferocity of the New World was revealed, Europeans would be further motivated to transform nature into a reformed Eden (Deloughrey, Gosson, and Handley 11). This trope surfaces early in the Caribbean poetic tradition, most evident in the poetry of the white Creoles, Bunberry and Redcam, as discussed in the previous section. Moreover, in the work of both Derek Walcott and Kamau Brathwaite, two of the most-well known poets of the region, we see landscape being continuously represented in feminine terms and the Caribbean subject's exploration of this landscape as one of male wanderings. This point is evident in the sailor, Shabine, of Walcott's "The Schooner's Flight" and the black male subjects of Brathwaite's *Arrivants*. The appropriation of the metaphor conflating woman and land by postcolonial Caribbean male writers represents a battle for ownership of the Caribbean landscape, or simply a claiming of ownership as the region is passed from male colonial hands to male postcolonial inheritors. In the 1960s and 1970s in particular, reclaiming and renaming the Caribbean landscape for Caribbean poets was an important component of the decolonizing project. It signaled a claiming of the Caribbean by Caribbean people and presented a way for Caribbean writers to differentiate Caribbean literature from European literary productions. Monar's attempt to claim land for Indians in Guyana in the poet's present is an extremely significant gesture, however, the poem's disposing of women from the processes of reproduction, from indentureship history, and from claims to land and nation remains problematic; yet are entirely consonant with the regional project of identifying the nation.

Mahadai Das: A Universal Working Class Vision

Mahadai Das studied for her Master's at Columbia University and was in a Ph.D. program at the University of Chicago before returning to Guyana due to illness.[117] Born in 1954, the poet tragically died at an early age in 2003. She published four collections of poetry: *I Want to be a Poetess of My People* (1977), *My Finer Steel Will Grow* (1982), *Bones* (1988), and *A Leaf in His Ear: Selected Poems* (2010), which was published posthumously by Peepal Tree Press. Das' first major collection of poetry, *I Want to be a Poetess of My People*, from which the two pieces analyzed in this section originate, was issued by the Guyana National Service in 1977 during her tenure as a member of its cultural wing. It reflects the poet's participation in the revolutionary politics of the P.N.C. when the party initially attempted to integrate the various ethnicities of Guyana's population in order to thwart accusations of being Afrocentric. Denise Narain, one of the few critics who have given substantial attention to Das' poetry, finds that the volume "is propelled by a militant nationalism which Das uses to appeal energetically to Guyanese generally, and to women in particular" (*Contemporary* 171). Narain correctly acknowledges Das' interest in appealing to all Guyanese and women specifically. However, the positioning of "They Came in Ships" as the first poem of the collection strongly indicates Das' sense of pride in her Indian cultural identity and her mission to insert East Indian perspectives into the narrative of Guyanese history.

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[117] Gamaglia and Jackson view Das' migration to the United States as the result of her becoming a political dissident. To substantiate this claim, they point out that the author migrated in 1982, a time when the P.N.C. was becoming increasingly hostile to its opposition, and after the murder of Walter Rodney in 1980 (130).

In “They Came in Ships,” the poet historicizes the movement of Indians into the Caribbean, highlighting the heterogeneous composition of the immigrants in the fourth stanza:

> Some came with dreams of milk and honey riches.
> Others came, fleeing famine
> And death,
> All alike, they came-
> The dancing girls,
> Rajput soldiers – tall and proud
> Escaping the penalty of their pride.
> The stolen wives- afraid and despondent.
> All alike,
> Crossing dark waters.
> Brahmin and Chammar alike
> They came
> At least with hope in their heart
> On the platter of the plantocracy
> They were offered disease and death. (15-29)

The form of the poem aptly reflects its subject; while its shape mimics the movement of the twin sails of a ship,[118] its content relays the movement of Indians into the Caribbean. The stanza outlines the way in which the composition of the indentured population was differentiated based on caste, class, and gender: those “fleeing famine/ And death;” the “dancing girls” who were perhaps cast out by family members or who might have ran away because of their status as single women or widows; the Rajput soldiers whose “pride” led them to challenge British colonial authority in the Sepoy Rebellion only to be punished through death, imprisonment, and exile; “the stolen wives” perhaps snatched by middlemen attempting to reach their quota and gain capital from colonial authorities; and learned “Brahmin” and low-caste “Chamar.” By presenting this survey of Indians from various social categories, in a different way than Singh in “Karma and the Kaieteur,” Das destabilizes the monolithic fixed images of the unlearned, low-caste poor indentured laborer. Moreover, the repetition of “All alike” throughout the stanza emphasizes that migration posed the possibility of leveling class and caste (and to a lesser extent gender) differences. Given the religious taboos surrounding the crossing of the *kala pani*, the journey symbolically made all immigrants low castes. Indentureship also directly contributed to the dismantling of caste difference; for instance, the 1891 Ordinance made no allowance for caste distinction in immigrant housing (Bisnauth 86). While caste distinctions prevailed in the New World as a way of claiming religious superiority, for the most part they faded particularly in regard to employment and living quarters. One of the most well-known literary treatments of the ornamental role of caste among Indian Caribbeans is V.S. Naipaul’s *A House for Mr. Biswas;* the protagonist, Mr. Biswas, who is normally viewed as a burden and annoyance to his extended family is sought out during religious ceremonies and is honored with gifts and the privilege of eating with the pundit. Moreover, Biswas is encouraged to marry his wife, Shama, because they share the same high caste background as Brahmins, despite his inability to support her or himself as a sign-painter. In a different manner from Naipaul, Das' engagement with the dissolution of caste suggests that the shared experience of migration and indentureship contributed to a notion of a collective Indian working class in Guyana.[119]

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[118] Interestingly, subsequent revisions and publications of the poem seen in *The Anthology of Caribbean Literature* and in *They Came in Ships* (an anthology of Indo-Guyanese writing that takes the poem’s name for the anthology’s title) do not retain this form.

Though the dissolving of caste barriers appears as a positive outcome of indentureship, the poem in no way celebrates the system; rather it presents a severe critique of British imperialism. The journey of the indentured begins with images of "dreams of milk and honey" that recruiters promised, but these transform into "death and disease" on "the platter of the plantocracy;" underscoring the realities of plantation capitalism. Metaphors of food recur as the poem and indict the British nation for its mistreatment of the indentured who died "Starving for the want of a crumb of British bread" (32).

In contrast to Monar and Singh who create particular indentured figures as subjects of their poems, Das gains access to indentureship collective memory through a general alignment with ancestry:

> Today, I remember my forefather's gaunted gaze.
> My mind's eye sweeps o'er my children of yesterday
> My children of tomorrow.
> The piracy of innocence.
> The loss of light in their eyes. (30-38)

Here, the speaker envisions, then embodies the hardships of indentureship, ultimately becoming one with the ancestral figure. She moves from being an observer of the atrocities of colonial oppression in the beginning of verse five, “I saw them,” to being one with her “forefather’s gaunted gaze” in stanza six (30). This connection allows her to view with her own “mind’s eye” her “children of yesterday” (31) and her “children of tomorrow” (32). Through her deployment of a lyrical “I,” the poet presents herself as the connection between past generations of Indians in Guyana with future ones,[120] suggesting that her role as a poet places her in a privileged position to preserve indentureship history while at the same time giver her authority to speak for and represent Indo-Guyanese people in general and women in particular both creatively and in her political position as P.N.C. party member.

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[119] As will be discussed in chapter six (see pages 217-219), Shani Mootoo's *He Drown She in the Sea* also explores the notion that the *kala pani* crossing placed all Indians on the same level, despite the attitude of elite middle class Indians in Trinidad who claim superiority (178).

As the poem progresses, it makes an important effort to situate indentureship history as part of Guyanese history overall by highlighting challengers of slavery (Cuffy, Akkarra,[121] and John Smith) and indentureship (Beaumont,[122] Des Voeux,[123] and Crosby[124]); in so doing, Das follows Singh, Monar, and others, including Jagan, by effectively connecting the two histories of colonial domination; a gesture that becomes more pronounced as the collection moves forward. Interestingly, while the poet names particular African and English leaders, she refers to the cry and whimpering “of the coolies” several times in the poem, always describing them in the plural and without names. This omission of particular names of Indian indentured workers can be read in several ways; first, it once again emphasizes the way in which Indian indentureship had remained for the most part invisible in world history in the poet's present; since then historians have reconstructed this history, even identifying the indentured laborer, Bechu, as a significant figure of resistance against the system.[125] Second, it further legitimates the poet's project of recording this history and, like the male figures she cites who championed the plight of the indentures, attempts to give voice to the nameless, whimpering coolies. All three of these poets, then, are concerned with articulating the Indo-Caribbean experience, as a part of the experiences of the developing postcolonial nation

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[120] This is much like the lyrical “I” of Grace Nichols’ 1983 poem, *I is a Long Memoried Woman,* where the “I” represents all women inheriting the past.

[121] Akkarra was one of Cuffy’s lieutenants in the 1763 revolt. For more on this topic, see Williams.

[122] Chief Joseph Beaumont served from 1863 to 1868, but was removed from office because of his empathy for the cause of the indentured.

[123] Stipendiary Magistrate William Des Voeux was well known for his public testimonies about the poor health and working conditions of Indentured laborers (Rodney 40).

[124] An Agent-General, the individual to whom an immigrant could approach in order to resolve disputes with his manager, Crosby was sympathetic to the plight of Indian immigrants (Bisnauth 72).

A shift from a concentration on Indian indentureship to a more whole perception of Guyanese history and identity based on a working class consciousness is particularly apparent in the title piece of the volume, "Does Anyone Hear the Song of the River Wending Its Way Through the Jungle?". The poem profoundly opens with the following two stanzas:

> Make me a poetess of my people.
> Let me too drink the sun that shines in early morning
> Knee-deep paddy-fields
> Drinking droplets dewing on endless acres of cane.
>
> Their life is like a dark river that flows through the jungle.
> No one hears

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[125] See Seecharan's *Bechu*.

Or no one listens when a gurgled protest of beauty escapes its brown
throat,
Civilisation motors her way into quiet songs of billowing cane-
leaves. (1-10)

While, in an initial reading, it may appear that the poet expresses the desire to speak for Indians when she employs the opening phrase "Make me the poetess of my people," as the poem advances it becomes apparent that this claiming refers to *all* working class Guyanese people regardless of race or gender. Through its connection of various parts of the Guyanese topography, the piece suggests a broader vision of Guyana than seen in the poetry discussed thus far in this chapter.

Similar to Singh and Monar, Das emphasizes the cane field as an important image in her references to "paddy-fields" and "cane" (3, 4 and 9), but then directs us to the hinterland and rivers by pointing to individuals whose livelihoods require them to inhabit the land: the hunter (19), the logger (22), the porkknocker (24) and the cane-cutter (30). In a circular fashion the poem returns once more at the end to the fields, tying the two varied landscapes of Guyana together. Through its focus on the range of occupations that labor the land and its linking of Guyana's seemingly distinct landscapes, Das creates a more universal vision of the working people's claim to Guyanese territory than Monar and Singh, and a number of other Indo-Caribbean writers who are more directly engaged with East Indians and spaces of Indian settlement, the coastland and the cane fields; an idea most evident in the words of Indo-Guyanese Canadian poet Cyril Dabydeen: "[I]ndeed the sugar plantation was all for us in Guyana's coastline (we called it *coastland*) – as if it were all the landscape of the country" (58). Das' involvement in

P.N.C. governmental projects aimed at further integrating Amerindians and the hinterland into the nation may have contributed to her broader poetic vision.[126]

Much like Derek Walcott who views the sea as "a grey vault," Das presents the "dark river" as an archive of Guyanese history and as a silent witness of the daily seemingly mundane existence of the Guyanese working class people, as evident in stanza three:

> These same gentle waters have diluted the blood of unnamed heroes-
> Can tell its tales of quiet suffering never quilled on paper memories
> These same quiet veins of water that flow through the land
> Like blood vessels through the flesh of my mother-
> Can tell of childless logies at the edge of fertility,
> Nigga-yards barren of one single beat of a drum.
> British Guiana evening skies untampered by its silent surveillance of
> anguish. (11-18)

Here, Das' imagery overtly invokes Carter's verse particularly in her reference to "Nigga-yards." However, in similar gesture to that seen in Jagan's memoir, Das parallels this image to "logies," the shoddy housing complexes indentureship inherits from slavery in order to connect the two systems of colonial oppression. In his poem "Like the Blood of Quamina," Carter also links the Guyanese topography to history and to the "blood of unnamed heroes": across the dark force of the river/ the hill of fire glows red like fresh blood/ like the blood of Quamina/ flowing through the green forest" (Carter 68). The common linking of body and land by both of these poets is differentiated in two significant ways. Firstly, whereas Carter identifies his unnamed hero, granting Quamina recognition and immortality, Das emphasizes the invisibility of freedom fighters as a group in Guyanese history by omitting particular names. This gesture does not devalue the efforts of revolutionaries such as Quamina, but instead, similar to Monar's rendering of the slain builders, Das recognizes that there are many others who remain unknown even though their opposition to colonial and neo-colonial forms of power are equally important, particularly women. Secondly, Das responds to Carter's (and that of other male writers including Monar) omission of women in his valorizing of male anticolonial leaders by linking gender and land. The many rivers of the Guyanese topography that Carter imagines as Quamina's blood become the veins that flow through the mother's body in Das' reimaging. Das' poem personifies mother earth as the eyewitness of "tales of quiet suffering" that only the immortal land can disseminate.

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[126] In Pauline Melville's well-known Guyanese novel, *The Ventriloquist Tale,* an Amerindian character, Tenga, comments that, "We Amerindian people are fools, you know. We've been colonized twice. First by the Europeans and then by the coastlanders" (54). Tenga suggests that governmental projects to "develop" the hinterland and its inhabitants were often perceived to be neo-colonial initiatives.

Moreover, Das presents a more indirect, but equally or perhaps even more powerful, engagement with gender than we see in Singh's "Per Ajie." The feminist impulse of the poem is disguised by a focus on male subjects and their embodiment of occupations that engage directly with the land; however, a closer analysis of stanza four suggests that women are also central to the poem's composition:

> In the full breast of the forest, there lives a hunter, his
> wife, his sons, …. his daughters.
> By the fall of night, he and the jungle are one. (19-21)

In the second and third lines of this verse, the poet purposely separates the possessive adjective "his" from "wife" with a line break that disrupts male ownership of the female body. In addition, in the same line, ellipsis set apart the word “daughters,” a strategy that further acknowledges the presence of women. Additionally, Das more overtly connects the woman’s body to the Guyanese landscape than Monar and Singh as evident in the line “In the full breast of the forest”; but importantly, she inverts this dominant trope to assert the power of the environment itself and the female poet’s ability to hear and read the earth. Das makes use of gendered metaphors and irony to juxtapose the barracks that remain “childless” and “barren of one single beat of a drum” to the fertile cane fields (15-16). The absence of the beat of a drum, another symbol of fertility, represents both sterility and the lack of joy and happiness typical of plantation existence. Moreover, sterility can be read as symbol of the planters’ lack of interests in the development of Indian families. The poem suggests that cane fields mock the workers’ condition since their work allows the cane to reproduce and flourish, but the fatigue that results might make them impotent or might hinder intimacy. In her connection to land through gendered metaphors and language, Das re-presents the Guyanese land not as something to be conquered by the male subject as seen in the literature of colonial and postcolonial male writers, but as one that provides nourishment to the new nation and its people, and one that must be listened to and read for the trauma that it has encapsulated. In the poet’s imagination the earth transforms into an archive whose meaning, to borrow Glissant’s words, “can only be traced on the underside” (Glissant, *Caribbean* 11).

The most powerful treatment of gender in the poem occurs at the very beginning of the poem, in the first line where the poet calls attention to her own gender as a woman, affirming that she is a poetess, in sharp distinction to a poet. Unlike Singh, whose muse becomes the female cane cutter, Das gains inspiration from a spiritual connection with the land itself. Written at a time when Caribbean male poets are more visible than their female counterparts, Das' assertion is an important claiming of literary space for Caribbean women writers. Furthermore, this first line answers the question that the poem's title poses, by suggesting that through a gendered identification the female poet can read and record the trauma of the landscape. In this way, the female poet derives power from an "alignment with nature and an unequivocal assertion of belonging in body and land" (Narain, "Landscape" 50).

Read side by side, the poetry of Rajkumari Singh, Rooplall Monar, and Mahadai Das demonstrates the way in which the literature produced in this moment in Guyanese literary history was crafted in the service of the working people. Through its emphasis on class consciousness, this literature tells the stories of the Indo-Caribbean folk and demonstrates the active involvement of Indians in the construction of a creolized national narrative. Writing after the P.P.P. schism, when the development of national culture becomes an important national project, an event that brought race to the forefront, Indo-Guyanese poets generally advocated for working class unity while at the same time they highlighted the contributions of the Indo-Guyanese working class to the nation by depicting aspects of indentureship history and images of indentured and free Indian laborers. The inclusion of gender by the women poets in particular can be read as a subversive and brave act given the contemporaneous male dominated political and literary climates. Importantly, the poets of this study claim Guyanese citizenship for those individuals whose occupations tie them to the land in order to project their ownership of the means of production, often invoking indentureship as a means for securing East

Indian claims to territory and national belonging. In their critique of colonial and neocolonial capital, their elevation of working class figures and their vivid representations of the struggles of the worker, Singh, Monar, and Das attempted to move the Guyanese people to continue to strive for the unity, equality, and freedom that independence promised.

The following chapter extends the discussion on gender politics that has begun in this chapter, by specifically focusing on the image of the indentured Indian woman. In my reading of Ramabai Espinet's 2003 novel, *The Swinging Bridge*, I argue that the text responds to colonial and missionary accounts that present indentured Indian women as promiscuous and to Indo-Caribbean male writers who portray these women as docile and passive. Espinet challenges these misrepresentations by foregrounding how these images are shaped by imperial and patriarchal interests that sought to manage the sexuality of Indian women. Additionally, the novel demonstrates the ways in which these images continue to shape narratives of indenture and constructions of Indian womanhood in contemporary Trinidad. Thus, the next chapter and the last share an interest in examining the relationship between indentureship history and authoritative modes of documentation, such as those encapsulated in the imperial archives, and illustrate how the legacy of indenture continues to affect the contemporary lives of Indo-Caribbean people in the Caribbean and the diaspora.

Chapter 5: An Archive of Silence: Indenture, Memory, and Gender in Ramabai Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge*

> "[G]enuine field laborers such as the planters require can be obtained only from among the lowest castes, i.e. from among the non-moral class of the population. A more moral type is found higher in the social scale, but such women would be useless in the fields."[127]
>
> -An Emigration Agent in Calcutta in 1915

Morality was often equated with class in the eyes of the colonial bureaucracy who oversaw the emigration of indentured servants to the British West Indies during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This equation presumed that Indian indentured women were a homogenous group from the lower realms of society and that their class status symbolized their loose morals. Moreover, it juxtaposed these women to their upper class counterparts. While the virtue of Indian middle class women supposedly remained intact, they were deemed unfit for plantation work because of their lack of agricultural experience. This comment from a seemingly minor colonial emissary reflects an image of the indentured Indian woman that is pervasive in colonial and missionary records. Importantly, the emigration agent's remarks also call attention to the ways in which knowledge of the "other" was recorded during the colonial period. Given that indentured women were often illiterate and could not speak or write English, their voices remain unheard in debates surrounding their moral values and their experiences as indentured laborers more broadly. While we have many nineteenth-century travelogues by Anglo-European women travelers, there are almost no documents written by nonwhite women.

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[127] Quoted in Reddock, *Women, Labour and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago: A History* 30.

The autobiographies of Mary Prince (a slave from Bermuda) and Mary Seacole (a healer and business woman of mixed ancestry from Jamaica) are notable exceptions. It is this set of circumstances that makes Gayatri Spivak's question retain its urgency in the Indo-Caribbean context: "As the historical record is made up, who is dropped out, when, and why?" (270).

Drawing on postcolonial theory's ongoing engagement with colonial archives and more recent scholarship dealing with the archives and archival practice,[128] this chapter argues that Indo-Caribbean Canadian writer Ramabai Espinet's novel, *The Swinging Bridge* (2003), intervenes in Caribbean historiography by offering a gendered perspective on indentureship and on the larger history of Indians in Trinidad. Specifically, the novel functions as an alternative archive to the facts and raw materials found in official repositories of collective memory, repositories that are often silent concerning the specific perspectives of Indo-Caribbean women. By reimagining what the life and struggles of the indentured woman might have been like, the novel challenges dominant (mis)representations of this figure seen in colonial records and missionary accounts as well as speeches by Indian nationalists; in their crusade to end indentureship, these nationalists took up the image of the insatiable Indian woman as evidence of the ways in which the system demoralized Indian laborers. In addition, Espinet's text offers an alternative to portrayals of Indian women seen in literature by canonical Caribbean male writers such as Samuel Selvon and Nobel Prize winning author V. S. Naipaul, whose female characters often remain in the shadows of male protagonists.

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[128] For more on the subject of colonial archives, see Stoler, Burton, and Richards.

More than simply a storehouse for governmental records or a transparent source of history, the imperial archive was a crucial component of the success of the 19th century imperialist project. According to Thomas Richards it was “not a building, nor even a collection of texts, but the collectively imagined junction of all that was known or knowable, a fantastic representation of an epistemological master pattern, a virtual focal point for the heterogeneous local knowledge of metropolis and empire” (11). The notion that detailed knowledge of the colonized was critical to gaining and maintaining control of these populations lead to the intentional and comprehensive collection and cataloguing of data from the widespread territories of the British Empire. Colonial records, museums, and social institutions played a central role in creating, disseminating, and perpetuating Orientalist thought.[129] Given the Eurocentric construction of History that the colonial archives buttressed, postcolonial critics have effectively debunked myths of archives as being unbiased depositories of history by demonstrating the way in which these institutions and the materials they house are the products of political, economic, and social processes at particular historical moments.

Rather than cast archives in the traditional image of state-based institutions of information and power, *The Swinging Bridge* theorizes archives as being associated with personal, private, and alternative sites of knowledge and knowledge production. The novel illustrates this idea on two levels. Firstly, the protagonist, Mona Singh, acts as a curator who pieces together her great-grandmother’s “untold story” from fragments of memory existing in family histories, journals, songs, and oral narratives. For Mona, her lack of knowledge about her great-grandmother, the original indenture who came to the New World, represents a larger fracture in her family history and in her identity as an Indian Caribbean woman living in the diaspora. Thus, her reconstruction of Gainder's life is partly an attempt to understand her own sense of self.

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[129] In his groundbreaking work *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said employs the term Orientalism as a way of defining the “systemic discipline by which European culture was able to manage –and even produce- the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively” (3). “European culture gained in strength and identity,” Said writes, “by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (3). Within this construction, the West (the Occidental) was cast as rational, civilized, and Christian whereas the East (the Oriental) was cast as irrational, exotic, and heathen.

Secondly, through its direct engagement with institutions that officially record and disseminate history, the novel calls attention to itself as an archive. To achieve the latter, the text imaginatively engages with the ethnic and gender politics associated with the construction of a museum exhibit commemorating the 150th anniversary of Indian arrival in Trinidad. Several questions are important to our understanding of how *The Swinging Bridge* can be read as an alternative archive: How are communal and national narratives of Indo-Caribbean history constructed at particular moments including the novel's 1995 setting? Which perspectives are validated and which remain invisible or are deliberately hidden? How are these narratives revised to fit postcolonial projects and desires (for belonging)? What strategies can be employed to uncover these buried narratives? Conceptualizing fiction as an archive, as Antoinette Burton argues, "raises crucial questions about the relationship between memory and history and about the role of colonialism itself in shaping what constitutes legitimate 'reliable' evidence of the past" (20).

Reading Imperial Archives

The Swinging Bridge reconstructs the history of Indian migration into Trinidad and Indian indentureship experience through its depiction of the female indentured character, Gainder Beharry. The author employs short italicized entries that frame each of the novel's three sections to relay Gainder's crossing of the *kala pani* from India to the Caribbean. These entries lie outside of the main narrative, which focuses on Gainder's great-granddaughter, Mona Singh. The two narratives finally merge in the last section when Mona pieces together the fragments of her foremother's life. In this way, Espinet employs the novel's structure to draw attention to the fragmented nature of Indo-Caribbean women's history. Gainder leaves India to escape a life of destitution. After the death of her father, her brother arranges her marriage to an older man. Unwilling to accept this fate, she runs away and becomes a *rand*, a singer and dancer in the temple of Shiva; "*[i]t was up some steep steps and they would climb up early in the morning and walk round and round the Shiva statue whole day, praying and chanting. People used to give them money in the day but in the night, men would come and take them*" (italics in original 273). Rejecting a life of continuous sexual abuse, Gainder embarks for the Caribbean to be an indentured laborer; the recruiter promised "*plenty money for easy work*" (italics in original 273). Migration from India to the Caribbean offered Indian women who were the victims of oppressive patriarchal Hindu and communal customs an opportunity for a better life. This group was often made up of widows, women who were in unwanted marriages, and women who were scorned because of illegitimate pregnancies and children. Despite the various circumstances that lead to female migration and the heterogeneous composition of the indentured female population, *The Swinging Bridge* indicates that these women were frequently branded as whores by colonial discourse: "[i]n a book about Christian converts in India [Mona] saw that *rand* meant widow, but also harlot" (italics in original 275). The novel suggests that this association of widows with prostitution influenced colonial and patriarchal attitudes towards indentured Indian women and indicates that this image continues to inform contemporary constructions of Indo-Caribbean history.

In order to investigate how *The Swinging Bridge* engages with representations of Indian indentured women and colonial records more generally, I draw on Spivak's "The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives." In her work, Spivak traces the ways in which colonial documents become History and foregrounds the issue of gender; specifically, she examines how the subaltern woman is represented or, more accurately, her lack of representation in colonial documents. Thus, the essay can help us to frame *The Swinging Bridge*'s critique of archival knowledge since the novel attempts to search for the subaltern Indian indentured woman within the gaps of colonial Trinidadian history.

Spivak's analysis proves useful to understanding *The Swinging Bridge's* critique of representations of indentured women that serve patriarchal and imperial interests and suppress the abuse these women endured during indentureship. Attempting to understand the outlawed custom of *sati* or widow burning from the viewpoint of the widow, Spivak finds that the subaltern woman, in this case the Queen of Sirmur, remains voiceless in colonial records and only appears in these documents when she becomes useful in the colonial project. Spivak examines the account of Captain Geoffrey Birch, an assistant agent of the Governor, who is sent to initiate contact with the people of the Simla Hills, located in the lower Himalayas in 1815.[130] The Rani of Sirmur surfaces briefly in Birch's account when the King is banished. She becomes the immediate guardian of his heir, her son. Given the fact that Sirmur had to be annexed to secure the East India Company's trade routes and frontier against Nepal, Spivak concludes that the Rani "emerges in the archives because of the commercial/territorial interests of the East India Company" (266). She does not significantly appear in these records until she supposedly declares her desire to be a *Sati*. According to Birch, the Rani states that 'her life and the Rajah's are one' (Spivak 267-268). While Birch interprets this statement as the Rani's wish to sacrifice herself at her husband's death, these words can also be read as the Queen's desire to be with the King during his forced exile and/or her desire to escape her own imprisonment in the palace. Responding to Birch, the Governor's Secretary emphasizes the "political importance" of the Rani as guardian of her son and deems that "every means of influence and persuasion should be employed to induce the Ranee to forgoe her supposed determination" (Spivak 269). Subsequent correspondence focuses on the Raja's exile, but does not mention the Rani, leading Spivak to ask: "As the historical record is made up, who is dropped out, when, and why? We remind ourselves of the meticulously tabulated cadets whose existence is considered reasonable enough for the production of the account of history. The Rani emerges only when she is needed in the space of imperial production" (270).

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[130] This collection of documents is housed at the India Office Library in London.

Spivak's analysis of Birch's letters presents a powerful critique of the hegemony of colonial history and foregrounds the limits of representation of the colonial archive. She demonstrates the need not only to read the content of archival materials, but also, perhaps more importantly, to consider the authority of these sources and the contexts in which they were produced. What historical circumstances lead to the representation of some experiences and the exclusion of others? Can the experiences of the subaltern ever be represented? Spivak seems to suggest no: "Caught in the cracks between the production of the archives and indigenous patriarchy, today distanced by the waves of hegemonic 'feminism,' there is no 'real Rani' to be found" (271).

While it is impossible to unearth the true experience of the subaltern, fiction provides a mode of imagining this reality that does not claim to be "truth." Martinican theorist Edouard Glissant posits that "history as a consciousness at work and history as lived experience" are "not the business of historians exclusively." The Caribbean writer "must 'dig deep' into [collective] memory, following the latent signs that he has picked up in the everyday world" to create alternative histories (64). Glissant asks us to consider, "if the written record is 'adequate' for the archives of collective memory?" (64). Literature, Glissant argues, records the collective memory and everyday lived realities that are invisible in official historiography. He makes a case for considering imaginative writing as a legitimate counterarchive to official records of history.

We can read Espinet's work in light of Spivak and Glissant, seeing in it the ways in which the subaltern Indian woman in the Caribbean context is silenced and misrepresented in official records, but also how this experience can be reimagined through fiction. By illuminating the gendered nature of accounts of Indo-Trinidadian history and how these narratives continue to be perpetuated in postcolonial society, *The Swinging Bridge* shows the importance of unearthing female centered historical narratives and presents strategies for doing so. In this way, Espinet's novel acts "as a ghost-archive, a record of alternative possibilities and alternate visions that also, through divergent narrative, highlights and shows as arbitrary the boundaries of the official record" (Booth 277).

“Unfaithful Wives” and “Wife Murders”: Representations of Indentured Women

The Swinging Bridge explores the various ways in which imperial and patriarchal forces undermined the agency of Indian indentured women in the New World through Gainder’s experience. A talented singer of Hindu songs, Gainder uses this gift to earn extra money in order to purchase land in Trinidad after her contract expires; however, she is prevented from doing so because “the estate [refused] to encourage single women to live alone” (248). Subsequently, Gainder weds an early Presbyterian convert, Joshua. After a month of marriage, Joshua forbids her to sing again, limiting her access to the public sphere in a similar manner to the estate official who restricted her access to land. In this way, the novel calls attention to the various forces that coalesced to push Indian women into the domestic sphere and curtail the freedoms they enjoyed as single, independent workers.

To appreciate the novel’s complex portrayal of Indo-Caribbean women’s history, it is important to consider the position indentured women occupied in colonial Trinidad. Scholarship indicates that Indian female plantation laborers had some financial power and exercised more control over their sexuality than in India. In the early years of indenture, single male laborers were preferred, since planters often saw Indians as temporary settlers who would repatriate after their contracts terminated. Additionally, female workers cost more to recruit than males. The relatively small number of Indian female immigrants allowed this group more freedom to choose their own partners without restrictions based on race, religion, or caste. Moreover, they were often in debt since they were paid less than men (who already received meager wages) and money was deducted from their pay for rations. Low pay, poor living conditions, and the consistent threat of sexual assault on the estates often induced women to seek out mates that would take care of them, sometimes leaving one mate for another or having multiple partners. These circumstances fueled male rivalry and jealousy, leading to severe problems on the plantation including "wife-murder, choppings, [and] beatings" (Espinet, *The Swinging Bridge* 248). For instance, of the two hundred and two murders that were recorded in Trinidad between 1872 and 1879, seventy-six of these victims were women (Mohapatra 232). But, rather than investigate the perilous circumstances in which the indentureship system placed Indian women, colonial discourse often attributed the root of the problem to "the type" of women being imported.

In *The Swinging Bridge*, Gainder's singing and her revised Hindu songs reminded Joshua of her social position as a *rand* and represented the disavowed *coolie* culture that the Canadian Presbyterian Church rejected. These performances symbolized Gainder's refusal to conform to prescriptions of Indian womanhood within the home and to uphold notions of Indian Presbyterian respectability outside of it, rupturing the tightly drawn boundary between the public and private spheres that imperial and patriarchal interests sought to impose. Presbyterian missionaries, who began proselytizing among Indians in Trinidad in 1868, strategically employed the notion that indentured women were promiscuous to promote the nuclear family model among East Indians. For instance, John Morton, the first Canadian missionary in the colony, set up a western-style primary education system for Indians that specifically included a special curriculum for Indian girls focused on "protecting" them and teaching them the domestic skills needed to be good wives to Indian male converts (Niranjana 64). This model of education aimed to transform Indian women from independent workers to dependent wives.

In her fiction, Espinet indicates that although Christian conversion offered Indians a means to assimilate to Creole Trinidadian society, it required that they reject Indian religion and cultural traditions. Chapter two of this dissertation outlines the social, economic, and cultural factors that lead to the perception that Indians were foreigners to colonial Trinidadian society.[131] As a result of Canadian Presbyterian missionaries, who began proselytizing among Indians in Trinidad in 1868, an isolated Indo-Creole middle class emerged that was perceived "to be a buffer between the Creole (black) population and rural uneducated Indians (Mehta, "Engendering" 28). Subjected to what Espinet terms a "dual colonization" by British and Canadian interests, the Indian Creole middle class internalized Western values and behaviors as its own, purging everything that was associated with Indianness and indentureship. In *The Swinging Bridge*, Mona reveals that her Indian Creole middle class parents viewed indentureship as an event that occurred "before they were born" and one that "was best forgotten" (29). Additionally, Indianness became part of their identity that was kept "well hidden except at home" (29). In this way, the novel suggests that elite Indian Trinidadians internalized Orientalist colonial discourse that Indianness was primitive and degrading and Creoleness was acceptable and progressive. This dichotomy lead to the perception that Indianness was a private entity to be confined in the home while Creoleness was public culture, a logic that reinforced the image of Indians as outsiders to Creole society rooted in colonialism.

The Swinging Bridge suggests that the estate's refusal to let Gainder exercise her legal right to purchase land pushes her into marriage. By connecting these two events, Espinet calls attention to the ways in which colonial policies, the Presbyterian mission, and Indian patriarchy coalesced to curb Indian women's agency in the New World. For instance, the 1880s marriage laws in Trinidad and British Guiana were created through the joint efforts of the colonial government and the Church to encourage the establishment of East Indian families and to curb Indian women's sexual freedom.[132] The killing of plantation women was used as the justification to implement laws that promoted Indian heterosexual marriages. Official discourse characterized this phenomenon as "wife murder" despite the fact that a significant number of women had been killed, not solely married women. Historian Prabhu Mohapatra asserts that the label "wife murder" allowed colonial officials to rationalize these killings as the products of 'unfaithful' wives and jealous 'cuckold' husbands and to suggest that this phenomenon was brought over through migration rather than characterize it as the result of the scarcity of Indian women or the precarious conditions of indentureship. An appeal made by the Governor of British Guiana in 1871 is instructive here. The Governor requested that the colonial office compare the incidence of wife murders among Indians in the colonies to that of India, arguing that "wife murders are just as prevalent amongst these people in their country as here; and this being so, it would appear that their cause cannot be attributed solely to the changed circumstances […] in this colony or in other colonies to which they have migrated" (qtd. in Mohapatra 235-236). Mohapatra goes on to argue that the 1880s marriage laws were established to "ensure orderly access to women's bodies, by curbing the 'immoral' nature of the [Indian] women and channelize the violent instincts of [Indian] men" (my brackets 250). For instance, by the 1890s the ordinances in

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[131] On the subject of Indian Trinidadians and Creole culture, see Munasinghe.

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[132] Government officials consulted John Morton as they were drafting these laws in Trinidad. Morton also inspired Indian men to petition for amendments that further criminalized women who committed adultery, while Indian men were not held to the same legal and social punishments. For more on this subject, see Mohapatra.

Trinidad had been changed to protect husbands whose wives had left them for another man. In such a case, the husband had the right to seek civil damages and criminal prosecution of the wife; however, a wife whose husband abandoned her for another woman was afforded no such protection. Thus, in the interest of establishing and preserving the patriarchal family, colonial law empowered the husband and curtailed the rights of the wife.

Rather than read colonial documents as transcripts of and/or responses to relations between colonized women and men, or as attempts to save brown women from brown men, Spivak's essay and Espinet's novel show us that we must consider how these accounts were fashioned to suit imperial agendas. Colonial records regarding Indian indentured men and women, such as those concerning the "wife murder phenomenon," centered on the sexuality of indentured women in order to shift public attention from plantation capitalism and the dehumanizing aspects of indentureship. Thus, the severe problems caused by the disproportionate ratio of indentured women to men and the failure of colonial planters to meet the basic needs of the worker were displaced onto the figure of the indentured woman; a voiceless, disadvantaged group that was susceptible to sexual abuse from all levels of the male dominated plantation hierarchy: partners, other laborers, managers, planters, and other colonial agents. A novel like Ramabai Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge* takes on the task of giving voice to this group deliberately made voiceless by colonial policy.

The image of the insatiable indentured woman was internalized by the Indian male psyche, so that rescuing Indian women from the immoral life that indentureship endorsed became a central concern for Indian men both in the Caribbean and India.

Tejaswini Niranjana argues that the indentured woman “could not be accommodated in [Indian] nationalist discourse, except as a victim of colonialism. By 1910 or so, when the campaign against indentureship was gathering momentum, nationalism had already produced the models of domesticity, motherhood and companionate marriage that would make the Indian woman a citizen of the new India” (79). Contrasting the figure of the indentured woman to that of the virtuous middle class Indian woman, who embodied the new India, Indian nationalists denounced indentured women as degenerate and wanton on the one hand, and on the other, blamed colonialism for bringing them to this state. For instance, in his address to the Council of India on March 4 1912, Gopal Krishna Gokhale states:

> Under the law, every hundred male indentured labourers must be accompanied by 40 females. Now very few respectable women can be got to go to these long distances [. . . .] The statutory numbers, therefore, is made up by the recruiters, and as admitted by the Government of India in one of their dispatches to the Secretary of State, by including in it women of admittedly loose morals, with results in the colonies which one had better leave to the imagination of the Council than describe […] As Mr. Jenkins, who was afterwards first Agent of Canada, said in 1870, ‘the women are not recruited for any special work, and they certainly are not taken there for ornamental purposes’. He also speaks of the immoral relations existing not only between many of these women and the men for whom they are taken from this country, but also between them and some of the planters themselves and their overseers. It is a shocking affair altogether, a

> considerable part of the population in some of these colonies being practically illegitimate in its origin (368).

Gokhale’s speech raises a number of important points regarding the way in which indentured women were perceived by indigenous Indian patriarchy. First, he deems them as having “loose morals;” a point that is validated by the authority of the Indian colonial government and the words of Edward Jenkins, an Englishman born in India who wrote a report on indentureship, *The Coolie, His Rights and Wrongs* (1870), and the novel *Lutchmee and Dilloo* (1877). Thus, Gokhale draws on colonial accounts to validate his claim.

Secondly, Gokhale’s speech reveals the idea that the primary purpose of female immigration to the New World was not to increase the number of field laborers, but for these women to be partners to the male indentured laborers “for whom they [were] taken.” This rhetoric suggests the idea that Indian indentured women were the property of indentured men. The fact that the sexuality and reproduction of these women could not be controlled by Indian males in the New World posed a significant threat to Indian male patriarchal systems both in India and abroad. Commenting on the issue, Mahatma Gandhi wrote, ‘The system brings India’s womanhood to utter ruin, destroys all sense of modesty. That in defense of which millions in this country have laid down their lives in the past is lost under it” (qtd. in Niranjana 79). Thus, one of the primary arguments made by Indian nationalists against indentureship focused on the need to safeguard the chastity of Indian female migrants. As Gandhi’s words indicate, protecting the virtue of the Indian woman was historically (and according to Hindu philosophy) seen to be the duty of the Indian patriarchy.

In summary, during the colonial period independent, disengaged, and sexually active indentured women were viewed as a threat to multiple parties. To Indian men both in India and in the New World, these women subverted prescriptions of Indian womanhood. Specifically, for Indian males in the Caribbean, liaisons between indentured women and men of other races were perceived to be a form of emasculation, a condition male indentures already experienced as outsiders to Creole society. To missionaries, disengaged indentured women disrupted the nuclear family mold and the monogamy that Christianity promoted. To colonial authorities, these women were at the root of many plantation disruptions; thus, taming them into the domestic would prove to abolitionists in Britain and nationalists in India that the plantation was a civilizing mechanism and indentureship was a benevolent system for *coolies*. By the end of indentureship in 1917, several factors coalesced to confine Indian women to the private sphere once again as they had been in India: the increased number of female immigrants, the establishment of villages, the responsibilities of childbearing and childrearing, the influence of Christianity, and the endurance of traditional Indian cultural values. Consequently, the voices of indentured women remain absent from official reports.

Since the early 1990s**,** the erasure of women's contribution to Caribbean historiography and Caribbean literature has been consistently challenged.[133] This significant corpus of critical work has demonstrated that while women have historically made significant social, economic, political, and literary contributions to Caribbean society, their efforts have been marginalized by imperial and patriarchal interests. The pioneering work of Patricia Mohammed, Rhoda Reddock, Verene Shepherd, and others has revealed the widespread exclusion of Indo-Caribbean women from dominant versions of Caribbean historiography. As academic critic and creative writer, Espinet has been one of the first in Caribbean literary studies to address this silencing of Indo-Caribbean women's experiences. Her groundbreaking 1989 article, "The Invisible Woman in West Indian Fiction," made a significant critical intervention by pointing to what she terms "the phenomenon of invisibility" or the failure of Indo-Caribbean male writers, such as V.S. Naipaul and Samuel Selvon, to present fully developed, complex Indian female characters. These depictions often restrict Indian women to the home and present them as secondary characters that support male protagonists as wives, mothers, and sisters. For instance, in Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* the mother of the protagonist, Bipti, remains on the fringes of the narrative and is largely written out of the text once she becomes increasingly "useless and impenetrable" to her son (Naipaul 39). Even Harold Ladoo's *No Pain Like this Body* that importantly centers on the experience of a female indentured woman, Ma, and her family, fails to grant the woman character interiority. Perhaps the domesticated, asexual female characters we see in literature by Indo-Caribbean males are a result of the pervasive association of indentured women with promiscuity and the widespread move to confine Indian women to the home. In contrast, Indo-Caribbean women writers, such as Espinet, have responded to these misrepresentations by interrogating Indo-Caribbean women's subjectivity and by attempting to create complex Indo-Caribbean women characters, filling in the gaps of our knowledge about this subaltern group through fiction.

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[133] See O'Callaghan's *Woman Version: Theoretical Approaches to West Indian Fiction by Women,* Cudjoe's *Caribbean Women Writer's Essays from the First International Conference*, Davies and Fido's *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean women and Literature*, Davies' *Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*, Chancy's *Searching for Safe Spaces: Afro-Caribbean Women Writers in Exile,* Mehta's *Diasporic Dislocations*, Shepherd's *Caribbean Women and History*, and Kanhai's *Matikor: The Politics of Identity for Indo-Caribbean Women* and *Bindi: the Multifaceted Lives of Indo-Caribbean Women.*

Excavating a History of Violence

In the late 1980s, Indo-Caribbean female authors began publishing full-length novels that provided more complex, dynamic, and heterogeneous images of Indo-Caribbean women.[134] The growing number of Indo-Caribbean women novelists and poets attests to the blossoming sub-field of Indo-Caribbean women's literature. These authors, however, have not received much scholarly attention. The recent publication of full-length critical works in this area indicates that this oversight is being rectified. The interdisciplinary edited collections of Rosanne Kanhai, *Matikor: The Politics of Identity for Indo-Caribbean Women* (1999) and *Bindi: The Multifaceted Lives of Indo-Caribbean Women* (2011) are invaluable contributions that bring together interdisciplinary perspectives on Indo-Caribbean women's cultural productions. Additionally, Brinda Mehta's *Diasporic Dislocations: Indo-Caribbean Women Writer's Negotiate the Kala Pani* (2004), the first monograph to consider Indo-Caribbean women's writing exclusively, and Joy Mahabir and Miriam Pirbhai's *Critical Perspectives on Indo-Caribbean Women's Writing* (2013), the first edited collection to provide a sustained analysis of this topic from a variety of theoretical approaches, also give critical insight into this body of work. Given the multiple levels of erasure that characterizes Indo-Caribbean women's histories, of which Gainder's story is an example, what strategies can be employed to unearth them? In what forms are these histories stored? *The Swinging Bridge* suggests that through memory and artifacts of the home, feminist histories can be recovered.

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[134] Janice Shinebourne's *Timepiece* (1986) and Lakshmi Persaud's *Butterfly in the Wind* (1989) were the first two novels by Indo-Caribbean women.

A researcher for Canadian films and a scholarship student at the University of Montreal, Mona is portrayed in the novel as the archivist who must collect and preserve Gainder's biography. Mona returns to Trinidad from Canada to fulfill her brother's dying wish: for her to purchase her grandfather's land, the place of their childhood years. Mona's family migrates to Canada in the 1960s to escape economic distress and increase discrimination against Indians in post independent Trinidad. If *A House for Mr. Biswas* can be read as a narrative about a colonial diasporic subject's preoccupation with setting down roots in colonial Trinidad, *The Swinging Bridge* can be read as a narrative about a postcolonial diasporic subject's attempt to excavate roots. Mona's quest for familial land quickly transforms into one for familial origins as her return to Trinidad sparks a desire to learn about her family history: "For generations the members of our family had all come to consciousness in the same place, rooted to the same place, rooted to the same spot on the island… Then, in my generation, everything had changed" (151). As a third generation Indian Trinidadian of Christian background, Mona claims "roots" in Trinidad rather than India; however, migration paired with the repression of her traumatic memories of home result in the severing of Mona's ties to Trinidad and the family history embedded in its landscape: "I imagine that something of me, and of all our lives here, lies buried in [the land]" (269-270). The indentured woman, embodied in the text as Gainder, emerges in the novel as the means by which Indo-Caribbean family and communal history can be reconstructed. By reconstructing Gainder's story, Mona reconstructs her family's history in Trinidad, solidifying her own claims to Trinidad as home and exploring her identity as an Indian Trinidadian; an identity that was fractured by her parents' Indo-Presbyterian worldview, by migration to Canada, and by her position as an immigrant of color in Canada.

In the novel, when Joshua forbids Gainder to sing, he not only suppresses her voice, but also sets into motion a series of events that almost completely effaces her from the family story. When reading "the official story of the family," Mona finds that Gainder's life is relegated to three sentences: "*Lily's mother was named Gainder. She came from India in the nineteenth century. She died in childbirth*" (271). Moreover, Gainder's son-in-law, Jamesie had "ripped out [her] songs" (271). Layers of female suppression are uncovered as Jamesie reenacts Joshua's violence by extracting Gainder's songs from the book of the family's past, rupturing Mona's ties to her maternal lineage and to the history of indentureship.

Memory is identified in *The Swinging Bridge* as a site of "legitimate historical practice" to borrow Antoinette Burton's words (102). The recurring image of the camera most aptly represents Mona's preoccupation with preserving the past: "If I had got the camera I wanted that Christmas long ago instead of a silly old pair of field glasses, we would have had lots of photographs" (16). Her inability to physically record memories leads Mona to psychologically attempt to retain them: "but the field glasses were not a camera, and all the snapshots I wanted of objects and places and people came and went in my head in a never-ending kaleidoscope, folding and unfolding in a crazy sequence" (34). Here, through its careful attention to the process in which the mind stores images and information, the novel makes a case for legitimating memory as history in the absence of documented evidence. David Scott situates memory as a powerful tool that counters history:

> The virtue of memory, so it is sometimes said, is that unlike history, it is openly partial, selective, fragmentary, allusive, nonlinear. If history commemorates the achievements of dominant powers, the prerogatives and interests of states and empires, for example, memory recalls, often in the minor key of pathos, the stories of those who have been excluded and marginalized by those powers: the dispossessed, the disregarded, the disempowered. (ix-x)

Scott identifies the practice of memory as an empowering act for those in the periphery; in particular, memory challenges history's claim to presenting "truth" and often fills in the gaps of official historiography. Unlike an official archive that classifies materials that are later drawn upon to produce a progressive linear narrative, memory works in a circular fashion, as *The Swinging Bridge* indicates, a "never-ending kaleidoscope, folding and unfolding in a crazy sequence."

In her narrative, Espinet presents two modes of memory that allow history to be encapsulated: through material artifacts of the home and through orality. A number of scholars have identified the domestic specifically as an important site of historical memory. As Bhabha writes, "the intimate recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasion" ("The World" 141). Both Bhabha and Burton point to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* as a powerful example of the way in which memory is stored in the physical space of the home; the house in *Beloved* "stands quite literally, at the intersection of past and present, serving as the concrete yet ghostly site for the reenactment and reproduction of African American history" (Burton 7). Given that the domestic is often the site of women's confinement, the house becomes a space saturated with female history and resistance. In Espinet's narrative this process occurs through

Mona's remembering of and excavation of the "ugly and violence locked inside the family walls" of the Indian Trinidadian home, the particular houses that her family has inhabited (15). These spaces house repressed memories of her own life and family history, and by extension the history of Indians in Trinidad.

Mona's transcontinental research leads her from the attic of her family home in Canada to the library and storeroom of her grandmother's house in Trinidad. Searching through old bookcases and in boxes filled with "all kinds of junk" for the missing pages from Jamesie's family history that contain information about Gainder's life, Mona encounters the shop books of Gainder's daughter, Lily. Within these books were details of Lily's daily trips to the village shops and encoded passages about Gainder:

> I scrutinized the pages carefully and saw that some of the shop books had whole passages about Gainder Beharry. Facts about her –the ship *Artist* was the one in which she had left India, in 1879. I went through the shop books madly after that, searching and searching. The ones at the very bottom of the box were beginning to be gnawed by mice and bugs, and I jumped back as a few insects scuttled away. … Finally, by combining Lily's jottings in several of her books, I was able to piece together the story of my great-grandmother. (272-273)

As Njelle Hamilton insightfully suggests, Lily's recordings challenge the assumption that "Indo-Caribbean women's silence in history and literary documents means a lack of voice, here we have generations of writing women in Mona's family, leaving behind written records of their lives and selves" (85). The seemingly mundane records of everyday life encode fragments of Gainder's story. Thus, the novel presents the domestic space as a site through which history is stored and a gendered perspective of Indo-

Caribbean history can be reimagined. In so doing, it links the personal private history of a woman and a family to the wider communal and public memory of indentureship.

In addition to artifacts of the home, Espinet identifies orality as a significant means through which a female centered historical narrative can be reconstructed. More than simply a means of orally recording and transferring communal knowledge, orality can be defined as an “underground female expression” that stresses “the importance of primeval bonds among women, the creation of politicized female spaces that override the uniformity of colonial and patriarchal readings” (Mehta, *Diasporic* 140).

In *The Swinging Bridge* Gainder participates in a long tradition of *Ramayana*[135] singing, “not the real Ramayana” but “the kind that village women would sing” (251). The appropriation of these Hindu religious songs by women surfaces early in the novel through the figure of Baboonie, who employs them as a way to overcome her marginalization in the Indian community. Baboonie’s status as widow and single woman makes her vulnerable to sexual violence from Indian men, who habitually invade her home and rape her (112). Her example further demonstrates the way in which the figure of the widow poses a threat to patriarchy, but it also shows the contradictions inherent in the construction of Indian femininity. On the one hand, a widow must remain without sexual desire and faithful to the memory of her husband by not taking any sexual partners; on the other hand, in upholding these restrictions she becomes prey to sexual violence from men. Additionally, her devalued status makes her unattractive to potential male suitors. Rather than recognizing Baboonie as a victim of rape, the community brands her as a prostitute. Espinet’s detailed handling of the plight of the Hindu widow in colonial Trinidad starkly contrasts to that of Naipaul in *A House for Mr. Biswas*, where Bipti's position as a widow and the negative attitudes and scant economic opportunities associated with such an identity are given little consideration. [136]

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[135] For a more comprehensive discussion of the *Ramayana* and its depiction in Indo-Caribbean, see pages 97-98 of this dissertation.

Espinet constructs *female* engagement with the *Ramayana* as a powerful mode of resistance and survival. Paradoxically, the songs that promote female purity are appropriated and reconstructed by the widow, Baboonie, to voice her oppression. While lying in bed one night, Mona hears Baboonie "crying through the rain, breaking up the classical words of the Ramayana with her own tale of exile and banishment, and in broken chords and unexpected riffs telling the story of a race. Of racial and tribal grief, of banishment, of the test of purity" (113). This act of appropriation is what Ketu H. Katrak terms "covert resistance," which is "couched in folktales, mythology, religious scripture, popular culture, uses of magic and obeah" (58). Covert resistance is a significant means of survival for women for whom overt acts of resistance may have grave consequences. Katrak goes on to say that in the *Ramayana*, "the figure of Sita, contrary to its classical representation as a model of silent suffering and self-sacrifice, also provides, in folk and popular versions, resistance to patriarchy" (58). In the novel, Baboonie dissects the epic into "broken chords" and "unexpected riffs," using it as a form of covert resistance to subvert the gender inequalities present in the Indian Trinidadian community and imbedded in the epics themselves. Symbolically Baboonie can be read as the embodiment of both Lord Ram and his wife the Goddess Sita; the widow's allusion to Ram's exile represents her own "banishment." Similarly, as Sita must undergo the "test of purity" in the mythic realm, Baboonie must prove her chastity as a widow in the real one. Her failure to do so, though involuntary, is punished by her rejection from the community. Sita's trial by fire becomes Baboonie's hell on earth.

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[136] In *A House for Mr. Biswas,* Bipti's inability to take care of her children after the death of her husband eclipses her efforts to be a caring mother; leading Biswas to blame her for their poverty; he tells her, 'You have never done a thing for me. You are a pauper" (63). In this moment, Biswas and the novel, fail to recognize the socially constructed position of, and limited economic opportunities available to, Indian women in general and Hindu widows in particular in colonial Trinidad.

In a similar manner to the case of Baboonie, Gainder's revision of *Ramayana* verse represents a mode of underground female expression, but it also serves as a significant vehicle for preserving and transferring communal history. With the help of a local *rand,* Mona translates and reconstructs Gainder's songs, discovering that one had become a "popular chutney love song whose composer was long forgotten." The songs "told a tale of love and loss, distance, journeying, hope, hardship piled upon hardship, and in the end, the triumph of fidelity" (293). As Rodolphe Solbias argues in his reading of Espinet's text, the songs "appear as archives containing knowledge about the migrations to Trinidad of independent Indian women who resisted male domination during the journey, an aspect of Indian female memory that needs to be reconnected to other historical accounts of Indian arrival in the Caribbean if Mona is to have a complete picture of her ancestral past" (234). The main site for preservation and transference of these songs is the female centered wedding ceremony, the *Matikor*.[137] Identified by scholars as an important site of female knowledge production and conservation, [138] the *Matikor* takes "place the night before the wedding when only women gathered, and through bawdy songs and lewd dances, love songs and open talk, the bride was instructed into the mysteries that awaited her marriage" (277). This women only space alleviates the imposition of the male gaze, enabling the female expression of pleasure through suggestive dancing and parodying of sex roles, including the use of props such as an eggplant to symbolize the phallus. In this way, the *Matikor* can be read as "an intergenerational ceremony of sexual repossession by Indo-Caribbean women who establish a legacy of feminist cultural resistance to sexual subordination" (Mehta, *Diasporic* 220). The specificity of Gainder's experience is erased in the popular version of the song and she is not acknowledged as its composer or its subject. The significant themes with which it engages, including female agency and resistance, are transposed from generation to generation, ensuring their preservation in collective memory. In this way, Espinet depicts how women centered spaces and practices provide windows into female histories and knowledges that are not presented in colonial, missionary, and patriarchal representations of Indian colonial women. At the same time, a case is made for investigating individual histories (as presented in Mona's search for Gainder) that are inherently linked to collective ones.

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[137] Alternative spellings of this term include *Maaticoore, Maticore,* and *Matti korwah*.

[138] For more on this subject, see Kanhai's *Matikor: The Politics of Identity for Indo-Caribbean Women* and Mehta's *Diasporic Dislocations*.

By presenting the domestic as a space through which the narrative of the indentured woman can be reconstructed, Espinet's work challenges the authority of official institutions of history. *The Swinging Bridge* imagines the type of institution with which it is engaging in the example of a museum exhibit commemorating the 150th anniversary of Indian arrival to Trinidad. Featuring "artifacts, objects, and precious mementoes from the Indian past," such as "chuntas, calchuls, a whole clay chulah, peerahs, pooknis, belnas, tawas, lotas, tarias, [and] hammocks" that were brought from India "or made [in Trinidad] out of skills that had survived the crossing," the exhibit can be read as a symbol for official institutions of national memory (282-283). The exhibit makes visible the contributions of Indians to the country's history and culture on the national level, visually legitimating Indian claims to Trinidadian citizenship.

Nonetheless, Espinet suggests that even in contemporary constructions of Indian Trinidadian history and communal identity, colonial anxieties surrounding the figure of the indentured woman reemerge. While Mona's cousin Bess agrees to display the lyrics of Gainder's song in the exhibit, she refuses to accompany it with Gainder's biography because it is a story of female agency that transgresses patriarchal prescriptions of Indian womanhood. Bess admits, "The grand picture is still what everybody wants. The righteous Indian family, intact, coming across the *kala pani* together [. . .] Not a journey of young widows looking for a new life" (297). Here, the novel reveals the way in which contemporary anxieties about the sexual purity of Indian women are folded into a historical imagination in which Indian women crossed the *kala pani* as wives and daughters, safeguarded by male patriarchy. The museum becomes an object of surveillance and site of knowledge production that consolidates and defends ethnic identification with particular pasts. The sanitized history of the exhibit rewrites Indo-Trinidadian history as one in which Indian women remained "pure" in the confines of the patriarchal household, evading narratives of single women, interracial sex, and promiscuity. In so doing, it suggests that the patriarchal stronghold on Indian women was untouched by the experiences of migration and colonialism and that the tightly knit Indian family migrated and remained together through these processes, effectively wiping out the history of abuse indentured women suffered on the plantation and their resistance to marginalization. Additionally, the range of intimate relations that existed on plantations is collapsed. Narratives that erase Indian women's sexual freedom also make invisible relations between individuals that transcended the rigid management of intimacy based on race, class, and sexuality; demonstrating the success of imperial strategies that worked to confine Indian women and to present the East Indian family as a successful product of the civilizing mechanisms of the plantation and the Presbyterian Church.

Moreover, the novel indicates that this sanitizing of the Indo-Trinidadian history by Indian male nationalists is an extension of the *jahaji bhai* (Hindu/Urdu term meaning ship brother) bonds established during the Atlantic crossings:

> They clung together, these shipmates, boiling with anger and shame at having to settle for other men's leavings, having to take for their wives rands, own way women who had tasted freedom and refused to bargain for less. Banding together for strength, these *jahaji bhais* devised new codes that would force women down on their knees, back into countless acts of self-immolation. (297)

Jahaji bhai relationships proved an invaluable defensive strategy to survive the alienation and the emasculation of Indian men in the Caribbean, but conversely contributed to the oppression of Indian women. Joshua's literal and Jamesie's symbolic restraining of Gainder's creative voice can be read as manifestations of the *jahaji bhai* union, but more problematically, the exclusion of Gainder's image, that of the indentured woman who subverts the mold of Indian femininity, from the contemporary museum exhibit demonstrates the way in which these bonds continue to dictate relations between Indian men and women and perceptions of Indian women in Trinidad.

Scholar Mariam Pirbhai offers *Jahajin-bhain,* a feminization of the more common *jahaji-bhai*, as a way to characterize the first generation of female migrants who experienced the process of recruitment, transplantation and resettlement in the plantation colony. Translated as ‘ship-sister,’ *Jahajin-bhain*, Pirbhai posits, describes the bonds forged by young girls and women traveling alone across the *kala pani* as indentured labor to the British Caribbean and other plantation colonies, relationships that intensified on the plantation (“Recasting” 25). *The Swinging Bridge* demonstrates that *Jahajin-bhain* bonds can travel across time and space through Mona’s feminist reconstruction of Gainder’s story that allows the protagonist to fill gaps in her own identity as well as participate in feminist historiography. Thus, the model of Indo-Caribbean feminism engendered by the indentured woman is practiced by subsequent generations of females such as Mona and, one might argue, in real life by Espinet herself.

Through her reimagining of the indentured woman and indentureship history, Espinet reconstructs Indo-Caribbean women as agents of history and presents possibilities for exploring Indo-Caribbean identities shaped by migration, gender, and colonialism. In this light, *The Swinging Bridge* can be read as a counterarchive to institutions that historically silence the stories of Indo-Caribbean women and continue to place them as passive subjects within the confines of patriarchy and imperialism. While the novel identifies the domestic as a site of female marginalization, it also presents it as a significant space in which women’s histories are encoded. As Pirbhai indicates, “Given the paucity of official documentation on indentured women’s labor, [Indo-Caribbean women’s] narratives are often structurally dependent on family history, folklore, oral testimony and other community-based sources that are under threat of erasure with each generation’s passing” (“Recasting” 25). Importantly, Espinet indicates that writers and scholars must reconstruct these histories through transnational feminist practices.

The next, and final, chapter of this dissertation continues to explore the limitation of official modes of historical documentation through its discussion of indentureship, sexuality, and colonial governance. While archival manuscripts reveal the ways in which colonial authority sought to manage colonial bodies, I assert that the novels of Indo-Trinidadian Canadian writer, Shani Mootoo, depict the socio-cultural effects of such laws. By presenting sexuality as a key element of indentureship history, Mootoo’s work foregrounds attitudes towards sexual violence, women’s sexual desire, and deviant sexualities that such laws engendered as well as demonstrates how the legacy of rigid laws and policies continue to inform the contemporary lives of Caribbean people.

Chapter 6: "Beyond the Kala Pani: Affect, Sexuality, and Indentureship in the Novels of Shani Mootoo"

> "I blistered the penis of Mohungu. I did so as a punishment as I thought he deserved it…Mohungu was the man who committed the act on Nabibuccus. I blistered him as a preventative, as he might have attempted the act again. I have known cases where the penis has been blistered, as a preventative treatment, in case of Masturbation with boys."
>
> ---Arthur Harrison, Surgeon Superintendent onboard the *Mersey* 1898[139]

Colonial authorities sought to control every aspect of life on ships carrying indentured laborers from India to the West Indies. Not only did they determine what, when, and where laborers ate, which chores laborers completed, and which parts of the ship laborers could access, they also attempted to dictate with whom indentured came into physical contact. As the above epigraph testifies, the management of affect was a significant colonial preoccupation. The 1898 report, from which Harrison's comments are taken, chronicles the punishment of two Indian men, Nabi Baksh and Mohangoo,[140] who were accused of committing sodomy on a ship (the *Mersey*) carrying indentured Indians to British Guiana. Upon hearing of the charge, the Surgeon Superintendent punishes Baksh by putting him in irons and handcuffing him every night from September 25 to October 31, the date of the alleged incident to the date of arrival in British Guiana. The second man, Mohangoo was ordered to scrub the decks from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Moreover, since it was believed that he was the man directly committing the sex act, the

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[139] Quoted in "British Guiana 1898: Punishment for Sodomy meted out to Nabi Baksh and Mohangoo on the *Mersey*."

[140] Throughout the report, Mohangoo and Nabi Baksh's names are spelled inconsistently; some variations include Mohangu, Mohungu, Nabibux, and Babibuccus. I have chosen to use the names presented on the Emigration Pass of each: Mohangoo and Nabi Baksh.

Superintendent blistered his penis. The Superintendent insisted that the men had confessed to the act, but when he is asked to relay the details of the confession, he admits "I cannot remember the words they used in confessing" since he did not record the testimonies of the accused in his journal. Subsequently, multiple levels of erasure characterize Baksh's and Mohangoo's perspectives in the archive. Their voices are not recorded in the actual account of the incident (the Surgeon's journal) or in the account that comes to us from the archive (the report of the incident). Moreover, upon further inquiry, it was found that the *sirdar* who had accused the men and who reported the incident may have coerced them into confessing with threats of physical harm. Given that this manuscript was produced by colonial bureaucrats in the interests of colonial governance, the subaltern perspective remains invisible. In the previous chapter of this dissertation, we have already seen the ways in which colonial records and missionary accounts perpetuated images of sexually promiscuous Indian women rather than address the social dangers in which the conditions of indentureship placed these women. This situation and the Baksh/Mohangoo case remind us that although "their own origins are often occluded and the exclusions on which they are premised often dimly understood, all archives come into being in and as history as a result of specific political, cultural, and socioeconomic pressures –pressures which leave traces and which render archives themselves artifacts of history" (Burton 6).

Rather than read the archival report in an attempt to uncover the "truth" of the incident, whether this was in fact an incident of sodomy or not, it is more productive to consider the questions this document raises about the entanglement of indentureship, the colonial archive, colonial governance, and sexuality. The Superintendent claims that he blistered Mohangoo's penis "as a preventative treatment," so that the accused would not attempt the act again. Admitting that this form of "treatment" had also been used to prevent young boys from masturbating, Harrison attempts to cure Mohangoo of what he deems perverse behavior. Officially, the Superintendent's role on the ship was to protect emigrants, a position that also gave him the authority to discipline them. But the archival source from which we get this incident, questions whether Harrison's pay should be docked for his actions. So why was Harrison's disciplining of the two immigrant men an issue at all? The answer might be that Harrison's action may have violated reforms that were put in place after the indentureship system had renewed. Between 1848 and 1851, the system was suspended due to abolitionists' outcry in England that the system was a new form of slavery. After the system's reinstatement, the crown attempted to present itself as the protector of the immigrants and to recast indentureship as a mechanism to civilize oriental subjects. In this context, Harrison's use of corporeal punishment might have been read as a violation of an agreement that prohibited harsh treatment of immigrants.

The Superintendent's fear of homosexual relations reflects larger attitudes towards same-sex relations during this era. At this time, sodomy was outlawed in India, in British Guiana, and in England; the latter largely influenced the construction of anti-sodomy laws in the colonies.[141] While this report of sodomy aboard a ship of indentures bolsters the colonial civilizing project as it presented the need to reform the alleged sodomites, it simultaneously registers the failure of colonial officials to control every aspect of life on board ships transporting indentured workers as well as to protect the rights and bodies of indentures. Even though in theory it was the task of colonial officials such as the captain and the Surgeon Superintendent to monitor and govern the banalities of life on board, from the moment recruits stepped on board the ship to their arrival in the West Indies, the Baksh/ Mohangoo incident disrupts this colonial logic. Moreover, the case intensely reflects the ways in which sexuality in general was policed by colonial ideologies and the particularly punitive measures taken to manage nonheteronormative sexuality, or in this case the suspicion of acting upon such desires. Importantly, the incident calls attention to the ways in which colonial laws and policies attempted to control all aspects of the individual under indentureship, specifically foregrounding indentureship's repressed history of sexuality, sexualized violence, and queer desire.

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[141] Sodomy was against the Indian Penal Code 377, against British Guiana's Criminal Offences Act, which was consolidated in 1893 (about 5 years before the Baksh- Mohangoo incident), and against the English Penal Code of 1861. In India in July 2009, the High Court of Delhi repealed the Indian Penal Code, but the Supreme Court of India reinstated the law in December 2013; the latter argued that Parliament, not the judiciary, had the authority to make such a decision.

Despite the fact that historians and cultural critics have examined the prolonged effects of slavery and indentureship in maintaining racial and class hierarchies in the Caribbean, the effects of indentureship on Caribbean colonial and postcolonial subject formation warrant further study (Gopinath 179). In their important work on Indian indentured women, feminist historians and cultural scholars have begun to unpack the ways in which Indian immigrant masculinity, the British colonial state, and Indian nationalists during indentureship sought to control Indian indentured women's sexuality.[142] According to Gayatri Gopinath, however, these, otherwise important critical interventions, often elide *queer female desiring agency* and "collude" (albeit unconsciously) "with the particular brand of heteronormativity initially put in place to legitimize continued labor exploitation under indentureship" (181). The fiction of Indo-Trinidadian Canadian lesbian writer Shani Mootoo opens up a space for interrogating the impact of indentureship on colonial and postcolonial subject constitution, particularly in terms of nonheteronormative sexuality.

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[142] See Patricia Mohammed, Reddock, and Niranjani.

This chapter broadly investigates how Mootoo engages with indentureship in her three novels, *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996), *He Drown She in the Sea* (2005) and *Valmiki's Daughter* (2008). Despite the fact that her novels are set after the indentureship period, most often in the contemporary moment, indentureship informs particular notions of identity and community in Mootoo's fictional worlds. The legacy of indentureship haunts these texts in myriad ways, including vestiges of indenture that remain in the physical landscape, colonial stereotypes of race, class, and gender that continue to inform the social organization of Caribbean societies, and the complex relations among Indo-Caribbeans of different caste and class backgrounds. But most importantly, in Mootoo's works indentureship is linked to the management of sexuality and affective relations.

While archival manuscripts, like the report detailing the Baksh/ Mohangoo incident, underscore how colonial law was employed to manage colonial bodies, I argue that Mootoo's novels vividly portray the socio-cultural effects of such laws, perspectives that are unavailable in archival materials including census reports, ships' logs, and medical records. Presenting sexuality as an important component of indentureship history, Mootoo's fiction gives insight into the attitudes towards sexual violence, women's sexual desire, and nonheteronormative sexualities that such laws engendered as well as demonstrates how the legacy of restrictive laws and policies continues to be felt in the contemporary lives of Caribbean people. Crucially, through her focus on relations of intimacy and kinship and how these relations respond to and disrupt colonial ideologies of difference, Mootoo charts alternative models that disrupt imperial and nationalist prescriptions for appropriate affect.

Cereus Blooms and Night: Connecting Ideologies of Race, Gander, and Sexuality

Mootoo's oeuvre has been well received in both the Caribbean and Canada; however, of her three novels, critics overwhelmingly focus on *Cereus Blooms at Night,* addressing its treatment of sexuality, sexual abuse, and trauma, as well as its depictions of nature and its generic experimentation with magical realism and elements of gothic fiction. Caribbean novels did not begin to openly critique issues surrounding sexual identity and sexual diversity until the 1990s. Thus, *Cereus Blooms at Night* is identified as a significant work in the Caribbean literary tradition, credited with breaking "sexual silences" (Donnell, *Twentieth-Century* 182). Centering on the life of Mala Ramchandin, who is raped by her father, Chandin Ramchandin, the novel opens with rumors surrounding Chandin's murder. Although Mala is suspected of committing the crime, the judge places her into the care of an almshouse, since no material evidence or eyewitnesses exist. Tyler (Mala's male nurse) narrates her story, gradually revealing his own tale as a nonheteronormative marginalized subject in Lantacamara, a fictional island that resembles Trinidad.

Intertwined with Mala's story are the histories of migration, indentureship, and sexuality in colonial Trinidad. Chandin's parents migrate from India to Lantacamara, as indentured labourers. Realizing that there was little difference in his socio-economic status and his quality of life in India and in the New World, Chandin's father "hoped to leave behind, as promised by the recruiter, his inherited karmic destiny as a servant labourer –if not for himself, at least for his son who had been born just before [he] left

India. In Lantacamara it was easier to slip out of caste. He planned to work hard, save money and educate Chandin out of the fields" (26-27). We see this theme of intergenerational relations and the promise indenture held for progeny throughout the Indo-Caribbean texts discussed thus far in this dissertation, including V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas,* Rajkumari Singh's poetry, and Ramabai Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge*. Even though the recruiter's promises prove false and never materialize in Ramchandin's lifetime, indenture still held the promise of a better future for his son, Chandin, "the gold bead of his life (27)."

Ramchandin's dreams seem to come to fruition when Reverend Thoroughly, a missionary from the Shivering Northern Wetlands,[143] (perhaps a thinly disguised imaginary England), adopts Chandin to live in his home and to be educated in the seminary. The first Indian to be afforded such a privilege, Chandin symbolizes hope for Indian laborers across the island. While his Christian education and lifestyle means literally and symbolically distancing himself from his family, religion, and culture, Chandin whole heartedly "[embraced] the smarter-looking, smarter-acting Reverend's religion," hoping that other Indians would do the same:

> He was mesmerized by the chandelier that hung low in the middle of the room. While he should have been studying he would spend long moments staring at the leaf-shaped glass pendants that kicked off flickers of blue, red and violent light. He wondered how many of the people in the cane field barracks had ever seen

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[143] It is unclear whether the fictional place, "Shivering Northern Wetlands," refers to Canada or England. Since the novel is engaging with the activities of the Presbyterian Church, it might refer to Canada from which Presbyterian missionaries travelled to Trinidad in the late nineteenth century. However, in the text, Mala's sister, Asha, does migrate to Canada. Thus, Canada is identified as a real place in the world of the novel. Perhaps this ambiguity presents a larger comment that links the imperial activities of both places.

> such a fine thing. He wished he could show them not only that item, but also the fine cabinets, carved chairs and side tables [. . .] At first he wanted the labourers to see it all because everything was new and exciting. Then he desperately wanted them to see the inside of the Reverend's house so they could embrace not just the Reverend's faith but his taste. In his innocence he felt that his people's lack of these things was a result of apathy and a poverty of ambition. (31)

In this passage, we see that Chandin's colonial training leads him to loth his Indian background and Indians more generally in favor of whiteness and the material and symbolic capital that whiteness holds in colonial society. On the one hand, Chandin believes that if other Indians saw him in the Thoroughly's middle class home, they would work towards social advancement. On the other hand, it is precisely Chandin's access to these European middle class possessions and values that differentiates him from other Indians and, in his eyes, makes him superior to them. The symbol of the chandelier aptly represents whiteness in the novel. Shiny and beautiful, it hangs low, giving the perception that it is within Chandin's reach. The leaf shaped pendants further solidify the chandelier's artificiality as it attempts to mimic the real flora of the lush Trinidadian landscape. At this point in the text, Chandin does not recognize that whiteness is in fact what he covets, believing that his conversion has secured him a genuine place in the Thoroughly family. Unable to understand the racial hierarchies that structure his colonial society, Chandin becomes a pawn in a colonial scheme that works to maintain this status quo.

The ultimate way to prove to other Indians and to himself that he has successfully adopted Christianity and the Thoroughly's European middle class lifestyle would be to become a Thoroughly, not just through adoption and association, but through marriage to Lavinia, the daughter of the Thoroughlys. It is here that the novel most acutely lays bare the racism imbedded in the colonial project and the Presbyterian mission. Despite Chandin's love for Lavinia, he is forbidden to marry her because supposedly they are siblings; however, soon after Chandin's rejection, Lavinia promises to marry a cousin abroad. Reverend Thoroughly strategically redirects Chandin's attention to Sarah, the only nonwhite female student at the seminary. The Reverend's hand in arranging this marriage and in grooming both Chandin and Sarah for this union through Christian education can be read as the novel's critique of the Presbyterian Church's mission to establish Indian heterosexual marriages, which were further sanctioned by colonial law. The previous chapter of this project discusses the ways in which colonial bureaucrats sought to encourage marriage and the nuclear family model among Indians in order to establish Indian village settlements, which in turn alleviated planters' financial responsibilities to provide living quarters and medical care for indentured families. Indian nuclear families also served as a symbol of the success of the plantation as a civilizing mechanism. The marriage laws that were established in British Guiana and Trinidad in the 1880s and 1890s, however, curbed indentured women's sexual freedom and equal rights.

Like Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge*, *Cereus Blooms at Night* also demonstrates how these laws that promoted Indian patriarchal households contributed to sexual violence against women; however, Mootoo goes further than Espinet to indicate that these laws also marginalized people, particularly women, with nonheteronormative identities. In the novel, Lavinia and Sarah, Chandin's Indian-appointed wife, develop a

Sapphic relationship. The love and gentleness we see between Lavinia and Sarah starkly contrasts to the "dispassionate" relationship between Chandin and Sarah. Despite the birth of their two daughters, Mala and Asha, the couple "seldom spoke to one another unless it was absolutely necessary" (49). In order to have a relationship away from the patriarchal gaze of Chandin, the Thoroughlys, and the larger community, Lavinia and Sarah escape abroad, accidentally leaving the children behind. Chandin responds to these events by raping and sexually abusing his daughters, especially Mala who attempts to shield her younger sister from the abuse. Gopinath argues that *Cereus Blooms at Night* suggests that since heterosexuality is employed by the colonial state as a mode to discipline subjects, then one means "by which to escape the sexual and gendered logic of colonialism is by escaping heterosexuality" (182). Gopinath goes on to say that the

> queer interracial desire between Sarah and her white lover within this home space, however, radically destabilizes the terms of colonial domesticity, unharnessing Indian women's sexuality from the propagation of the heterosexual, national family unit [. . .] Mootoo's novel emerges from within the patriarchal confines of the home, within the cracks and fissures of heterosexuality, and is inextricable from the violences of colonialism and misogyny. Queer desire enables Sarah to quite literally remove herself from the sexual, racial, and gendered logic consolidated under indentureship. (183)

In this way, Mootoo links sexualized violence against women and sexual minorities to other histories of violence, including the racialized violence experienced by Chandin and the colonial exploitation experienced by his indentured parents. Moreover, same-sex relations are presented as a mode of resistance against a heteronormative belief system that casts sexual diversity as unnatural and that overlooks sexual violence against women within heterosexual unions and within the patriarchal family.

In addition to reading *Cereus Blooms at Night*'s depiction of sexual intolerance as "historically implicated" in "systems of racial classification, gender socialization and moral rectitude naturalized by colonial domination," Allison Donnell asserts that the novel intervenes in the 1990s debates on sexuality in Trinidad and the wider Caribbean. For instance, the 1996 Sexual Offences Bill of Trinidad and Tobago prescribes the same penalty for incest, homosexual consensual relations, and male homosexual rape. Donnell insightfully argues that

> having the rape of a daughter by her father at the centre of a narrative that is occupied by characters with diverse sexualities [. . .] break[s] open what is commonly represented as a flattened continuum of sexual deviance in the Caribbean, running from homosexuality to incest, encompassing rape, bestiality and other acts of non-consensual sex. (Donnell, *Twentieth-Century* 243)

In light of Gopinath and Donnell, we can read *Cereus Blooms at Night* as linking colonial and postcolonial laws that seek to manage sexual relations by demonstrating how the ideologies inherent in the former continue to inform postcolonial sexual politics. After all, the sodomy laws of Trinidad and Tobago and many other Anglophone Caribbean nations are directly inherited from an 1861 British law. According to a 2011 report by the International Lesbian, Gay, Trans and Intersex Association's (ILGA) "11 of the 12 Commonwealth Caribbean countries have laws that make same-sex intimacy illegal;" the only nation of this group to decriminalize same-sex relations is the Bahamas. Coincidentally, the countries with the largest East Indian populations also carry the most severe consequences; “Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago’s laws prescribe the harshest punishment – life and 25 years in prison respectively” (Gaskin Jr. 429). Although *Cereus Blooms at Night* does not blatantly address these laws, the novel painfully lays bare the beliefs that these laws promote in its depictions of the community’s response to Mala’s rape:

> While many shunned [Chandin] there were those who took pity, for he was once the much respected teacher of the Gospel [. . .] what man would not suffer a rage akin to insanity if his own wife, with a devilish mind of her own, left her husband and children. Whether they disliked him or tolerated his existence, to everyone Chandin was Sir (195).

Rather than confront Chandin’s abuse of male power, the community overlooks his sexual violence against Mala, further alienating the victim through social rejection. We see the community’s attitudes towards Mala when she arrives at the almshouse. Placed on the floor while she awaits a room, the head nurse brands her as a "psychiatric," who takes resources from poor people. Additionally, no nurses, except Tyler, want to touch her body.

We can also read the almshouse as a microcosm of the larger community’s attitudes towards alternative sexualities. Even though Tyler is the only nurse who has been trained abroad in the Shivering Northern Wetlands, his association with advanced training methods in the colonial metropolis is undercut by what is perceived as his aberrant sexuality, a point most evident in the tasks that he is assigned, such as scrubbing the floors of the almshouse.[13] Additionally, his feminine mannerisms and ways of dressing provoke "condescending" comments and “the kind of notice that one might shower on a child" (15). Because Tyler does not fit the heterosexual mold, the community ostracizes him, clearly sending the message that he will not be accepted as a full citizen, despite his professional training and service. Tyler's ambiguous sexual identity and his relationship to the transgendered[144] character, Otoh, challenge fixed notions of sexuality. Otoh and Tyler's relationship seems to be one between a transgendered female (Otoh), who has relations with both males and females, and a homosexual male (Tyler) who cross dresses. However, the novel resists such clear-cut sexual identifications. The text's resistance to fix identity is particularly seen in Otoh's name which is a shortened form of Otoh-Boto, the letters meaning – "On the one hand" – "but on the other" (110). Otoh and Tyler's relationship demonstrates the possibility for the existence of nonnormative sexual identities that do not neatly conform to homosexual/bisexual/heterosexual categories, a topic that Mootoo returns to in *Valmiki's Daughter*. In this way, Mootoo indicates the inability of implementing Western models to nonnormative Caribbean subjects without critically considering the limitations of such categories. Through its interest in relations between individuals and the relationship of individuals to communal belonging, *Cereus Blooms at Night* demonstrates the ways in which colonial ideologies continue to inform legal discourse and popular attitudes surrounding sexuality and the everyday affective lives of Caribbean women and nonheterosexual subjects.

The narrative's structure illustrates how we can gain insight into narratives that exist in the rifts of history. We are first introduced to Chandin through Tyler's childhood memory of a conversation he has with his grandmother who attempts to explain the idea of incest. While Chandin's abuse of his daughter and the island's colonial history are the foci of the early part of the novel, indentureship quickly recedes into the background as Mala and Tyler become the center of the story. In this way, the narrative transforms from one of multiple oppressions to one of resistance, survival, and healing. Drawing on his grandmother's stories, communal gossip, his own observations of Mala's bodily movements, and the accounts of Otoh and Ambrose, Tyler relays Mala's story in public form, not claiming to speak for her or to have the entire story. Mootoo crafts the entire novel as a letter from Tyler to Asha that serves as a counter-narrative to authoritative sources such as court records, police reports, medical documents, and community gossip. While these sources display multiple versions of the real story, all claim to hold the true facts of Mala's experiences. In employing the epistolary form, Mootoo presents writing as a strategy to come to terms with and make public the traumatic histories of oppression under the colonial regime of indenture that includes racial discrimination, gendered violence, and sexual intolerance. This idea is powerfully echoed in Mootoo's view of her own work: "Ultimately, it is in my writing and in my creative work that the Indian starboy [a persona with which Mootoo closely identifies] rears up to fight the injustice and to ask for tolerance and acceptance as a person in a country and communities that are constantly transitioning" ("On Becoming" 93-94). Mootoo's own work and Tyler's relaying of Mala's story and the history of Lantacamara suggest that authoritative modes of documentation cannot be relied on as the only source of history. Moreover, as I have been arguing throughout this dissertation, Mootoo and other Indo-Caribbean writers indicate that the younger generations and descendants of indentures must bring to light the circumstances of Indian indentureship in the Caribbean.

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[144] Mootoo consistently avoids using labels that fix identity such as transgendered, lesbian, gay, queer, etc. in her fiction.

He Drown She in the Sea: Transcending Rooted Identity

In *He Drown She in the Sea*, Mootoo moves away from engaging overtly with sexual diversity like we see in *Cereus Blooms at Night*; however, her interests in uncovering the ways in which women are policed within the patriarchal domestic home intensifies in this second novel. Additionally, the novel also centers on how colonial ideologies about race and class consolidated during indentureship continue to impact the social structure of the larger Caribbean society. Oscillating between a fictionalized Caribbean island (Guanagaspar) and Canada as well as between the 1940s and the present day, *He Drown She in the Sea* depicts the love story of two childhood friends, Harry St. George and Rose Sangha. Separated by the rigid class structure of their Caribbean home, the couple reconnects in their adult lives in Canada. Whereas Harry relocates to British Columbia to escape the racial and class tensions that erupt on the eve of the island's independence, Rose stays in Guangaspar, marrying an elite Indo-Caribbean man who becomes the Attorney General of the island. The novel employs the romance plot to explore the ways in which colonialism continues to impact the economic, political, and social organization of the postcolonial Caribbean island, even dictating human relations and intimacy. However, it rejects heterosexual marriage "as a means to [accommodate] or highlight national difference" as many popular and literary formulations of Caribbean creolization often do (Taylor 68).

The romance genre has long been employed as a trope to chart Caribbean experiences. Historically Anglo-American writers used the genre to chart stories of white male conquests of colonized territories and native female bodies.[145] Donnette Francis argues that these narratives "categorically disavowed the horrors of slavery, specifically sexual violence, choosing instead to represent love stories centered around the benign project of civilizing Africans and other natives, which then provided the ideological logic for various imperial expansionist projects" (5). Additionally, as seen in novels by such writers as V.S. Naipaul and Earl Lovelace, the heterosexual romance narrative has often been used in Caribbean literature as a means to negotiate and accommodate difference in nations with culturally diverse populations. Working against these models, Francis argues that Caribbean women's texts "offer no normative coupling and coercion is vividly marked as violence and sexual abuse" (6). Francis offers the term *antiromance* to describe the novels of Caribbean women writers that refuse "any integrity of wholeness, insisting that there is no properly realized nation to come of age to and no idealized domestic or 'home' space to reclaim" (6). We can read *He Drown She in the Sea* (and *Cereus Blooms at Night*) in light of Francis' *antiromance* since it uncovers the abuse women endure inside the home, their lack of sexual freedom, and outright rejects the institution of heterosexual marriage; however, the novel does not entirely reject heterosexual relations. Depicting Harry and Rose's relationship as one of equality as well as mutual respect and love, Mootoo's work portrays it as one in a continuum of intimate relationships, but also as one that cannot exist in societies divided by various forms of difference; I will return to this point shortly.

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[145] Maxwell Philip's *Emmanuel Appadocca* (1854) and Charles Kingsley's *At Last: A Christmas in the West Indies* (1871) are two examples of works that employ the romance plot in this way. For more on this

He Drown She in the Sea indicates that the island's geography and division of labor are intricately linked to categories of race and class that stem from indentureship. The residue of indentureship appears in the island's political and social organization as

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subject, see Faith Smith's "Beautiful Indians, Troublesome Negroes, and Nice White Men: Caribbean Romances and the Inventions of Trinidad," Doris Sommer's *Foundational Fictions: The National Romance in Latin America*, and Belinda Edmonson's *Caribbean Romances: the Politics of Regional Representations*.

well as its material landscape. For instance, in the novel the working class is made up of people of African descent and those of Indian descent, but in the rural setting of the novel, these groups inhabit separate geographies. Whereas Africans are primarily portrayed as fisherman and are mainly relegated to Raleigh, a village by the sea, Indians occupy the rural town of Central and work “either in the rice fields or on sugar cane plantations” (91). Moreover, the racial stereotypes that colonial bureaucrats employed to construct Africans and Indians as inferior to Europeans and to pit African and Indian groups against each other continue to structure perceptions of race on the fictional island; the novel explores this point through its depiction of Harry’s family background. His father, Seudath, grows up in Raleigh and is described as being a “more-African-than Indian Indian.” Dolly, Harry’s mother, tell him that Seudath “was brazen more like black people” and that “[b]razeness was a sign […] of craziness or don’t careness, and an attribute of black people, not of Indian people, who were more careful about how they appeared to others” (90). In contrast, Indian men are described as serious, quiet men who became brazen, or laughed and raised their voices, only at the end of the workday, when they headed straight for the rum shop or congregated under someone’s house” (91). Abandoned as a child, Seudath is adopted and raised by an African couple, Uncle Mako and Tante Eugenie. Although Seudath dies before Harry’s birth, Uncle Mako and Tante Eugenie prove to be a significant cultural influence that shapes Harry’s life and his relations with others.

On the one hand, through its portrayal of Seudath’s creolized identity and the kinship that exists between these African and Indian characters, the novel shows that the racial stereotypes rooted in colonial discourse can be overturned through individual relationships. On the other hand, *He Drown She in the Sea* calls attention to the ways in which racial taxonomies inherited from colonialism continue to impact the politics of the island:

> Unlike the Africans, who had been brought to the islands against their will and enslaved, the Indians had come as indentured laborers, armed with the promise, the guarantee even, of a return trip to India, or, if they chose, after the completion of their indentureship, a parcel of land, gratis. Still, a century and more later, they bowed before the white-skinned British, yet lorded superiority over those of African descent. Suddenly the Indian population was terrified, Younger nationalistic Guanagasparian Indians, infuriated by the divide of Africans and Indians and therefore of the country they knew as their one and only home, fanned the fires of protest. Pandemonium threatened to drown the little island. (260)

In this passage, the novel lays out and connects the island's colonial histories of slavery and indentureship. Whereas it directly critiques a false sense of racial superiority among Indians that resulted from constructions of race during indentureship, it also rejects notions of Indians as outsiders to Guanagasparian society, firmly establishing them as rightful citizens of the island. Moreover, Mootoo employs the eruption of racial tensions and political turmoil as a plot device that leads Harry to migrate north to Canada in search of political stability and the opportunity to escape the racism and classicism ingrained in the fabric of his Caribbean home.

In addition to being linked to the larger island community's geographic, social, and political organization, in *He Drown She in the Sea* indentureship informs gender ideologies and class divisions *within* the Indo-Guanagasparian community. When we first encounter Seudath, he is riding "along the winding dirt roads of the Central plains" with rice paddies on either side and cane fields on the outskirts to sell fish to the Indians who live in the "barrack houses" (89). The barracks are where Seudath and Dolly meet, but in the larger world of the text, it is the space, along with the canefields, that is most directly linked to indentureship. *He Drown She in the Sea* distinctly ties the barracks to an enclosed Indian community that attempts to maintain its cultural traditions through its policing of Indian women's sexuality. When Dolly becomes pregnant as a result of her liaison with Seudath, she is dragged out of the home by her brothers and stoned by the other Indian families who live in the barracks. Permanently pushed out of her familial home for her sexual transgression, Dolly goes to live with Seudath.

The novel indicates that the oppressive gender ideologies that we see at play within Dolly's working class family are not limited to class or what might be attributed to the Indian working class' struggle to hold onto archaic Indian patriarchal traditions. Rather these attitudes surface throughout the novel's depiction of Indian families across class and over time. For instance, after Seudath's death, Dolly works as a domestic worker for an elite Indian family, the Sanghas. It is here that Dolly's son, Harry, meets Rose, the Sanghas' daughter. Mrs. Sangha spends her days caring for Rose and listening to her Zenith radio, hoping to get news of her husband's business trips abroad and of the events of World War II. Despite glaring evidence of Mr. Sangha's extramarital affairs, Mrs. Sangha does not question his abuse of patriarchal power. Moreover, when Mr. Sangha comes home to find the children sleeping next to each other, he forbids Dolly and Harry to return to his home. In an irrational attempt to protect his daughter's purity, Mr.

Sangha severs the close friendship between the children and between his wife and Dolly. Tellingly, in the narrative scope of the novel, we do not see Mrs. Sangha protest her husband’s unreasonable reaction, suggesting her acceptance of her position as the passive Indian middle class wife. Moreover, this scene shows Rose’s early socialization into this model of Indian womanhood and her introduction to what are deemed to be appropriate relationships based on class.

We see the effects of this socialization later in Rose’s own marriage to Shem Bihar, who becomes the Attorney General of Guanagaspar. Shem replicates Mr. Sangha’s behavior by having romantic liaisons outside his marriage, expecting Rose to play the part of the passive Indian housewife and mother. The marginalization we see Mrs. Sangha endure and that Rose struggles against as an adult can be read as an extension of patriarchal and imperial attempts to control Indian women’s sexuality during indentureship that I briefly outline above and discuss in the previous chapter. The novel indicates that migration outside of the Caribbean and the relationship she develops with Harry allows Rose to transcend the gender and class restrictions of her Guanagasparian home. In Shem’s view, Canada “made [Rose] strong willed and put ideas into her head” (291). With Harry, Rose realizes that she can express her sexual desire, acknowledge her own needs, and does not have to accommodate “everyone else’s wishes” (17). When Rose returns to the Caribbean, she can no longer accept the restrictive gender role that her class status and ethnic identity requires. In this way, the novel constructs migration as a mode for women to escape patriarchal oppression and gain sexual liberation and self-actualization. Additionally, Rose’s daughter, Cassie, who lives in Canada, has intimate relationships with women. Since Cassie remains a minor character in the story, it is unclear why Cassie moves to Canada. However, it is clear that her relations with women make Rose uncomfortable and would be frowned upon by her father. Thus, as we see in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, *He Drown She in the Sea* presents nonheterosexual relations and migration as viable options for women to live more fulfilling and loving lives.

Suggesting that migration North allows more freedom for women, Mootoo does not settle for a simple North/South dichotomy where the North is characterized by liberalism and the South by oppression. In Harry's experience in Canada, we see him gain economic mobility and grow to be more confident, particularly through his relationship with a working class white woman, Kay; however, the novel also engages with the issue of racism in Harry's experience in predominantly white British Columbia, demonstrating both the possibilities and limitations that migration to Western nations pose for Caribbean subjects. At the end of the text, Rose and Harry are unable to return to either Canada or Guanagaspar, signaling the deep colonial connections between the two nations that cannot be escaped. In order to be with Harry, Rose fakes her death and the couple embarks on a boat to Honduras; by escaping, the couple relinquishes all material and familial ties to Guanagaspar and Canada, including to Rose's children.

Their journey to Honduras calls attention to South-South migrations, including those by Amerindians and maroons that have been integral to histories of Caribbean migration, resistance, and survival. The novel closes with the couple sailing away in Uncle Mako's boat, one that he had long dreamed of using to return to Africa, connecting the oceanic voyages of slavery and indentureship as well as linking these past migrations to Harry and Rose's present journey. Moreover, the couple reenacts the *kala pani* crossing that enabled the shedding of religious, caste, and class distinctions among

Indians. As for their indentured ancestors, the sea holds the possibility for a new beginning for Rose and Harry, washing away the class distinctions and the gender and racial dichotomies of their Guanagasparian society; however, we are unsure whether the couple reaches their destination at the closing of text since a wave engulfs their boat. The last scene presents the recurring trope of the sea as death and destruction that we see earlier in the text in Seudath's death and at the opening of the novel when Harry as a child dreams that a flood wipes out his town, leaving him and his mother as the only survivors. This dream gives hope that perhaps Harry and Rose have also survived the turbulent, dangerous *kala pani* like their ancestors, who risked their lives to escape oppressive circumstances and to pursue for a new beginning.

Additionally, the novel evokes the *kala pani* crossing and indentureship more broadly as part of a collective history upon which a sense of Indo-Caribbean collective identity can be forged. Recognizing Harry's desire for inclusion into the elite Indian circles that the Sanghas inhabit, Dolly tells her son:

> They different, son, but they not better than you or me. . . All of we cross Black Water, sometimes six and sometimes seven months side by side in the same stinking boat, to come here. Same-same. All of we. One set leaving something unsavory behind, another set looking for a fresh start. How, child, how out of those beginning some end up higher than others and some end up lower, tell me this? Well, God only know. We comes here same time, same boat, same handling. They not better than we, and *that* you should remember. (italics in the original 178)

Here, the novel constructs indentureship as a history that elites, like the Sanghas, would rather forget, but one that links all Indo-Caribbeans. While indentureship is acknowledged as an integral part of Harry's identity, the novel suggests that identity should not be confined to an essentialized Indian identity. Through Harry's affiliations with African characters, Uncle Mako and Tante Eugenie, and with a working class white Canadian woman, Kay, the novel suggests that Harry's identity reflects Edouard Glissant's *poetics of relation*. As discussed in chapter two of this dissertation, within Glissant's formulation, identity is defined *in relation* to rather than *in opposition* to the other. A relational identity does not promote essentialism or assimilation, but embraces creolization, "not merely an encounter, a *métissage*, but a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open" (*Poetics* 34). Unlike the Sanghas who draw on restrictive class, gender, and racial categories to hold on to their identities as elite Indians, a rooted identity based on power and essentialized notions of culture, Harry constructs his identity based on *a poetics of relation*, refashioning his sense of self through his interactions with others. This broader understanding of cultural and class identity allows Harry to move more easily in and out of different spaces and circles. John Corr insightfully reads *Cereus Blooms at Night* in light of *a poetics of relation*, expanding Glissant's concept to include sexual difference. For Corr, Mala and Tyler's relationship most aptly represents the notion of a relational identity. Given Mootoo's interest in various forms of difference and the power of individual relationships to confront intolerance and overcome oppression, I believe that Glissant's theory helps us to understand all three of Mootoo's novels, whose themes and concerns overlap in myriad ways.

In *He Drown She in the Sea*, indentureship is presented as being integral to an understanding of the social and geographical structure of the novel's fictional Caribbean island and to relations between individuals and groups based on race, class, and gender. Importantly, through its disparate linking of indentureship with other historical events including slavery, U.S. military intervention in the Caribbean, national independence, and World War II, the novel also situates indentureship as part of world history; a theme that Mootoo explores in more detail in *Valmiki's Daughter*.

Valmiki's Daughter: Troubling Appropriate Prescriptions of Affect

More than *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *He Drown She in the Sea*, *Valmiki's Daughter* treats indentureship as a prominent theme even though the text occurs solely in the contemporary period. Through its focus on the history of Indians working on cacao plantations, the text reveals a forgotten chapter in Caribbean historiography. Specifically, Mootoo illustrates how this history can be glimpsed through physical structures, landscape, and bodies. Moreover, in this novel indentureship is linked to the constitution of sexuality in a different way than we see in the author's previous work. Here, we are given details regarding same-sex love, passion, and sexual intercourse. Rather than primarily focus on how affective lives were managed through imperial and communal ideologies of race, class, gender, and sexuality, *Valmiki's Daughter* goes further to depict how these restrictions were transgressed, particularly in relation to women's same-sex desire.

Valmiki's Daughter relays the story of a contemporary middle class Indian family, the Krishnus, in Trinidad. Through its portrayals of the Krishnus, the novel gives us a glimpse into the families, relationships, businesses, and homes of Indo-Trinidadian elite society. Valmiki Krishnu, one of the main characters of the novel, is a doctor who employs his extramarital affairs with white women to cover his same-sex relations with an Afro-Trinidadian working class man, Saul. The narrative also focuses on Viveka, Valmiki's second daughter, who develops an intimate relationship with Anick, the French wife of Viveka's friend, Nayan. Through its erotic portrayal of same-sex relations, *Valmiki's Daughter* extends *Cereus Blooms at Night's* interest in nonheteronormative identities. Whereas Lavinia and Sarah's gentle and sensual friendship is written out of the text when they escape abroad, *Valmiki's Daughter* lyrically and powerfully portrays Viveka and Anick's sexual fulfillment. At the center of the novel is the struggle of these characters to maintain proper heteronormative lives through the institutions of the family and marriage and, at the same time, to attempt to fulfill their desire for same-sex love. Additionally, through the novel's portrayal of what Allison Donnell calls "queer forms of queerness (adulteration, inversion, lavender marriage)," Mootoo presents nonheterosexual subjects that do not fit neatly into categories of heterosexual, homosexual, gay, or lesbian (a theme we also see in *Cereus Blooms at Night*) ("Caribbean" 218). Thus, Mootoo "represents a continuum of sexual preferences and behaviors in which the thresholds between desires that are illegitimate and legitimate, open and illicit, rewarding and damaging cannot be resolved by the mapping of hetero and nonhetero attachments" (Donnell, "Caribbean" 223).

Expanding on a theme presented in *He Drown She in the Sea*, *Valmiki's Daughter* portrays indenture as a shameful part of Indo-Caribbean heritage that has been willfully erased in the Indo-Caribbean imagination. This point is particularly evident in the novel's depiction of the character Nayan Prakash. The heir to his family's cacao estate, Nayan goes to Canada to attend university, where he gets engaged to a French waitress, Anick. During his visit to France to meet Anick's mother, Mimi, and her father, Armand, the narrator tells us that Nayan

> did not want to introduce himself as the descendant of indentured field workers, so he said simply that his ancestors had immigrated to Trinidad less than a century ago, from northern India. To which Armand had asked: Did they immigrate? I would have thought that they went as indentured labourers after the abolishment of slavery, not so, to replace the slave work force? Nayan was forced to correct himself, and was puzzled that a Frenchman living in a town he had not heard of before meeting Anick would know this detail. He talked to them of his family's cacao estate and Nayan felt like a dark prince, owner of land, of an estate, of a chocolate-making empire, until Armand asked about the origins of the estate itself. Nayan told them that it had been in his family for three generations, bought from a French planter in the 1930s. Armand had seemed suddenly quite aroused [. . .] and then he said, So on your land, the very land you now have, there would have been slavery, and all the ravages that went with that, then Indian indentureship, and then what was typical of the time –the Indian workers bought the estates from their bosses when the market declined. Nayan now admitted […] that he hadn't actually thought of any of this before. (214-215)

This passage raises important questions about the creation of indentureship history, its transference, and its remembering. Nayan revises his family's acquisition of the plantation into a script not unlike one taken from a Hindu epic, in which he is a dark prince and the estate is his kingdom. His lack of knowledge about his family's past mirrors Mootoo's own realization that, "Within the walls of my family there are no traces of an indentured heritage. Had some branch of my ancestors managed an erasure of our past swinging machetes in the blazing heat of scorpion-infested cane fields?" ("This is"). Both accounts reflect the Indian middle class' devaluing of indenture and its failure to transfer this history to subsequent generations.

In Armand's rendering of Trinidad's history, the French involvement in the exploitation of indentured Indians is glossed over, as is often the case in narratives of Anglophone Caribbean historiography that are dominated by British imperialism. Whereas for Nayan indentureship is linked to the traumatic exploitation of his ancestors that emerges as shame, for Armand, this history does not carry the same burden. Armand's privileged position as a French male grants him the authority to not only remember this history, but to recreate his version of it for Nayan. Mootoo's choice to wed Nayan to a French white woman from France rather than a French Canadian woman or a British woman, indicates her interests in foregrounding a particular narrative of colonial history; as we see throughout her fiction, in *Valmiki's Daughter* the author employs the trope of heterosexual coupledom as a means to explore connections between Indians and French Creole in Trinidad as well as between the histories of Trinidad and France.

Armand's historical amnesia of French Creole involvement in indentureship speaks to a larger "historical amnesia among the French Creole planters, and a complacent view of themselves as somehow exempt from the moral and ethical taint of slavery" (Munro 184). Beginning in the 1780s, the Spanish government offered land grants to Roman Catholic planters, primarily French Creole, from other territories to settle in Trinidad and facilitate the colony's transformation into a sugar-producing territory. The fact that some of the immigrant planters from neighboring territories were of African descent, who were fleeing discrimination in their former territories, added to the view that Trinidad was less racially oppressive than the older colonies (Munro 177). This perception of French Creole self-image aligned with “the well-known, though false, conception that slavery in Trinidad was a benign affair, with well-treated slaves and paternalistic masters” (Monroe 184).

In his study of French Creole poetry of Trinidad, Martin Munro finds “that the black and Indian field workers are never mentioned” in the poems he examines; “it is as if they did not exist or as if they were happily part of the felicitous French Creole plantation system” (184). Munro goes on to say that the “French Creoles seemed to exempt themselves from any historical guilt about slavery, and by the 1860s had already cultivated a celebratory and nostalgic image of their past in Trinidad” (184-185). Within these myths, French Creoles presented their planter ancestors as pioneers who tamed the wilderness of Trinidad; these origin tales were further consolidated by French Creole surveyors, geographers, and mapmakers. “Through surveying and map-making,” as Munroe asserts, “the French Creoles could demarcate, name and thereby further take possession of the land” (178). In a similar manner to early French Creole historians and cartographers, in *He Drown She in Sea* Armand disseminates a version of Trinidadian history that erases the role of the French Creoles in the exploitation of African and Indian peoples.

The novel indicates that the opportunity to refashion oneself was not restricted to the French Creoles or Europeans, but extended to indentures as well. Mootoo suggests that migration provided possibilities for indentures “to reinvent themselves in a new landscape where their histories were unknown, where caste, for instance, could be shed, [and] for the enterprising and daring [. . .] in a new land they might as well become whatsoever and whosoever they fancied" ("On Becoming" 83). We have already seen the ways in which migration initially presented Indian women with possibilities for a new life in the last chapter. In *He Drown She in the Sea*, Nayan also attempts to reinvent himself, but Armand's correction leads him to inquire about the true circumstances of his family's past in the New World. Upon further inquiry Nayan finds out that his grandfather, Deudnath Prakash, came to the New World as an indentured labourer. While many workers who traveled on the same boat with him were sent to sugarcane estates, he was sent to a French owned cacao estate. After the end of his indentured contract, Deudnath stayed in the estate and eventually became one of the estate's Hindi speaking managers. In the 1930s, a significant price decrease in the international cacao market made it possible for Deudnath to purchase the estate as owners across the island sold off their properties. Through Deudnath's story, Mootoo relays a significant difference between the trajectory of Indians on cacao plantations and sugar plantations in Trinidad since "[s]ugar would not be hard hit for some time yet and […] it took longer for the Indians who had ended up in the cane fields to get out of them" (214-215). Moreover, Deudnath's accomplishments presents a mode of self-fashioning that moves beyond the imagination as he transforms himself from a position of servitude, as an indenture, to one of power and status, as an overseer and then plantation owner. Unlike Ramchandin from *Cereus Blooms at Night*, the promise of economic mobility that indentureship held is realized in the Prakashs' experience, since Deudnath's migration and hard work are rewarded when he buys the estate, a move that further secures the material well-being of his descendants. Through Nayan's experience, *Valmiki's Daughter* suggests the Indian middle class' historical amnesia provides a means to validate their elite status, particularly in the eyes of other members of the middle-class and foreigners like Anick and her family. Moreover, this history symbolically links them to their Indian workers with whom they believe they share little in common (a theme that *He Drown She in the* Sea begins to explore). In spite of this historical amnesia, indentureship surfaces throughout the text.

Despite *Valmiki's Daughter's* sustained focus on the intimate lives of elite Indians, their families, the landscapes they inhabit, and their domestic spaces, which more often than not mimic European tastes and structures, traces of indentureship are embedded in the landscapes and domestic spaces we encounter. Mootoo directly draws the reader into the narrative through particular sections that position him as a traveler through Trinidad. For instance, in a section titled, "Your Journey, Part Three" the reader travels from San Fernando to Rio Claro. Addressing the reader, the second person narrator states:

> The air becomes increasingly thick and sweet at the back of your throat, announcing your proximity to the sugar-cane factory at Sainte Madeleine. The ancestors of the Indians who worked these fields carry with them the stigma of impossibly hard manual work, for little pay, done under blazing sun amidst the threat of snakes and scorpions. You pass them, one of them immediately, an Indian man, risking life and grey limbs by walking on the edge of the shoulderless, two-lane road he must share with vehicles –from bicyclists to buffalo-led water carts. The man you have just passed is serious, appears to be

> humourless; sweat trickles down the side of his face. He is gaunt, and you attribute all of this to the common idea that the Indian leads a harsh life mired in notions of the irrevocability of one's fated lot in life.
>
> Continue to travel due east, on an instant incline that undulates toward and well past your destination, riding high above sea level. (267)

Here, Mootoo employs sensory imagery to appeal to the reader's sense of smell, taste, and sight. The "thick and sweet" air signals to the traveler a change in topography as she enters "valleys of gently billowing sugar cane" (267). But rather than describe a picturesque scene for the tourist gaze, Mootoo underscores the violence of plantation work and the history of indentureship. Even if the tourist chooses to ignore this past, her senses do not allow her to do so; a point most evident in the sudden visual presence of the Indian worker, who not only risks his life in the fields, but surfaces also as a traveler on the same road. The passage suggests that the reader might share the commonly held belief that the field worker holds almost the same position as his ancestors because it is his "fated lot in life," or according to Hindu philosophy as part of his *karma*.[146] However, a wider reading of the novel situates the worker's position as related to his continued exploitation under capitalism and his inability to break the cycle of poverty that originated in indentureship. Mootoo's positioning of the traveler does not directly implicate the traveler in the perpetuation of these systems as we see in a text such as Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place*, but the jarring image of the Indian worker that stays with the traveler even as she continues on her journey indicates the need to look beyond the surface of dominant narratives and outside appearances. The novel challenges us to move beyond the visual to activate all of our sensory experiences and demonstrates that so much exists that we choose not to see, including the existence of nonheteronormative identities alongside normative ones. Images of Indian field workers appear throughout the novel, serving both as a reminder to the Indian middle class of their indentured ancestors and as a symbol of the continued exploitation of workers by capitalism. Thus, neither the reader nor the elite characters within the novel can escape the history of indenture.

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[146] Mootoo's use of fate in this way in similar to that which we see in V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas.* See my discussion in chapter two, pages 46, 48, and 54.

The most interesting space, however, in which indentureship arises in *Valmiki's Daughter* is through the land and house on the cacao plantation on which Nayan and Anick live. On the grounds of the estate, Anick falls in love with Viveka. Through its recording of this union and the sexual fulfillment that the women experience, the novel links indentureship history to sexuality. The senses and sights of the surrounding estate's flora and fauna represent their mutual love and desire. As Anick leads Viveka deeper into the estate grounds, the dense landscape mimics the women's passion: "With each deep breath [Viveka] drew in the cloying odour of ripened forest fruit, not the sort of fruit found in the grocery or in the market, but fruit that gave off scent as if it were a pheromone, sickeningly sweet, insistent" (317). In this passage, the pheromone fruit, or fruit whose chemicals secretion affects the behaviors of others from the same species, foreshadows the sensual pleasure of the two women, who communicate their desire for each other more intensely through the senses than through speech. The overripe fruit represents Viveka's own repressed sexuality and anxieties about her ambiguous sexual identity. These anxieties are released when Viveka's expresses her desire for Anick, a moment that represents Viveka's first same-sex sexual encounter and first love relationship. In *Valmiki's Daughter,* as Donna McCormack argues, "Smells, sights, sounds, tastes and touch emerge through the body, flora and fauna, and intimate objects, opening up the possibility of coming close to unspoken memories, histories and embodied expression" (220).

If, as McCormack suggests, "Anick functions as an embodied reminder of […] an oftentimes forgotten French colonial presence in Trinidad" (215), then we can read Anick and Viveka's actualization of their same-sex love within the spaces of the cacoa estate as a reenactment of what Ann Stoler terms "the intimacies of empire." Colonial state projects, Stoler states, "attended minutely to the distribution of appropriate affect (what sentiments could be shown toward, and shared with, whom), to relations in which carnal desires could be safely directed, to prescriptions for comportment that could distinguish colonizer from colonized" (25). Particularly from the mid-1880s British officials stationed in the colonies were urged to exercise sexual restraint. During indentureship, white estate managers and government officials were regularly warned against having liaisons with Indian women. While sex between white men and nonwhite women was "officially" frowned upon, researchers have shown the prevalence of this practice; since the initial European encounter with natives to slavery and indentureship, white males have consistently used their power and privilege to coerce nonwhite women into sex.[147] In the specific context of indenture, European overseers were urged to stay single since their salaries were not adequate to support wives and they often lived in houses with other overseers. Even if an overseer did want to get married, there were few appropriate white partners available (Bahadur 151). Thus, although colonial policy "officially" discouraged liaisons between European men and Indian women, the conditions and policies of indentureship often unofficially encouraged them.

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[147] In his analysis of imperialism and sexuality, Hyam points out that in the eighteenth-century, the practice of European men sleeping with black women and having Colored mistresses was ingrained in West Indian life; these circumstances extended to white men of all social ranks (92-93). Hyam suggests that these practices begin to wane in the late nineteenth-century in the British colonies as a result of the Purity Campaign (1). However, in her recent archival study on Indian indentured women in British Guiana, Gaiutra Bahadur presents an opposing view; Bahadur cites a number of cases in which European men "kept" Indian women and other instances where tensions on plantations were incited because overseers had relations with Indian women who did not welcome these advances or who were already in relationships with Indian men (131-160).

Whereas sex between white men and nonwhite women was seen as a threat to empire, sex between white women and nonwhite men was seen to be a larger concern, making white women's sexuality an entity to be strictly managed. Francis' work on colonialism and women's sexual citizenship proves useful here. Francis argues that "from the colonial period, European travelers have established a sexual grammar that sought to apply radicalized scales of sexual value to the region's women: black women as 'untamed,' white European women as 'chastened,' white creole women as 'ravenous,' mulatto women as 'wanton,' Indian women as 'policed,' and Chinese women as 'protected" (17). These labels demonstrate the ways in which "racialized gender and sexuality" are constructed to produce differences amongst women and to rationalize denying this group the rights of sexual citizenship. Francis goes on to say that

> [p]ositioning black, mullato, and white creole women as sexually insatiable effectively nullifies violence enacted upon their bodies. Conversely, representations of sexual purity mapped unto white European, Indian and Chinese women justify their heightened surveillance by community members while also subjecting them to violence in the name of patriarchal protections. (17)

In light of Francis, Mootoo's depiction of Anick and Viveka's relationship can be a read as a transgression of practices that seek to divide women of different races as well as a critique of policies that sought to deny *all* women the rights of sexual citizenship, which include the right to choose their own sexual partners based on race, class, and gender as well the right to sexual fulfillment. We see this disciplining of women's sexuality throughout the novel in Viveka's self-policing as well as in her mother's disapproval of her masculine appearance and her friendships with Anick and other female characters. Additionally, although in Canada Anick discloses to Nayan her desire for women and past relations with them before marriage, Nayan attempts to erase this part of her history and identity when they get married and move to Trinidad. Viveka's childhood friend, Merle Bedi, serves as a powerful reminder of what often happens to women who transgress sexually. Pushed out of her family's home for her nonheteromormative sexual desire, Merle turns to prostitution as a means of survival. Her haunting presence in the novel powerfully represents the social and material consequences of deviating from heternormativity. Thus, in its portrayal of Viveka and Anick's interracial same-sex union, the novel demonstrates the fulfillment of both Indian women's and white women's sexual desire, challenging imperial and patriarchal control of women's sexuality. Moreover, it depicts a certain form of interracial union that refigures the distinction between ruler and the ruled, a distinction that is also reflected in Nayan and Anick's relationship. We might read this union as an attempt by Mootoo to turn the colonial hierarchy of race and status on its head by presenting the Indian man as plantation estate owner and the French European woman as his wife.

Importantly, *Valmiki's Daughter* acknowledges the possibility of, and existence of, women's same sex love during indentureship. We know little about nonheteronormative sexuality and affect during colonialism. Research in Postcolonial Studies on this topic predominantly focuses on the activities of European male travelers, writers, and officials who had relations with men in the colonies.[148] These experiences ranged from relations between white men, such as soldiers who turned to each other for sexual satisfaction given their close living quarters, the lack of available white women, and official restraints placed on liaisons with native women, to relations between white and native men. My earlier discussion of the Baksh/ Mohangoo case foregrounds the topic of homosexuality and Indian men in the Caribbean. As Gaiutra Bahadur points out in her reading of court cases and archival materials related to indentureship, a Scottish minister in British Guiana reported in 1866 stated that "uncleanliness in its most revolting forms is now exhibited amongst [the indentured], by the coolies and Chinese, under the names of bestiality and Sodomy." Moreover, Bahadur found that the highest courts heard at least one case involving "unnatural crime: amongst indentured men, in 1892" (88). However, little is known about same-sex relations between Indian men. The shortage of Indian women and the close-bonds made between Indian men often described as *Jahaji-bhai*, or ship brothers, suggests the possibility of these relations; however, the pervasiveness of heteronormativity has silenced such possibilities, so that the "Indo-Caribbean subject of Jahaji bhai culture is not only always-already gendered, but also already sexualized [...] the Indo-Caribbean masculine subject is indeed heterosexual" (Lokaisingh-Meighoo 86).

If we know little about Indo-Caribbean male same-sex relations, we know even less about Indo-Caribbean women's same-sex desire given the strict policing of this group and their strategic confinement to the domestic. Scholars have identified the *Matikor*, the female centered wedding ceremony, as an empowering space for women's performance of sexuality. Originally a ceremony of lower-caste Hindus, the *Matikor* aims to introduce and instruct naïve Hindu girls on the mysteries of sexual intercourse. This female centered space falls outside the purview of the male gaze, enabling the female expression of pleasure through suggestive dancing and parodying of sex roles. While scholars have read the *Matikor* as a space that demonstrates female cultural resistance to sexual subordination and as one that can enable feminist dialogue and practice across African/Indian racial barriers (see my discussion of this topic in the introduction), few have identified this exclusively female space as a possible site of Indo-Caribbean female queer desire (Pragg 12). As Gopinath states, studies on Indian women's sexuality often center on imperial and patriarchal activities aimed to contain Indian women's sexual freedom, eliding Indian Caribbean female queer subjectivity. Under these circumstances, Mootoo's expression of Indo-Caribbean female queer desire and sexual fulfillment through Viveka's sexually intense relationship with Anick opens up a much-needed dialogue on Indo-Caribbean queer female identities.

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[148] For more on colonialism and homosexuality see Hyam, Aldrich, and Arondekar.

It is important to note that in her novels, Mootoo does not present same-sex loving between Indo-Caribbean characters, neither men nor women, as we see in the films of Guyanese-Canadian filmmaker Michelle Mohabir, who visually represents two Indo-Caribbean women making love in a backdrop of canefields and plantation imagery in *Coconut and Cane*. Mohabir's work suggests that the queer potential of the tight-knit, affectionate bonds forged between plantation women because of their small number and the mutli-layered oppression they experienced cannot be overlooked. In contrast, Mootoo's presents a broader interest in queer female bonds that transcend racial lines.

At the same time, *Valmiki's Daughter* also indicates the extent to which female sexuality and sexualities deemed as deviant continue to be managed by society and the postcolonial state. By the end of the novel, Anick and Viveka ultimately choose the safety and acceptance offered by the patriarchal heterosexual institutions of marriage and the nuclear family; Anick is pregnant with Nayan's child and Viveka has decided to marry an Indo-Canadian man and move to Canada.

Read alongside each other, Mootoo's novels trace a history of queer desire across time from indentureship to the present "that would appear otherwise unreadable and representable" (Francis 47). Thus, in its linking of indentureship history and sexuality, Mootoo's fiction charts an alternative genealogy of sexuality that includes interracial unions, female sexual agency, and ambiguous sexual identities; giving us a glimpse into narratives that are most often than not, silenced in imperial, patriarchal, and heteronormative accounts. Additionally, by showing how contemporary constructions of difference -race, gender, class, and sexuality – are historically implicated and socially constructed, Mootoo indicates that intolerance can be changed through individual relationships. In *Valmiki's Daughter*, Viveka powerfully articulates this call for acceptance: "In exchange for honesty, integrity, a lifetime of service, she prayed that she and all people like her be granted the freedom, so long as it did not hurt anyone, to love whomever they chose, to love well, and to have that love returned without judgment" (360).

The importance of Mootoo's focus on individual relationship and communal transformation becomes particularly apparent when read in light of anti-discriminatory legislation in the Bahamas. Although the nation outlawed "buggery laws," discrimination against nonheterosexual subjects continues to be pervasive and the state has failed to implement legal protection for these subjects that allows them to combat acts of discrimination (Gaskin Jr. 440). While I do not mean to suggest that Mootoo’s novels reject changes in legal discourse, I argue that her texts show us that a top-down approach is not enough; changes in attitudes towards difference need to occur on the ground level within individuals, families, and communities. Mootoo’s fiction attempts to affect this process by intimately showing us characters who endure the pain and destruction of oppressive attitudes as well as by helping us to imagine what a more ethical and accepting world might look like.

Conclusion

In the Indo-Caribbean literature examined in this dissertation, indentureship surfaces as a historical haunting, as an experience that engendered cultural exchange and the transformation of Indian cultural practice and literary forms, as a way to claim belonging in the Caribbean region, and, crucially, as an important component to the formation of Indo-Caribbean individual and collective identity in the Caribbean and the diaspora. As these works often suggest, in order to transcend the oppressive ideologies upon which the indentureship system was built, Indo-Caribbeans must first come to terms with this historical reality, recognize how its echoes continue to be felt in Indo-Caribbean material and affect lives, and claim it as an integral aspect of Indo-Caribbean heritage.

Gaiutra Bahadur ends her 2013 book, *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture,* by powerfully conveying the ways in which the violence of colonialism reverberates in the contemporary lives of Guyanese people:

> In a sense, other men, the colonizers, were also responsible for the dismembering [of Guyanese women]. The British had severed the indentured from their country, their caste, their kin. And imperial officials had created the conditions for violence against women through unnatural gender ratios. From this angle, colonialism rather than physical chopping was the crime, and colonial policy and practice, the perpetrator. There was certainly more precedent in more symbolic actions by European colonizers. They had maimed ancient statues found in Indian caves; offended by the sexuality manifested in the stone, they had cut off noses and breasts. Could those mutilations be seen as a metaphor for real and lasting disfigurements to the people who would become Indo-Caribbeans? Does history

> gather a momentum of inevitable loss, following the physics tending to chaos, entropically devoid blame? Or can history be held to account for current intimate partner violence in Guyana? (204)

Here, Bahadur details the violence that continues to get reenacted on women's bodies and indicates that it can be read as an extension of the conditions of indenture, such as the disproportionate gender ratio and efforts to domesticate women that created an environment where sexual abuse and violence against women were pervasive and often accepted. Bahadur links this violence further back to British colonial activities in India, emphasizing the deep-rooted impact of colonialism on the colonized Indian subject. Perhaps in this light we can describe the first Indian indentures as being "twice colonized," to borrow Ramabai Espinet's term from a different context. The dismembering of Indian women in contemporary Guyana can also be read as a direct outcome of the plantation violence that Indian men endured from overseers and plantation managers; as Rooplall Monar's poem, Babu, states: "Whiplash explodes from sunburnt hands." The powerlessness and frustration engendered by this public form of violence gets transformed in the private sphere, the home, as violence against women, who are perceived to be in an inferior position to their male partners. Importantly, Bahadur also makes clear that for many Indian men who work on estates cutting cane today, the social and economic conditions of indenture continue to dictate their lives since they receive low pay for long hours of hard work and often are unable to provide adequately for their families. Thus, Bahadur indicates that the cycle of violence, poverty, and female marginalization perpetuated by indentureship continues to shape the real lives of Indo-Caribbean people. Through its reading of selected Indo-Caribbean texts, this dissertation has engaged in a similar project by showing how indenture continues to structure relations between individuals and groups based on race, cultural difference, gender, class, sexuality, and other categories of difference.

This project only scratches the surface of Indo-Caribbean cultural production. While I have engaged with well-known texts, I have also tried to bring to light others, particularly early writing that has been overlooked and may not be readily accessible. I have also broadly outlined the emergence of an Indo-Caribbean literary tradition as a subgenre of Anglophone Caribbean literature. The study's Anglophone scope, however, has left unread Indian indentured literature from the French Caribbean, including texts by Guadeloupe's Ernest Moutoussamy and Martinique's Laure Moutoussamy, and literature from the Dutch Caribbean, including works by Surinamese authors Jit Narain and Ismese Krishnadath. My grounding of Anglophone Indo-Caribbean literary production in plantation history can be viewed as a possible framework for discussions of Indian literature from other plantation colonies in the Caribbean and across the world. The project's focus on literature has also largely prevented me from engaging with the rich work being done in other media, particularly visual culture. Work, such as Andil Gosine's performance art and fashion that take inspiration from indentureship as well as Roshni Kempadoo's multi-media installations that draw on colonial images of slaves and indentured workers and contemporary images of black-British subjects, transcend conventional forms in art and create new artistic modes to grapple with diasporic experience. I offer "Unhomely Stirrings" as my contribution to the vibrant scholarship being composed in the emergent field of Indo-Caribbean Studies.

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