

Transatlantic Relations: Race, Labor, and Sexuality in the Afro-Asian Diaspora

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SUMMARY

Transatlantic Relations: Race, Labor, and Sexuality in the Afro-Asian Diaspora is a comparative and interdisciplinary study that examines literary and cultural representations of the East Indian worker within twentieth century literature produced by black intellectuals struggling to articulate anti-imperialist and transracial narratives of freedom, liberty, and justice. I situate gender and sexuality as the central mechanism of racialization when unraveling the multiple ways that hyperbolic portrayals of the “coolie” figure as effeminate merchant, Afro-Asian prostitute, and gangster or thug in order to consolidate liberal ideologies of progress for the African Diaspora. Within this framework, I contend that Pauline E. Hopkins, Claude McKay, C.L.R. James, and Peter Abrahams rearticulated the political dynamics of colonial and imperial power in order to critique dominant narratives of progress, development, and self-governance found in western modernity. In doing so, they mobilized the highly redemptive figure of the racially liminal and sexually deviant East Indian worker to illustrate the weaknesses of black and creole nationalist projects, imagine alternative reorganizations of society produced from multiple histories of East Indian migration and African slavery, and defy parochial but potent pervasions of British liberalism that pitted and defined Africans and Asians against each other. Their figurings of East Indian workers or subjects, I argue, are both ambivalent and affective, nurturing the desire for producing developmental narratives of national inclusion while battling the fermentation of nationalist fervor. While the East Indian worker, who occupies a pivotal and incendiary role in their narratives, helps to consolidate black intellectuals’ claims to national inclusion, national integration, and self-government by reconfiguring black female sexuality or black

masculinity as productive and generative, this subject also functions to undermine those very categories of identification, of subject formation, and personhood. The contradictions in their narratives particularly illuminate the tension between striving for citizenship, for freedom, for community, and rearticulating and reimagining those very same ideologies in alternative modes that require unification and integration.

1. INTRODUCTION

In *The Rising Tide of Color* (1921), Lothrop Stoddard evokes the alarming “spectre of the Indian coolie” in his discussion of the “brown menace to white race-areas” of the world (84-85). This spectral figure emerges at a significant historical moment in the history of East Indian and Chinese labor migrations, when the abolishment of slavery in 1838 detrimentally affected the supply of cheap labor for plantation economies. The lack of a pliable labor force prompted imperial officials to recruit Indian laborers through an indenture system, vernacularized in North Indian languages as “girmit” or “contract” and pejoratively referred to as “coolies” or low-class workers. Although East Indian workers helped to propel the economic interests of empire, their transatlantic mobilization ignited extensive social and political struggles for black subjects *and* also provided opportunities for new affiliations, thereby fragmenting, destabilizing, and undermining the imperial project and furthering the aims of decolonization, nation building, and nationalisms. While Loddard’s fears center on the incorporation of Asian hordes into white national bodies, black intellectuals in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries situate and imagine the East Indian worker in varying and contradictory ways, as pernicious threats, desirable domestics, diseased bodies, and virile invigorators.

Transatlantic Relations: Race, Labor, and Sexuality in the Afro-Asian Diaspora examines literature produced by black intellectuals between 1890-1965 in the United States, Caribbean, and South Africa. I contend that in struggling to articulate anti-imperialist and transracial narratives of freedom, liberty, and justice, transnational black intellectuals in the African diaspora rearticulated the political dynamics of colonial and

imperial power in order to critique dominant narratives of progress, development, and self-governance found in western modernity. In doing so, they mobilized the highly redemptive figure of the racially liminal and sexually deviant East Indian worker to illustrate the weaknesses of black and creole nationalist projects, imagine alternative reorganizations of society produced from multiple histories of East Indian migration and African slavery, and defy parochial but potent pervasions of British liberalism that pitted and defined Africans and Asians against each other. Rather than advancing the balkanizing efforts instigated by the colonial government, narratives produced by black writers such as Pauline E. Hopkins, Claude McKay, C.L.R. James, and Peter Abrahams posit a contrapuntal relation between East Indians and Africans in the diaspora that highlights how the two constituencies have been variously positioned within socio-economic and political domains.¹ Their figurings of East Indian workers or subjects, I argue, are both ambivalent and affective, nurturing the desire for producing developmental narratives of national inclusion while battling the fermentation of nationalist fervor. While the East Indian worker, who occupies a pivotal and incendiary role in their narratives, helps to consolidate black intellectuals' claims to national inclusion, national integration, and self-government by reconfiguring black female sexuality or black masculinity as productive and generative, this subject also functions to undermine those very categories of identification, of subject formation, and personhood. The contradictions in their narratives particularly illuminate the tension between striving for citizenship, for freedom, for community, and rearticulating and reimagining those very same ideologies in alternative modes that require unification and integration.² In black intellectuals' struggles for decolonization, then, the East Indian worker can be seen as

collapsing the boundaries between respectability and indecency, between savagery and modernity, and between self-determination and colonial dependence.

The economic dispossession, political disenfranchisement, and social marginalization of blacks after emancipation and resulting from indentureship must be taken into account when examining Afro-Asian relations and issues of race, gender, sexuality, and nationhood. The omission of the impact of indentureship on black writers' literary corpus reveals a scholarly gap in African Diaspora and Afro-Asian studies, which has a tendency to idealize and privilege unity or multiracial solidarity. While scholarship produced by notable academics like Vijay Prashad and Bill Mullen has been seminal in clearing a path of intersectional histories of black and Asian oppression, they also emphasize extraordinary moments of cross-racial alliances, such as the Bandung conference in 1955, or rely on the works of few renowned figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois in exposing the transnational linkages between African and Asian constituencies. Antoinette Burton, on the other hand, reminds us to be cautious regarding the potentialities of cross-racial solidarities. Arguing for a fractious politics, Burton challenges academics to consider why "it should be so disquieting to suggest that we dwell in an archive of intimate interracial conflict and tension across sites of decolonizing struggle" (Menon 235). Other works, like Helen Jun's *Race for Citizenship*, gesture towards exclusion and displacement. My dissertation diverges from these studies because it intimates not just the fractious, exclusionary, and unified moments of Afro-Asian relations, but argues for the simultaneous desire and impulse for coexistence and unification under intense pressures to adhere to divisive tactics. Hopkins, McKay, James, and Abrahams illustrate sympathy towards the East Indian figure and affection toward

other racialized subjects with whom black constituencies shared the putrid remnants left by empire.

Transnational Relations moves beyond the traditional black and white paradigm to a racially triangulated model, arguing that the dynamics of East Indian labor and mobility must be read against white hegemonic domination and black disenfranchisement and dispossession in order to understand the multidirectional nature of power that occasionally aligned East Indians' interests with imperial interests or with the interests of black constituencies. Because of their perceived racial indeterminacy, intermediary laboring status, and claims to imperial and national citizenship, East Indian figures are illustrated as operating elusively yet forcibly through various modes of representations. I, therefore, assert the fluidity of racial identities and their representations and insist on understanding race as "an unstable and 'decentered' complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle" (Omi and Winant 68).

In addition to escaping the black and white binary, *Transatlantic Relations* maps Afro-Asian relations across three geopolitical sites – the United States, the Caribbean, and South Africa. Extending the geographic scope of my project to include multiple colonies and imperial formations enables a richer account of how transnational black intellectuals across national spaces illustrated the enduring complications arising from East Indian labor migrations. Historically, the haphazard and experimental system of managing racialized workers through surveillance, segregation, and displacement was either propagated or reined in by experiences in other colonies. For example, the South African colony of Natal conjured images of East Indian or Asian hordes overwhelming the South African colony, which in turn helped perpetuate a "yellow peril" discourse in

the United State and Canada (Chang 103). Historian Kornel Chang states that the Natal example was repeatedly invoked as a warning to the white settler word: “The cautionary tale of Natal was told and retold by white labor leaders in every dominion of the empire” (104). This menacing racial dystopia, moreover, helped curb and regulate Asian immigration into the United States and Canada. Similarly, Ato Quayson notes that the transfer of Asians through the British Empire during the colonial period “relied essentially on the instrumentalism of population dispersal as a key component of colonial governmentality” (365). Lisa Lowe denotes these transatlantic connections as “the intimacies of four continents” (192). The interdependencies between Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas constitute “global intimacies out of which emerged not only modern humanism but a modern racialized division of labor” (Lowe 192). Aside from seeing interdependencies between these spaces, the transatlantic framework enables a host of intersectional investigations, such as how Victorian ideologies of race and ethnicity became a shaping force in black writers’ engagements with East Indians in the U.S. or how American culture operated as a masculinizing force for South African East Indians in the 1950s while they were battling segregation initiatives spurred by British Empire.

By examining these different geopolitical sites, I argue against static and discrete conceptions of “empire,” and instead underscore the dynamic, complex, and somewhat messy processes of imperialism that sought to advance capitalism and political control. While many scholars are moving beyond national contexts in order to examine multiple spaces, South Africa remains marginalized even though it occupied a significant place within British imperialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. On a broad scale, the

Anglo-Boer war signified a crisis in British national identity, and the racialized and economic turbulence within the South African colony provided the means for both domination and resistance to racial hierarchies and labor exploitation.

Besides investigating a range of national spaces, including the United States, Trinidad, Jamaica, France, and South Africa, Guyana, and Canada, *Transatlantic Relations* highlights narratives that portray ports, barrack yards, cities, plantations, farmlands, and ships as strategic arenas for the development and contestation of citizenship. These spaces are tumultuous, conflating boundaries placed around citizenship as they exemplify various concentrations and circulations of nonlocal, foreign, mixed bodies. It reveals that even liberalism's twentieth century visions of a homogeneous national society of citizens was impossible as the influx of racialized labor in these spaces led to a host of uncertainties regarding allegiances, sovereignty, respectability, and cultural identities. These spaces interact differently to global processes than the visions endorsed by nation-states as the global traffic of goods and labor shifted the terms of belonging, and therefore, they are salient sites for understanding community and belonging outside of strictly national modes. Claude McKay, C.L.R. James, and Peter Abrahams's novels privilege these sites in order to address how the project of national citizenship plays out differentially across racial groups thrown together to serve the labor needs of empire.

Arjun Appadurai and James Holston note that cities, for example, "may still be the most important sites in which we experience crises of national membership and through which we may rethink citizenship" (202). In South Africa, city space harbors a history of identity-based violence and volcanic eruptions of the imperial administrative

objectives of apartheid between east Indians and Zulus. That appropriation of city space differs drastically from certain cities in the United States, such as New Orleans, where the tourist trade allowed the flourishing of Oriental goods, creating a space for mobile Bengali peddlers to work. Vivek Bald explains that the Bengalis' neighbors were predominantly "black" and "mulatto," and living on the edges of the sex district, and they often married women of color. Bald writes: "African American women anchored the network's operations in New Orleans...They worked in the boarding houses that Indian men established...kept up their households in the United States even as the men continued to travel through the network" (75-76). My point in asserting the difference between Natal and New Orleans is to emphasize that a focus on city-spaces rather than nations can reveal racial solidarities as well as racial tensions between East Indians and African populations, but that these revelations result from clear understandings in how and why these spaces differ from each other. Even though in both cities, trade and commerce exceptionalize the East Indian subject, New Orleans offers spaces of affiliation whereas Natal itself is a space of antagonism due to the competition for resources, land, and rights that kept Zulus disenfranchised while bolstering East Indians' claims to imperial citizenship. These differences are crucial in understanding a more nuanced, though less unified understanding of state operations of managing racialized subjects.

By focusing on these spaces, my aim is not to dismiss the nation and its ideologies but to arrive at a more layered and historicized understanding of national histories and transnational processes. It moreover, dissipates the notion that black or East Indian communities were bounded by national borders, which not only shrinks the geopolitical territories occupied by twentieth century black intellectuals but also

minimizes their affiliations across ethnic groups. Even though such affiliations are easily noticeable in print journalism in the early twentieth century, such as *The Beacon's* unabashed endorsement of Gandhian politics in South Africa, what is less obvious are the ways that black intellectuals maneuvered racial politics in order to destabilize dominant conceptions of errant sexuality or masculine violence.

It is within these layered spaces that articulations of citizenship become the most salient for the Afro-Asian Diaspora. British Indians, Sukanya Banerjee notes, repeatedly claimed their “perceived” rights as subjects of the crown, invoking their status as citizens rather than subjects of Empire under British colonialism (3). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, before the inception of the nation-state, Indians laid claims to universalist ideas of imperial citizenship, which were enacted culturally and imaginatively. The trajectories of Indian and African constituencies were intertwined as their claims to political selfhood and democratized citizenship were often situated against each other. For both constituencies, the question of labor or work was directly related to citizenship, whether it centered on seafaring merchants in the U.S. or Indian indentureship in the Caribbean and South Africa. Work was at the center of Indian claims to nationhood and the notion that citizenship rights needed to be earned through industriousness, moderation, thriftiness, respectability, and class mobility, was prevalent in the colonies. In South Africa, for example, this competitive industriousness met with displeasure by white settlers who countered the perceived success of East Indians by mobilizing discourses of filth, poor hygiene, and disease. This relation can also be seen in Hopkins’s representation of the diseased East Indian merchant who is morally and physically unfit to belong in the American family or nation.

In underscoring the importance of space and “colonial space making” as the “sets of relations that were structurally generated and contested across a series of interrelated vectors through the colonial encounter (Quayson 365),” *Transatlantic Relations* utilizes a comparativist, relational and transnational approach. Scholars working on the African Diaspora have long worked towards a critical methodology that enables interwoven histories that resist artificial and arbitrary borders between nations and cultures. Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* is heralded as a seminal text for breaking disciplinary boundaries that refute discrete cultural flows in favor of a transatlantic and transcultural frame. Several other scholars in African American Diaspora studies, such as Robin Kelley, Michelle Stephens, Stephen Knadler, and Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo have articulated varied ways of thinking about black transnational identities in the Americas and the solidarities, internationalism, and radical ideologies forged by black intellectuals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Robin Kelley, in his introduction to *Radical History Review*, states that African-American history has been “international from the beginning” (1). Each scholar with their own critical vocabularies, such as “cosmopolitanism” or “Black Empire,” seek to advance a rigorous analysis of “black” subjectivity as transnationally constituted. National identifications, transnational movements, and the desire for citizenship and belonging are vexed intersections in their scholarship as they attempt to situate the African diasporic subject outside of geographical/spatial binaries.

While indebted to this scholarship, *Transatlantic Relations* challenges versions of transatlantic crossings that privileges Anglo-American and European spaces. As Jet Etsy notes, one of the limits of Atlantic discourse, particularly exemplified by Gilroy’s

analysis is that it conceives of “the impossibly liquid space of the oceanic as a ‘structure and system,’ with an inside and outside” (105). Rather, I am interested in delimiting the “Black Atlantic” (and also the “Brown Atlantic”) to include other types of social interactions, political alliances, and multiple diasporic histories. The group of black writers I discuss conceptualized democratic citizenship and rights in complex, uneven ways rather than along a set of dichotomous boundaries of either Afrocentricism or cosmopolitanism, national or international, and black or white. In examining dynamic and emergent affiliations, my research underscores the role of comparative racializations arising from labor and class formations in fracturing a homogeneous “black” identity. W.E.B. Du Bois recognized these affiliations in the early twentieth century and articulated them through “Afro-Orientalist” tropes in his novel, *Dark Princess*. In *Afro-Orientalism*, Bill Mullen examines the struggles of Africans and Asians against Western imperialism. By looking at the writings of W.E.B. Du Bois, Richard Wright, Robert Williams, Grace Lee and James Boggs, Mullen demonstrates the desire for and the contradictions of Afro-Asian unity. In doing so, he shows the evolving internationalist perspectives adopted by Du Bois and illustrates Wright’s Orientalism and the difficulties he faced in identifying with Asian and African anticolonial movements.

Mullen asserts that Du Bois’s writing on Asia is marked by an Afro-Orientalism that links African American political interest to Asian destiny. Mullen understands Afro-Orientalism as a means to destabilize white supremacy – Orientalism – because it also threatened black Americans, and therefore, Afro-Orientalism can then be seen as a counterdiscourse to a modernity that threatened both blacks and Asians with subjugation and exploitation. Mullen writes: “Du Bois came to understand ‘proletarianism’ primarily

as the processes of western capitalism's interpellation of black, brown, and Asian workers in the advance of capitalism" (*Du Bois on Asia* xix). For Du Bois, the standard of living in Europe and America with its greatest concentration of wealth was directly related to the "plight of America and India" (*Du Bois on Asia* xix). Du Bois, moreover, cultivated friendships with international Pan-Africanists such as George Padmore and Kwame Nkrumah and supported the efforts many Asian activists, such as Sun Yat Sen, Jawaharlal Nehru, Mao-Tse-Tung, Mahatma Gandhi, and Lala Lajpat Rai, an Indian anti-colonial nationalist exiled to the United States. Although Du Bois does not directly figure into my dissertation, his critical assessment of the connections between Africans and Asians in the diaspora provides a useful perspective for his contemporaries, such as Pauline E. Hopkins, Claude McKay and C.L.R. James who worked under similar internationalist ambitions but in starkly different ways, particularly *against* the racial romanticism that inflected Du Bois's work on Asia.

Unlike Du Bois, Hopkins, McKay, James, and Abrahams's renderings of East Indians do not suggest an unequivocal investment in multiracial solidarity. Rather, they illustrate an ambivalent yet profound infatuation with the East Indian racial other who elucidates the vistas of their own restrained liberation. While they too, like Du Bois, sought multiple affiliations and racial unity to mitigate racist ideology, economic forces, and political disenfranchisement, they also aspired to displace racist and sexist ideologies that denied their demands for incorporation and unification. Their relationship with East Indians, therefore, were vexed and complexly interrelated in economic and socio-political ways. Winston James, for example, notes that in Jamaica, the decision to bring East Indians to the colony took an economic toll on Afro-Jamaicans: "...the planter class

conspired to undermine the already low wages of the poor by bringing into the island thousands of Indian and Chinese indentured workers. To compound the injury...the very taxes extracted unfairly out of the Jamaican masses would be used to help defray the cost of importing cheap Indian labor” (23). This initial economic relation percolates into black writers’ textual and cultural imaginings of national incorporation, unification, and aspiration for citizenship.

1.1 Chapter Summaries

The second chapter, “Figures of Racial Passing: Imperial Plunder and National Virtue,” examines discourses of black racial uplift and national inclusion alongside debates on Asian Immigration at the turn of the twentieth century in the United States. Specifically, I examine African American writer, Pauline E. Hopkins’s narrative, “Talma Gordon” (1903) and the relational positioning of two racially passing subjects – the “virtuous” mulatta and the “deviant” East Indian. I contend that Hopkins constructs an analogous relationship in order to implicate white Americans in imperial plunder, destabilize white patriarchy, and claim belonging in the American national family. In deploying *strategic* Orientalism to advocate for black women’s assimilation into the nation, Hopkins evacuates the East Indian from the national space. In order to consolidate a racially mixed national family, moreover, she also expunges black men of color, thereby erasing black male sexuality or male racial passing.

Chapter three, “Alchemizing the Masses: Deviant *Douglas* and the Subject of Modernity,” shifts to the Caribbean space, specifically Trinidad. In this chapter, I

examine black nationalist ideologies centering on self-determination and argue that C.L.R. James's barrack yard novel, *Minty Alley* (1936), counters the marginalization of East Indian "coolies" from the national space and critiques dominant discourses about East Indian cultural imperviousness and dispensability. While *Minty Alley* stages the "coolie" woman as loyal to the nation, the Afro-East Indian hybrid, or *dougla*, requires regulation and disciplining by the black bourgeois male. James's configuration of the *dougla*, however, is a highly redemptive figure that innervates the middle class with an alternative masculinity and provides a sense of fraternity with the lower classes. I examine *Minty Alley* alongside Alfred Mendes's novel, *Black Fauns* (1935), asserting that whereas Mendes sees the *dougla* figure as condemnatory, James views the *dougla* as invigorating the Trinidadian middle class, which was rendered impotent by the desire to embody bourgeois respectability.

Chapter four, "Black Community and the "Coolie" Gal in Claude McKay's *Banjo* (1929) and *Banana Bottom* (1933)" charts McKay's trajectory from *Banjo* (1929) to *Banana Bottom* (1933). These novels are strikingly dissimilar in their explorations of black internationalism, black nationalism, and the nation-state. McKay invokes the Afro-East Indian prostitute as a figure that encumbers black transnational vagabonding by imposing gendered constraints of domesticity and heteronormative coupling. This female *dougla* figure becomes imbricated in McKay's critique of French liberalism because she engages in the bid for whiteness and for capital gain, however, she also demonstrates the capacity to exist outside of oppressive statist conditions. *Banana Bottom*, in contrast to *Banjo*, restrains the East Indian hybrid's sexuality in order to incorporate her into an idyllic Jamaican national space.

Chapters three and four critically investigate the historical, cultural, and political relationships between slavery and indenture in the Caribbean. The “coolie” mixed-race figure advances “race-consciousness” in significant ways by revealing the basis for cross-cultural diasporic identification, as in the case of *Beacon* nationalists who understood Gandhi’s politics and the plight of Indians as central to their own fight for freedom and democracy. For both James and McKay, the “coolie” instigates a detour around British imperial hegemony as writers look toward the East to promote their cause for liberation. They contest loyalist discourses of color-blind British rule and forge racial identities that could promote true democracy.

Chapter five, “The Black Indian: Myth and Nonracial Humanism in Peter Abrahams’s *A Night of Their Own* (1965)” shifts the discussion to South Africa. Similar to the way that the Caribbean writers locate the “coolie” as central to the unification of Trinidad and Jamaica, Abrahams explores the possibilities of a racial romance between a black South African male and an Indian South African female. This chapter argues that *A Night of Their Own* conceptualizes a resistance to racial dominance and apartheid through the consolidation of a nonracial humanism, which can only be secured through modes of black/Indian racial passing. Despite the highly dramatized racial romance between an African male and an Indian female in the narrative, the novel’s ambiguous ending, articulations of freedom from racial oppression, and the fulfillment of sexual transgressions, *A Night of Their Own* resists articulating and culminating in a genealogical counter-narrative that argues for the inclusion of Indian motherhood in a humanist South African nation. Rather than appropriating the logic of national reproduction, and giving birth to a biracial future, Abrahams’s ambiguous ending and the

perpetual deferral of black paternal filiation emblemizes an emergent, yet divided nation. Though the Indian woman, Dee Nunkhoo, carries the potential for a counter-patriarchal role for women, she functions as the guardian of male authority and the nurturer of African and Indian male revolutionaries.

The final section of my dissertation is a coda, “Liberating the ‘Coolie’ Woman,” which redirects attention to contemporary representations of “coolie” women offered by female South Asian diasporic writers, Ramabai Espinet and Gaiutra Bahadur. In contrast to my earlier chapters on black male writers’ imaginings of East Indian “coolie” women, this coda elucidates how South Asian female writers invoke the East Indian “coolie” woman in their novels. In Espinet’s *Swinging Bridge* (2003) and Bahadur’s *Coolie Woman* (2013), I assert that the “coolie” woman is heralded as emancipatory and she negotiates new gender spaces that transgress borders and refute patriarchal hegemony. Espinet and Bahadur recover and rescue the “coolie” woman in order to counter persistent heteronormative domestic roles that they attempt to escape or envision as anachronistic but part of a global neoliberal economy. Even though Espinet and Bahadur recover the “coolie” woman to contest their own contemporary subject positions, they ultimately subscribe to the dominant ideology of family and state patriarchy.

2. FIGURES OF RACIAL PASSING: IMPERIAL PLUNDER AND NATIONAL VIRTUE

In “Talma Gordon” (1900), Pauline E. Hopkins (1859-1930) reinterprets the American imperialist project at the turn of the twentieth century by juxtaposing two racially passing subjects, the wealthy mulatta and the enterprising East Indian worker and constructing a relation between subjects of British Empire and subjects of American slavery. This analogous relationship serves several important narrative functions in the story – it implicates Americans in imperial plunder, exposes pernicious forms of white morality, thwarts white patriarchy, and enables black-white racial entanglements. Though both figures occupy precarious roles, Hopkins sanctifies the mulatta by constructing her as a metonym for a racially mixed superior nation in order to advocate for the assimilation of black women while deploying a strategic Orientalism that ultimately serves to discipline the East Indian, severing him from accessing or participating in American modernity. Their differentiated functions or forms in the narrative help solidify the mulatta’s role in the American family, a formation that can never materialize for the East Indian. In other words, the East Indian’s racial menace, however legible, strengthens Hopkins’s gendered claims to racial uplift and forecloses any possibilities for affiliation. In addition to this relation that manifests in two forms of passing between two figures of exclusion, Hopkins’s narrative incidentally envisions only mulatta characters as part of the American national family. The subtext of her short story then, evicts men of color, thereby removing any trace of mythologies of black sexual pathology that constructed black males as rapists and white women as victims. The historical violence and residues of slavery evident in the criminalization and designation of black men as

rapists and the legality of lynching based on racialized sexual myths, is narrated outside the story so that their presence cannot be perceived as a threat. In producing the erasure of black men or men of color as generative or reproductive agents, Hopkins evacuates them of agency and deifies a normative discourse of national family that sublimates the mulatta woman and authorizes her subordination to a white patriarch.

Early twentieth century African American cultural production was a critical site that enabled African American writers to envision, articulate, challenge, and disrupt their relationship to the U.S. nation-state and to emergent forms of nationalism and internationalism. *Colored American Magazine (CAM)*, for example, was one of the most widely read African American periodicals that operated between 1900-1909. It was part of the magazine revolution that began in the 1880s and targeted American citizens of color. The magazine aspired to define and create a black magazine-reading public and was considered international in scope (Carby 125). Women, moreover, formed an integral part of the audience and the magazine made a concerted effort to represent women in biographies and sketches. In addition to giving black women visibility, the magazine provided a venue for African American intellectuals to voice their concerns regarding black disenfranchisement, sexual stigmatization, U.S. imperialism, and black racial uplift (Cho 2). Other magazines like *CAM*, such as *Voice of the Negro* and *Horizon*, also capitalized on the United States literary marketplace in order to attain racial goals; they marked a shift from abolitionist rhetoric in antebellum journals like *Freedom's Journal* and *National Reformer*.

Hopkins was founder, writer, and editor of *CAM* until 1903. Born in Portland, Maine in 1859 and raised and educated in Boston, Hopkins worked as a stenographer

while also writing plays and short fiction. She published her first novel, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* (1900), when she was forty years old, which was when she also became a founding member of *CAM*. In charge of its artistic direction, she advocated the development of African American art and literature, asserting that the magazine's aims were to provide a medium for "American citizens of color" in which they could "demonstrate their ability and tastes, in fiction, poetry, and art, as well as in the arena of historical, social and economic literature" in the hopes of intensifying the bonds of racial brotherhood.³ She believed that these bonds of brotherhood would help the cause of racial uplift by enabling African Americans to "assert their racial rights as men, and demand privileges as citizens."⁴

Black intellectuals like W. E. B. Du Bois, Martin Delaney, Booker T. Washington, Frances Harper, Anna Julia Cooper, and William Ferris supported the project of black racial uplift, which sought to prove that the black masses could be uplifted in moral, intellectual, and cultural ways. These portrayals aimed to invalidate the notion that blacks were unworthy of political enfranchisement. In *Uplifting the Race*, Kevin Gaines elaborates that in black nationalist discourses, uplift "represented the struggle for a positive black identity in a deeply racist society, turning the pejorative designation of race into a source of dignity and self-affirmation through an ideology of class differentiation, self-help, and interdependence" (3). Meant to resist lynching, segregation enforced by the 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* ruling, and pseudo-scientific racism, the doctrine of racial uplift enforced cultural achievement in order to enact social change.

By illustrating respectability, purity, and bourgeois values, Hopkins's fiction relied on black nationalist discourses of racial uplift in order to make claims for humanity

and citizenship. Although many literary scholars, such as Houston Baker and Barbara Christian, have understood Hopkins as upholding an assimilationist stance in her literature, particularly because she utilizes the mulatta figure within traditional and domestic spaces, Hazel Carby, Claude Tate, and Ann DuCille have sought to redefine her narratives of racial miscegenation and domesticity as politically and ideologically charged. DuCille notes that for Hopkins, like Frances Harper and William Wells Brown, the mulatta figure was a rhetorical device and a political strategy that allowed explorations of “proscribed social and sexual relations between the races” and enabled them to “build a visual bridge or graphic link between the white face of the mulatto and the black body of the slave” (7-8). In doing so, these writers were not simply trying to cultivate white approval, but were illustrating the humanity of black subjects. In other words, dismissive readings of this strategic function of the mulatta fail to see a powerful critique of middle class values.⁵ DuCille cautions critics to read marriage not as a “sign of liberation and civility...nor as the symbol of entrance into the realm of bourgeois American society” (8) but as embedded within material conditions and relations of power.

For John Cullen Gruesser, much like DuCille, the project of racial uplift has not received its critical due, particularly in discussions of empire. Gruesser critiques scholars like Kevin Gaines who adheres to the notion that uplift colludes with a “patriarchal, metaracist discourse” because it assumes imperialist racial hierarchies that void uplift of possibilities of resistance.⁶ Colleen O’Brien also critiques Gaines for his lack of historicity when asserting Hopkins’s complicity in spouting “Christian civilizationist rhetoric,” (246) and race science. O’Brien asserts that Gaines’s expectation that Hopkins and other black writers refute a monolithic “racist discourse” while dealing with the

mythologies and ideologies of scientific racism is faulty because “he fails to consider that, within a discursive arena of pseudoscience that fails to differentiate between biological and cultural explanations, the kind of ‘refutations’ available...were practically impossible” (247).

Hopkins’s politics are most evident in her nonfiction works where she claims that African Americans are living under conditions that amount to a new form of bondage that includes bribery and emasculation.⁷ She believed that blacks lacked the heroic and inspiring leadership of an inspirational, revolutionary, and international black male figure like Toussaint L’Ouverture who was much needed in their fight for equality. Only a handful of scholars, such as Goyal, Cho, O’Brien, and Gruesser, have approached Hopkins’s works through the lens of internationalism; except for Gruesser, their readings primarily center on her novels, *Of One Blood; or, The Hidden Self* (1902-3), *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* (1900), and/or *Winona: A Tale of Negro Life in the South and Southwest* (1902). Yogita Goyal, for example, argues that the failure of the domestic romance in *Of One Blood* can be understood through the novel’s turn to Africa, which illustrates that “the failure of the romance plot is also the failure of the American nation to provide a home for Hopkins’s mixed-race characters” (28-29). Africa, therefore, becomes the “sign under which ideas of black political futures can be debated, offering a rich critical opportunity for probing the relations between uplift and black nationalism, race mixture and hybridity, and the domestic romance and imperialism” (Goyal 29). Cho, like Goyal, also stresses the failure of the domestic romance and asserts that *Contending Forces’s* “domestic and transnational framing of the marriage plot suggests that marriage, as an institution that maintains state power and

naturalizes nationalist identification, is unable to eliminate the class conflicts and color-based hierarchies within black communities” (3). Cho situates *CAM*'s politics regarding the domestic manifestations of imperialism alongside Hopkins's developing international political imaginations about interracial relations after 1904. In problematizing the marriage plot in *Contending Forces*, Cho argues that Hopkins challenges the cultural nationalism evident in *CAM*'s negotiation of colored “Americans” and racialized “aliens”. When read in the context of class conflicts shaped by labor and capital, the narrative illustrates that the reliance on a “state-sanctioned instrument structurally tied to racism and capitalism to contest the dehumanization and exploitation of black subjects ironically reproduces the class- and color-based divisions *within* the black community and signals the ambivalent relationship between the legacies of slave trade and US imperialism” (Cho 9). In this astute move that refuses to polarize Hopkins's relationship with U.S. imperialism, Cho contends that an irresolvable tension between marriage and slavery exposes the institution of marriage as producing differences and inequalities rather than humanity and citizenship. *Contending Forces*, Cho expounds, gives way to a later envisioning of coalition politics between the “dark races” of the world based on the connections between labor exploitation, racism against African Americans, and women's suffrage (16). Noting that Hopkins's “internationalism paradoxically aligns her vision of racial solidarity with U.S. dominant discourse of progress,” (19) Cho urges critics to understand the complexities in Hopkins's work and her negotiations with dominant ideologies.

2.1 Cultural Narratives of Orientalist Difference and Imperial Citizenship

CAM was just one of the many periodicals that attempted to demarcate and trouble the boundaries between African Americans and Asian immigrants. In *Race for Citizenship*, Helen Jun argues that the black press in the late nineteenth century utilized Orientalist difference to assimilate black Americans into the American national fabric (16). With regards to Chinese immigration, Jun asserts that these discourses of “black Orientalism,” can be understood “as a specific formation of racial uplift, generating narratives of black moral, political, and cultural development, which in turn reified the Orientalist logic of the Anti-Chinese movement” (17). In black newspapers such as *Freedom’s Journal*, stories about Chinese or Asian cultural differences accentuated narratives of black modern development.⁸

During the same decade in which Hopkins published her short narrative, the press was sensationalizing East Indian migration. In a cartoon published in *San Francisco Call* (1910), titled “A New Problem for Uncle Sam,” the figure of the “Hindu” is depicted as being picked up by his backside by Uncle Sam and held out for the Viceroy of India, who laughingly rejects him. Uncle Sam – giant and towering, angry, intimidating – implores British India to “take this impossible Thing back!” Uncle Sam further asserts, “We don’t want it over here!” The unhygienic “Hindu” is labeled as such by a price tag, wears a turban and is tagged with signs proclaiming, “Incompetence, Indolence.” He is, moreover, held in limbo outside the very concretely drawn borders of United States and India, smoking a cigarette. The opium-smoking Viceroy turns his back on the Hindu, rejecting him as a subject of the British Empire while the United States also rejects him as an undesirable commodity, much less a U.S. national subject.

In one sense, the cartoon highlights the precarious position of the East Indian subject during a crucial period of Anti-Asian sentiment, hostility, and exclusion in the United States alongside the anti-opium debates between the United States, China, and the British Empire. Though it's rarely recognized, Americans had their own history and investment in British India's opium trade through the East India Company. American participation in the opium trade involved difficulties with the Chinese, who "launched a series of crackdowns on the traffic," and threatened the East India Company's economic base (Downs 425). Americans as "energizers in both the Turkey and Indian trade, were a crucial factor in compelling the British East India Company to expand cultivation of the poppy in Bengal" in the early part of the 19th century (Downs 433). The direct role Americans played in the opium trade between India and China, between 1800-1840, centralized opium's role in world commerce. It was the "single most valuable commodity traded in the world, with the English alone grossing more than \$18 million per annum" (Aurin 428). England's advantage in the opium trade caused significant envy in the United States where the value of opium was highly contested for moral, social, medical, and political reasons.

During this time, opium was widely available for allopathic purposes in the United States. It had been a "staple medicinal product, sold almost everywhere: general stores, groceries, open markets, chemists, import and wholesale house, and by mail order" (Aurin 417). Its medicinal value was encouraged until the mid-19th century when the rhetoric of addiction and degeneration became linked to opium usage. By the early part of the twentieth century, addiction, psychosis, criminality, indecency became linked to drugs and the influx of immigrants into the United States.⁹ The first anti-opium law,

Smoking Opium Exclusion Act of 1909, was directed towards Asian immigrants for whom opium smoking was designated a primary activity. U.S. policy regarding the opium issue was complicated by imperial interests; It wanted to support China's anti-opium efforts and therefore, condemned opium trade on a moral and economic basis (Aurin 429) in order to further its own design in expanding its trade with China while at the same time, excluding Chinese American subjects. The Government of India, on the other hand, perceived anti-opium sentiment as a threat to the financial and political security of India, where Opium served medicinal, cultural, religious, and economic purposes (Richards 380).

The Viceroy of India's vested interest in opium could only be sustained without the migrant East Indian subject's fight for freedom on American land. It is therefore, not surprising that the aforementioned cartoon of 1910 represents the "Hindu" as hanging between Asian exclusion in America, U.S. commercial interest in China, and Britain's India's Opium trade. In addition to being positioned in between imperial interests, the East Indian worker was negotiating immigration in the United States.

Just prior to 1910, Immigration policy for East Indians was greatly influenced by American relations with Great Britain, which led to significant numbers of East Indians entering the United States between 1906-1909.¹⁰ Also prior to 1910, many East Indians became naturalized citizens based on their eligibility to citizenship under an 1870 agreement of reciprocity between England and United States or they advanced claims to Aryan blood (Ngai 40-41). Because East Indians were considered citizens of British Empire, the U.S. was bound to provide certain rights denied to other Asian ethnic groups. Although citizenship was sometimes granted to East Indians by local courts, the federal

government also litigated and deported immigrants who had been improperly naturalized (Ngai 41).

Ngai's history of Asian immigration is significant in understanding how Asian immigrants fought for their rights in America. In addition to their legal status, though, East Indians imagined rights and citizenship based on their status as subjects of British Empire. Sukanya Banerjee notes that the Queen's Proclamation of 1858, right after the revolt of 1857, announced the sovereignty of the Crown over British India. The Proclamation declared: "all shall alike enjoy the equal and impartial protection of the Law...And it is our further Will that, so far as may be Our Subject, of whatever Race of Creed; be freely and impartially admitted to Offices in Our Service."¹¹ The Proclamation became a "rallying" point for East Indians in the late nineteenth century and was repeatedly utilized strategically to argue for the suitability and social respectability of East Indians (Banerjee 22).

By 1910, however, the influx of Chinese labor or the "yellow peril" perceived by United States turned into "the Hindu peril". Even though East Indians constituted a small minority of railroad workers, "coolies" and other transient laborers, media reports continually exaggerated the numbers of subjects arriving into the country. One article claims:

Dirty bands of from a score to two score consumptive, emaciated Hindus, their heads covered by dirty yellow, red, white and black turbans, can be seen every day on the streets of the Coast cities. In the railroad camps and the vineyards, in mills and foundries, these people of India are rapidly driving out white labor because they work cheaper.¹²

The great danger posed by the Hindu, according to the article, is not the competition with white men, but that Hindu men at some point, will be "unable to work, except for the

railroad...and the railroad will have a veritable army of Hindus whom they can hold in a state of abject peonage” (“Hindus by Thousands”). The Hindu was seen unfit to be a citizen of the United States and considered “the most undesirable of Asiatic immigrants” because of their dirty, immoral, insolent ways (“Hindus by Thousands”). This year, which anticipated the passing of the Hayes Bill that specifically threatened East Indians and Japanese, saw a barrage of reportage on Indian invasion and exclusion. Articles on barring Hindus, the dark skinned and turbaned Orientals, and turning back the Hindu invasion flooded coastal newspapers.¹³ The language of terror, panic, and anxiety coupled with the rhetoric of repulsion were often accompanied by images of brown men in turbans stepping off boats and onto American soil. Most of these articles reflected the East Indian figure in the cartoon – they were all depicted as unhygienic, diseased, emaciated, immoral, insolent, lazy and weak. These representations justified the charge that East Indians could never be equal to whites.

These tensions regarding racial and national inclusion were ambivalent and often contradictory, particularly when the *color* of the East Indian subject was literally questioned. The mainstream media couldn’t decide on the extent of “blackness” of East Indian workers and their relationship to national rights. In an article titled “Color in Question: An East Indian forcibly Resents the Imputation that He is of Negro Descent,” the reporter narrates a physical altercation between John Scott, “a colored waiter who has a record and Otto Wennecher, a dishwasher of German descent.”¹⁴ John Scott, who has a “reputation of being an obliging servant” is “very touchy upon any reference to his color” and believes that he has the same entitlements (such as eating and drinking in the kitchen of the hotel with other white servants). Wennecher’s acceptance of the “psychological

wage” that whiteness offers occurs at the expense of the East Indian racialized-as-black servant. John Scott’s vehement reiteration of his identity as “East Indian” rather than “negro” is similar to the ways that Sikh workers identified themselves on the Pacific coast for whom cultural markers such as the turban acted as positive signifiers of difference from blackness.¹⁵

In the case of John Scott and the Sikh workers, brownness serves as part of a “spectral” tertium quid, restructuring what is overtly represented as a binary relation (Dayal 87). In this structural “three-ness” that characterizes the blackness, whiteness, and brownness of the figure of the East Indian worker, whiteness is “reinscribed as a hegemonic standard, simultaneously spectral and obdurately in the position of the Other as it mediates relation(s) between minorities” (Dayal 88). The mediation between minorities, in this case, the East Indian and African American, was part of a longer discursive racial formation that was based entirely on labor, capital, and conditions of production. The “black white” worker on the Pacific coast was unlike the “coolie” who was “less submissive than the negroes” but more easily managed than the Chinese. It was believed that the Indian “coolie” did not have “a conception of rights” unlike other minorities and nourished “toward his white master an intense hatred”¹⁶ Indian “coolies” were considered more likely to bide their time and poison their masters instead of overtly rebelling against the low-wage system that “approximates so closely to slavery.”¹⁷ The Indian “coolie’s” use-value was always judged in relation to “Southern negroes, well enough in their place, but by nature not adapted to (New England) climate.”¹⁸

As historian Moon-Ho Jung argues, the “coolie” served as “liminal subjects that were neither yet both” and evoked “fears of chattel slavery and ‘wage slavery,’ and, came

to epitomize the enemy of emancipation, freed people, free labourers, and indeed, ‘immigrants’” (143). Their liminality or interstitial position arose from their ‘partly colored’ (Leslie Bow) status and their performance of labor in the United States as well as other colonial territories. While the East Indian “coolie” traffic in the United States itself was muted, the discourse around the trafficking of Asian labor provoked images of hostile subjects revolting against a “natural” process of “coolie” immigration, which favored notions of free trade and liberality.¹⁹

Though most of the existing discourse on South Asian immigration and citizenship focuses on this particular migration of Sikh workers on the Pacific coast, the narration of the history of South Asian labor remains simply one of a history of immigration and incorporation.²⁰ It offers a “success” story of Punjabi Indians, one where hard work triumphs over alienation, racism, and exclusion, narrating them as “successful landowners in the New World” due to their ability to save money and accumulate capital quickly (Jensen 39). Like the “East Indian” colored waiter whose sense of entitlement was based on distancing himself from being classified as a “negro,” the Punjabi immigrant was seen as a “black white man” whose “whiteness was invested both literally and symbolically with the attributes of property,” thus signifying a structure of privilege that was denied to the African American. The coupling of the “black” and “white” designations indicates an odd and ambiguous racialization that is related to a structure of belonging where the threshold between black and white presents the East Indian immigrant as a “self-contained, legible, non-threatening” subject who is “ultimately, marketable and consumable” (Bald 60). The legibility of this particular formation of the East Indian subject, I would argue is not only related to their material

success, but also to the revolutionary histories of the Ghadhar Party and the Bhagat Singh Thind Case, which granted citizenship to South Asians. The fight for freedom abroad and the fight for citizenship at home indicate the ultimate narrative of nationalism for new citizens-in-the-making who lay claim to American land as well as America's reaching imperial power.

While the press portrayed East Indians as a threat to the labor of white men and placed him on the border of British subject/American citizen, the state began to formally recognize "Hindus" as a distinct population of the Asian category in the 1910 census. The census noted the "distinctly different" nature of "Hindus" as "ethnic" insiders, yet "cultural" outsiders.²¹ According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census:

Pure-blood Hindus belong ethnically to the Caucasian or white race and in several instances have been officially declared to be white by the United States courts in naturalization proceedings. In the United States, however, the popular conception of the term "white" is doubtless largely determined by the fact that the whites in this country are almost exclusively Caucasians of European origin and in view of the fact that the Hindu, whether pure-blood or not, represent a civilization distinctly different from that of Europe, it was thought proper to classify them with non-white Asiatics. (*Population 1910*, 126)

The shifting categorical classification of Hindus as white or Asian, therefore, was based upon "a combination of ideological exclusivity, international pressures from various Asian governments, and bureaucratic stickiness" (Hochschild and Powell 74). In terms of both the state and popular discourse, the "Asian" classification configured the "Hindu" as a "public charge" or as part of the "white man's burden."²²

2.2 “Talma Gordon” and Transatlantic Relations: Looting Virtue and the Formation of the Hybrid National Family

The historical context of East Indian or South Asian immigration to the United States in the early twentieth century is essential to Hopkins’s short story because it highlights her complex negotiation of racial differentiation and claims to full citizenship in the United States. What does her inscription of the East Indian immigrant and racially passing subject exemplify within her narrative of national family and reconstitution of national motherhood? I contend that like the sensational reportage on South Asian immigration that pervaded the press, Hopkins illustrates a deeply ambivalent negotiation with the Oriental other, whose very spectral and gothicized formation in the story demands recognition because his violent disruptions puncture the lauded white national family. Paradoxically, Hopkins contains his disruptive force to the domestic and national space in order to reconsolidate and envision a racially mixed family in which the black woman functions as the national mother.

Hopkins’s emerging visions of solidarity between African Americans and the “the dark races” of the world and the contradictions they generate for her can be perceived in her early work, “Talma Gordon,” which also mediates the violent legacies of slavery and histories of imperialism through racial, labor, and class differentiations. For the most part, “Talma Gordon” is an overlooked text, which has garnered very little critical attention by scholars. Like *Contending Forces*, “Talma Gordon” was written soon after *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896), the Spanish American War of 1898, which led to the secession of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam to the United States, and the annexation of Hawaii in 1899. By the end of the nineteenth century, the U.S. had solidified its empire and was

attempting to manage the influx of African, Filipino, Indian, Polynesian, Japanese, and Chinese migrants through various legal codes. The “separate-but-equal” segregationist language that characterized *Plessy vs. Ferguson* occurred just before the United States’ entry into the world imperialist competition and the collision of these two historical moments produced tensions regarding the national subjectivity of black citizen-subjects in relation to global expansion. Carby states that at the same time that black Americans were being “systematically excluded from participation in social institutions, the status of the people who lived in what the U.S. now deemed to be its “possessions” was an integral component of the contemporary discourse on race” (133).

“Talma Gordon” can broadly be considered domestic or sentimental fiction that imagines “resolutions to an array of social contradictions generated in the post-Reconstruction era by conflicting demands of racial, sexual and national identities” (Gilman 225). But her sentimentalism is also inflected with sensationalism. Hopkins’s narrative is intermixed with the genre of crime narratives, which illustrates dramatic violence, illicit relationships and “titillating” transgressions (Halttunen 3). Crime narratives elicited strong emotions precisely because they mirrored nonfictional stories of murder that presented murder as a matter of mystery. Halttunen states that these narratives evolved from early stories in New England in which printed responses to crimes took form of the execution sermon, preached shortly before the convicted criminal was put to death for his or her offence. Rather than discussing the bloody crime itself, the execution sermon tried to understand what was at stake for the murderer. In other words, what course of events led to the murderer’s transgressions and what was his or her spiritual state? What were the motives and what constituted justice? These sermon

narratives eventually became replaced by another set of texts, such as criminal biographies and autobiographies, journalistic narratives and printed transcripts. These journalistic accounts in the media, furthermore, were also reflected in fictional narratives. Although crime narratives and detective fiction are often thought of as a literature of escape that attempts to delight the senses, they effectively transport readers to “anxious locales” (Nickerson 744). These narratives, according to Nickerson, are deeply ensnared with the “thornier problems of the Victorian, modern, and postmodern eras, including gender roles and privileges, racial prejudice and the formation of racial consciousness, the significance and morality of wealth and capital, and the conflicting demands of privacy and social control” (744). This hybrid textual form that incorporates mystery, romance, factual and fictional crime narratives constitutes an ideologically charged space that merges a variety of discursive fields for political reasons.²³

In addition to being a crime narrative, Hopkins’s short mystery is further complicated by its gothic elements, which was common to “low-brow” pulp fictions of the early twentieth century. The pulp genre embodies the “desire for and the excitement, confusion, and trepidation about empire, despite the ideological impulses to justify, deny, and forget the nation’s history of conquest” (Aleman and Streeby xv). As a subgenre of the pulp, the twentieth century American gothic yielded a reflexivity about national boundaries that buttressed borders while simultaneously portraying them as permeable. Degeneration, decay, dissolution became staple elements because they tapped into pressing doubts about national identity and empire.²⁴ Hopkins’s mixing of form and genre – the short story’s crime narrative and gothic elements – can provide “glimpses of development from a usefully de-centered perspective” (Bascara 86). Unlike a novel’s

investment in individual development, the short story does not need to place subject formation at the center of the narrative, and therefore, can be interpreted as genealogies of a “moment of danger”.²⁵

“Talma Gordon” begins with an elite gathering at Dr. Thornton’s house. As a renowned white physician, Thornton is duly admired and respected by his guests who are members of the prestigious Canterbury Club. The upper class, male residents of Boston society narrate the dinner through the first person plural form point of view, “we” that provides readers with a sense of “white” authority over the story and imbues confidence about redefining the contours of the national against the foreign. The collective “white” voice of the nation enters into a debate about the America’s imperial outreach, thereby socially formulating the hierarchical relations between race, nation, and capital.

The topic for discussion is “Expansion: Its Effect Upon the Future Development of the Anglo-Saxon Throughout the World” (Hopkins 49). While the all male guests discuss the amount of wealth an overseas empire can generate for the United States and the possibilities afforded for missionary opportunities, Thornton says that he is not convinced by their arguments. He urges his guests to examine both sides of the debate and interrogate amalgamation as a serious consequence of imperialism. Thornton asks, “Did you ever think that in spite of our prejudices against amalgamation, some of our descendants, indeed many of them, will inevitably intermarry among those far-off tribes of dark-skinned peoples, if they become a part of this great Union?” (Hopkins 50). Thornton’s question emphasizes the racial issue surrounding American expansion, incorporation, and statehood.²⁶ Although some guests accede that amalgamation may occur within the lower classes, Thornton argues that intermarriage will occur among all

classes to an appalling extent and that it will bring forth superior beings if the dark races possess “decent moral development and physical perfection” (Hopkins 51).

Hopkins relies upon heated debates in the 1880s and 1890s regarding colonialism, which appeared to contradict American ideals of democratic incorporation. Ngai notes that the American acquisition of the former Spanish colonies “required a break with the tradition of incorporation and its promise of statehood” because it meant expanding sovereignty over territories with unequal status, or establishing colonies” (98). Anti-imperialists opposed possession of overseas territories on the basis of democratic principle and on the perceived backwardness of colored races. Others supporting the cause invested in economic advantage and the moral duty of advancing the welfare of the natives. Economic development was therefore, promoted as “modernizing progress, even as ‘economic emancipation’” allowing Americans to believe that “their imperial venture was noble in purpose unlike Old World imperialism” (Ngai 99).

In order to demonstrate the fissures in imperialist rhetoric and assert his point regarding the creation of superior mixed beings, Thornton narrates the history of the Gordons and the locked-room murders of Captain Gordon, Mrs. Gordon, and their son, Johnny.²⁷ The history of the family, then, serves a pedagogical function meant to educate elite white males. Thornton’s tale acts as the second frame of the narrative. He details his medical relationship with Capitan Gordon, a retired sea captain who was previously engaged with the East India trade. The Gordons were “old New England Puritans” who had arrived in the *Mayflower* and had impeccable lineage. As his family physician, Thornton enjoys unrestricted access to the family and is privy to all the intimate details of the household. He knows that the daughters of the first wife, Jeanette and Talma, are

estranged from their stepmother, who lacked her own fortune and envied their inheritance provided by the deceased, first Mrs. Gordon. Although Jeannette resembles the father and wields no discernible talents, Thornton asserts that Talma looks like her dead mother:

Talma was like her dead mother, and possessed of great talent, so great that her father sent her to the American Academy at Rome, to develop her gifts and talents. Upon her return, her father throws a party and Talma is admired by all her guests... (She was) a fairylike blonde in floating white draperies, her face a study in delicate changing tints, like the heart of a flower, sparkling in smiles about the mouth to end in merry laughter in the clear blue eyes. (Hopkins 53)

Hopkins characterizes Talma as the embodiment of wealth and culture whereas Jeannette appears dark and stern like her father. The heroine is one that a white audience can be expected to adore and immediately empathize with.

The home in “Talma Gordon” serves as a microcosm of national society where domestic ideologies are imagined and negotiated, allowing women to participate in the endeavors of American nationalism. In this space, Talma learns to be virtuous and develop her “fairylike” countenance. Portrayed as an ideal young woman, and in fact, a “genius,” Talma appears capable of building and strengthening the home or nation. The narrative discloses upfront that both Talma and Jeannette are motherless and that Talma’s mesmerizing powers – the very virtues she embodies – are derived from the white patriarch in the household who inculcates superior characteristics in her.

The same night that Talma arrives, there is an “uncanny howling of a dog” and a cry for help (Hopkins 54). The storm strikes the Captain’s tower with fire and when Thornton, Talma and Jeannette enter his room, they find that the Captain’s throat has been gashed. After examining the dead bodies of the Captain, Mrs. Gordon, and little Johnny, the doctor finds that Talma is the primary suspect. An old servant informs the

doctor and police chief about a quarrel between Mrs. Gordon and Talma involving their inheritance. Although the jury fails to convict her due to sufficient evidence, she is haunted by public opinion of her and by her desire to know who has committed the murders. The Gordon girls flee for Europe and the audience discovers that Jeanette suddenly dies, leaving Talma to inherit her portion of the wealth as well. Talma, at this point, has become a recluse.

Thornton explains that while the Gordon daughters were in Rome, he opened a sanitarium for chronic diseases. He describes one of his patients, Simon Cameron, as a “man claiming to be an Englishman, and fresh from the California gold fields” (Hopkins 60). Suffering from the last stages of “tubercle fiend,” this man had a “fascinating and wicked” face. Dr. Thornton describes: “The lines of the mouth were cruel, the eyes cold and sharp, the smile mocking and evil. He had money in plenty but seemed to have no friends, for he had received no letters and had had no visitors” (Hopkins 60). Thornton continues, “He was an enigma to me; and his nationality puzzled me, for of course I did not believe his story of being English” (Hopkins 60). Although Dr. Thornton does not believe that Cameron’s nationality is English or British, he can neither prove his suspicions nor pinpoint his nationality or ethnicity.

Thornton’s suspicions about Cameron’s racial and national origin inscribe an ambiguity in the story precisely because she illustrates him in Orientalist terms, as duplicitous, foreign, alienated, and evil. His Orientalist characteristics, furthermore, are couched in terms of labor and migration. Hailing from the California gold mines, Cameron has garnered significant wealth. He can, therefore, be seen as a “self-fashioned” man whose accumulation of profit and upward mobility enables him to perform a new

racial identity, that of whiteness.²⁸ In other words, his characteristics of enterprise and industriousness help to classify him as a white subject.

When Talma returns, looking like a ghost, she discloses several shocking revelations – that Jeannette had discovered their mixed heritage (her mother was 1/16 black), they were to be disinherited, and that Jeannette had tried to harm Captain Gordon with an “old East Indian dagger” but was beaten to it by someone else. Jeannette’s anger, Talma learns, stems from the treatment of her mother as an “outcast” and when she confronts Captain Gordon, he asserts that he was disappointed at the births of his daughters and wanted a male heir. When Gordon’s wife and Talma’s mother finally delivered a son, the boy was born dark like a mulatto with Negro characteristics. After initially believing that his wife committed adultery, she reveals her true genealogy and explains that she was an abandoned octoroon girl adopted by a white, childless, Northern family. After her confession, she and her black son both pass away.

The discovery of Talma’s dead mother’s impurity is compounded by the legacy of motherlessness that haunts Talma in the story and that speaks to the ongoing effects of slavery’s disruption of family life. In other words, motherlessness is figured as occurring over the course of many generations, causing the black women in the narrative to suffer from civic alienation. It, moreover, severs Talma’s identification with her father, Gordon, and displaces her, throwing the entire family into crisis. It is no surprise Hopkins chooses to deploy mixed-race female figures instead of the mulatto in order to propel her narrative forward since it is the mulatta who will produce future generations of Americans dealing with the aftermath of slavery. The narrative significations of the trope of the motherless mulatta cannot be overlooked in Hopkins’s story as she employs the

figure with liberatory potential and situates her as an agent of social change as well as a symbol of victimization, oppression, and racial patriarchy. Eve Allegra Raimon notes that unlike her light-skinned male counterpart, the mulatta “can best act as a conduit for imaginative representations that reveal the multigenerational implications and contradictions for an increasingly multiracial America founded on ideals of individual liberty” (9). The potentiality of this figure allows Hopkins to compel her readers to imagine the body politic as both interracial and gendered. DuCille asserts, “the focus on female characters and on the feminized subject of matrimony, rather than on male figures and the masculinist theme of manhood rights, must be considered as a claiming of the civil right that marked the difference between slave and free” (18).

The use of the mulatta also circumvents the much more scandalous and violent implications of black men with white women and the issue of lynching and state violence. Because interracial sex between black men and white women was considered to be an extremely heinous form of criminality, it justified the legality of lynching and entrenched racial and sexual myths that pictured African American men as rapists and white women as virtuous.²⁹ It also reinforced the notion that black males embodied savagery and were morally unfit to be American citizens. By disavowing the institutionalized, paternal, spectacular, and brutal violence of lynching, Hopkins contains the racialized mythologies of black male sexual pathology and simultaneously marginalizes the threat posed by the black man on the national family and ideologies of progress.

Hopkins’s silence around black masculinity, black racial passing, and the romantic entanglements between white women and black men can be, in Michel Foucault’s assessment, an “element that functions alongside the things said, within them

and in relation to them within over-all strategies” (27). The strategic hybridity that Hopkins deploys writes black male agency and progress outside the narrative. It, moreover, produces and reifies a normative discourse of national family that sublimates the mulatta and sanctions her subordination to a white patriarch. The invisibility of black male racial passing and black hybridity, then, introduces a problematic of gender and sexuality at the core of race and culture as the mulatta woman’s productivity is signaled through her womb.³⁰

As Talma imparts the knowledge of her mixed ancestry to Doctor Thornton, Cameron also confesses his real identity and motive – that his name is not Simon Cameron and that he murdered the Gordons. With his “bright, wicked eyes,” Cameron reveals:

I am an East Indian, but my name does not matter, Cameron is as good as any. There is many a soul crying in heaven and hell for vengeance on Jonathan Gordon. Gold was his idol; and many a good man walked the plank, and many a gallant ship was stripped of her treasure, to satisfy his lust for gold. His blackest crime was the murder of my father, who was his friend, and had sailed with for many a year as a mate. One night these two went ashore together to bury their treasure. My father never returned from that expedition. His body was afterward found with a bullet through the heart on the shore where the vessel stopped that night. It was the custom then among pirates for the captain to kill the men who helped bury their treasure. Captain Gordon was no better than a pirate. (Hopkins 67)

Cameron’s history “blackens” Gordon’s character, debunks Gordon’s pure lineage and white morality, and questions his racial intolerance of his mixed-race wife and daughters who embody morality, respectability, and virtue.

It is significant that Cameron’s racial and national ambiguity is buttressed by his false name and identity. Gruesser notes that for Hopkins, a literary artist who also incorporated history into her literature, altering names would have required careful

premeditation. She was well aware of the political repercussions of changing the names of not only significant African American figures, but also peripheral characters. Many scholars have alluded to the “pivotal role that naming and unnamings have played in black experience” (Gruesser 78). Because a person’s name is linked with identity, robbing one of his name cuts “that person off from his or her ancestry, family, and history, whereas to give someone a name situates the person within a societal, genealogical, and historical framework” (Gruesser 78). Cameron’s false name functions to disguise his true racial and ethnic identity and allows him access to the Gordon household, a symbolically powerful site that reconstructs the domestic space as the space of the nation.³¹ Cameron gains covert access to the household through a secret entrance, disclosed to him by *his* dead mother, signifying his ability to penetrate the boundaries of the home and nation.

Cameron’s revelation of his motive for committing the murderous act paints Gordon as treacherous, thieving, deceptive, and violent. After his confession, Cameron dies, ending the mystery and resolving the main tension in the narrative – Talma’s blemished reputation as a murderer. As Thornton solves the mystery for his audience, he introduces the elite male crowd to his wife, who is none other than the beautifully restored Talma Gordon. The conclusion of the narrative – Talma’s formal introduction to a white male constituency – portrays her acceptance into society. As the mother of two boys, Talma reclaims motherhood and reclaims the nation, raising the possibility of redemption for black women in the United States.

The narrative’s closure indicates that black women’s full participation in the American body politic can only occur with Cameron’s confession. Hopkins’s confession and characterization of Cameron has thus far been overlooked even though it plays a

significant role in consolidating a healthy, racially mixed national family. It is through Cameron's confession of his true subject position that we come to know who the *real* murderer is. Even though both Cameron and Gordon are murderers, Gordon's crimes make him unfit to be the white patriarch of the national family and his death ushers in Talma's rightful place within the domestic space.

Gordon's history of piracy dilutes the purity of Anglo-Saxon "civilization" and equates it with piracy. It, moreover, "categorizes slavery in the United States as a byproduct of imperial rapacity that resulted in amalgamation and racial intolerance," which constitutes the transmission of a brutal and intertwined legacy of imperialism and slavery (Gruesser 125). Naming Captain Gordon after the sea captain, Nathaniel Gordon, who was convicted of piracy and hanged in 1862 for slave trading in Africa, Hopkins links New York City's role in profiting from the transatlantic slave trade. Like Talma's father, Nathaniel Gordon had committed multiple acts of duplicity by stowing Africans under hatches and packing them in by spreading their limbs apart (Rowley 221). His execution, however, marked a turning point in American history and the transatlantic slave trade because it consolidated the Lyons-Seward treaty, which allowed the United States and Great Britain to search each other's vessels, try suspects in New York, Sierra Leone, and Cape Town, and end the slave trade between Africa and the Americas (Rowley 224). Hopkins's rendition of Gordon's acts critiques Anglo-Saxon patriarchy by denouncing it as savage, illicit, and a vicious part of American history. But Gordon's murder alludes to other sinful crimes committed by the East Indian worker, Cameron.

Although Cameron's confession acquits Talma, his lurking criminality results from his desire for revenge, his duplicity, and his intrusion into the national space as a

transnational worker. Hopkins suggests that criminality is also in his blood. Not only was Gordon a pirate, but so was his mate, Cameron's father, which stains his genealogy. Cameron's lack of morality manifests physically in his body through his affliction caused by tuberculosis. Diseasing the East Indian body illustrates his decay but it also allows Hopkins to displace the site of contamination that was associated with African Americans, ultimately rendering him unfit to be a national citizen. Cameron's nonheteronormative status as single, foreign, degenerate, alienated and utterly lacking in masculinity results from tuberculosis.

Tuberculosis, between 1890 to 1910, fetishized difference between white and black and between upper class and lower class subjects. The tensions over tuberculosis reinforced common beliefs about biologically based difference that surfaced through a medical condition that linked insanity and depravity to national, social, mental and physical health. In an article titled "A Brief History of Insanity and Tuberculosis in the Southern Negro," (*JAMA* 1897), physician McKie explicated the relation between blackness, mental health, and physical disease or deterioration. McKie extended the disease to upwardly mobile African Americans for whom civilization was stressful. He argued that the strain of being civilized like Caucasians or participating in upward mobility was enough to cause deleterious health conditions. Medical experts believed that the only way to contain the disease was by removing the affected person to a sanitarium, which for the general public, involved significant amount of expense in building, equipping, and maintaining facilities. The burden, especially in relation to African Americans suffering from tuberculosis, was placed on the white national body.

Hopkins relies on the contemporary immigration problem at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century to inform her characterization of Cameron as a figure that can negotiate the racial and class divide. Though Thornton suspects that Cameron's nationality is not really English, he is still able to pass as such, and his passing as English positions him directly between British imperialism and American race relations. Nikhil Pal Singh states regarding race and U.S. imperialism: "The U.S. is conceived as the product of imperial relations that cut across the boundaries separating domestic race relations born of slavery and expansion, and the global scramble for colonies that ushered in the twentieth century" (431). In this context, racial ascription simultaneously disturbed the sense of who was a true national subject while remaining indispensable to determining normative national subjectivity (Singh 434). Although national subjectivity was primarily determined along the black-white axis, for East Indian immigrants like Cameron who were racially ambiguous, it was formulated between domestic and international racial mappings, more specifically in-between boundaries of the American nation-state and British Empire. Because of Cameron's positioning in the story as English or British, and his diseased body, the narrative never poses the question of Cameron's incorporability into the American family or nation. Cameron's belonging can never materialize because of his criminality, narratively executed as legible, understandable, and even honorable; Hopkins, however, needs to mark a distinction between older forms of colonialism and the rising American imperialism that Talma will partake in.

While Talma's incorporation directs attention to a bright and reproductive future premised on a superior form of hybridity, Cameron, another figure of male race passing,

embodies an old form of colonial intermixture that needs to be censured because it was endlessly perceived in terms of debauchery, promiscuity, degeneracy even as it was the under the umbrella of development, progress, and civilization. Robert Young notes that colonial intermixture was not a straightforward sexual matter because forms of sexual exchange brought about by colonialism were also reflections and consequences of modes of economic exchange. Young writes,

The extended exchange of property which began with small trading posts and visiting slave ships originated, indeed, as much in the exchange of bodies as of goods, or rather of bodies as goods: as in that paradigm of respectability, marriage, economic and sexual exchange were intimately bound up, coupled with each other, from the very first. (181-182)

In order to consolidate a new vision of American family and solidify her role as a mother fit for the demands of development, Hopkins must expunge Cameron as the product of an undesirable union between white and nonwhite races.

Hopkins's utilization of racial passing and hybridity allows her to set up complex cultural interactions within multiple imperial formations between subjects of the "dark races" as they negotiate the terms of incorporation. The mulatta in relation to the "English" East Indian elucidates the intricate and imbricated processes of race, gender, and sexuality as they manifested in discourses of racial uplift, processes of migration, and accounts of imperial expansion, development and modernity. While Hopkins's curious juxtaposition of two figures stages the possibility of incorporation for black women by revealing the dark and sinister imperialist plunder that lies at the heart of American identity, it does so on the basis of erasure of black masculinity and male racial passing.

3. ALCHEMIZING THE MASSES: DEVIANT *DOUGLAS* AND THE SUBJECT OF MODERNITY

Cyril Lionel Robert James's (1901-1989) novel, *Minty Alley* (1935), illustrates his emerging proletarian ideas regarding the relationship between the black bourgeois male and working class subjects in a pre-independence colonial urban space – the barrack yard. This chapter contends that *Minty Alley's* representation of a dynamic heterogeneous working class constituted by Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians critiques the black colonial elite's insular desires for bourgeois respectability and disrupts the logic of colonial segregation. In refusing to separate East Indians from black urban space, *Minty Alley* evidences James's anti-colonial sentiments by dethroning dominant discourses about East Indian cultural imperviousness and suggests that the complex racialized and transatlantic relations renders a nationalist model based on race inadequate.³² *Minty Alley* infuses and innervates black bourgeois impotence. Despite his reliance on fairly stereotypical West Indian Orientalist tropes, James counters the marginalization of East Indians by situating the “coolie” woman as loyal and indispensable and the *dougla* as a linchpin around which desire, masculinity, and fraternity can materialize. In contrast to his contemporaries, like Alfred Mendes whose figuration of the *dougla* remains condemnatory, James critiques the dominant discourse about “coolies” as peripheral to the nation.

This chapter, like chapter one, concentrates on the racial and sexual complexities produced by the histories of British colonialism and slavery, particularly as they are illustrated through discursive representations of miscegenation, amalgamation, and national unification. While the first chapter investigates the pathology of racial

difference and contradictory processes of democratic citizenship in the United States for East Indians and African Americans, one that pivots on a black/white racial axis, chapter two explores the manifestation of fears surrounding interracial sexuality between East Indians and Afro-Trinidadians as they become embodied within transgressive lower-class *douglas*. In both the United States and the Caribbean, racial difference becomes identified with sexual perversion and mixed-race bodies become sites for negotiating the emergent postcolonial nation; in Trinidad, specifically, this entails how national narratives articulate Caribbean modernity by grappling with the socio-political consequences of East Indian indentureship.

The broader issues I examine in this chapter are the linkages between black and Indian nationalism, respectability, and sexuality. Jacqui Alexander notes that colonial rule in Trinidad instituted laws governing Negros, Mulattoes and Indians all the while positioning white masculinity outside the law (12). Identities were collapsed onto bodies; black women's bodies, for example, were considered unruly and deviant whereas indentured women's bodies were "formulated as dread and desire, mysteriously wanton, inviting death and destruction, although it could also be domesticated" (Alexander 12). Indian manliness, moreover, was imagined as unrestrained, violent, and androgynous. In order to turn the "savage into the civilized," the British aimed to socialize the colonized into respectability (Alexander 12). The black middle class, thus, were educated in morality, civility, and respectable citizenship. Black middle class elites who later established nationalist parties eventually became part of the state apparatus and in their efforts of nation building and citizenship, they invoked the necessity of guarding the nuclear, conjugal family and of upholding respectable femininity.³³ Black nationalist

masculinity, moreover, needed to demonstrate its capacity to rule, which was based on legitimate paternity, and required estrangement from unruly working class femininities. Through this lens, I consider how representations of the non-procreative, nonproductive, and sexually deviant *dougl*a functions in relation to black masculine respectability and to the interests of the nation-state. How does the notion of the “wandering” or mobile female “coolie” contribute to Indo- and Afro- nationalist ideologies and why do influential political and literary figures like James imagine national unification and self-determination as entangled with the emergence of a new creolized or *douglarized* society? James’s early work struggles to articulate his revolutionary visions regarding national unification, integration, and working class agency and race consciousness within a divided Caribbean national space in which democratic privileges are intertwined with the histories of multiple migrations produced by histories of colonialism and modernity that created racial hierarchies.

C.L.R. James was born in Port of Spain and raised in the village of Tunapuna in Trinidad in 1901 to a black Trinidadian middle class family. Inculcated with bourgeois middle class values of propriety, James was taught to reject the sexual and moral customs of the black lower classes because they rejected English sensibilities and were perceived as an “affront to the morality of the colonial model” (Robinson 252). He was, therefore, instructed to dissociate from spaces that joined the middle and lower classes, such as Carnival. Instead, he focused his energies on literature and teaching. Cedric Robinson notes in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* that James was indirectly exposed to popular agitation from an early age. The Trinidad Workingmen’s Association (TWA) was founded in 1897 and was composed of professional and artisanal

men who felt betrayed by the colonial state.³⁴ Although driven by the need of workers to create representation, the TWA aimed to gain a seat before the Royal Commission during which they voiced their concerns regarding the system of East Indian indenture. Walter Mills, the president of TWA argued that the organization was strongly opposed to state-aided Indian immigration because it “increased the competition for the starving wages paid on sugar states” (Prashad 84). Setting up an antagonistic relationship with East Indians and the planter class, the TWA became inoperative and then became reactivated in 1906 with the new British Labor Party. It expanded its membership by incorporating the “traditionally apolitical” East Indian worker, and by 1919, donned a transethnic, working class character.³⁵ Vijay Prashad notes that “the 1919 struggles terrified the planter state which saw the birth of a phenomenon it named ‘Creole Coolie’ who would refuse to be ‘manipulated as a buffer against the African’”(85). This resignification of the “coolie” indicated that the East Indian worker could no longer deflect the tensions between the colonial state and the Afro-Trinidadian population. During this time, the islands were in complete disarray from the depression after the war and saw numerous strikes including the oil workers strike in 1917, railworkers, scavengers, stevedores, sweepers, sugar and dockworkers in 1919, and asphalt and railworkers again in 1920. These years incorporated Trinidad as part of the postwar black movement, situating the island’s struggles alongside Indian nationalist agitation in Ceylon, African nationalism in Nyasaland, and Marcus Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association in Jamaica.³⁶ In an interview with Stuart Hall, James recalls that when he became a teacher, he also worked for a short time on a sugar estate. Though James did participate in proletarian

work, he could “see what the workers were doing and they had a big strike”³⁷ He notes that witnessing the strike formed part of his education, “but chiefly from the outside”.

Robinson states that in James’s early years, unlike his friend, George Padmore, he was more interested in cricket and literature than politics, thus glossing over James’s emergent political ideas regarding Trinidad’s working class and middle class constituencies, revolutionary leadership, and social change. His early writings – the short barrack yard stories, articles on Gandhi and the struggle in South Africa, editorials on racial oppression, essays on self-government, *Minty Alley*, and *The Life of Captain Cipriani* – were penned with the intention of teasing out the relationship between the leader and the people, the creation of a new national form, the subversion of colonial domination, the establishment of the humanity of the previously enslaved, and the capacity of the “barefooted man” to effect social change. While literary criticism on James has primarily examined the class relations and proletarian ideologies that threads James’s literary production, scholars have been divided on James’s gender politics. Although the “reclamation of history” as a sign of reclaiming Caribbean masculinity (Edmonson) can be gleaned in James’s later work, the relationship between black masculinity and the working class in *Minty Alley* has confounded many critics who either perceive his narrative as trivializing the role of men (Buhle 36) or marginalizing the role of women. Intervening into this argument, Hazel Carby, in *Race Men*, notes that James “sought to develop a theory of a direct, unmediated relation between the heroic male figure and the people... (an) ideal of the black male hero as one inspiring as well as expressing the social passions of the people” (116). Carby argues that the working class is imagined as female, signifying gendered class divisions. Following Carby, Michelle

Stephens maintains that revolution and masculinity are also integrally linked in James's work, and in black transnational discourse in which the state emerges as a desired entity because of its power to embody a diasporic and transnational racial body politic.³⁸

In addition to this stream of scholarship, Brinda Mehta emphasizes the racial tensions within *Minty Alley*. Mehta is correct in noting that one of *Minty Alley*'s "revolutionary and truly innovative merit lies in its ability to spotlight a previously invisible Trinidadian constituency through a literary engagement with Indian-ness by a black author" ("Addressing Marginality" 38). Although Mehta lauds this gesture of inclusion, which is narrated in the story through the margins, she does not consider why it is important for James to include the Indo-Caribbean constituency. Matthew Quest, like Mehta, argues for the importance of examining James's scattered political thoughts on India and the Indian question in his pan-African consciousness. Although Quest fails to provide a reading of East Indian characters in *Minty Alley* in favor of supplying a rationale for James's anti-imperialist perspectives on Gandhi, his work argues for the relevance of understanding James's vision of modernity as both "majestic" and "marked by blind spots" (192), particularly in the ways that James valorized Gandhi's theory and practice of non-violence as a political strategy. Quest writes: "James suggests Gandhi's life and 'spiritual powers' are a metaphor for the potential of 'underprivileged East Indians in Trinidad' of the streets, who he describes as 'frail,' 'unkempt' and 'scantily clad'" (193). Though the signification of this metaphor is unclear in Quest's text, it does raise several questions about the place of East Indian subjects in James's imaginary of the Trinidadian working class. What anxieties do "coolie" and *dougla* characters reveal about the consolidation of a unified working class that was so important to the future of

the Trinidadian nation? How does it reflect or prefigure political cleavages between Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians that persist to the present moment?

By the period in which James and his contemporaries started writing about racialized working class subjects, Victorian travelogues, magazines, newspapers, journals, and memoirs had already circulated romanticized portrayals of indentured East Indian women. These cultural representations also participated in colonial discourses that warned against mobile women exercising sexual freedom. Fears regarding their uncontrollable and exotic sexualities during the post-emancipation period, I assert, morphs into the figure of the *dougla*, or the Afro-East Indian hybrid, illustrated by Caribbean intellectuals in the early twentieth century, in order to critique and reconcile visions of homogeneously formed working class subjectivities within urban spaces.

It is important to note the intricate discursive production of “coolies” and *douglas*. The “coolie” was transported to the West Indies to resolve the labor crisis that emerged after the emancipation of slaves. Symbolically, the “coolie” figure could be regarded more generically as a mobile worker that embodied instability, placelessness, and racial difference. Anand A. Yang notes that in many ways, indentured workers mirrored convict laborers from Asia and were subject to various legal codes and rules of conduct exercised by the colonial or imperial state and the employer.³⁹ Emerging into visibility during the decades preceding slave emancipation and the emergence of a free working class, the “coolie” was often discussed as a mediating laboring subject that occupied a liminal space between un-free and free and between permanent and temporary labor. Madhavi Kale in her seminal work on indenture in the Caribbean, *Fragments of Empire*, provides a rich account of the debates surrounding Indian indenture in Britain, India, and the

Caribbean in relation to the black laboring population. According to Kale, indentureship lay at the juncture of post-emancipation labor-shortage claims, where black and white subjects depended on the “absolute alienness” of other imperial subjects to negotiate representations of freed people’s racial and social inadequacies” (65). The mobilization of indentured workers was highly dependent on rhetorically depicting them as “free” and unencumbered. Planters did not want Indian “coolies” to settle in importing colonies and wanted to use the East Indian workers to discipline or mold the now free Afro-Caribbean laboring population (Kale 160-161). Planters were concerned about the unnatural sex ratios of migrants and were afraid of the “immoral” range of sexual activities that might result from importing Indian “coolies”. Indian indentured migration was “cast as sexually corrupting the susceptible emancipated populations of the former slave colonies, and compromising the imperial project for social and moral uplift inaugurated with the “Great Experiment” of 1833” (Kale 162). On the other hand, conjugally disposed women, regardless of their racial identifications, were perceived as alleviating corruption because they were “carriers of the seeds of stability, morality, and culture”.⁴⁰ Heteronormativity within the structure of the Indo-Caribbean family formation, thus, was perceived as desirable and legitimate whereas intimacies across racial lines or outside the confines of marriage was denoted as corruptive to the entire Caribbean society.

Douglas, the offspring of mixed Afro- and Indo-Trinidadian sexual relationships, evidenced the permanence of East Indian workers in the colonies. They became embodied manifestations of the anxieties that the Trinidadian state felt regarding East Indian importation because they existed outside of family systems and heteronormative standards advocated by the state. These racially hybrid offspring also insinuated that the

wrong type of indentured laborers were being sent, such as vagrants and prostitutes. East Indian “coolie” women, thus, appear as the “medium through which some proscribed sexual practices – same-sex and interracial sex – were to be controlled, as well as the medium through which other proscribed sexual and social behaviors...were introduced and proliferated” (Kale 166).

Any discussion of Caribbean literature and politics must take into account the historical relation between African/Indian mobility and the ways that race, gender and labor systematically reconstructed national identities for both ethnic groups. The reason the Caribbean defies static definitions, as Kamala Kempadoo notes, is because it was constituted through a violent history of colonial rule that included the genocide of the indigenous peoples, the forced importation of Africans as slaves, and indentureship of thousands of Asians (5). The relational nature of migration and work, therefore, established differing notions of race and gender across ethnic groups. Faith Smith asserts:

Indians are crucial to definitions of the identities of both Black Creoles in the Caribbean and middle-class Indian subjects in India. When Trinidadian elites assert Black respectability, this is sometimes secured by belittling Indians, while commentaries in travelogues on Indians’ exotic bangles and veils are linked directly to the vulgarity and lack of ‘culture’ of Black Creoles. (20)

Smith uses the term “counterreference” when discussing the relational nature of Indian and African subjectivity in the Caribbean. This is true specifically when discussing women in the colonies. East Indian laborers were conceived as the antidote to black flight from the plantations and the two groups were defined in relation to each other so much so that single black women who dominated Trinidad’s urban spaces encapsulated all the “transgressive energies of the nonelite,” and were contrasted to their

male counterparts, middle-class women, and to “docile” Indian women” (Smith 18). Part of the appeal of the docile “coolie” women in contrast to the perceived vulgarity of the Negresses was that they were not only submissive to their masters, but also to their “papas” or “husbands” (Smith 116). Though East Indian women were hierarchically placed above Afro-Trinidadian women, they were always rendered inferior to East Indian men.

As part of her analysis, Smith depicts the ambiguous terrain on which British subjects like Kingsley and Froude compared emancipated slaves and East Indian workers in the late nineteenth century that were subsequently and critically contested by Afro-Trinidadian blacks and creoles like Herbert and J.J. Thomas. She recounts Thomas’s discomfort at a “coolie” woman that categorically aligns herself as “naygar” partly because her usage of the word symbolized the persistence of defining Negro as slave, an association that Thomas wanted to erase. When the outsider, such as the “coolie” woman identifies as a “naygar” because of her indentured status, it legitimized the “grammatical and conceptual given that the dehumanization and social indignity of slavery was defined by persons of African descent” (Smith 126). The “coolie” woman’s identification as “naygar” indicates that she may not have considered her conditions under indenture to be significantly different than the conditions under slavery or that she might have desired solidarity with Afro- and creole Trinidadians against the racial and class hierarchies. Thomas’s disavowal of her position as a woman emerging out of indenture marked the limit of her incorporation into Trinidad. The “coolie” woman was, therefore, distinctly situated outside creole formations that could allow her access to national belonging.

This limit becomes reproduced in various ways in subsequent narratives, which continues to inform national inclusion and exclusion in Trinidad. Imperial hierarchies and formations of labor, race, and sexuality certainly influenced national tensions regarding inclusion and exclusion. Pertinent to my analysis are the myriad ways that constructs of race and sexuality in England influenced the colonies' attitudes and positions on subjects, hence, the rhetoric of prostitution and the legal and cultural codes, such as vagrancy laws, used to configure, manage, subvert, dominate bodies of prostitutes also became visible in Trinidad. This relationship between the metropole and colonies is illustrated through portrayals or representations of women by marine authors or shipping merchants who travelled transnationally, circulating goods from port to port.

Marine authors like Basil Lubbock (1876-1944) provided accounts of the mobilization of workers. His "record" of labor transportation across the Atlantic during slavery and after emancipation compares the humanities of coolie labor alongside the inhumanities of slave labor. Aside from naturalizing an apparent division between "free" and "unfree" labor, his rhetoric of progress, or claim to modernization, crystallizes this shift from slavery to indenture as part of a process that Lisa Lowe describes as not only a modern racialized division of labor, but also a form of "modern humanism" (192). Lowe states that the introduction of indentured labor into the slave plantation economy was "described in terms of a need for a nominally 'free' labor force, one that would not substitute for the slaves but would perform different labors and would be distinguished racially and socially from both the white colonial planters and the black slaves" (196).

Lubbock's differentiation between slavers and "coolie" ships subscribes to a hierarchy of racial classifications that emerged to manage the labor of Africans and

Asians. His nonfiction text, staged in three parts (Slaves, Coolies, and Goods), begins by recalling the “horrors of the middle passage” and refuting contemporary arguments in favor of slavery. Whereas slave ships are illustrated as slaughterhouses and death traps, where a “living man had less room than a dead man in his coffin” (11), “coolie” ships are “beautiful”, “artistically finished, with much teak carving and ornamentation” (29). In contrast to slavers, these fast ships are efficient, strictly regulated, aesthetically pleasing, and spacious as evidenced by idyllic “coolies” sitting above deck.

In comparing indentured migration, Lubbock makes a sharp distinction between Chinese and East Indian “coolies”:

The Chinese coolie trade, which was chiefly in the hands of the dagoes, flourished throughout the fifties, and the name of many a famous American clipper ship was soiled through participation in this abominable traffic, which was every bit as bad in its callous treatment of the human being as the African slave trade. (32)

Attempting to portray the Chinese “coolie” trade as “abominable” due to the essential attributes of the Chinese themselves, he describes the Chinese as the “most unfeeling race on the globe,” impenetrable, incendiaries, dangerous (31-34). Lubbock’s distinctions between the Chinese and the East Indian “coolie” trade constructs the Chinese “coolies” as essentially dangerous and ultimately responsible for their own tragic conditions. The British Empire is evacuated of any responsibility in mishandling their transportation or treatment. On the other hand, East Indian “coolies” were under imperialist protection and portrayed as the benefactors of an efficient and humane system predicated on the proper management of “coolie” bodies.

Lubbock’s images of healthy, “robust” East Indian workers were also circulated in the press, especially the adorned and exotic “coolie” woman who seemed a “much

prouder and more exclusive race than the African” (Burroughs 275). Descriptions of “coolie” women as exotic creatures were accompanied by other markers of difference, such as adornments. In an article published in *Trenton Evening Times*, a writer advises fellow travelers of the Trinidadian East Indian women:

A great deal of jewelry is worn by the coolie woman. Solid bracelets of gold or copper, reaching from wrist to elbow and elbow to shoulder, are not unusual. Heavy necklaces of silver or gold, some of them weighing several pounds, are hung around their necks: and heavy anklets are worn around their ankles, which look too delicate to sustain the weight of the crude ornaments. Toe rings, rings for the ears and nose and for each finger and the thumbs, and an elaborate headdress form a part of the holiday dress.⁴¹

Such descriptions were commonplace and often, the “coolie” woman was photographed with her heavy ornaments, reminiscent of ceremonial or wedding jewelry.⁴² The images reinforced her cultural authenticity by marking her as “traditional” and stressed ownership of property and wealth. These Orientalist descriptions of the encased body symbolically validates the practice of indenture as a humane form of development and modernized labor by sublimating images of shackles of slavery with the weighty jewelry of indenture. Her unfettered “delicate” body paradoxically burdened by symbols of eastern femininity also signals her colonial docility to the liberal promises of freedom and progress, charting a linear progression of modernity marked by contractual and conjugal responsibility.

The discourse on Indian women’s bodies relates to the perceived morality of the migrants and the failure of the family. Out of the total number of emigrants, only 25% were women (Mohapatra 230-231). Most female recruits were unaccompanied by husbands or other male relatives. Others were widows, prostitutes, and runaways. Because female recruits were considered part of the lower class and already shunned by

respectable Indian society, they were stereotyped as unchaste, morally depraved, and vengeful, and thus, capable of inciting sexualized violence like wife murders. The colonial government recognized the skewed ratio as a problem. Sir G. Young, one of the Royal Commissioners to British Guiana, reported:

In Trinidad, a population of 110,000, there were 24,5000 immigrants and 5500 Creole coolies, making 30,000 in all. The female sex was as yet sadly deficient in numbers. The Colonial Office insisted on a minimum of 40 to every 1000 males who were recruited, and would increase the proportion but for the extreme difficulty of making up the quota without resorting to women of a character likely to neutralize all the benefits intended on their introduction. (216)

The government felt that the dangers of low female migration would at best, cause the breakdown of family structures, and at worst, be responsible for sexual deviances, such as rampant homosexuality between male indentured workers or interracial intimacies.⁴³ In either case, imperial concerns about self-rule centered on the East Indian “coolie” woman. These concerns mirrored the objections of Indian nationalists’ who argued that conditions of indenture enslaved men and turned women into prostitutes thereby preventing the consolidation of family structures. The perceived failure of the East Indian family resulted in the abolition of indenture in 1918, partaking in a wider imperial discourse on the origination and constitution of monogamous family formations, meant to accumulate private property and spur economic growth and productivity in the colonies (Mohapatra 228).

Discourse of indentured Indian women’s morality circulated in tandem with other competing arguments, ranging from condemnations by white British women who viewed themselves as championing Indian women causes or Indian nationalists who were concerned about the morally corrupt nature of indenture. It was Indian nationalist

agitation over women that led to the abolition of indenture in 1918. Prabhu Mohapatra explains that it was on the basis of failure of family formation that the indenture system had been morally condemned by Indian nationalists who asserted that the laborers had been degraded, and “the men had been enslaved, the women made prostitutes, and family life destroyed” (227-228). In order to contest the breakdown of the Indian family and counter Indian nationalists’ objections to indenture, British West Indian discourse circulated visual and literary representations, such as photographs of industrious “coolie” families, in order to justify imperial rule. Amar Wahab notes that travelogues and artistic representations on Trinidad deployed the ‘plantation picturesque’ form, which was initially a European convention of organizing social reality. This mode required the “presence” of indentured workers to reify persistent Orientalist tropes of “coolies” while constructing the “irrational” Indian figure into a “rational” indentured subject. In addition to aligning indentured workers with “rationalist and Victorian virtues of industry, their presence also portrayed the maintenance of traditional customs and family life to deflect criticisms from anti-indenture activists in India and England” (Wahab 288).

Capturing images of “free” liberal East Indian indentured women, therefore, furthered imperial goals by *humanely* satisfying labor demands. Instead of the “coolie” woman being imagined and configured as a suffering “Third World” woman, her liberation from the socio-economic conditions in India served to abdicate imperial responsibility in the Caribbean, which was portrayed as a site of freedom. These pictures, however, conflicted or were countered by discourses regarding the very immorality of these women who could not be relied upon to form solid family structures and to procreate for Trinidad’s economic sustenance and growth.

3.1 *The Beacon and Barrack Yard Narratives*

Representations of indentured East Indian women also flourished within the pages of *The Beacon*. *The Beacon*, operated by Portuguese Creole writer Albert Gomes, was considered to be extraordinarily influential, revolutionary, and international. Alfred Mendes writes in his autobiography: “it shook and shocked the island into awareness of values which had been taboo to its people...its antennae caught all the winds of change blowing from every corner of the world, and translated them in terms of Trinidad’s social, economic, moral and cultural life” (*Autobiography* 85). It was centered in the movement of cultural renewal, aimed at jolting awake “a rather somnolent society ruled by a complacent white colonial elite and their supporters among the black business and professional classes” (Rosengarten 160). The main purpose of the journal was to be a vehicle that allowed the expression and development of a literature and philosophy of the Caribbean that advocated new avenues of racial and political justice. *The Beacon* did not want to reproduce European literature in Trinidad. Rather, it wanted to foster the development of a uniquely Trinidadian voice. Thus, the driving force behind the work that they published was decentering European thought in Trinidad.

The Beacon depicted “elementary literary landscapes of colonial societies” that helped the emergence of “significant initiatives in the indigenous intellectual and literary traditions of development” (Whitlock 36). Through the medium of these sometime short-lived journals, writers rejected colonial romanticism for colonial realism through sketches, short stories, and argumentative essays. Wanting to see itself as part of a black international progressive intelligentsia, *The Beacon* was intent on creating a new “literature of the oppressed” that could allow blacks from anywhere in the world to

articulate their conditions (Carby 39-52). An internationally informed West Indian nationalism operated within its pages, bent on discursively or countering the terms of oppression. In many ways, *The Beacon* wanted to function as a “transmission belt for ideas arriving pell-mell in the West Indies from as far off as the Soviet Union and as nearby as other Caribbean islands” (Rosengarten 160). By connecting writers from the Harlem Renaissance, to the *Revue Indigene* in Haiti and to *La Revue du Monde Noir* in Paris, *The Beacon* created a literary space blacks throughout the world to articulate their political views about the emancipation and rights of Africans and Asians, their own conditions of oppression, and their opinions regarding white racist ideologies. *The Beacon* writers knew that the press was an important vehicle for organizing West Indian nationalism and identity and it set the stage for the writing of West Indian history by West Indians.

The West Indian working class subjects in the barrack yard narratives refuse the segregationist logic that infused colonial Trinidad that kept East Indians and Afro-Trinidadians physically and socially apart. United by the labor required to maintain the yard, these proletarians reflect Marxist black nationalism’s attempts to submerge racial strife under class interests. In addition to depicting the need for such unified consciousness within the lower class, the proletariats also show an immense capacity for questioning and subverting power relations. Barrack yard dwellers are representations of James’s idealized “bare-footed men” or the ordinary subject who he believed illustrated the capacity for independence and self-government.⁴⁴ In his early conceptualizations of black nationalism, James idealizes the plantation as a space that produces “modern” subjects fully capable of self-organizing, self-mobilizing, and participating in democracy.

The working class, therefore, inherits a legacy that is revolutionary and has the potential to effect change because it stems from a common oppression that indefinitely bonds West Indians – plantation labor.

Although James and Mendes utilize similar tropes in their short stories and novels, their representations are markedly different. James believed that in Mendes's fiction, "the race theme was too brutally articulated" (Mendes, *Autobiography* 81). In an interview in the *Jamaica Journal*, James recalls the tension between himself and Mendes, their social standings, and their literary production. While they both formally used *The Beacon* to express their thoughts and politics, they clearly occupied different class positions, which affected their publishing endeavors and intellectualism in Trinidad. For James, Trinidad was not necessarily anti-intellectual but it was "indifferent" to those without substantial economic means. James explains: "there I was, an intellectual concerned with books and there was Mendes, an intellectual concerned with books whose father had money. I believe that had a lot to do with it. There were two people interested in books and one of them had money" (*Jamaica Journal* 24).

Like James, Mendes published several short stories in *The Beacon* between March 1931 and November 1933 before eventually working for the colonial government. Although he was a Marxist and critiqued the racism in Port of Spain society, which was heavily influenced by the Roman Catholic Church, his works did not always privilege the black working class subject. Many of his literary fictions interrogated the psychological breakdown of the lower class Portuguese male through the hypersexualized "coolie" or *dougl*a subject. He, therefore, saw East Indians as a pathological threat. Because of the racial and sexual violence in his narratives, Mendes's works were considered scandalous.

In 1932, he faced a libel suit by a man named Septimus Louhar, whom Mendes used as a model for one of the protagonists of his short story, “Sweetman” (1931). Mendes describes the “sweetman”:

His wide nostrils gave his face a wild expression; he was, however, considered good-looking by all the women. Anybody could see that he was a *dougl*: in other words, that one of his parents was an East Indian and the other a negro. His black hair, long and curly, clustered about his head in a great tangle. The electric lights shone upon his chocolate-brown face, giving it a bronze appearance. The grey suit he wore, with tie and socks to match, was a present from Mamitz. Indeed, everything Seppy owned had been given him by Mamitz. It was more than a year since they had been ‘friending’ with each other; and the very first night Seppy had met Mamitz his blood had taken to hers. (1)

Seppy, the *dougl* “sweetman” whose economic existence depends explicitly on sexual favors, resonates with Mendes’s other characters in *Pitch Lake* and *Black Fauns*.

The libel suit eventually led Mendes into a deep depression in 1940s, which caused him to burn many of his unpublished manuscripts. Undeniably, social structures and the masses he witnessed in the slums influenced his fiction and the literary birth of the sweetman, a figure that captured a transgressive male subjectivity informed by destitution and powerlessness. Mendes was not shy about admitting that he developed his narratives from real life scenarios, which depicted the actual struggles of the lower class against colonialism and imperialism.

The Beacon writers imagined decolonization through patriot politics that examined, at the very least, race consciousness and an awareness of competing imperialisms. Harvey Neptune states that in terms of national formation and identification, the West Indies “belonged to Britain, but lay in America’s backyard” (6). This geopolitical factor contributed to a diasporic identification or a “sense of belonging to a global community of Negros” (Neptune 29). Aside from fostering diasporic

identifications, authors like Mendes used the changing landscape offered by the American presence as way to shed light on the racial, class and gender inequality on the islands. In “Beti,” Mendes writes about a young East Indian woman and an American Singer salesman, Peter Farley. Beti, the product of indentured parents raised in barracks on plantations, is “married” to an orphan whose mother was murdered by his jealous father. In this narrative, Mendes considers the East Indians’ history of sexual violence and death as “cultural” and relies upon existing conceptions that non-white minorities routinely engage in primitive and misogynistic cultural practices.⁴⁵

When Farley approaches Beti at her coconut stand for the first time, Mendes writes that Farley “regarded all women as prospects: black, brown, or white; poor or rich; ugly or pretty; from whatever walk of life – they were all grist to his selling mill – as they were for him grist to his other mill.” (Mendes “Beti” 150). For Farley, sexual consumption cannot be divorced from economics. Although Beti is “desperately poor,” he feels lured by her East Indian beauty:

Her sleek hair fell down her shoulders, every now and again the wind blowing it about and across her face. Peter was astounded. Not for a moment had he realized how beautiful the girl was. You had to be near to see the classic cut of the features, the large, lustrous eyes, the glowing brown skin, the perfect lines of the body. She was ravishing and as he looked at her, her face broke into a smile that revealed two lines of white, perfect teeth. Her laughter rippled into the bright morning air like the song of a bird. (“Mendes, Beti” 151)

Farley discovers that she is interested in purchasing a sewing machine and she asks him to bring a machine back for her and to demonstrate it in the evening. When he returns and demonstrates the machine, he feels uncomfortable in her presence. The confidence in his sexuality diminishes and the situation, ripe for seduction, seems sinister to him because of their close proximity; Beti appears simultaneously oppressed and

liberated. When he boldly confronts her about her intentions, she informs him that she will buy the machine and pays for it in cash. Beti's economic agency is coupled with her perceived sexual prowess, which disturbs Farley's sense of composure. Her purchase of Singer's sewing machine and sexual interest in Farley speaks of her indoctrination into American imperialism through a culture of "civilization" and consumption. The imbrications of colonialism with commodity capitalism shift the focus onto an informal imperialism that operated in Trinidad. It is no coincidence that Mendes depicts the figure of a cultured East Indian woman, who also poses as a sexual threat, as partaking of an upward mobility allowed by free trade and global economic integration. The "coolie" was always stereotypically seen as thrifty and possessing the "natural" ability to engage in commerce. Mona Domosh states that Singer was one of the first and largest American international businesses whose formula for success entailed aligning its products with notions of American civilization, thus allowing consumers to ideologically participate in the American 'dream'. Owning American products, therefore, signified western modernity in relation to American domesticity (457). Beti's purchase of the sewing machine, thus, signifies her participation and complicity in imperialism.

These modernizing impulses are seen in Mendes's other work. His novel *Pitch Lake* (1934) sets the stage for a narrative that is embedded within imperial power relations. Mendes writes:

It was Saturday in San Fernando, a town lying but a few miles from the famous Pitch Lake of Trinidad, and in and out of old Antonio da Costa's rum-shop walked Indians and Negroes and colored people. Now and again a white man would appear before the counter and demand a drink of whisky-and-soda in a harsh American accent that told you he was an oil-driller from one of the oilfields lying between La Brea and San Fernando. (9)

White American drillers, granted automatic respectability because of their race, held a contentious position amongst local elites. Although drillers “envisioned themselves as no less courageous than Roosevelt and his renowned Rough Riders” (Neptune 57), they were considered as representing a crude and vulgar whiteness.

James cautioned Mendes to “stop tapping into the fashions of the day” and model his work after the classic writers. Mendes, however, believed that classic writers were prudish and he wanted to develop a narrative voice that refused to succumb to hypocrisy.⁴⁶ Though *The Beacon* aimed to reach and represent the poor black constituency of Trinidad, Mendes often constructed his narratives around a “multiracial tapestry” that depicted African, East Indian, and Chinese Creoles, English and Spanish Creoles, and European expatriates.⁴⁷ The discovery and representation of the masses in the barrack yard became part of their nationalist project for middle class Afro-Trinidadians who were seen as isolated from lower class subjects. Sylvia Wynter asserts that James uses a pluri-conceptual framework, a “pieza framework” where “multiple modes of domination arising from such factors as gender, color, race, class and education are nondogmatically integrated” (63). The multiplicity of consciousness that the framework effects into the barrack yard narrative, allows characters to refuse “their value of nothingness” in society where colonial encounters have led to a social hierarchy based on degrees of color and wealth.⁴⁸ These interplays explode demarcations between public and private zones where dramas between characters occur within places that are simultaneously open and closed. Unlike the white/black dichotomy of the United States, grades of color exist alongside capital value and the “differential life value” of colored persons informs the national question that serves as the theme and motif of James book.⁴⁹

While Wynter is one of the few scholars to specifically address the barrack yard narrative as emerging from an historical, ideological and political system that addresses the “pluri-consciousness” of the Jamesian identity, the significance of the barrack yard as an organizational and institutional structure that disturbs categories of familial or private space and public space have been minimized; the barrack yard narrative not only portrays working-class spaces but also enables alternative imaginings of home and family in light of migration histories. It represents an ambiguous and unstable space that encompasses the household alongside the community. Rather than moving collective spaces into a privatized household or domestic sphere, the two spaces are intertwined in the barrack yard. The community moves into the barrack yard and “gets translated into household structures whose internal dynamics...are commodified, from the preparation of food, to the cleaning and repair of home appurtenances and clothing, to custodian care, to nursing care, to emotional repair” (Wallerstein 112). The yard thus embodies the intersection of market and personal identity within the lower classes, and their aesthetic renderings draw attention to socially invisible subjects reviled in urban discourses on sanitation, civility, and production.

In *Minty Alley*'s colorful barrack yard, domestic space is overlaid with leisure, employment, and businesses, which affect the nature of relationships within the tenement. Mrs. Rouse, the black matriarch who operates a baking business out of the barrack yard, raises, shelters, and educates the white Creole nurse. Mr. Benoit, the *dougl*a father figure and an account keeper, grooms her for respectable employment as a nurse, cleansing her of prior indiscretions. Their tenuous multiracial kinship proves to be just as unstable as the operations of the tenement, which is steeped in debt. These relations refute discrete

spaces and borders sought by the Trinidadian nation as it aims to map cultural and racial differences onto sexuality.⁵⁰ For this reason, *Minty Alley* constructs barracks as transformative spaces in which the perceived chaos, crudity, vulgarity, of the lower class, resulting from urbanization, could be harnessed as an alternative to bourgeois notions of domesticity. It functions, moreover, as a site of waste that accommodates and reproduces the “excessive” population of economic modernization (Bauman). These spaces produce perpetual uncertainties and anxieties about racialized deviants – the black working class, the unemployed, or the improperly employed – subverting the interests of the state. Shuffled into slums of the cities or nations, these subjects exemplify the heterogeneous nature of culture and nation.

3.2 C.L.R. James’s *Minty Alley* and Alfred Mendes’s *Black Fauns: The Afro-Asian Hybrid and Deviant Sexualities*

Yard novels were representative of Trinidadian “anti-establishment” fiction of the 1920s and 1930s. They challenged the comfortable heterosexual assumptions and stereotypical binaries forwarded by the discourse on family and heterosexual reproduction by thematically exploring nonheteronormative, *dougl*a sexualities. James’s *Minty Alley* and Mendes’s *Black Fauns* both employ crude *dougl*a characters whose deviant or queer sexualities wreak havoc on the barrack yard, ultimately producing irreparable cleavages between its inhabitants. James’s “sweetman” and Mendes’s bisexual prostitute exhibit sexual and economic behaviors that defy liberal ideals of heterosexual and monogamous relations; the instability that we see in the yard, moreover, is a feature of the unstable contingencies that constitute working class formations.

Although the *dougl*a figure in *Minty Alley* threatens the national framework, he also magnetizes the yard and innervates the anemic black bourgeois male.

Jennifer Rahim notes that the discussion of sexuality in the Caribbean is difficult because it has been policed by insecurities and prejudices regarding the heterosexual boundaries of human sexuality. This has served effectively as an “epistemological surveillance strategy to support the intellectual and institutional censorship of nonheterosexual realities from the taxonomies of Caribbean postcolonial cultural resistance, and by extension, from the imagined sovereign Caribbean nation” (Rahim 2). Rahim laments the absence of scholarship regarding homosexuality in the Caribbean and recognizes that while sexuality is celebrated during specific moments, like during carnival, there is a heavy silence regarding deviant and non-productive sexualities. Jenny Sharpe and Samantha Pinto also address the lack of scholarship by claiming that it is partly due to “a fear of reproducing the negative stereotyping of black hypersexuality that emerged from a history of slavery and colonialism” (247).⁵¹

Feminist scholars whose work centers on indentureship have made significant strides in the study of sexuality in the Caribbean. Kamala Kempadoo’s text, *Sexing the Caribbean*, connects racialized sexualized practices with the economy (4). In her sociological analysis, Kempadoo argues for a different lens for thinking about Caribbean sexuality stating that instead of viewing sexuality as a fabrication of the European imagination or dismissing it as part of colonial discourse, scholars must confront hypersexuality as a “lived reality that pulses through the Caribbean body” (1). She rejects the Western ideal of the “eternally monogamous, patriarchal, heterosexual arrangement” and proposes that Caribbean sexuality is characterized by diversity, in

which “multiple partnering relationships by both men and women, serial monogamy, informal polygamy, and same-gender and bisexual relations are widely practiced, and that many women and girls, and increasingly more young men, exchange sex for material goods and benefits” (Kempadoo 2). In tracing the ways that sexuality has been and continues to be material for the reproduction of the workforce, the family, and the nation, she emphasizes its role in supplying important economic resources (Kempadoo 3). Race and ethnicity are interwoven into this type of sexual economy, shaping ideals and fantasies about the exotic, and engendering sexual labor migrations. Rather than just monetary exchange, she emphasizes the role of “transactional sex,” which refers to “sexual-economic relationships and exchanges where gifts are given in exchange for sex, multiple partnerships may be maintained, and an upfront monetary transaction does not necessarily take place” (Kempadoo 42). This understanding of prostitution and commerce plays a critical role in the early barrack yard narratives as lower-class subjects articulate their sexualized positions through various networks of exchange.

Minty Alley begins with the middle class protagonist’s, Mr. Haynes’s, desire to break with his monotonous and schooled life, one that reminds him of his deceased mother and their black bourgeois status, signified by the walls and accessories of his home. Leaving his house, with its pleasant furniture, mahogany sideboard, spotless china, and silver pieces, means leaving behind the European commodities valued by the aspiring middle class as well as privatized isolation and class hierarchies. Haynes reflects: “Most of his childhood and his youth had been passed here, untroubled about anything except his own adolescent dreams. He had spent seven years at the secondary school, a shy, solitary boy, doing his lessons, playing games but making few friends, no friends – no,

not one” (James, *Minty Alley* 22). Even though he had continued to live in the house from “sheer inertia” (James, *Minty Alley* 23), Haynes knows changes are necessary if he wants to experience vitality and friendship, even if it is temporary: “He would marry some day and bring his bride home” (James, *Minty Alley* 24). James’s pathologization of bourgeois ennui suggests that the alienated middle class constituency lacks social development and masculine autonomy and potency, which can only be pursued outside of bourgeois confinement. Even though Haynes is ready to leave his lifestyle to seek friendship, he realizes that his return will require the restoration of his domesticity and respectability. For the moment, however, “the sea of life was beating at the walls which enclosed him” (James, *Minty Alley* 23).

Haynes moves into Minty Alley, which is teeming with activity by its busy inhabitants who are not “ordinary people” nor his “class of people” (James, *Minty Alley* 21). The barrack yard is filthy and he notices that the surroundings are “nothing the eye would dwell on without reason. The yard was reddish dirt and bits of stone, but much more dirt than stone, so that on rainy days it would be a mass of slippery mud, treacherous to shoe and slipper, and needing care even from naked feet...A dull enough prospect” (James, *Minty Alley* 28). Haynes sees the yard as the antithesis to his middle-class lifestyle and his proximity to this environment allows him access to real people and events. The disorder he witnesses indicates the social passions in the yard. In contrast to the feminizing force of civilization and domesticity in his mother’s home, the working class space is fetishized as authentic, enabling the development of masculine sensibilities. James explained in an interview that nothing much was happening in the middle-class

world and that life teemed in the yards, among the people whom middle class kept away from (Dance).

When Haynes first arrives, Mrs. Rouse, a black creole, shows him to his room and says, “No one will disturb you here, you know, Mr. Haynes. You’ll be quite private...Any –er- quite private...Any –er- come and see you at any time you will be able to have them” (James, *Minty Alley* 26-27). While Haynes feels ashamed at her sexual insinuation, the notion that there is a code and expectation that he can and will have visitors appeals to him. He spends considerable time studying the residents, everyone from Mrs. Rouse to the white Creole nurse’s eight-year-old son, who has fair skin color and straight hair. In addition to the Afro-Trinidadian Mrs. Rouse, the white Creole nurse and her son, the yard houses an East Indian female servant, Philomen, a hybrid Afro-East Indian male *dougla*, Benoit, and Mrs. Rouse’s niece, Maisie. Haynes is cautious of mixing and recalls his maid’s warning about “‘mixin’ up with these people too much (James, *Minty Alley* 77). Haynes obvious prejudices regarding miscegenation prevent him from participating in interracial intimacy even though he is now placed within a space where miscegenation seems commonplace or ordinary. Haynes’s rejection of interracial intimacies stems from the price that respectable middle class subjects paid for sexual deviance: “If anything did happen there would be a terrific scandal. And he might lose his job. If he did he could no longer pay the installments on the mortgage, and his mother’s house would go” (James, *Minty Alley* 77).

The dire economic consequences of interracial mixing apply to Haynes but not to Benoit, a *dougla* whose “very black face was undistinguished-looking, neither handsome nor ugly.... very dark skin and curly hair showed traces of Indian blood. The only thing

one might have noticed was a rather cruel mouth below the sparse moustache” (James, *Minty Alley* 30). Benoit’s racial identity, understood through his phenotype and articulated as the product of Afro-Indo intimacies, reinforces his lack of lineage. Haynes becomes privy to the sexual activities of Benoit through the crack in the wall in his room, where he assumes an invisibility that distances him from the deviant *dougl*a body. Intrigued and excited to be residing at the yard due to the glimpses he catches of Benoit’s escapades with the other women and in particular, the nurse, he suddenly feels invigorated and decides to stay at Minty Alley: “he was suddenly no longer sleepy. Instead, he was very much alive. In fact, he behaved quite idiotically. He balanced himself on the small of his back and kicked his feet up in the air” (James, *Minty Alley* 37). While Haynes had always read about women and craved physical contact, he had never “kissed or been kissed by a woman who was not related to him...now he had been pitch-forked into the heart of the eternal triangle” (James, *Minty Alley* 37). Haynes’s physical display of exaltation and covert titillations at improperly witnessing the illicit sexual encounter between Benoit and the nurse sexually immaturity, arrested masculinity, an inexperience. Through Benoit’s sexual encounter, Haynes is awakened to his own sexual desires but thoroughly lacks the ability, the knowledge, and the resources to fulfill them, at least without Benoit’s guidance.

Benoit’s sexual energies are equated with his incessant consumption for food, sex, and entertainment. He alludes to his excessive sexual appetite through his continuous consumption of nuts, which he believes motorizes his lust. Benoit juxtaposes his virility and strength against Haynes: “You have a nice, fat cook, man...guard your property. I am a man girls like...If she fall in my garden I wouldn’t have to lock the gate to keep her in”

(James, *Minty Alley* 31). Haynes's embarrassment by Benoit's language of sexual desire illustrates his inept abilities to engage with Benoit's hypersexualized masculinity. Benoit's aggressive sexuality and desire for multiple partners is characterized as uncivilized, animalistic, and unrestrained: "He held her and placed her against the kitchen door. Then he leant himself against her. 'This is what I wan,' he kissed her savagely. 'And this,' he kissed her again. 'And this, too, and this'" (James, *Minty Alley* 37). His "savage" desires remind the reader of Haynes' earlier phenotypical descriptions of Benoit that linked racial ideologies to natural dispositions, and they infer the differences in masculinity between the lower-class *dougl*a subject and the middle class black creole subjects whose effeminacy is an exemplification of his cultural hybridity or creolization. Haynes's effeminacy is overtly linked to his middle class status, which perceives sexuality as vulgar and an aspect of the "native" that requires civilizing. Benoit's power-laden masculinity critically mobilizes and naturalizes male power between Haynes and Benoit within a social structure that understands Haynes's masculinity in terms of discipline and restraint instead of wildness and savagery. The homosocial relationship between the two male characters, regardless of the differentiated masculinities, exhibits a bond that exists outside of the one between the women and Haynes. The promotion of male rivalry and/or male solidarity between the only two male characters in the novel propels the narrative forward as Haynes becomes sexually educated and enervated by Benoit and Benoit becomes disciplined and subdued by Haynes.

Throughout the narrative, Benoit's consumption resurfaces as a dominant trope and is portrayed as antithetical to middle class values of thrift and bourgeois codes of bodily restraint. He devours food, clothes, women and brags about the excessive

indulgence allowed by the white creole nurse. For dinner, the nurse feeds Benoit “beef, port, and a three-pound chicken, pigeon peas, and rice. Rum, vermouth, and gin” (James, *Minty Alley* 76). Haynes discovers that Mrs. Rouse’s financial problems resulting from the mortgage on the boarding house, is caused by Benoit’s spending habits. Maisie, Mrs. Rouse’s niece and Haynes’s eventual sexual interest, reveals that he spends Mrs. Rouse’s money recklessly on entertainment, clothing, and other goods, asserting that Mrs. Rouse works “like slave and he like a prince” (James, *Minty Alley* 60-61). Similar to the prostitute who engages in “transactional sex,” Benoit is not only unproductive in every sense, but is also the prototypical, conspicuous consumer whose sexual pleasure is explicitly linked to spending (Kempadoo).

Benoit’s lack of monetary and moral control propels him towards the white Creole nurse because she provides more access to goods. His affair with the nurse is not just driven by male heterosexual desires, but is also about economic exchange. After Mrs. Rouse discovers the affair, Haynes consults with Benoit about his plans to reconcile with Mrs. Rouse and Benoit responds by emphasizing the nurse’s access to goods: “Her colour help her, you see: she does only attend to the white people. And when she leaving they give her presents, brooch and watch and sometimes ten dollars extra. If you see the presents the woman does get! And this one here, her business going bad” (James, *Minty Alley* 64). Benoit informs Haynes that he and the nurse have an understanding. Aside from appearing white, she is a “moving woman” (63) whose upward mobility he is counting upon to raise him out of the barracks. His economic justification for sexual liaisons pivots on the racial markings of the black creole and the white creole women, who are both working-class women struggling to earn a living. Although Haynes is

shocked at Benoit's participating in West Indian pigmentocracy, and his disregard for the relationship with Mrs. Rouse, Benoit clarifies, "I ain't a married man" (James, *Minty Alley* 65). The reiteration of this phrase disavows their relationship allowing him to invoke his freedom at the expense of the black Creole woman. Brinda Mehta notes that "debasement of a black woman guarantees Benoit the satisfaction of white approval in which difference is abolished through his mental lactification and identification with the positivity of whiteness" ("Addressing Marginality" 44). By stating that he is a "free man" (James, *Minty Alley* 69) who is not legally bound by children or marriage, Benoit can follow his own sexual "science" and manage sexual contracts with the women in the barrack yard at his own discretion. His sexual "science" indicates a baser form of education that stands in stark opposition to Haynes formal education. Benoit's science, or strategy, misleads him and compels him to be subservient to the nurse. His allegiance to the nurse, moreover, reveals his complicity with colonial politics of whiteness that conferred privileges onto lighter-skinned bodies. Benoit's relationship with the nurse ultimately destroys him. Although Benoit once exercised patriarchal control over the nurse and the other women in the yard, their cemented relationship resembles a master/slave dialectic, recalling earlier moments in the narrative when she commands him to follow her like a dog.

Unwilling to form a family with Mrs. Rouse, Benoit fulfills the objections that both Afro-Trinidadian and Indian nationalists voiced against indentureship. Although complaints regarding sexuality and indentured immigration placed the burden of morality onto women, James reverses this notion by configuring the male *dougla* into the "prostitute" and economically and emotionally enslaving the black Afro-Trinidadian

female. Mrs. Rouse supports Benoit and is often referred to either as slaving for Benoit's comforts or a slave to the pleasures he can provide her. His failure to commit to a familial relationship with Mrs. Rouse finally allows her to realize that her "blood and coolie blood don't take" (James, *Minty Alley* 240), which is based upon her spiritual guide's warnings against the treachery and bad luck of "coolie" blood. Although Haynes is skeptical, he cannot dispute that the *dougla* carried out "treachery" or infidelity against Mrs. Rouse. The notion of blood not mixing well harks back to Haynes's earlier contemplations regarding miscegenation. Haynes's and finally, Mrs. Rouse's anxieties over the circulation of raced bodies becomes transplanted onto the *dougla*, illuminating the tensions between Afro- and Indo- Trinidadians. After Benoit passes away – destitute and impoverished – Mrs. Rouse leaves the barrack yard by selling Minty Alley No. 2.

In contrast to Benoit's laziness and proclivities towards whiteness that lead to his demise, the "coolie" woman, Philomen, who is Mrs. Rouse's most loyal and hardworking servant tirelessly labors to maintain the yard. The novel describes Philomen as "fat and brown and pleasant-looking" with "masses of straight black hair banded down by a white cloth" that gave her a "picturesque effect" (James, *Minty Alley* 32). In addition to her appearance, she exudes "good nature" and smiles amicably. The use of the "language of landscape aesthetics," in this case, the picturesque, rationalized British agendas that metonymically associated West Indian plantations with "civilized control" (Wahab 288-289). The novel's framing of the East Indian "coolie's" good nature and serene beauty recalls the Orientalist images and language used to identify the morality of the "coolie" subject in nineteenth century photographs, postcards, and newspapers. Amar Wahab notes that this aesthetic bore 'indigenizing' qualities that naturalized migrant laborers and

“justified colonial practices aimed at securing a moral bond between coolie and state” (291).

Minty Alley's representation of Philomen allows James to subordinate her within the barrack yard as a racialized underclass. The narrative, therefore, obscures her presence and reduces her to the function of labor. Maisie's persistent rumors about Philomen's unbridled sexuality, the falsification of Philomen's character, and her blatant racism towards her fractures Mrs. Rouse's beliefs in Philomen's morality, signifying the ways that colonial histories fabricated the stories of “coolie” women in order to justify their exclusion from the nation. Maisie's attempts to illustrate her own superiority by denigrating Philomen indicate the relational construction of Afro- and Indo-Trinidadian subjectivity. Mehta argues that Maisie's vilification of Philomen is a projection of her own helplessness within a colonial social order that limits women's potential: “The duplicitous collusion of patriarchy and colonialism offers limited possibilities of fulfillment for colonial female subjects who are caught within normative codes of compliance that instigate a serious erasure of female agency through misogynist patriarchal and colonial control” (“Addressing Marginality” 51). Philomen's assertions within the yard and her alliance with Mrs. Rouse are contested by Maisie because it reminds her of their shared marginalization as racialized female laborers, which Maisie refuses to accept by not completing her assigned chores within the yard or gaining employment elsewhere. While Philomen is confined to the kitchen, barely able to nourish herself despite her employment, Maisie roams freely within and outside the barrack yard, indulging in the fruits of Philomen's labor.

The novel suggests that Philomen's forced evacuation from the barrack yard is misguided. When Philomen is condemned by Mrs. Rouse because of her superstitious belief that "coolie" blood is harmful, contaminated and evil, the machinations of the yard collapse. Mrs. Rouse states to Mr. Haynes that when she went to see her guide, he told her that the mixture of her blood and "coolie" blood is dangerous: "He say that's why Mr. Benoit treat me as he did. He say I have nothing to expect from coolie blood but treachery...and he warn me against having any coolies around" (James, *Minty Alley* 240). Mrs. Rouse's blind faith in the obeah man's warnings supersedes Philomen's indispensability in the household. Even though Mrs. Rouse acknowledges that Maisie is making her life more difficult by "driving Philomen" (James, *Minty Alley* 112) away, she succumbs to the popular imaginary that stereotyped the "coolie" as evil and evicts Philomen from the yard. While her absence creates a desperate void for Mrs. Rouse, it propels Philomen to find alternative employment and happiness. At the end of the narrative, Haynes reflects that Philomen "grows fatter than ever and is happy" (James, *Minty Alley* 243). Even though she maintains a sense of loyalty to Mrs. Rouse, Philomen survives and excels because of her fortitude.

Without Philomen's labor, it is impossible for Mrs. Rouse to operate the boarding house. But without Benoit, the boardinghouse lacks luster, vitality, and spirit. James writes: "As Benoit's spirit had dominated the life at No. 2 even when he was not actually present, so with this death, the life at No. 2 came to an end" (James, *Minty Alley* 242). Although Benoit wreaked havoc on the lives of the women of the barrack yard and perturbed Haynes's moral sensibilities, his death elicits an incredible amount of sympathy and signifies a closure to the once effervescent yard and its social relations. Afterwards,

when Haynes walks past Minty Alley, he sees that “husband and wife and three children lived there and one of the children was sitting at the piano playing a familiar tune from Hemy’s music book” (James, *Minty Alley* 244). Haynes is rooted in front of the door, still peeking inside, and feeling nostalgic for his barrack yard days. The heteronormative family that James witnesses rewrites the working class fractured yard formation that generated the bourgeois male’s sociability with the lower class. Haynes sees this normative “progress” as both inevitable and lamentable. It is a “point of duty” (James, *Minty Alley* 243), or a moral responsibility, for him to look inside and witness the change first hand, which recalls the paternalistic attitude that Haynes displayed towards the transgressions of the working class subjects. Haynes’s enduring friendship with Philomen harks back to his initial desire in the narrative to seek relations that impinge on his isolation and alienation from the community. Even though it is through Benoit that Haynes acquires self-consciousness about his own masculinity and drive, his ties with Philomen indicate the solidarity between black bourgeois and East Indian constituencies.

Like the bacchanalia of *Minty Alley*, the yard in *Black Fauns* also depicts sexual intrigues and liaisons, violent confrontations, survival, and the circulation of money and bodies. This representation, however, differs starkly from *Minty Alley* because the *dougl*a character in *Black Fauns* lacks the complexity and charm that James imbues in Benoit. Even though Benoit’s actions are deplorable, they are also invigorating and energizing for the black bourgeois male. In *Black Fauns*, the duplicitous lesbian *dougl*a, Estelle, lacks any sense of morality. When she arrives at the yard, she is pregnant and ready to deliver an illegitimate child. Martha, a yard resident who aspires to black middle class respectability through marriage, realizes she intimately knows Estelle from before. Her

prior lesbian relation with Estelle threatens Martha's engagement to a heteronormative, desexualized, Creole black man.

Estelle is a young woman who cannot be categorized as a "pure negress," because one of her parents is an East Indian. Mendes writes: "It was only her mouth that gave her negroid ancestry away, her mouth and that pronounced blackness of skin so often found in *douglas*. Perhaps it was this very mixture of bloods in Estelle, the negro and the East Indian, that made her attractive to Martha" (Mendes, *Black Fauns* 141). Her phenotypical and cultural differences from the other residents are marked by the focus on her orifice; in this way, she resembles Benoit's colorful characterization in *Minty Alley*. Martha succumbs to Estelle's magnetism in the erotic and privatized domain of her bedroom, which paradoxically secures Martha's heterosexual contract with her fiancé since Estelle urges Martha to marry him for his money. Indulging in her suppressed lesbian desires causes Martha to shirk the attentions of her fiancé, the rent collector named Mr. de Pompignon, keeping him located outside her door and in the public space of the barrack yard. Martha's lesbian sexual practices undermine the heteropatriarchal imperative of black respectability and normativity that she strives to fulfill.

Estelle couples their illicit sexualities with unregulated economic activities when she compels Martha to steal 200 dollars from Miss Et'elrida, a fellow yard resident who also illegally acquired the money that originally belonged to a Chinese man. The homoerotic aspects of the novel link explicitly to the informal economic survival strategies the women develop that circumvents the state's effort to regulate capital. Estelle convinces Martha that she needs the money to nurture her fatherless, sick newborn conceived while engaging in prostitution and Martha realizes that she "would

have done anything for Estelle at the time they were in the yard” (Mendes, *Black Fauns* 148). After stealing the money and transferring it to Estelle who frivolously spends it, Martha understands Estelle’s manipulative behaviors and begins to suffer from psychosomatic disorders resulting in violent outbursts, attempted murders, and physical sickness. Specifically induced by Estelle’s refusal to nurse her child back to health, Martha’s disorders stem from the urgent need for a responsible black working class maternal figure esteemed by black nationalists. Her neuroses, induced partially by the inability to demarcate strict boundaries between her secretive lesbianism and her public heterosexuality, causes her to commit murder, reveal Estelle’s treachery, and reject her suitable fiancé. The decomposition of Martha’s subjectivity ensues not only because she fails to stifle her homosexuality and police her lesbian desires but also because she disregards racial and patriarchal regulations.

Mendes poses her lesbian identity as a destabilizing and contradictory site to assertions of normativity inherent to black nationalist discourses. Within the normative boundaries of nationalism, lesbianism challenges bourgeois domestic ideologies of the black middle class that sought authentication and validation through heteronormative familial relations. Just as these normative relations become subverted in the narrative, the secret lesbian expressions between Martha and Estelle *also* remain unfulfilled because of Estelle’s deviant character. Lesbianism functions as a pathology, effecting the disruption and breakdown of the yard and the Afro-Trinidadian woman.

While *Black Fauns* cannot even imagine the unification of the East Indian and Afro-Trinidadian, *Minty Alley* proposes that both sectors are necessary to effect social and political change in Trinidad. In James’s introduction to Ron Ramdin’s *From Chattel*

Slavery to Wager Earner: A History of Trade Unionism in Trinidad and Tobago (1982),

James critiques Afro-Trinidadian attempts to exclude East Indians:

They have made many attempts but so far they have failed (to permanently racially divide Trinidad). Dr. (Eric) Williams has written in public one important thing that he has done is to keep the Indian and the African people apart. In reality, it is my belief, and I say it plainly, that there is no salvation for the people in Trinidad unless those two sections of the population get together and work together. (14)

The barrack yard narratives imagine the possibilities for the union between these two populations and the transformations they can instigate in the development of direct democracy. His subversion of the dominant rhetoric that constructed the East Indian as backwards and uncivilized stems from his belief that East Indians in the sugar plantation were modern because they learned the relation of agriculture to industry and knew how to use fertilizer: “He is not an ordinary peasant, he is a highly developed agricultural laborer and for some years now (and this is what is decisive) he has been trying to come to an understanding with the workers in the highly developed Oil Workers’ Trade Union”⁵² Thus, the Indo-Trinidadian characters in *Minty Alley* reflect James’s belief that they are integral to the national development as equal laborers. Both Philomen and Benoit script this belief in his yard novel even though they serve very different purposes; Philomen critiques the colonialist superstitions that rendered the labor of East Indian women invisible and marginal to the nation and Benoit invigorates the insipid body of the black bourgeois male. This integration and relation is central to the creation of a new multiracial society because it redefines black masculinity outside the terms of English bourgeois formation, debunks the imperialist maneuvers that pitted Afro- and Indo-Trinidadian women against each other, and critiques the exclusion of East Indian labor from the national imaginary. But even as Benoit serves a generative narrative function,

Haynes maintains a paternalistic attitude towards him and the other working class subjects, recreating the hierarchies between the middle and working class. By imparting restraint, rationality and warning Benoit and Maisie of their actions and consequences, and disciplining Benoit's "savage" desires, Haynes continues to be situated outside the working class formation, which illustrates the residual traces of colonial uplift discourse on Black middle class masculinity. James's critical construction of Haynes implies that in disciplining Benoit, Haynes cannot acquire the working class consciousness that he needs in order to belong in that constituency.

4. BLACK COMMUNITY AND THE “COOLIE” GAL IN CLAUDE MCKAY’S *BANJO AND BANANA BOTTOM*

(Parts of this chapter were previously published as Das, Smita. “Subjecting Pleasure: Claude McKay’s Narratives of Transracial Desire.” *Journal of Black Studies* 44.7 (2013): 706-724.)

No two novels appear more dissimilar than Claude McKay’s (1889-1948) *Banjo: A Story without a Plot* (1929) and *Banana Bottom* (1933). The black transnational male vagabonds in *Banjo*, whose itinerant internationalism functions as the basis for black identity within the African diaspora, starkly contrasts with the deployment of the black peasant woman’s coming of age story in *Banana Bottom*, which centers on domesticity, heteronormativity, and class relations within the Jamaican national space. *Banjo*’s detachment and validation of a decentered and transnational identity within the black diaspora is reined and bounded within the desires for coupling, marriage, land and property in *Banana Bottom*. Despite the differences in these two novels, the black characters’ relationships to each other and to empire, state, nationalism and diaspora is punctured by the East Indian “coolie” woman. How does this figure either help consolidate or destabilize notions of black community in McKay’s novels? What histories does she invoke and why does McKay immobilize, exclude, or discipline her?

This chapter charts the trajectory between *Banjo* and *Banana Bottom* through the figure of the Afro-East Indian “coolie” woman in both novels. I argue that in *Banjo*, McKay weaves a narrative of male transnational alliances and black homosocial desires that excludes the Afro-East Indian prostitute, Latnah. Her characterization as heterosexual, domestic, and nurturing circumscribes Banjo and Ray’s freedom from consolidating an alternative model of diasporic consciousness that eschews any form of

nationalism, capitalism or ideology of development. I locate Latnah, a paradoxically redemptive female prostitute, within debates surrounding immigration and expulsion of colonial workers as a disciplinary mechanism to control criminality, vagrancy, and prostitution. Within the milieu of debauchery, whoring, and vagrancy in *Banjo*, McKay differentiates Latnah from the other whores because she vacillates between commercialization of sex and consensual pure desires. Like *Banjo*, *Banana Bottom* also maps a conflictual relationship between Yoni, the licentious Afro-East Indian “coolie” woman, and Bitia, the middle-class, western-educated black peasant, who both wrestle to attain national belonging and bourgeois domesticity within an idyllic Jamaica. While *Banjo* reveals McKay’s earnest yearnings to form transnational black affiliations without the constraints imposed by any woman, by any demand for domesticity, legitimate coupling and reproduction, and settling down, *Banana Bottom* reconciles the wrought relations between black middle class Jamaicans and “coolies.” This reconciliation, however narratively forced or strained, emphasizes the significance of merging an East Indian genealogy into his utopic vision of a united Jamaica. The Afro-East Indian’s tangentiality to a diasporic consciousness within *Banjo* shifts in *Banana Bottom*, where her incorporation becomes necessary and even essential to creating a pastoral fantasy that refuses the disavowal of indentureship.

4.1 French Liberalism and Assimilation

Before engaging in a reading of *Banjo*, it is imperative to understand the main tenets of French liberalism. In *Social Contract* (1762), Jean Jacques Rousseau, established that modern democratic liberty depended upon popular sovereignty by

asserting that legislative power belonged to the people (Bernd 84). Rousseau's work on the general will was imbedded in the *Declaration of Rights of Man and the Citizen* (1793), which states:

The law is the expression of the general will. All citizens have the right to contribute personally, or through their representatives, to its formation. It must be the same for all, whether it protects or punishes. All citizens, being equal its eyes, are equally admissible to their capacities, and without any other distinction than that of their virtues and their talents. (qtd. in Bernd 84).⁵³

The *Declaration* asserts that citizens, regardless of any "distinctions," could equally benefit from all rights, and this constitutes its republican tradition and universal principles. Rousseau's "one man, one vote" philosophy, however, advanced privilege for whites while excluding nonwhites as second-class citizens. Blacks and mulattoes were denied political rights, and were relegated to a space of dehumanized non-being. Europeans, blacks, and mulattoes were placed in a hierarchical relationship with each other, which claimed rights and entitlements for Europeans based on notions of civilizational qualities, intellectual abilities, and cultural endowments. Black backwardness at the expense of white advancement operated under both the French First Republic and the Second Republic, after the abolishment of slavery in 1848 when blacks were granted formal rights. As the Second Republic participated in industrialization and the production of sugar in the in the Caribbean, the French state coerced newly emancipated blacks to enter into unequal contract relations or indentureship, which ended in 1860 in French colonies in the Caribbean. Bonded labor brought 16,000 Africans to the French Caribbean and after the termination of African indentured labor the French state shipped 77,000 Indian, 1,300 Chinese, and 500 Vietnamese workers (Bernd 88).

Anyone without fixed employment after emancipation was denounced a vagrant, which was a punishable crime.

Under the Third Republic (1870-1940), the time period that McKay invokes in *Banjo*, France continued to mobilize nonwhite colonials in order to satisfy labor demands and regain economic power while simultaneously imbuing white bodies with civilization and culture.⁵⁴ To become French then, it became essential to assimilate. Colonial subjects deemed “unassimilable” were classified as “indigene” (Bernd 89). The contradiction of French liberalism, therefore, resides in its advancement of “universalism” while also differentiating between a valued French-European culture and other non-white cultures that it classifies and excludes as “unassimilable” on which basis rights are denied. Republicanism and racism, particularly the way that France positioned itself as the land of liberty while evoking racial difference and practicing racial exploitation, reveals a Eurocentric bias in the relationship between democracy, citizenship, and exclusion.

Tyler Stovall notes that while black France and black America share many similarities, such as the history of the transatlantic slave trade, elusive promises of citizenship, and their self-definitions as lands of liberty, a salient contrast between the two countries is the role of nonslave African migrants (“Green Pastures” 182). Unlike the United States where most African Americans are descendants from the slaves brought to the New World, France established a formal empire in Sub-Saharan Africa in the late nineteenth century and incurred a significant African migration after World War I. The combination of descendants from Caribbean slaves and African immigrants disturbed the notion of any single “black” community in France. But more than that, in nineteenth century France, it became possible to associate French national identity with the fusion of

originally diverse racial or ethnic groups (Fredrickson 107). It endorsed a positive evaluation of mestissage, which rationalized colonial expansion. George Fredrickson explains that the 'assimilationism' that was touted as the philosophy of the French empire was considered to be a process of both biological and cultural amalgamation (107). The notion, therefore, that it was desirable to assimilate indigenous groups through intermarriage drew on French universalism. French scientific racism even maintained that intermarriage was desirable in some situations, such as the colonies where whites were in the minority. Unlike the United States, mixed marriage was not prohibited, which was a sharp distinction from racial ideologies in the United States. Even though race mixture was seen as a distinguishing and prominent feature of the civilizing mission, it did not translate into equality of black immigrants in France. In American imperialist discourse, on the other hand, there was a clear absence of assimilationist rhetoric, and when the United States acquired the Philippines and Puerto Rico at the turn of the century, full assimilation of people of color was not even a remote possibility (Fredrickson 110).

The myth of French racial liberalism drew African Americans who believed that France valued black citizens because it supported and encouraged the literary endeavors of African American writers and intellectuals, such as Phyllis Wheatley, Williams Wells Brown and Frederick Douglass. During WWI, moreover, African American soldiers felt as if French officials openly received them and were enamored by the jazz music they brought from the United States (Tillet 937). By the 1920s, Paris became a meeting place for African American writers and artists like Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Jessie Fauset, and Claude McKay who felt that France provided opportunities for success that were unavailable to them in the United States. Even though they were aware of France's

colonial practices abroad during the interwar years, their liberatory views of France were understood through the prism of American race relations. Stovall states that the “contrast between an overtly racist America and a tolerant and accepting French capital had dominated the life of the expatriate community in Paris. Even those who did not consciously identify themselves as exiles took advantage of the greater opportunities offered them by Paris than their native land” (217). McKay radically revised his views on French liberalism when he traveled to Europe.

4.2 Black Itinerancy and Internationalism: Vagabonds, Prostitutes, and the French Nation- State

Since McKay’s encounters with marginalized colonials transformed his conceptualizations of racial duality, his narratives are best understood through his politics of travel and location. Caren Kaplan explains that “travel can be defined as a manifestation of pain or work” and evokes hard labor (117). After leaving Harlem in 1922, McKay visited the Soviet Union as a delegate of the African Blood Brotherhood, which was a self-organized network for black racial solidarity (Nickels 3). Because he did not belong to the American Communist Party due to his suspicions regarding institutional communism and political centralization, McKay’s reception was hostile. Joel Nickels notes that McKay saw himself as a “radical dissident” because he dissented from Soviet Orthodoxy like anarchists, anarcho-communists, syndicalists, and “Left-Wing” communists (4). “Dissident internationalists,” like McKay, supported nonhierarchical approaches to international self-government (Nickels 4). McKay subsequently lived in Marseilles from 1924 to 1927. While writing *Banjo*, his travels into

international spaces resulted in a more comprehensive understanding of material inequalities outside the context of United States' oppressive racial system. Encountering and identifying with other black transnationals within a global political economy informed a global political consciousness that perceived racial formation and national identity as functions of social and economic disparities caused by colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. Michelle Stephens writes in her seminal work, *Black Empire*, that narratives such as McKay's "represent a desire on the part of marginalized modern black subjects to tell global stories of the race in the context of empire and conquest...and the survival of alternative ways of imagining political community and multiracial global democracy" (59). This political community, residing in Vieux Port, Marseilles comprised of black international subjects such as sailors, international drifters, prostitutes, and criminals, whose lives were shaped by the structural dominations imposed by colonialism. While socializing with this group, he unloaded ships and befriended seamen who identified as musicians and worked in the cafes that lined Vieux Port. Even though these disenfranchised subjects symbolized the abject condition of modern Western civilization for McKay, they still embodied a more realistic or "folk" portrayal of Negro life unencumbered by the cause of racial justice (Cooper 212). The novel's preoccupation with representing black vernacular culture, music, and humor depicted his desire to wield an authentic "artistic consciousness" fueled by a revolutionary stance against narratives of black racial uplift and western literary aesthetics that sought to construct a unified, homogenous, and western literary national form.⁵⁵

The black itinerants that he befriended in Vieux Port piqued his desire to travel to Africa. After completing his first draft of *Banjo*, he traveled to Casablanca where he became aware of the inequalities of French rule in Morocco. Initially, he compared the Arabs of Morocco to the East Indians he had known in Jamaica, lacking a sense of kinship with either group. Eventually, he concluded that in Morocco, different ethnic groups managed to retain internal community cohesiveness despite economic and material inequality. Each group had its place and function in the overall society, and McKay believed that this type of balance could resolve racial tensions in the United States.

McKay understood the limitations of mobility for African diasporic subjects because of his Jamaican roots and the Caribbean's entanglement with colonialism and imperialism. Although travelling to Europe allowed McKay to escape racial divisions in America, he was not blind to covert racial prejudices in France. Unlike other African Americans seeking refuge from American racism during the interwar years, he refused to propagate myths of racial harmony and egalitarianism in France and critiqued black intellectuals for their delusions of autonomy under French liberalism. Although Europe's racial restrictions were not as stringent or visible as South Africa's apartheid or America's Jim Crow system, racial oppression undergirded the façade of racial equality in France. While African colonials exercised freedom of movement, they also faced difficulties in acquiring property and employment.

The racial contradictions of liberalism, racial inequalities, and state policing, thus, acts as the backdrop of *Banjo*, which wields an anarchist modernist aesthetic that considers polyvocal blackness as resistant to industrial capitalism. Through black

proletarian agency, embodied by the African American character, Banjo, the Haitian intellectual Ray, and a group of nationally ambiguous black itinerants, the novel illustrates emancipated subjectivities based upon counterhegemonic black primitivism seen in jazz and other African cultural forms. The vagabonds are accompanied by Latnah who solicits customers aboard docked ships in the port, and who is valued as a member of their group for her nurturing instincts and her sexual magnetism. Even though this motley group mixes freely, they do not necessarily traverse all spaces. For example, Latnah consciously avoids the bars in the Ditch, which are configured as Negro spaces of enjoyment and discourse where international black subjects can freely articulate their concerns regarding inequality and oppression. The state exercises police brutality only in Negro spaces in order to discipline black bodies instead of “Arab” bodies.⁵⁶ Depictions of invisible borders and spatial relationships that illustrate myriad forms of racialized violence (whether through limitations in mobility or through overt physical violence and discipline by the state) saturate his novel.

The contradictions of the state emerge in relation to racialized status of black immigrant vagabonds. In *The Practice of Diaspora*, Brent Hayes Edwards investigates the word “vagabond” invoked in *Banjo*. Edwards believes that “vagabondage” goes beyond cultural transmission to embodying a culturally oppositional politics to colonial policy, national belonging, and racial and class subjugation. Edwards’ singular focus on the male group of vagabonds on the Vieux Port of Marseilles in the early to mid 1920s precludes the role Latnah plays in *Banjo*. He marginally heeds Latnah’s position in the narrative, stating that even though Latnah can be considered a significant female character in *Banjo*, McKay takes an “uneven approach” to her role as a prostitute and as

Banjo's lover (Edwards 209). Although Edwards recognizes that Latnah forms a component of this group, he fails to account for exactly what that component is or how that component is linked to the novel's focus on black male international vagabondage. He, therefore, does not interrogate the "disturbing elements to the portrait of Latnah" and the ways that those elements affect the composition of not only the black masculine group but also their relationship to the French state, since Latnah's subject position as an ambiguously racialized prostitute marks her as external to both the black diasporic community and the French nation-state.

While Edwards foregoes the opportunity to place Latnah centrally in the narrative, Michelle Stephens in *Black Empire* reads Latnah's exclusion at the end of the narrative as the novel's rejection of heteronormative, domestic nationalisms. Certainly, as Stephens contends, the racial bond between the black male subjects in the narrative is reinforced through Afro-centric and homosocial relations, particularly between Ray and Banjo. While Stephens's argument conceptually situates race, nationalism, and internationalism within an indiscrete complex, it continues to subscribe to a binary racial dynamic. Latnah's Oriental foreignness "reflects McKay's own tendencies to stereotype, racially and sexually, hybrid international female subjects, thereby releasing the black male from the traps and trappings and the loyalties and affiliations of a pure, black, racial home" (Stephens 199). Stephens overlooks the national implications of Latnah's Orientalized and ambiguous racial positioning that is at the core of the "international romance" staged by McKay.

In addition to accounting for Latnah's specific positioning within the French state, it is important to place her within the context of McKay's emerging radical political ideas

regarding anti-statist and black global autonomy. Latnah occupies a privileged role in the group of black vagabonds, so much so that they all exhibit some form of desire for her, but she continues to be “othered” either because of her racial indeterminacy and orientalism or her engagement with commercial exchange. Her final exclusion from Banjo and Ray’s global homosocial imaginary needs to be understood as gendered, as Stephens contends, but also a result of her markedly different commercial engagement with the world. Unlike the other black prostitutes in the novel who are only governed by capitalist logics of commodification, Latnah is constructed as a redeeming character precisely because not all of her relations are governed by monetary exchange. Her affection for the black vagabonds and her desire to nurture and protect them, for example, signify her exceptional characterization. But even though she is able to associate with the black vagabonds, her relations with them are limited by her economic sense.

The novel begins with Banjo’s arrival at the Vieux Port, Marseilles oldest waterfront section, which he describes as marvelous, dangerous, and attractive. Lined with “crooked streets of dim lights, gray damp houses bunched together...and rowdy signs of many colors” (McKay, *Banjo* 12-14), it showcases a multicultural milieu of foreign sailors, international drifters, prostitutes, criminals, and petit bourgeois merchants who struggle for subsistence. Mongrels with beady eyes, skeleton-like hags, and girls, touts, and vagabonds constitute the “derelicts” that reside at the port (McKay, *Banjo* 18). These proletarians circulate goods and labor to the developing world – from the Caribbean, the Gulf of Guinea, the Persian Gulf, the Bay of Bengal, the China Seas, and the Indian Archipelago. McKay writes:

Sweat-dripping bodies of black men naked under the equatorial sun...carrying loads steadied and unsupported on kink-thick heads

hardened and trained to bear their burdens. Brown men half-clothed, with baskets on their backs, bending low...digging plucking for the Occident world its exotic nourishment of life, under the whip, under the terror.
(*Banjo* 67)

The “modern movement of life” hinges on the port’s spatial production as “Europe’s best back door” that receives and discharges traffic from both the Orient and Africa. Placed outside national and colonial spaces, the port is a licentious space of international exchange that enables interracial and transsexual intimacy that undermines legitimate boundaries between gender, sexuality, and economy. In its inversion of cultural norms, the space of the port acts as a site of transgression that propagates interracial relationships within spaces of commerce. Although the port is a commercial space with ceaseless international traffic, it also serves as a living, dining, and leisure space for what the popular press in France termed “social garbage”. Within this spatiality, the black vagabonds solidify the ties of brotherhood as they beg, cohabit, and play together, realizing transnational kinships. The port, thus, acts as a symbolic site of waste that accommodates and reproduces the “excessive” population of economic modernization (Bauman). These spaces produce perpetual uncertainties and anxieties about racialized deviants – the black working class, the unemployed, or the improperly employed – subverting the interests of the state. Shuffled into slums of the nations, they exemplify the crisis of labor and immigration that the French state repeatedly attempted to manage through the socio-political and legal system.

It’s within this context that the black vagabonds – Banjo, Bugsby, Malty, and Taloufa – refuse to be productive capitalist members of society. Their subsistence is dependent upon begging for food from sympathetic black crews rather than participating in a labor regime that operates under racist capitalism. The men make a conscious choice

to refrain from working, proclaiming “irresponsibility or bohemian excess,” which are categories explicitly imposed by the French authorities (Edwards 202-203). The vagabonds realize that if they work for the French state and march to the tune of civilization, they will be subjected to the dictates of capitalism, forced to “labor under its laws” (McKay, *Banjo* 314). Instead, they want to live as if “they were taking a holiday” (McKay, *Banjo* 18). The vagabonds embody the very condition of waste and excess of the port. This excess codes an aspect of the black vagabonds’ “rude anarchy” illustrated by their “loafing, singing, playing, dancing, loving working” (McKay, *Banjo* 324). Instead of subscribing to any form of hierarchical order, the boys create and achieve their own social existence and order through spontaneity and vitality.

Their vitality is reflected in their music. Like their decentered lifestyle, Banjo’s band performs the “rough rhythm of darky-carnal life...One movement of the thousand movements of the eternal life-flow...jungle jazzing, Orient wriggling, civilized stepping...sweet dancing thing of primitive joy, perverse pleasure, prostitute ways, many colored variations of the rhythm, savage, barbaric, refine – eternal rhythm of the mysterious, magical, magnificent – the dance divine of life” (McKay, *Banjo* 57). Their articulation of primitive joy is communal, relational, revealing, reciprocal, and perverse, simultaneously operating to construct a de-centered cohesive sociality. Nickels states that McKay’s music “creates strange, new forms of ritual: ritual not backed by the customary authority of the chief, the clansman, or the hierophant, but instead realized and confirmed only through the reciprocal exchange of energies of semi-anonymous modern subjects” (McKay, *Banjo* 12).

Their unencumbered lifestyle and their ability to perform music at their will for their own self-gratification however, is disrupted by acts of violence and continual policing by the state. When “chording up” to play their music and participate in the “strutting, jiggling, shimmying, shuffling, humping, standing-swayin...,” they are interrupted by a bomb that “halts” the boys who then leave to escape the police. These scenes suggest the impossibility of freedom from surveillance within the French colonial state’s obsession with vagabondage that was considered to be one of France’s greatest social ills. It was a “veritable” industry in not just France, but across Europe.⁵⁷ They believed that criminality naturally emerged from vagrancy.⁵⁸ Public charity for vagabonds became a source of antagonism among citizens and some argued that assistance provided by welfare bureaus was the culprit for the rise in vagabondage.⁵⁹ The French state, therefore, wanted to reduce the assistance to vagrants in an effort to refocus resources on the elderly, mothers and children.⁶⁰ Assistance led to the creation of a work-relief program, which utilized the assisted by providing them with tasks, such as breaking stone, reconstructing roads, and restoring canals that aimed to repress the perceived deviancy of the vagrant. Depots, designed after the Belgian national prison-labor camp, and colonial prisons were also designed to contain the problem. French elites believed that the reasons behind vagrancy were related to morality and individual choice rather than socio-economic factors. According to Smith, the “pauper was increasingly portrayed as a sub-human” or “social garbage” in the popular press, and in award winning books mainly from fields of medicine and science. Within these textual spaces, elites claimed that vagrancy was a biological condition that lay in the blood. The line

between the migrant and the vagrant, therefore, was also blurred, as the French believed that race and begging were clearly linked.

While France was invested in curing itself from begging, it was also addressing the social dimensions of prostitution as the antithesis to the state's interest in reproduction and national rejuvenation of its citizens. The obscure definition of prostitution, like vagrancy, typified a prostitute as any woman partaking in indecent behavior, exemplifying bad morals, or acting freely, which included widows, separated women, or foreign women. Because their matrimonial status was suspect, they lived on the fringes of society as non-procreative subjects. Like vagrancy, social and sexual ideology was lodged within regulatory and disciplinary laws and institutions as prostitutes were often seen as embodying unbridled sexuality, generally attributed to colonized people, which the French believed was evidenced by population growth in Africa and Asia.⁶¹ Alain Corbin notes that the prostitute symbolized “disorder, excess, and improvidence,” and signified the “rejection of order and economy” (xv). Prostitution, as a whole, opposed the French state's interest in developing white mother citizens who could produce children who would eventually assimilate into the French nation-state through intergenerational reproduction.

The prostitute, unlike the vagrant, was granted more tolerance after neoregulation policies became widespread in 1904, which only required the sequestration of prostitutes if they *failed* to get health checks.⁶² Thus, while the vagrant continued to be vilified and imprisoned, the prostitute became accepted as a part of society because she provided a social function. Whereas vagrancy laws did not even grant beggars the formal right to choose their work due to imprisonment, unregistered prostitutes weren't even strictly

marginalized. Unregistered prostitutes operated in various milieus and were able to move into different communities, which empowered them with social and geographical mobility, precisely because they were recognized as workers.⁶³ Aside from performing a social function, prostitutes were also “strategically located within the horizon of family household life while standing on the outside...By their proximity, they both threatened and reinscribed domestic values” (Reid 79).

In McKay’s text, the black vagabonds and black prostitutes are both subject to schemes of exclusion and marginalization as they are either imprisoned or under surveillance for their deviancy. The black immigrant vagrant, however, is positioned differentially than the Afro-East Indian prostitute in relation to the French state. The colonial state exercises disciplinary power, continually intruding into pure black spaces in the novel, in order to expel Negro colonial subjects. The end of the novel is replete with images of the state repatriating colored migrants by providing them with “Nationality Doubtful” papers and free trips to their countries of origin in the hopes of securing employment for French men at the expense of black foreigners (McKay, *Banjo* 313). Imposing an institutional solution to the problem of “wayward” subjects who have failed to assimilate into society, the state’s effort to recruit and resend black workers to their colonies strategically reorganizes the empire into a fixed and racialized geopolitical order in which the colonial Other returns to the colonies while the French citizen enjoys the benefits of the metropole. Ray understands this institutional violence inflicted on the beach boys as the “universal” attitude towards colored men, invoking the contradictions of French Republican universalism that emphasized the role of color blindness within national identity (McKay, *Banjo* 313). In underscoring the denial of citizenship rights for

colonial workers based on racial hierarchies constitutive of immigration discourse that prized whiteness as indicative of “biological” and cultural similarities to the French national body, McKay highlights the culmination of imperial anxieties around national degeneration and exclusion as the basis for black displacement.⁶⁴ The reinvigoration of France depended on purging foreigners and carefully selecting compatible bodies that could prevent national decline. Such racialized exclusions meant to foster a new vision of a virile France that could only be achieved through a prosperous French economy.

In addition to the state encroaching upon their enactments of pure joy by restraining and circumscribing the vagabonds, Latnah also performs a related and obstructionist function by seeing their music as instrumenting capitalist gain and as part of a necessary commercial exchange. When Banjo becomes a “permanent lodger” at Latnah’s home, she tells him that after his health improves, she will “go with him to perform in some of the bars of the quarter and take up a collection” (McKay, *Banjo* 19). Later, when Latnah witnesses an old man leaving with a collection because won a bet, she screams at Banjo: “All that money man take and gone is you’ money You play and he take money. You too proud to ask money and you no have nothing” (McKay, *Banjo* 25). During their heated argument, Banjo responds: “No woman nevah ride me yet and you ain’t gwine to ride me, neither” (McKay, *Banjo* 26). He and the rest of the vagabonds depart, leaving Latnah in the bar, seething “with all her instincts of acquisitiveness and envious rivalry” (McKay, *Banjo* 25).

This scene crystallizes their different motives for performing music and their clashing engagements with the world. While Latnah adheres to the logic of economic exchange (money for music) and harbors opportunistic motives, Banjo could care less

about profit. Banjo says after an audience leaves without even buying him a drink: “Hell with their coppers...I expected them to stand a round just for expreciation only of a good thing” (McKay, *Banjo* 8). Even though Banjo does expect some form of exchange, one of mutual aid or enjoyment, it precludes money or any alienated signifier of his powers of creativity and judgment. Banjo is glad that Latnah tries to stay away when he is performing because he does not want her to collect sous from fellows like himself and instead preferred to “play for them and be treated to wine. Sous! How could he respect sous? He who had burnt up dollars” (McKay, *Banjo* 46). The novel inextricably links her “cackling” with capitalism and fractures her relationship with Banjo and the vagabonds. Her capitalism and desire to always accrue wealth is at odds with the liberty and humanism that the black boys celebrate.

Latnah’s full participation in commercial exchange is rooted in her survival instincts spurred by the need to provide for herself and those around her. But Latnah also displays moments of redemption in the narrative, particularly when she exercises freedom, independence, and pleasure outside of prostitution. These moments depict her capacity to embrace pure pleasure and joy that challenges both patriarchy and state power. In one of these moments, Latnah has euphoric sex with Ray. McKay writes:

Deep dark passion of bodies close to the earth understanding each other...The pinks bring trouble and tumult and riot into dark lives...Oh the tropical heat of earth and body glowing in the same rhythm of nature...sun-hot warmth wilting the blood-bright hibiscus, drawing the rich creaminess out of the lush bell-flowers, burning green fields and pasture lands to crispy autumn color, and driving the brown doves and pea doves to cover cooing ...” (*Banjo* 284)

In this scene, their sexual experience of “primitive joy” takes Ray back to a pastoral island space resembling the West Indies with “black draymen coming from the

hilltops, singing loudly – rakish chants, whipping up the mules bearing loads of brown sugar and of green bunches of bananas, trailing along the winding chalky ways” (McKay, *Banjo* 284). And within this particular moment, Latnah’s joy of life instigates Ray’s desires for return. He then becomes transported to Harlem and the jazzing of Sheba Palace. Their abandonment to self-fulfillment outside of restrictive coupling allows Ray to channel the primacy of nature, of the “heat of the earth” through Latnah’s body with no expectation of return. Their coupling, moreover, bears a striking resemblance to Banjo’s performances, which drowns everything else out.

Later, when Ray reconciles the Negro’s place within the “mechanical march of civilization,” (McKay, *Banjo* 324) while embarking on his journey with Banjo under the pretense of a wage labor contract, he conveys his desire to invite Latnah. Banjo replies, “A woman is a conjunction. Gawd fixed her different from us in moh ways than one. And theah’s things we can git away with all the time and she just kain’t” (McKay, *Banjo* 326). By precluding women from their black diasporic vagabondage, they emphasize the limits to her autonomy. Latnah’s gender excludes her from their internationalist vision expressed through their homosocial fantasy of escape from national progress, colonial oppression, narrow black nationalisms, domestic obligations, race pride, and bourgeois values of heteronormativity.

Her oscillation between mercantilist ideology and uncontaminated, anti-statist behaviors situates her in an ambivalent relationship to the Banjo and Ray. Banjo understands that even though she threatens their imaginings of international community, she is particularly vulnerable to the dictates of commerce. Anthony Reed notes that Latnah is both “the example and the limit of community: in this case, the national and

linguistic boundaries that must be forgotten along with the differential forms of violence and subjection that inform the different sites of diaspora. As conjunctions, the female characters have a very basic structuring function, that which determines temporal directionality” (McKay, *Banjo* 768).

This directionality is evidenced in her attempts for progress through orderly conduct. Early in the narrative when Banjo is deserted by a tramp and divested of economic means, he meets Latnah, a “little olive-toned woman of an indefinable age, clean-faced, not young and far from old, with an amorous charm round her mouth” (McKay, *Banjo* 16) who leads him to her home, located outside the ditch. Her inviting abode displays several oriental objects, and she provides Banjo with shelter and food. Against the backdrop of the debauched port, Latnah’s orderly domestic space illustrates a tranquil and harmonious ambiance produced from her sexual economic exchanges. Although she normally engages in unregistered sexual commerce like the other free women of the port, she doesn’t outright defy the state through displays of disorderly conduct, violence, and lewd behavior. She, moreover, develops an intimate and nurturing bond with the vagabond boys, which differentiates her from the other prostitutes in the novel who are portrayed as manipulative, vulgar, and unhygienic. While the crude and disorderly black prostitutes deplete the vagrants’ resources, Latnah provides them with material goods.⁶⁵ In contrast to Banjo’s frivolity, Latnah secures goods for the vagabonds, buys them presents, and gives them spending money, taking on a maternal, nurturing, and protective role towards the vagabonds.

Latnah’s quintessentially Orientalist characterization and framing also aid in her mission for progress and uplift. The Oriental dagger that she hides in her bosom marks

her dissimilarity from the black vagabonds and the other more vulgar prostitutes. When Malty rescues her from a peddling woman and a sexually aggressive and intoxicated man, McKay writes that she “slipped from her bosom a tiny argent-headed dagger” that made him recoil with fear because “it was as if Latnah had produced a serpent from her bosom...not an instrument familiar to his world, his people, his life. It reminded him of the strange, fierce, fascinating tales he had heard of Oriental strife and daggers dealing swift death” (McKay, *Banjo* 29-30). Noting that unlike the other women of the Negro race, Latnah “glided” gracefully like a serpent through the water (McKay, *Banjo* 30-34). Her form reminds the men of coolie women who were “weighted down with heavy silver bracelets on arms, necks and ankles, their long glossy hair half hidden by the cloth that the natives called coolie-red”(McKay, *Banjo* 30), and the eruptive image of the serpent simultaneously induces fear and admiration within the vagabonds. McKay’s reinforcement of the stereotype of the Oriental woman articulates her racial and sexual differentiation from the black vagabond males.⁶⁶ The ambivalence surrounding her otherness depends on denying Latnah a fixed racial identity besides her Aden origins (part of British India until 1937) and her Negress mother.⁶⁷

Aside from distinctly Orientalizing Latnah, the serpent epitomizes her intermediary status between blacks and whites. While the vagabonds are joking around, Banjo relates an anecdote:

A nigger is a bohn mistake...When Gawd made the white man, he put a little stuff in his haid for him to correct his mistakes. And so when the white man invented writing and pencil, he put an eraser on that pencil to rub out mistakes. But Gawd nevah gived the nigger no brain-stuff foh’m to correct his mistakes, and so the nigger kaint invent anything to correct his mistakes. For when God was making the first nigger, a blue bird jest fly down into the Tree of Life and started singing that the wul’ was ready and waiting foh the love a Gawd. And the tune was so temptation that

Gawd lost his haid and set down the golden bowl with the nigger's brain in it. And the serpent was right there. And he ups and et the nigger's brain and put a mess a froth in the golden bowl. And that stuff for the nigger's brain gived the serpent the run of the earth... And when Gawd done took up his work again, he took the froth in the bowl and dumped it into the nigger's brain and finished his job. And that's why you find the world as it is today. The debbil ruling hell and earth, the white man always getting by and there, and the nigger always full a froth or just dumb. (McKay, *Banjo* 181)

This humorous anecdote, which Goosey calls “raw niggerism,” counters a black middle class uplift perspective that sees the use and performance of dialect as forms of black self-denigration and subcivilization for the entertainment of whites. Goosey says to Banjo: “...you ought to be ashamed to tell that on the race before a white person” (McKay, *Banjo* 181). Banjo laughs and effeminizes Goosey by calling him a lady for being unsettled by the joke and not deriving pure pleasure from the rhetoric of primitiveness and the mode of improvisation that he enacts. Banjo's storytelling and humor ascribes an incredible amount of black agency because he seizes control of the image of blacks within a multiracial society, subverts white power and authority, and redresses power imbalances.

Aside from its humor, the parable recreates the discourse of creation myths and polygenesis circulating within the realm of science, religion, and ethnology, particularly in relation to African Americans, which were meant to exclude Negroes from the human family.⁶⁸ Within these alternate Biblical scenes, temptation became personified as a black man instead of a snake.⁶⁹ Standing in for seductive evil and creating anxieties about miscegenation, the production of the black man as Tempter of Eve attempted to eradicate black male sexual threat from the nation's collective white consciousness.

The parable differentiates the races in terms of origin and knowledge, and rather than depicting the serpent as a threatening black male presence, McKay configures it as a liminal figure that deceptively acquires knowledge for its personal gain. Latnah, who displays the easy mobility and sexual lure of the mythical serpent, the ambiguous darkness, and social value (Malty recalls that Latnah knows everything, including all languages), stands in-between the inferior black man and the knowledgeable white man. Configuring the serpent and Latnah as intermediary figures that cross boundaries, McKay endows the hybrid “feminine with an autonomous cosmic value” (Mehta 654) who mediates the physical and spiritual realms and ensures “the effective elimination of binary oppositional forces that would undermine a more holistic conception of human development” (Mehta 654). The narrative empowers Latnah by linking her to the enduring potency of the serpent, rather than demonizing her as in the Genesis myth and the parable ultimately becomes an allegory explaining the reasons behind racial inequality. This projected fantasy of agency and transcendence situates her outside the black and white racial contestation while also endowing her with the power to intercede, manage, and control.

The parable Banjo relates is followed by similar conclusions drawn by Ray toward the end of the novel, which propels him to unite with Banjo and leave the port. In accordance with Banjo’s ideas, it seemed socially wrong that “a black child should be brought up on the same code of social virtues as the white” within a society that thrived on the “survival of the fittest” when a “Chinese or Indian could learn the stock virtues without being spiritually harmed by them, because he possessed his own native code from which he could draw, compare, accept, and reject while learning” (McKay, *Banjo*

319). Westernization and modernization for Asian, therefore, do not have the same detrimental effects because they are able to retain their cultural traditions. It becomes apparent to Ray that the Negro child cannot compete for a legitimate place because he lacks the right kind of knowledge – folk wisdom (McKay, *Banjo* 319). Ray's epiphany, his comparison of the relational histories and attributes of the different races, echoes Banjo's earlier sentiments regarding the playful rendering of the Negro's place in the geopolitical sphere. Unlike the code of social virtues in whites and the native codes in Asians, the Negro's code is a counter-virtue that is recalcitrant to imperial capitalism, providing "native warmth and feeling" (McKay, *Banjo* 320).

While McKay's problematic gender politics situates all prostitutes as conspicuous opportunists and vulgar in their insatiable appetite for money, he illustrates Latnah as respectable and in many ways, an asset to a colonial state invested in economic productivity, regeneration, and whiteness. Latnah, however, also experiences moments of pure joy and elation outside of capitalist gains and domesticated desires, which cause Ray to question whether she can belong in their international vagabonding. Leaving Latnah signifies their inability to envision her in a formation that disparages any kind of capitalism, nationalism, or institutionalism. The French port ceases to be a space of utopic possibilities when the protagonists realize that the racially coded universalism spouted by the French Republican state will never bestow economic agency, community, citizenship, and freedom. It is this search for belonging outside of restrictive state practices, narrow black nationalisms, and middle class race pride, that carries McKay, like Banjo and Ray, to Africa after leaving Marseilles where he comprehends an

alternative model of community in which different ethnic groups cohere despite material inequalities.

4.3 *Banana Bottom and the Quest for an Alternative Peasant Modernity*

While *Banjo* articulates McKay's fraught search for international community and alternative forms of liberation unencumbered by gender constraints, *Banana Bottom* illustrates his reconciliation with the Jamaican national space, domesticity, and heteronormativity. *Banana Bottom* traces Bitia Plant's complex awakening to and acceptance of folk life in rural Jamaica. Born into a prominent peasant family, Bitia falls in love at the age of 12 with a mentally deranged fiddler named Crazy Bow, who is a mixed-race descendant of a Scotsman who purchased Banana Bottom and married a black slave. McKay's foregrounding of mongrelization and degeneration illustrates the colonialist logic of island politics regarding racial and sexual mixing. After engaging in sexual intercourse with Crazy Bow, which she initiates, Bitia is adopted and educated by the Craigs, the white missionary couple that founded Jubilee and spouts racialist ideologies regarding African primitivism and European superiority. The Craigs attempt to civilize Bitia by exposing her to European culture and cultivating English qualities within her in hopes of erasing her "primitive" and baser instincts. Eventually, Bitia breaks from the Craigs, questioning the validity of the knowledge that she has attained from them, and returns to Banana Bottom, securing a domestic place within the rural utopian landscape through her marriage with Jubban, her father's dark and working class drayman who is considered below her station. Bitia's return is accomplished through the advice of Squire Gensir, who urges her to question western education and values in order

to see the intellectual restraints that prevent her from attaining the “unconscious freedom” of the peasant folk (McKay, *Banana Bottom* 121). While the Craigs advance stereotypes of sexual promiscuity by continuing to believe that Bitá must combat her essential nature, Squire Gensir, an amateur anthropologist who likes to listen to Anancy stories and native dance tunes, is excited by cultural hybridity, such as his discovery that a native dance tune has its origins in a Mozart (McKay, *Banana Bottom* 124). Gensir’s lessons, however, often reinforce the structures of oppression that he means to counter and Bitá must decide between the two ideologies that inform her consciousness.

On a surface level, this novel can be read as a “return to roots” narrative wherein McKay, through Bitá Plant, returns to an essentialist origin, enacted through a utopian, speculative vision. Through careful placement of this text in relation to *Banjo*, however, this return is anything but simplistic and is not invested in a root identity. Complicated by cultural hybridity, cultural contact, and a persistent mongrelization, the text denies the notion that the search for origin stands in opposition to creolization. *Banana Bottom* exemplifies that political possibilities of creolization are realized only through a return dissociated from a longing for ancestral origins. According to Glissant,

“Diversion is not a useful ploy unless it is nourished by reversion: not a return to the longing for origins, to some immutable state of Being, but a return to the point of entanglement, from which we were forcefully turned away; that is where we must put to work the forces of creolization, or perish” (*Caribbean Discourse* 26).

Reversion, through diversion, becomes a political undertaking that requires a reconnection rather than a reductive narrative of return. Glissant’s conceptualization of return is crucial in understanding McKay’s solidification of a unified Caribbean identity

as the point of entanglement, which can be achieved through reconciliation between the licentious Afro-East Indian hybrid, Yoni, and the black peasant community.

Thus, Bitá's own return to the folk is challenged by Yoni, the "coolie gal" miraculously conceived on the Sunderland Sugar Estate that employed many East Indian indentured coolies. These coolies "magnetized" the Negro peasantry with their loin cloths and "their women moving with little steps almost gliding like serpents, draped in loose flowing garments of many colors and weighted down with heavy silver rings and bracelets in nose and ear, on arms and ankles" (McKay, *Banana Bottom* 65). By exposing the veil that surrounds Yoni's conception, *Banana Bottom* foregrounds and ridicules the historical disavowal of sexual contact between East Indians and Afro-Jamaicans on plantations and the *douglá* children born of their illicit relations. Yoni's magnetic quality attracts Tally Tack, a fellow that proudly flaunts his newly acquired wealth from Panama. Unlike Bitá, whose struggle for liberation warrants the realization of her folk belonging and the more "natural" and "instinctive" freedoms of peasants, Yoni seeks material comforts and economic gain, which she believes Tack can provide because of his conspicuous consumption resulting from his success in Panama, a potent signifier of Pan-Africanism.⁷⁰ McKay writes: "...Yoni's head was turned for Tack...she liked his "panamerican" clothes...and his Colon strut...And if Tack was too raw mannered...she would go back to Panama with him." (McKay, *Banana Bottom* 68). The Panama boys, like Tack, are described as "peacocks" who are "hard-drinking and strutting with bad manners, loud clothes and louder jewelry" (McKay, *Banana Bottom* 35). Yoni aligns herself with the only transnational working body in the narrative, asserting a desire for a place outside of Jamaica where she and Tack can freely engage in

a sexual and economic relationship. Aside from his relationship with Yoni, Tack also solicits Bitá's affections, a woman of property and education whose station in life exceeds his. Although he considers himself equal to Bitá because of his travels and economic success, the idea that a New World man can be a suitor for Bitá is rendered ludicrous even though McKay provides ample context that such transnational crossings symbolized economic development. Bitá remarks that Negroes make money in Panama, at least "two dollars a day" and "eight times more gain" than the amount in Jamaica (McKay, *Banana Bottom* 35). Although Bitá asserts pride in overseas black labor, her teacher and peers assert that transnational labor mobilities deplete their nation of talented youth.

The American Panama Canal functions similarly to the port in Banjo. Jennifer Brittan notes that it was meant to connect "the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans to the west, open up a quick route between the US possessions off either coast, and fuel commercial expansion into the Pacific" (302). Black labor migrants for the Caribbean fueled their informal economy, and thus, it signified a transition from agricultural to industrial labor during a period when the United States was gaining global dominance.

Banana Bottom illustrates that Negro emigration to the Panama Canal Zone and the plantations in Central America is a result of national economic hardships exacerbated by "coolie" importation. The replacement of the labor source through indentureship drives the antagonistic feelings towards East Indians, preventing the extension of "liberal sympathy" to Indian 'coolie' immigrants. To the Afro-Jamaican community, indentureship is "just another form of chattel slavery under cover of indenture, with the slaves strange brown men instead of black" (McKay, *Banana Bottom* 238). Bitá and

Squire Gensir do not approve of East Indian labor even though they recognize that “coolies” effected a transition within Jamaica by driving a “more intensive development of the hardy Negro peasantry” (McKay, *Banana Bottom* 238), who refused to work for “coolie” wages and needed to develop alternative survival strategies. For both of them, native peasant life constitutes a form of resistance to British colonial rule and enables Afro-Jamaican economic autonomy (Nicholls 83).

When Yoni discovers that Tack wrote a letter to Bitá declaring his feelings for her, she feels jealous and goes to visit an Obeahman, paying him two months worth of wages. The Obeahman convinces her that Bitá is her enemy and conducts a magical spell. This visit spurs Yoni’s determination to continue her relationship with Tack, which is discovered by her stepfather who subsequently confronts Tack. During their fight, Yoni’s father dies, spurring Tack’s suicide outside the Obeahman’s cave. McKay reveals that Tack had hired the Obeahman to protect him from evil for a large sum of money. In staging the fractures, deaths, and delusions caused by Afro-Caribbean rituals and religious practices, McKay disrupts the notion that Obeah is always a powerful force and in fact, does not provide an avenue for human brotherhood if it is tarnished by capitalist modernity. Even so, Obeah and African religious practices have the power to threaten the authority of the colonialists, specifically by forcing Mrs. Craig to understand that African objects might have “their origin in some genuine belief... That the night-wrapped creatures of Africa might also have had there in the dim jungles their own vision of life” (McKay *Banana Bottom* 198).

Tack, Yoni, and Bitá’s triadic identities as transnational worker, bastardized “coolie,” and privileged native are “produced in a chaotic network of Relation” linked by

the “contradictory experience of contacts among cultures” (Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 144). As Tack lusts after both women, his death provides the space in the narrative for Yoni and Bitá to come to terms with each other while they undergo significant alterations. Tack’s death forecloses any possibilities of Yoni’s participation in new imperial sites or formations. Instead, Yoni becomes infused by the spirit of Revival and then impregnated by a reformed Afro-Jamaican boy, Hopping Dick, who tames her unruly sexual desires by agreeing to marry her. Through heteronormative domesticity, Yoni and her child will be incorporated into the nation as middle-class and respectable subjects. Bitá, on the other hand, succeeds in resolving the internal duality that fractures her hybridized identity. After the second rape attempt by a nearly white man of the planter class who calls her “only a black gal,” Bitá examines herself in the mirror:

She undressed and looked at her body in the long mirror of the old fashioned wardrobe. She caressed her breasts like maturing pomegranates, her skin firm and smooth like the sheath of a blossoming banana, her luxuriant hair, close-curling like thick fibrous roots, gazed at her own warm-brown eyes, the infallible indicators of a real human beauty.
(McKay, *Banana Bottom* 266)

Upon seeing herself in the mirror, she picks up a poem written by Blake and realizes that the racial contours in the poem, the divisions between blacks and whites, entails a “murder of the spirit” (McKay, *Banana Bottom* 268). Rather than exoticizing her, this scene reveals an empowered self-consciousness that generates critical insight into contradictions of modernity.

As different as *Banana Bottom* is to *Banjo*, they both stage the unveiling of power structures, the injustices of colonization, ideologies of racial supremacy as central to the quest for liberty and redemption for the negro and for a black community invested in national integrity. Bitá, like Ray in *Banjo*, develops a second sight or vision that bears

witness to historical suffering of the Afro-Jamaican woman and it results directly from her struggle with racial double consciousness. Whereas for Ray, this struggle leads to international vagabonding, for Bitia it has the opposite effect. Once she unearths her “true” and organic self, Bitia feels free to marry her father’s drayman, Jubban, who also rescued her from sexual assault and who she finally sees as the true Jamaican national subject. This resolution and consolidation of Bitia’s new peasant family provides Bitia with autonomous control and it inculcates her in the logics of a new political modernity.

The utopian and romantic conclusion has garnered criticism from scholars like Hazel Carby who writes:

Much of the argument of *Banana Bottom* in the tension between attempts by missionaries to eradicate black cultural forms and the gentler forms of abuse present in white patronage of black culture. Against these forms of exploitation McKay reconstructs black culture as sustaining a whole way of life. But it is a way of life of the past, of his formative years, a place that the intellectual had to leave to become an intellectual and to which he does not return except in this Utopian moment. (78-79)

Carby is right to note that McKay’s political investments regarding agency and liberation in the narrative are resolved without any contradictions, but she fails to situate this within the broader context of McKay’s work, particularly in terms of how his utopian fantasy can only occur through the establishment of a peasant family and heteronormative reproduction as the basis of an alternative modernity. This imagining also necessarily includes the disciplining and reunion of Bitia and Yoni within patriarchal structures, which allows the emergence of a unified and economically potent Jamaican nation.

McKay’s reconciliation with the geopolitical migration histories of the Caribbean, advanced through these characters, surely excludes the errant, mobile and diasporic subject as a rightful citizen of Jamaica. With Tack’s death, the homosocial bond between

Yoni and Bitia becomes possible through a shared celebration of domesticity (they have dual wedding and both conceive children) that entrenches them within the Jamaican national imaginary. *Banana Bottom*, therefore, departs from *Banjo*'s thematic explorations of transnational subjectivities and solidarity between black subjects by mapping a parallax shift between the native Jamaican and the Afro-Asian hybrid woman. In managing the unruly hybrid body by taming her sexuality and binding her reproductive value to Jamaica, the novel attempts to reconstitute a Caribbean history ruptured by multiple dislocations. Bitia's struggle for self-liberation, fulfilled through her marriage with the drayman, cannot occur in isolation from Yoni's.

Banana Bottom is in many ways antithetical to *Banjo* in every aspect, including its female protagonist's desire to embrace her peasant roots through domesticity within a Jamaican landscape that is divided by multiple religious practices, the residues of colonialism and imperialism, and labor formations. Bitia's pastoral nationalist drive contrasts sharply with Banjo and Ray's anti-statist and internationalist aspirations for an alternative modernity unfettered by gender trappings, heterosexual domesticity, and nation-state formations. In both novels, however, the Afro-East Indian licentious woman occupies a privileged position as a figure that needs redressing. While in *Banjo*, Latnah is marginalized because of her drive to accumulate wealth and somehow embody the properties of a relatively desired national French subject, in *Banana Bottom*, McKay must confront Yoni's place within the national space, arriving at the notion that she is necessary to carving the national integrity of a unified Jamaica. In fact, it is only the intimate relations between the peasant and working class that assure the future economic prosperity of Jamaica. This prosperity is deeply dependent on disciplining the women of

Banana Bottom. In order for McKay to carve a nationalist resolution, both Bitá and Yoni need to confront their failures. Yoni's moral failures need to be restrained and properly domesticated in order for her to be incorporated into the national family. Bitá, who is destined to have a historical role and embodies tremendous historical agency, always falls for the wrong partner. In order to realize her full potential, she must embrace the black male working class drayman and harness his love for the land. These novels illustrate McKay's entanglements with the histories of indentureship and his need to conjure the East Indian "coolie" in order to reconcile his vision of Jamaican nationalism.

5. THE BLACK INDIAN: MYTH AND NONRACIAL HUMANISM IN PETER ABRAHAMS'S *A NIGHT OF THEIR OWN* (1965)

Peter Henry Abrahams's novel, *A Night of their Own* (1965) narrates the multiracial political collaborations between black, Indian, and colored South Africans in the underground movement for liberation against apartheid. In the novel, a South African expatriate whose alias is Richard Nkosi, returns to South Africa after a ten year exile to deliver funds to the underground opposition movement, which is sorely in need of economic support. After delivering the funds to a group of South African Indians, Nkosi is falsely accused of murder and is avidly pursued by the Natal Bureau of Internal Security. Forced to be hidden and protected by the Indians, Nkosi realizes the importance of the Indian minority to the African movement and falls in love with Dee Nunkhoo, the sister to one of the key figures in the opposition, a respected Indian doctor named Dawood Nunkhoo. While Nkosi is under investigation, the Records Department discovers that Nkosi's real name is Dube, and he is the son of a privileged gang boss who once worked in the mines. The Afrikaner man in charge of bringing Dube into custody, Karl Van As, realizes that he and Dube have a shared history outside of South Africa, having previously met and mingled in Europe where they felt unified in their "South Africanness" despite their racial differences. In merging the various overlapping and complex interests of these multiracial characters, Abrahams envisions an alternative form of opposition to apartheid forces and weaves a tale about the possibilities of political transformation where sex, miscegenation, and love serve as the ethical basis or catalyst for change. Abrahams's racial romance, *A Night of their Own*, signifies a shift in South African apartheid literature and is a conscious artistic inscription of resistance to racial

dominance, particularly in the way that it destabilizes earlier cultural narratives of Indian immigration and citizenship in South Africa.

The novel's three sections provide close third person point-of-views of three males – Dube (African), Van As (Afrikaner), and Old Man Nanda (Indian) – all South African men struggling to come to terms with racial apartheid as they battle their own internal demons regarding race prejudice and the struggle for national and socio-political power. The political plot in the narrative, the Security's hunting of Dube and the resilience of the African and Indian opposition, is interweaved by two romantic plots, the relationship between Dube and Dee and the covert relationship between Van As and a colored woman. For all of the characters, passing exposes the artificial boundaries of race, however, for Dube and Dee, it also constitutes a resistance strategy of interracial solidarity. In this chapter, I argue that Abrahams's literary and revolutionary representation of multiracial solidarity between South Africans and Indians imagines the potential for governance that defies and transcends the color bar, which can only be achieved by embracing a nonracial humanism. This humanism disrupts the animosity between South Asian immigrants and native South African subjects. In spite of its romantic gestures between Africans and Indians, however, the novel's ambiguous ending and its narratives of freedom and racial and sexual transgressions resist articulating a genealogical counternarrative that argues for the inclusion of Indian motherhood in a humanist South African nation. Rather than reappropriating the logic of national reproduction, and giving birth to a biracial future, Abrahams's ambiguous ending and the perpetual deferral of black paternal filiation emblemizes an emergent, yet divided nation. Though the Indian woman, Dee Nunkhoo, carries the potential for a

counterpatriarchal role for women, she functions as the guardian of male authority and the nurturer of African and Indian male revolutionaries.

While my previous chapters examined the politics of Afro-Asian hybridity by underscoring the figure of the gendered and sexualized *dougla* in Afro-Caribbean narratives, this chapter shifts the geopolitical terrain to South Africa where the history of Indian immigration, racialization, and citizenship is complicated by multiple waves of both indentured and passenger migrations. Unlike the Caribbean space where the majority of Indian migrants were indentured workers, many Indian migrants to South Africa arrived to take advantage of economic opportunities as traders or merchants. Approximately 150,000 Indian indentured workers arrived in Natal from the 1850s to 1911. These Indians, of which 63% were men, 26% were women, and 11% were children, were shipped from Bombay and Calcutta (Majumdar 480). They worked as domestic servants or in plantations, dockyards, railways and coal mines, and at the end of their contract period, most indentured workers chose to remain in South Africa. In 1872, Muslim “passengers” or traders and merchants followed the arrival of indentured workers, and by 1885, they constituted 20% of Indians in South Africa (Majumdar 481). This labor force was mobilized by the demand for cheap workers after the abolition of slavery, which touched every corner of the empire, from the sugar plantations in the Caribbean to the plantations in Fiji, Mauritius, or South Africa. In South Africa, regardless of whether Indians migrated as indentured workers who fulfilled their contracts *or* as merchants, the two groups fashioned themselves as “settlers” (Hofmeyr and Williams 10). The class differences between indentured migrants and merchants or traders, however, had a significant impact in their ability to protest colonial conditions and garner rights. The

most well known of these middle class migrants was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who later became the leader of India's independence movement.

Gandhi, born in 1869 in the Indian state of Kathiawad, traveled abroad to study law in England in 1888. He stayed in London for three years to pursue academic and intellectual interests, and his subsequent return to India proved to be disappointing because his training in England prevented him from practicing in the Indian courts and because he noted an attitude of English arrogance toward Indians that he had not seen before. When recruited to practice law in South Africa, he willingly agreed and planned to stay only for one year. He remained in South Africa, however, for twenty-one years because of his active involvement in the political strife of Indian South Africans. During his years, he developed his philosophy of satyagraha, which he describes as "the Force which is born of Truth and Love or non-violence" (qtd. in S. Banerjee 88). Gandhi's played an instrumental role and function in mobilizing resources for resistance and struggle, which primarily targeted the Indian middle class or traders. Bijita Majumdar writes: "It is important to recognize that in the initial years, for Gandhi and other Indian leaders in South Africa, the fight against the administration was framed by the same exclusionary principles used by the Whites" (481). Organized activity was steered by and directed towards wealthy, moderate leaders; The Natal Indian Congress, which Gandhi helped establish, had a membership fee that effectively marginalized indentured workers from participation. The exclusion of indentured Indians marks just one aspect of the complexity of citizenship for Indians in South Africa, which perceived Indians as racialized colonial subjects of the British Crown who held the potential to work; claims regarding Indians' industriousness and work ethic, moreover, set them apart from

perceptions of “kaffirs” who were thought to be lazy and unproductive. Although Indians were seen as necessary for economic development by the British Empire, they were also undesired within the South African community by both whites and natives. Through various legislations and imposed taxes, both indentured workers and merchants/traders suffered from restricted property rights in segregated areas, were forced to carry passes, could not hold licenses in mining enterprises, and were prohibited from being legally married to each other or any other ethnic group.⁷¹ These laws were a way to manage and discipline the Indian population, which was generically understood by the state as the “coolie” community. Despite the homogenization of the Indian community, recognition of differences precipitates a more nuanced understanding between citizenship and subjecthood within and outside the community. Pallavi Rastogi notes, “South African Indian identities are always configured by the multiple, often discrete, experiences of indenture, migration for commercial purposes, language, religion, gender, and class politics” (538). The Indian community’s heterogeneous composition confounded “the classificatory impulse on which the foundations of apartheid rested” (Rastogi 538) and disturbed the Manichean boundary or binary black/white opposition that characterized anti-apartheid and apartheid discourse (Kruger 115).

Another crucial difference between the two spaces is the separation between blacks and Indians. Whereas in the Caribbean, discourse on Indo-Caribbean sexuality and literary representations of unruly “coolie” women prevailed in *Beacon* and other literary journals, in South Africa, tensions regarding Indian immigration were articulated through the language of trade and commerce, simultaneously upholding the virtues of Indian commercial enterprise while denigrating Indian masculinity. This discourse was

primarily divorced from sexuality and miscegenation. Literary texts produced during apartheid, particularly as they relate to race and sexuality, are key textual sites that imagine alternative race relations between South Africans and Indians that account for miscegenation, and to some extent address the glaring absence of discourse on black and Indian sexual relations. Sex, as Lauren Berlant points out, “complicates the ordinary, because, even when it is collaborative, it forces the rational/critical subject to become disorganized for a bit” (433-434). In South Africa, sex complicates the logic of economics, of labor, of productivity, that bolstered and disenfranchised Indians and black natives. Abrahams’s novel, produced outside the borders of South Africa but very much a South African novel, does not instantiate the dominant narrative that harps on socioeconomic and racial boundaries between the two social groups in South Africa. Rather, the novel narrates the confluences caused by the transatlantic movements between Indians and South Africans and highlights the importance of transatlantic cultural influences from the Caribbean.

The visibility of these transatlantic relations in South African literature of this period is particularly significant as it highlights the crucial and ambivalent space that South Africa occupied in empire building efforts in the twentieth century. Not only was indenture in Natal modeled after indenture in Trinidad, but Natal exemplified to white imperialists in the United States and Britain the dangers of South Asian transnational migration. Historian Kornel Chang notes, “Serving as a persistent example of white declension, the South African colony of Natal evoked images of Asian hordes overwhelming the white settler world, and it became part of a racial vernacular that helped perpetuate a “yellow peril” discourse” (103). Even though South Africa played an

important part within British imperialism during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it continues to be marginalized within the fields of postcolonial and African Diaspora studies. Aside from the Anglo-Boer war, which inflicted a crisis in British national identity and which has not been sufficiently examined, there has not been much research on the aesthetic, ideological, and/or socio-political effects of significant events such as the Zulu War, the 1949 Natal riots, the empire-building efforts of Cecil Rhodes, or of the wealth accrued from mining in South Africa by British imperialists, etc. In addition to the absence of this research, diaspora studies often do not consider black transnational movement between South Africa and the Caribbean. Peter Abrahams, exemplifying this diasporic movement, fled South Africa and migrated to England and then Jamaica in 1957, a country he became deeply attached to. In Jamaica, he became a radio commentator and the editor of the *West Indian Economist* (Logan 519). But even after moving to Jamaica, his artistic vision and writings could never exclude the apartheid period in South Africa. It is, in fact, only after his move to Jamaica that his literature explores racial consciousness from transnational and inter-relational perspectives. In *A Night of Their Own*, he incorporates the racial and sexual dynamics between East Indian and black populations while his much later novel, *A View from Coyaba* (1985) explores the extermination of indigenous Jamaicans, the Atlantic slave trade, African American nationalism, Pan-Africanism, and the meanings of black identity.

Abrahams's trajectory and his developing transnational artistic vision resembles Claude McKay's travels and literature. Like McKay, Abrahams can be located within an emerging transnational black community that imagines black collectivity outside of strictly national frameworks as the basis for political action. And like McKay, the

transnational focus does not operate as mutually exclusive to the national as Abrahams is very invested in national culture. Both African nationalism and transatlanticism can be understood as mutually supportive and transformative rather than antithetical or exclusive.

5.1 Race and Labor in South Africa Pre-Apartheid.

In *The History of Old Durban and the Reminiscences of an Emigrant of 1850* (1899), George Russell writes, “idolatry, cholera, and other epidemic and contagious evils were at our door. Skilled thieves, dacoits, and Indian mutineers more or less sanguinary, were certain to infect our native population” (479). This fear of contagion expressed by Russell operated on multiple levels, indicating a paradoxical Orientalist construction of the East Indian as physically weak and also criminally threatening, morally corrupt, and infectious. Cultural representations of infections were accompanied by legislative maneuvers, such as the Volksraad Law 3 of 1885, which attempted to mitigate the perceived “Asian invasion” and its corresponding evils by stipulating that public health concerns necessitated separate streets for Indian habitation *even if* trade could not be spatially restricted. These concerns of habitation, sanitation, and trade, applied to East Indian indentured servants or “coolies” who were not considered British subjects of Empire. While passenger Indians and other Asiatic traders easily fell into the category of British subjects, “coolies” (along with “Arabs,” “Malays,” and “Mahomedan” subjects), were not granted “full liberty” under the British government but were, on the contrary, subject to the laws of the South African Republic, whose white inhabitants feared the spread of epidemics “engendered by filthy habits and immoral practices” and petitioned for spatial segregation on the basis of unsanitary dwellings.⁷² The tropes of

contamination and contagion used to stereotype “coolie” workers and exclude them from pure white bourgeois spaces were interlinked with fears of danger and crimes associated with the poor inhabiting the urban slums.

While the construction of diseased and contaminated “coolies” was similar across national spaces such as the United States and Caribbean, South Africa’s multiple migrations of East Indian workers alluded to differences in class that did not exist elsewhere. In Trinidad, for example, only “coolies” migrated in mass numbers, and in the United States, East Indian workers were illustrated and imagined as “coolies” even when they were not indentured workers. In South Africa, “coolies” and “merchants” were easily accepted as distinct categories because of African longstanding trade relations with South Asia. Although “coolies” could not acquire citizenship or own property during the length of their contract, other passenger Indians or traders exercised their rights to own land, set up enterprises, and engage in transnational commerce. While the white inhabitants of the Republic desired to stunt Indian trade due to fear of competition, Indian merchants resisted on the basis of class, arguing against stereotypes relating to sanitation, habitation, and “trade jealousy” arising from Indian “temperate and thrifty habits” (*South African Republic* 37). Cecil Harmsworth noted the tension regarding Indian trade when voicing the fear of Indian industriousness and European rights: If Indian subjects, under the Crown, were better workers, why could they not replace the European? Thus, while the white South African Republic attempted to justify their rule on the basis of economic acumen and intelligence, which was thwarted by the Indian subject, they were also negotiating issues of sanitation and habitation within the socio-political sphere in order to resolve their labor crisis. The discourse on sanitation became an effective means to

delegitimize claims to citizenship for “coolies” while feeding the demands for cheap labor.

Indentured workers also contested Orientalist representations and segregationist initiatives. One of the testimonies, for example, recorded on September 23, 1885 by the Railway Hospital Prison in Natal, provided by inmate John James, or “coolie” no. 23, 091, exemplifies that the systematic implementation of institutional racial segregation was deeply influenced by a complex interplay of colonial and metropolitan medical discourses (Deacon 288). Charged with absence without a pass, James was sent to the hospital where he immediately penned letters to the General Manager, Colonial Secretary, and the Protector of Immigrants. These letters detail grievances about the fabrication of truth regarding his work ethics, the lack of food and clothing, and the physical abuses endured by himself and other indentured laborers for vagrancy and drinking. James writes:

We have left our independent shores...with every assurance of being well looked after – But not to be treated with cruelties, that every English soul detest – all the concocted charges, alleged against me, were discharged by the Magistrate – and it apparently astonishes me – why I should be locked up in the Hospital, though I am very willing to work. (*Documents* 267)

His testimony appeals to the rhetoric of justice, liberty, and industriousness, treasured in British liberal ideals of citizenship, and questions the unfulfilled contractual obligations of the British in supplying provisions in lieu of work. By invoking “work” as the site of contestation, James appeals to the logic of imperial citizenship, which valued industriousness as part of a broader preoccupation with character, in order to counter his criminalization through charges of vagrancy and desertion.

For James, the hospital is a “queer hole” that attempts to contain and manage his vagrant attributes through imprisonment and rehabilitation. Although James’s accusations of unethical treatment were substantiated, the Commission report dismissed him as unworthy of credit and incapable of embodying the values of a moral citizen as he had already been branded a conspirator, a repeated deserter, an instigator of resistance, and an immoral subject capable of faking his own death to escape work. In other cases, where the “coolies” were not fortunate enough to survive their punishments, the truth becomes obscured by a focus on decomposition, disease, and/or mental disorders, resulting in quick dismissals of the cases. One farmer reports that his “coolies” were “imbeciles, one had his tongue hanging out and his eyeballs revolving like a madman, another was subject to fits and should have been in the asylum” (*Documents* 433). The other two men he employed had confessed to him that, “they had committed manslaughter in India and were just out of prison” (*Documents* 433). These remarks or designations made by the white farmers reproduce the Orientalist logic that constructs the East Indian man as violent, precluding him from participating in the South African colony as anything other than a temporary laborer.

Such “vagrant” or unruly designations of criminal insanity were utilized to undermine citizenship claims made by Indians who appealed to the British imperial government for redress or rights. Since claims were modeled on expressions of character, health, credit, and cleanliness, the indentured workers were positioned as both indispensable to and unrepresentable within the rhetoric of imperial citizenship (Banerjee 76). Assumed to be handicapped by their weak physical or mental states, “coolies” could never embody the values centering on virtue and character heralded by Victorian

ideologues. The testimonies of the “coolies”, recorded by the colonial government, thus, are always seen as inaccurate, defensive, and conspiratorial. Though “coolies” could appeal to imperial agents, Europeans could maneuver the legal domain by leveraging their understanding and control of documents as well as their control over the discourse within which the documents circulate.⁷³

By contesting his segregation imposed on the basis of his “character”, James’s testimony (among others) constitutes the discourse of the subaltern whose voices can only be heard through mediated reproductions. Rosaura Sanchez asserts, in a different context that “in its very production, the mediated testimonial introduces a disjuncture, a doubling, a split voice, an overlay of subaltern and hegemonic narratives spaces, perceptible in its dual modality” (8). In seizing the liminal space of mediated representations, the testimonies of the indentured workers recovers some discursive agency even as they are caught within a nexus of uneven power relations that position them as dependent rather than autonomous subjects.

While Indians were contesting the terms of their indenture, citizenship, and national belonging, native Africans were negotiating their own relative construction as “idle” and irascible workers. Many indentured workers after their contract stayed and entered into trade, thereby preventing the development of African trade. William Beinart notes, “one striking difference between southern Africa and much of the rest of the continent was the absence of colourful rural markets or of African traders in produce” (24). South African black farmers, unlike Indian and white farmers, produced local food for internal markets, and therefore, their successes were less visible (24). “Native policy,” meant to strengthen the white supremacy of the British, was deeply influenced by the

necessity of labor supply, which invoked the tenets of Victorian liberalism and solidified racial hierarchies. These hierarchies were also based on Public Health legislation, which followed the Indian example, and sought to drive Africans out of towns and continually redraw urban boundaries (Beinart 77). Not only were they perceived as less productive, their physical proximity became linked with disease and infection.

Segregation in the 1920s and 1930s reached a high point (Beinart 125). During this time, formal policies were undergirded by racial prejudice. These policies effectively halted black political organizations and stalled black national opposition to white domination. Regardless of Afrikaner and British efforts to prevent black urbanization by attempting to keep black Africans within the reserves, however, economic demands and social fluidity drew Africans to the cities during the Second World War. Novels of this period, such as Abrahams's *Mine Boy* (1946) and Alan Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country* (1948), represented African inner-city culture as one of conflict and vitality.

Early segregationist attitudes led to apartheid in 1948. It rejected an all-embracing nationalism and entrenched racial distinctions within its legislative and political programs. Among other legal maneuvers, The Mixed Marriages Act (1949) and the Immorality Act (1950) were passed to prohibit marriage and sex across racial boundaries. Despite its repressive racial order, legal acts failed to completely reverse black urbanization and some suburban freeholds such as Sophiatown in Johannesburg remained populated by blacks. Colored and Indian communities were dispersed through the city and they were dogged by metaphors of disease, which helped justify slum clearance and urban planning (Beinart 152).

Despite Afrikaner legislative attempts to cultivate a multiracial and separate nation, literature produced by native Africans and Indians resisted the limitations of colonialist and apartheid initiatives. Black literary magazines such as *Drum* played a crucial role in voicing the concerns of Africans through nonfiction articles, sensational reportage, short stories, and visual images. Just as the *Beacon* in Trinidad became an important medium for early short stories by Afro-Trinidadian intellectuals, *Drum* “marks the beginning in South Africa of the modern black short story” (Chapman 183). The colorful images “contrasted with the vision promoted by the freshly elected Nationalist Party’s policy of apartheid: a docile, rural lot, ready for servitude” (Jayawardane 62). Seminal in formulating a black national consciousness, the short story published in *Drum* became defined as protest literature. It is this genre and medium that gave birth to the *tsotsi*, a collective figure and a symbol of tragedy, highlighted interracial intimacies, and shifted the terrain of black racial discourse during the cementing of apartheid. Ezekiel Mphahlele in *Down Second Avenue* states that *Drum* was a key venue that voiced significant African and Indian writers in the mid-twentieth century, such as Abrahams:

The outbreak of World War II ushered in Peter Abrahams. He had left South Africa just before the war broke out and worked his way on a boat to Britain. While the Boer government, which came into being in 1948, was masterminding Bantu literature by using school inspectors and Boer publishers to censor it heavily, a new urban writer was emerging....they were turning out a sparkling, racy, and impressionistic prose” (xi).

These writers included Ezekiel Mphahlele, Alfred Hutchinson, Richard Rive, Bloke Modisane, Alex la Guma, Can Themba, Arthur Maimane, and Lewis Nkosi, and were influenced by black American writers like W.E.B. Du Bois, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Langston Hughes. These early black South African writers fought the white government’s aggressive maneuvers to divide South African subjects based on racialized,

ethnolinguistic, and nationalist terms; these divisions, in so many ways, prevented the realization of the common interests of a unified multiracial country. Peter McDonald writes that apartheid policy aimed to “prevent a non-racial idea of a ‘South African’ writer, or indeed, a citizen, from ever emerging” (160).

Drum advanced critiques of urban life and reconfigured social evils such as crime, prostitution, and vagrancy as empowering forces for blacks, coloureds, and Indians. The slums are mapped outside a racialized logic that iconicized the inhabitants as pre-modern and savage. The urban space mapped by *Drum* is ideological, or a representation that produces a relationship between subjects and their real conditions of existence. *Drum*'s gangster narratives, moreover, highlight excitement, adventure, and an urban lifestyle. Mac Fenwick notes that “these stories characteristically rely on sex, violence, and money to keep the plot moving and they frequently resemble nothing so much as Mickey Spillaine novels or Hollywood movies” (620). Fenwick is right in noting that the gangster's sexual prowess, wealth, and power is a running theme in the sensational narratives. While Sherriff Khan in the article “Go Straight Sheriff Khan” is a ruthless robber and thief, he is also a “regular Casanova,” dressed-to-impress in a well-tailored and expensive suit. His image and the image of other gangster resemble Humphrey Bogart and Edward G. Robinson. His detestable crimes on the street and “relentless machismo” (Rob Nixon) are counteracted by his love and respect for women. *Drum*'s gangster-figure, however amorous, alludes to the magazine's complicity in containing the “menace and desirability of women within an ideology of domesticity” (Fenwick 621). In *Drum*'s reproduction of European and American constructions of gender and the sexual conquest, women reaffirm the gangster's masculinity, virility, and vitality. These

gangster narratives emerge at the forefront of the South African short story in order to contest colonial representations and offer a profoundly ambivalent and complex construction of the Other.

Although black male writers penned narratives of liberated and heroic urban identities in *Drum*, female writers and representations of liberated women were conspicuously absent. Dorbrota Pucherova states, “The only aspect of women’s political involvement covered in *Drum* was anti-pass campaigning, which was considered a sufficiently ‘domestic’ issue appropriate to women” (113). Celebrated female coloured writers such as Bessie Head were excluded from discourses of resistance and writing, and soon learned to voice opposition to racialism and racial nationalism on the basis of its patriarchal underpinnings.

While many scholars have pointed to the importance of *Drum*’s role in reconfiguring black masculinity and have also critiqued its masculinist biases, the magazine’s incorporation of Indian subjects has largely gone unnoticed. *Drum*’s Indian gangster, the most common gangster figure in the magazine, challenges conventions of the effeminate and weak “merchant” or “coolie” immigrant and creates alternative representations of Indian subjectivity. More than contesting dominant images, *Drum* opens up a dialogic space in which Indians, native Africans, and coloureds could create a broader black identity, granted performative agency to transform the contours of black solidarity, and challenge binary operations of black/white. The narratives are, therefore, not just “escapist” or “sensational” but also part of anti-apartheid discourse that charted the intersections and trajectories of transatlantic migrations, negated racial hierarchies, and demystified the terms of engagement for a new urban identity.

The representation of black Indian solidarity and the defiance of racial nationalism are similar themes that undergird *A Night of Their Own*. While black American writers inspired Abrahams to become a “color nationalist” (Abrahams, *Tell Freedom* 197), the color bar was also a point of contention for him, a hurdle to transcend because of its resemblance to the South African government’s racial policy. He believed that it was his duty as an artist to portray whole beings or “people with human thoughts, conflicts, longings and strivings, not with causes” (Abrahams, *Return to Goli*, 419). His articulation of humanism, therefore, positions the “human” as a moral category and advocates for human wholeness over political causes with socially determined divisions. In *A Night of their Own*, the main black South African protagonist, Nkosi, claims, “It isn’t the fact of birth or death that is most significant. It is the fact of living. Being alive, being human is more important than being either Indian or black or white or South African” (34). Nkosi’s idealist humanism, nonetheless, requires the recognition of the subjugation of the other within colonialism: “And then there were the Indians. In a remote sort of way he had always known about their situation. But not with the horrible starkness that made him feel guilty and weighed down with depression” (45). Nkosi’s humanism, which Dee believes is naïve and childlike early in the narrative, shifts as he realizes the stakes for Indians in the fight against apartheid. Abrahams, thus, advances dissent from racial thinking in favor of arriving at an understanding of the legacy of racialized suffering that affects white, black, and Indian characters.

Abrahams’s humanism is similar to Frantz Fanon’s notions of humanism that centers on a “reciprocal recognition” of the Other, reflectivity, and a consciousness of difference. In “Racism and Culture,” Fanon delineates his ethics of recognition:

The occupant's spasmed and rigid culture, not liberated opens at last to the culture of the people who have never really become brothers. The two cultures can affront each other, enrich each other. In conclusion, universality resides in this decision to recognize and accept the reciprocal relativism of different cultures, once the colonial status is irreversibly excluded. (*African* 44)

Without reflectivity, moreover, there can be no transcendence of racial boundaries. This leads to a postcolonial consciousness that enables “a concept of man, a concept about the future of mankind” (Fanon, *Wretched* 143) that is not based on national or racial identities. For Fanon, like Abrahams, self-consciousness, identity, and ethical recognition of all Others leads to a new humanism that effects material realities across the globe. Both their visions of humanism, then, are inextricably linked to socio-economic and political change.

Abrahams's illustration of humanism has gone entirely unnoticed or unremarked upon. For Mphahlele, Abrahams reveals “a dominating symbolism through the characters in his novels – this tragic longing for socially forbidden things (184)”. Mphahlele, however, is one of the few critics to laud Abrahams's work as significant for its literary, rather than historical or political, merits. In *Tasks and Masks*, Lewis Nkosi criticizes Abrahams's novels for lacking “vibrancy” or “energy” and for very frequently collapsing into “dead, clichéd language” (49). Nkosi's contention with Abrahams's novels is based on Abrahams's “failure to arbitrate properly between legitimate African interests and the illegitimate claims to plunder by a white settler community” (49). Abrahams's inability to see the value in African traditions, in other words, his understanding of African traditions as “primitive” and “obstacles to modernism and development” incite Nkosi's criticism. The ideological content of Abrahams's work or Nkosi's perception that Abrahams aligns himself with bourgeois liberal ideals, bothers other critics of African

literature as well, such as Michael Wade who has dismissed Abrahams's *Dark Testament* as "naïve and gauche, containing little of literary merit". Kolawole Ogungbesan writes that though Abrahams's novels are "mostly situational," and his plots are "bare-bone thin," he disagrees with the criticisms that are directed towards Abrahams, asserting that they are primarily based on "political postures" rather than literary qualities" (Ogungbesan, *Writing of Peter Abrahams*, 99). Ogungbesan writes of *A Night of Their Own*: "In spite of the failure of its characterization and dialogue, *A Night* succeeds because Abrahams refreshingly casts his novel in the form of a dialectical, political fable in which the dilemmas facing the main groups are stated and dramatized" (129).

In fact, Abrahams's revolutionary aesthetics incorporates multiple generic literary modes, including naturalism, racial romance, realism, and modernism; these modes are used to transcend the historical trauma engendered by apartheid violence and allude to the way that forms became part of an inherited tradition as well as "sites of its reimagination" (Gikandi 311). Through mimetic details, Abrahams illustrates an atmosphere of barrenness, of starkness, and of slight character developments. In addition to literary realism, the narrative style can also be characterized as modernist, particularly because of its use of free indirect discourse where the characters' developing consciousness cannot be illustrated through objective representation but also through first person interjections. Regarding the tension between literary forms in the colonial world, Simon Gikandi notes that "the challenge for early postcolonial writing was to find aesthetic strategies that recovered the lived experience of the nation (a tragic history of violence and oppression) and at the same time presented this writing to its readers as an object of romance, of love, and wish fulfillment" (319). In *A Night of their Own*,

Abrahams's desire to meld realism and romance illustrates the important work that sentiment, desire, attachment can do for politics and nation building. The politics of liberation, Abrahams suggests, cannot operate rationally and above the level of attachment but is embedded within networks of power and knowledge that are simultaneously political, philosophical, and affective. Abrahams's novel marks romance as significant to the development of his characters political awareness and consciousness, revealing their fortitude and vulnerabilities.

A Night of Their Own takes place soon after the Sharpeville massacre when opposition movements were outlawed and driven underground.⁷⁴ The opposition to Afrikaner power was symbolically and literally outside the framework of existing South African reality, which propelled members of the African National Congress (ANC) to consider effecting more violent forms of resistance (Clingman 44). It is within this socio-political context that Richard Nkosi reenters South Africa after traveling to Europe, bringing economic support to the underground opposition movement. His return entails a traumatic, transoceanic crossing of the dark waters, or "kala pani": "the underwater craft surfaced, breaking the black water with a loud whoosh that disturbed only this particular minute section of the world" (Abrahams, *Night* 3). The "black water," produces a "black silence," where all the "noise of the world was the splash as the paddle went in and out of the water," as his body felt "caught up in the regular unending motion...of the timeless movement of the timeless sea" (Abrahams, *Night* 5-6). After separating himself from the dinghy, Nkosi is welcomed by a tall bitter white man recently denounced as coloured, Westhuizen. Westhuizen delivers Nkosi to the Indians, specifically to Doctor Nunkhoo who informs him that officially, he is "opposed to common action" but unofficially he is

his “host” (Abrahams, *Night* 18). Nunkhoo states: “We have paid dearly for our former transparently honest methods of struggle. When they were ready they pounced and destroyed the movement, because we all had declared ourselves from public platforms all over the country. We have now learned that this is bitter war, no platform game” (Abrahams, *Night* 18). Nkosi not only learns that there is a strong Indian faction that supports the ANC, but also that once indentured Indians have merged their political interests with upper-class Indians. While Nunkhoo’s medical expertise offers a shield to the Indian faction, Sammy Naidoo, whose family originally migrated as indentured contact workers, is a trade unionist and acts as the muscle of the organization. Whereas the “upper class” and Europeanized doctor shies away from violence, the “black” Naidoo reminds him of the trauma the Zulus have effected on them by being manipulated by the whites: “Have you forgotten what happened when they encouraged the Zulus to slaughter our people? D’you remember how they stood by while it happened? Remember, Doc?” (Abrahams, *Night* 22-23). Naidoo’s working-class presence and his rhetoric of historical violence illustrate the complex and tenuous subject position of Indians in the black opposition movement.

Naidoo’s figuring as a trade unionist has a significant political function in the novel. Robert Lambert notes, “from its inception, the trade union movement had been haunted by the spectre of racism” (277). African nationalism or ANC’s left-wing leadership, by the 1950s, was denied the right to organize until the inauguration of the South African Trade Union Conference (SATUC) in March 1955, which recognized that political success was dependent upon the support of the black working class, SATUC constituted a radical break with past unions because it was cognizant of the racism and

fragmentation within the labor movement. In the novel, the economic situation is subsumed by the political as class struggle is presented as subordinate to the national question. Naidoo is beset by the racism that he harbors towards Nkosi but also realizes the importance of keeping him safe by shielding him from the authorities.

While Naidoo battles his own doubts regarding Nkosi's intentions, Nkosi's introduction to Dee Nunkhoo, his caretaker and Doctor Nunkhoo's sister, propels him to reconsider the shared destiny of black South Africans in their struggle against oppression. When Nkosi first meets Dee, he notices that she is a cripple: "Her left shoulder and left hip dipped down low when she went down on her left foot; then she rose up high on to the right foot. Her left leg was several inches shorter than her right foot...For a brief, flashing moment Nkosi felt embarrassed, guilty, confused because she was crippled" (Abrahams, *Night* 26). While for Nkosi and Van As, her disability is off-putting and a condition she desires to hide, for the Indian men, they either feel a "sense of guilt" because "men support such states the best" (Abrahams, *Night* 54) or feel protective of her crippled and vulnerable body. Dee's crippled, vulnerable body operates not only as a crisis for her individual identity that needs protection from the gaze of others, but also signifies the crippling of the Indian community that must come to terms with its violent and traumatic history.

Dee's attempts to hide her disability from Nkosi's gaze are thwarted by his efforts to discover the cause of her shame. After Nkosi and Dee have sex and his foot comes into contact with her clubfoot, Nkosi feels her "withdraw, both physically and spiritually" (Abrahams, *Night* 58). Abrahams writes: "He wondered why. There had to be a reason for this deformed foot to mess her up so; there had to be a reason for this defensive

foisting of her crippledness on people” (Abrahams, *Night* 58). Forcing her to reveal her history, she narrates her sordid love affair with a radical black Marxist in London who used her for her economic means and her domestic services:

“I became his mistress; I paid the bills; cleaned his room; cooked his food; I even stayed out of the way when he wanted to sleep with another woman for a change. You see, I was so grateful that his godlike and eloquent and brilliant revolutionary should have time for me; it meant that in spite of my deformity I could be attractive to a man like that. (Abrahams, *Night* 61)

When Dee refuses to continue to support him financially, the “revolutionary” tells her that he had to “suppress a sense of physical revulsion” when they had sex but because it was “part of the system and he had more than paid for every penny” she had provided; it was necessary. Dee reveals: “...his sense of physical revulsion stemmed from the fact that not only was I Indian, I was a crippled Indian to boot” (Abrahams, *Night* 62). The shame of her rejection ceases to haunt her when she falls in love with Nkosi, who shows her that neither her disability nor her Indian identity should be perceived as crippling.

As Dee struggles to negotiate her relationship to disability and society by ceasing to pass as normal, Nkosi must racially pass in order to escape the police and to also realize the limits of a black consciousness predicated upon entrenched racial identities. When the police trump up murder charges against Nkosi for murdering Westhuizen, his only option is to disappear in plain sight by passing as an Indian “coolie”. Nunkhoo states, “As far as they are concerned, Dicky’s just another low-class coolie, but we’ll have a fake Dicky here in his place just in case...Make him look as Indian as you can...Blacken him up. Sorry, friend, you must now be transformed into a low-class Hindu” (Abrahams, *Night* 75). Prior to his physical transformation, Nkosi tells Dee that there is nothing wrong with Indians, Africans, and Europeans wanting to stay within his

own group as long as “each group will accept and respect the equal humanity of the other” (Abrahams, *Night* 75). But as Dee transforms Nkosi, he finds himself in a “pattern of counter-thought on the origins of prejudice, realizing that it has never stemmed from the lower class, but from the “more sophisticated, the more privileged, the more powerful within any group or any society” (Abrahams, *Night* 78). His counter-thought defies an elitist and idealistic vision of group liberation.

As he is led through the “dull drabness” and squalor of the “slum backwaters of the country,” Nkosi realizes that the smells and personal habits of Indians and other groups could not conceal the similarities of the slums (Abrahams, *Night* 80). The working-class environment, their everyday activities enable his escape from the city. Becoming lost in the crowd of Indians, he realizes that the “common danger, the common enemy, and the common objective of outwitting” the police brings him together with the Indians in a “special and intimate relationship” (Abrahams, *Night* 82). Nkosi sees that the enclosure and protection the Indians offer to him is temporary and contingent on political necessity. After the danger or threat of the detectives or the state passes, the woman shrinks back or withdraws from him. Abrahams writes: “He knew that this withdrawal was instinctive, that the other, the coming towards him and protecting him, was the consciously chosen action of reason he knew that the real manifestations of hope for the future” (Abrahams, *Night* 82). Nkosi understands that reason will counter racist instinct and that rational choice and political necessity will function as the basis for future hope. As they work their way through the Indian procession on the street, Nkosi arrives at the realization that “they were a part of the moving mass of dark-skinned and white-robed humanity, moving as such masses have moved for centuries down to rivers to

worship some ennobling force” (Abrahams, *Night* 83). The religious pilgrimage functions as a cover for the real political agitation, and after he is out of danger, he asks about the “holy business” and is informed that “their leader, the skinny little old man in front of them” is going to give a “hell of a long speech” (Abrahams, *Night* 83). Though he finds shelter in the political movement of the Indians, and is able to see how they use religious performance to disguise their efforts toward liberation, he also feels ambivalent, unsure about its possibilities for fruition.

This moment marks a key turning point in Nkosi’s understanding of a non-racial humanism and he apprehends the Indian’s ambiguous positioning in African society: “Whatever they do, however much they sacrifice, however much they give, the African victory, when it comes, may be as bitter for the Indians as the period of white rule” (Abrahams *Night* 88). His ethical recognition of the Indians’ political situation and their tenuousness and vulnerability are unmasked as he comes to see that they are willing to risk their security and rights for the possibility of liberatory social change. His capacity to be self-reflexive towards the Indian group pushes Nkosi to an alternative consciousness that solidifies his decision to further the myth of his perpetual escape. Nkosi’s realization of a consciousness centered upon a nonracial humanism, dependent upon his transformation into a god-like mythic force, enables the opposition movement to destabilize the power of the white government.

When Sammy Naidoo is forcefully taken from his home and killed because he refuses to betray Nkosi’s location, the Indians and Africans work together to continue to conceal him and further the myth of the elusive and subversive African: “...the word went out that the battle was on and that everyone had to be calm and peaceful: no one

should resist arrest, no one should fight back, but no one should cooperate” (Abrahams, *Night* 175). The word of mouth that carries the myth of Nkosi’s escape offers an alternative account of collective resistance. Abrahams writes: “The word spread until it too was nationwide like the arrests; whispered from man to man, from woman to woman, passed on even from child to child till, in the end, it reached up to the highest places in the land” (175). By embodying a political myth, Nkosi bolsters a unified national identity that challenges the established institutions of power in South Africa. Van As realizes that prior to Naidoo’s capture, he had been close to “breaking the Nkosi myth”, but that the longer Nkosi remains free, the more power he accumulates. As a tale of heroic escape meant to galvanize resistance to Afrikaner rule, the myth empowers Indians and Africans to imagine themselves as part of a wider community, a nation.

The narrative’s preoccupation with myth as a means to build solidarity between Indians and Africans and subvert the political sovereignty of Afrikaners plays with conventional gender roles for Indian women, Indian men, and African men. Dee is the virile initiator of their sexual escapades while Nkosi is a willing but somewhat passive participant. Dee maneuvers Nkosi’s racial transformation and also bears the historical trauma of racial violence in the narrative. In this way, Abrahams places Dee in an active role as the bearer of socio-political change whose personal interests are submerged under the desire for a common humanity undivided by race or gender.

Even though Dee plays a central role, she perpetuates and preserves the patriarchal authority of the resistance movement. When Dee’s brother and Nkosi escape the hunters, leadership passes to another male, Dicky Naicker. Abrahams writes: “Dicky had grown up suddenly, overnight. He had become a man with the burdens and the

responsibilities of a man” (Abrahams, *Night* 236). As the men slip off onto the sea, leaving Dee desolate, she reflects, “And so our men must leave us. Some to die; some to go into prison; some to hide; some to go to far lands. And we must be alone in the land, waiting and working and fighting and scheming for the day of reunion” (Abrahams, *Night* 237). Although Dee plays a central role in the “production” and “reproduction” of the Nkosi myth, nurturing Nkosi’s leadership skills, taking care of the household, and operating behind the scenes, the narrative fails to imagine a counter-patriarchal role for her. Always the nurturer of the male revolutionary subject, both Indian and African, Dee conforms to the underground opposition’s prescriptions for female participation in the movement.

In addition to Dee’s ultimate subordination under a patriarchal leadership, the narrative circumscribes her role in the reproduction of an African-Indian future by marking the impossibility of a mixed baby. After Dee and Nkosi have sexual intercourse, Dee says to Nkosi: “I want to have at least six babies and I want you to sire them” (Abrahams, *Night* 94). She asks whether they will be cripples, Africans or Indians? Later in the narrative, when she says goodbye to her brother, Doctor Nunkhoo, she states that she would “love to have his children...But you understand why I don’t want you to worry?” (Abrahams, *Night* 172). While children might offer a concrete manifestation of political success, Nkosi has provided her with political purpose and a new sense of kinship. Regardless of the movement’s failure or success, Nkosi’s arrival and impact has illustrated the possibilities for change that can occur through African and Indian intimacy on social and political levels.

Dee's dream of motherhood that she fosters once she falls in love with Nkosi never materializes in the narrative and whether they will be born is a historical question that the novel poses. Nkosi's spiritual and social development and reproduction as a messianic hero, therefore, requires an uncertain sacrifice in the narrative, that of genealogical reproduction. Dee's inability to fulfill her procreative desires results from the unpredictability of South Africa's future, one that she hopes will be radically transformed through African and Indian solidarities.

In *A Night of Their Own*, the powerful sexual magnetism between Nkosi and Dee is illustrated as an occasion for the transcendence of racial violence in South Africa. Abrahams's theme of interracial love for the forbidden racial other functions as a crucial device in Abraham's nonracial humanism, which can only materialize through solidarity between Africans and Indians. This solidarity manifests through the transformation of both Nkosi and Dee but is also shown through the transformation of the other Indian male characters in the novel. Even though Naidoo, for example, aspires to achieve cross-racial solidarity, he also realizes he must counter his own patriarchal and racist response to miscegenation and Afro-Indian intimacy. In a short but telling conversation between Naidoo and Dicky, the two Indian males reveal that they have both been sexually intimate with black African women, who were all different but not because of their race or color but because they were individuals. Through these various romantic realizations, the novel dismantles the racial assumptions of apartheid discourses that created the color bar, and also attempts to undo conventional gender roles that characterized South African Black nationalism, illustrated in magazines like *Drum*, by locating the Indian woman as central to the fulfillment of the power of myth. Abrahams imagines a revolution based on

myth, as a rational and modern system of subversion, that incorporates female leadership as crucial to the consolidation of a nonracial and free world; the role of the Indian woman, however, is circumscribed by male authority and leadership. Dee's ability to further the power of myth but not the longevity of the African Indian family signifies the ambiguity of the future of South Africa.

Similar to Claude McKay's *Banjo* and *Banana Bottom*, Peter Abrahams's *A Night of Their Own* illustrates African/Indian intimacies and miscegenation as the modality through which another political resolution is imagined and scripted. Through interracial intimacies, which have overtly political overtones in Abrahams's novel, McKay and Abrahams are able to open up a creative space that reconfigures national black identity into a multiracial collectivity that has the capacity to facilitate political change and national transformations. This reconfiguration, of course, occurs through romance and the marriage between national destiny and personal sentimentalism, one that promises revolution and liberation. This "erotics of politics" legitimates the nation-family through love and productive sexuality, providing a model for "non-violent national consolidation during periods of internecine conflict" (Sommer 76). By privileging the coupling between an African male and an Indian female and putting these two groups into intimate relations, both McKay and Abrahams imagine miscegenation, hybridity, and mixing as oppositional, transgressive, and transformative, destabilizing colonial structures of power.

6. LIBERATING THE “COOLIE” WOMAN

In my previous chapters, I explore the various ways that black writers in the early twentieth century imagine the East Indian worker as central to disrupting the western logic of political development for blacks across the United States, Caribbean, and South Africa. In remarkable and fascinating ways, Caribbean writers like Claude McKay, C.L.R. James, and Peter Abrahams represent East Indian female sexuality as operating in myriad ways. McKay’s illustration of the licentious, deviant, Orientalized, and magnetic “coolie” woman demonstrates his cravings for unification between blacks and East Indians. James, for whom black/Indian miscegenation bars the way to an alchemized state, tenaciously witnesses the hardworking and industrious “coolie” woman as the stable, respectable, and uplifted future of Trinidad. Abrahams, similarly, craves interracial relations between black South Africans and Indian South Africans, seeing the East Indian woman as central to overthrowing the rigid structures of apartheid. The “coolie” woman, therefore, wields an enigmatic power and has the capacity to derail the racist ideologies of empire, creating an incipient consciousness or awareness of cross-racial relations.

This coda then emerges from the necessary and apposite questions raised by the figure of the “coolie” woman. If black male writers like Claude McKay in the early twentieth century paint the erotic, licentious, deviant, nonnormative “coolie” woman as a figure that must be accounted for in order to reconcile the fragmentations caused by imperial and colonial labor demands, then how does the figure of the “coolie” woman emerge in narratives of South Asian writers? Although black male writers invoke the “coolie” woman and situate her within various interracial contexts in order to reveal

tensions regarding political membership, unification, and citizenship, it is imperative to consider how this figure performs a different kind of ideological work in South Asian literature. Not surprisingly, the figure of the “coolie” woman is being invoked in starkly different ways in the work of South Asian women writers. This coda examines literary representations of two contemporary female South Asian diasporic writers who envision the “coolie” woman as emancipatory; that is, she not only offers a counter-history of female labor and migration to the New World that suggests an alternative origin narrative that claims matrilineal ties to India, but also negotiates new gender spaces that transgress borders and refute patriarchal hegemony.⁷⁵ I read Ramabai Espinet’s *Swinging Bridge* (2003) and Gauitra Bahadur’s *Coolie Woman* (2013), asserting that Espinet and Bahadur excavate the “coolie” woman to counter heteronormative roles that persist regardless of their own diasporic mobilities, however, their texts betray a contradiction in their narrative desire for agency and self-determination by critiquing and then subscribing to the dominant ideology of family and state formation. Ultimately, both Espinet and Bahadur’s narratives are problematic because their resolution to gender inequalities that have marginalized East Indian women and their ancestral “coolie” grandmothers are utopic and/or statist, displacing tensions regarding sexual regulation and domestic violence onto Indo-Caribbean men rather than situating violence within institutionalized sites.

Although both *Swinging Bridge* and *Coolie Woman* prop the “coolie” woman centrally in their quests for recovering a heroic narrative of emancipation and sexual liberation, Espinet centralizes issues of black/Indian racialization, interracial intimacies and cultural hybridities whereas Bahadur skirts black/Indian miscegenation entirely.

There is no symmetrical counterpoint to black male writers' fantasies of Indo-African intimacies and relations, and the works of Espinet and Bahadur do not unequivocally and equally address miscegenation as a trope of national unification. Rather, for Espinet and Bahadur, the subjugation of Indo-Caribbean women to male control, domination, violence in the name of respectability, whether exercised on the terrain of Afro-Indo relations or not, becomes the primary focus of their narratives. This is not to say, however, that the familial tensions and the patriarchal violence directed at women is divorced from nation-states that continue to suffer from colonial residues.

Brinda Mehta aptly notes that Indo-Caribbean female writers from Guyana and Trinidad have been subjected to "literary and cultural eclipsing by their black counterparts, by the diasporic hegemony of South Asian writers from North America and Britain, by Indian men and by women writers from India" (*Diasporic* 1). Most representations of the Indo-Caribbean woman emanated from either masculine or Afrocentric perspectives. In addition to the black writers in my study, other male Caribbean writers such as Edgar Mittelholzer illustrate the Indo-Caribbean as part of the landscape, or in a pastoral, one-dimensional, childlike capacity. Other Indo-Caribbean male writers, such as V.S. Naipaul in *A House for Mr. Biswas*, depict contempt for the Indian woman while black female writers such as Olive Senior in "The Arrival of the Snake Woman" reduce "Indian womanhood to its coolie status" (Mehta, *Diasporic* 2). More recently, however, pioneering scholarship by Brinda Mehta, Rhoda Reddock, Veronique Bragard, Patricia Mohammed, Jan Shinebourne, Ramabai Espinet, and Verene Shepherd have directed attention to the histories of Indo-Caribbean women's migrations and subjectivities, and have also emphasized the importance of Indo-Caribbean woman-

authored texts. Much of the scholarship on these texts, however, examines transatlantic connections between the ancestral homeland and the Caribbean by examining the effect of dislocation or displacement from India or stays located within the Caribbean itself in order to represent Indo-Caribbean experiences of racial and/or national belonging, gender norms, and Indo-Caribbean patriarchal oppression.⁷⁶

6.1 The Cultural Production of the “Coolie” Woman

Although the transnational migration of East Indians/South Asians predates European colonial history, the largest dispersal was instigated by the British colonial administration during the post-emancipation period. The burgeoning demand for labor to fulfill the immediate needs of capital on the plantation economies in the island colonies, on railways, and in administration enabled unprecedented movement during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the Caribbean region, migration occurred between 1830 and 1920 when over 750,000 East Indian indentured laborers were shipped to work as “coolies,” a label that homogenized the wide range of backgrounds the migrants came from. Moreover, the “c-word stung,” Bahadur notes, because it was a reminder of “lowliness in the hierarchy of a sugar estate, a hierarchy based on race. Indians were at the bottom, below the English, the Scottish and the Irish as well as the African descendants of slaves sometimes assigned as ‘drivers,’ or foremen in the charge of work gangs” (xx). The permanent designation served as an inescapable marker of difference that kept “coolie” workers marginalized from the national sphere. Colonial records, moreover, suggest that many of “the single women who emigrated during this time did so to escape the sexual and other abuses of the *zamindars*, the landlords, or to

elude the punitive consequences of acts deemed by the Hindu orthodoxy as sexually or socially transgressive” (Pirbhai 7). For women, indentureship was a double-edged sword because it was exploitative and abusive on one hand and escapist and liberatory on the other. Indenture provided women with the means to escape oppressive conditions of existence such as child marriage, widowhood, and caste discriminations while endowing them with relative economic independence. Regardless of these liberties, women were vulnerable, often being assaulted and/or forced into prostitution. The social formations they were joining were, therefore, differently oppressive.

While “coolie” men were variously illustrated as docile and effeminate (barefoot, emaciated, stooped-low and turbaned) or aggressive and irrationally violent (the cutlass wife-hacking migrant), “coolie” women were romanticized, Orientalized, and exoticized. In one anonymous poem in a British Guyana newspaper, published in 1893, the writer exclaims, “Oh, cooly girl with eyes of wonder...This Western world can claim your birth...This land of mud has been your home...’Twas here that you drew your natal breath...Then why so foreign? Why so strange...In looks and manner, style and dress -- ...Religion, too, and social ways” (Bahadur xix). Although the woman is not indentured, in the social imaginary, her strange appearance and habits mark her as exotic, unknowable, lacking interiority, and essentially foreign. The corollary of her foreign and traditional status was that it located her outside Caribbean national spaces because she could never be imagined as creole. Cultural anthropologist Viranjini Munashinge notes that the exclusion of East Indians from creolization designated them as culture “bearers” rather than “culture” creators (554). East Indians are, thus, always seen as diasporic

rather than creole, “unmixable” because their “core culture” is perceived as remaining Indian rather than Caribbean.

This discursive exclusion was also perpetuated through visual images, particularly through the circulation of South Asian women on postcards. Saloni Mathur, in her discussion of colonial postcards in India, notes that the colonial postcard reached the status of a commodity that was transnationally circulated, collected and consumed by imperialists. Mathur, furthermore, writes that the “colonial postcard is inseparable from the thematic of gender, for the postcard, as others have noted, reveals a complicated sexual and political economy” (Mathur 96). The postcards captured images of exotic women from the colonies, making visible differential and hierarchical constructions of womanhood. Europeans and Americans consumed these postcards, which were mass-produced and dispersed across multiple sites, encompassing many national firms and local operations. Mathur explains that the postcard was both a “cosmopolitan form and a constant reminder of the imperial conditions that establish the basis for modern cosmopolitanisms” (100).

The East Indian woman’s body was often portrayed as located within the interior space and in poses that suggest that she was ‘thinking’ or ‘dreaming’. Although the women are heavily adorned and immobile, the images indicate highly sexualized and exotic fantasies of the Indian other, specifically by making visible a single body part, such as a bared foot. In the context of “coolie” women, the postcards categorized under “coolie types” depicts heavily-adorned and fully-clothed young East Indian women with exposed feet or delicate, resting hands. She is marked by an Orientalist gaze, one that occupied a central place in the production of her difference. Recast as traditional,

domestic, and familial, these images assuaged the colonial administrator's dilemma regarding the tension between satisfying the needs of labor and defining the Indian laboring class as dangerous to the civilizing mission in the Caribbean. It, moreover, underscored the global circulation and representational value of the downtrodden yet sensuous woman who was idealized, romanticized, and pathologized in the Western, liberal imagination. Perceived to be in need of salvation, she was perfectly poised as a marker between the liberated West and the oppressive, barbaric East and systematically reproduced as homogeneous and monolithic.

6.2 Suspension in *Swinging Bridge*

Both *Swinging Bridge* and *Coolie Woman* resist a linear narrative form as their protagonists attempt to locate the forgotten and shrouded “coolie” woman in multiple spaces, such as local and global, private and public. The novels approach the history of women's migration as a fragmented genealogy that requires the partial work of recovery. In *Swinging Bridge*, the “coolie” woman's story is embedded within the prologues of each section – Borrowed Time, Manahambre Road, and Caroni Dub – constantly reminding the reader that the ancestral grandmother's history is linked to the present migrations of Mona Singh, the female protagonist, and that the grandmother's migration disrupts discrete and linear histories. The ancestral grandmother, Gainer, is a “rand” fleeing her marital obligations to a much older man by joining the Vashnavites or the women who “used to sing and dance for money,” walking round and round the Shiva statue whole day and sleeping with the men at night (Espinete 273). Through this figure, Espinete draws links between patriarchy, prostitution, and migration by explaining how

the British condemnation of sati in 1829 presented itself as a solution to labor demands in other colonies:

Now, instead of being immolated on their husbands' pyres, thousands of young widows were regularly turned out of doors by their in-laws and could be found wandering in the cities, seeking a living by various means, singing and dancing, begging for alms, often prostituting themselves. Large numbers of these widows proved to be ripe for persuasion..." (Espinete 294)

Even though the rand satisfied the quota for women deemed necessary for family formation, she also posed a problem for Indian men. Espinete writes:

The rand, casting her vivid shadow upon the face of indenture, obscured for more than one century, shook her defiant, dancing body in the faces of those closed knots of *jahaji bhais*... 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, one-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)

The novel's primary plot follows Mona, an Indo-Trinidadian woman living in Toronto, Canada who works as an assistant to a film producer seeking to consolidate a visual history on Haiti. Although Mona is interested in recovering stories of Haitian women, she is interrupted by a phone call from her brother in Montreal, who is secretly dying of AIDS. He sends her on a journey to Trinidad in order to procure their old house in Trinidad. Her return to Trinidad results in the breakup of her relationship with her white lover, as she uncovers and reclaims her own personal family history alongside the histories of other women that have been shrouded in secrecy and effectively marginalized, such as Baboonie's history, the outcast woman whose songs and cries Mona hears but cannot actually witness.

On her trip back, Mona acquires documents from her illegitimate cousin, Bess, which provide the official history of their migration to Trinidad: “There was a family tree at the very front with no mention of Bess. And at the end of the final page was a three-sentence history of Gainder: Lily’s mother was named Gainder. She came from India in the nineteenth century. She died in childbirth” (Espinet 271). After discovering that several pages have been torn out by Gainder’s husband, Mona feels personally violated at the loss of history, compelling her to search other nontraditional archives, such as old recipe books, letters, church and concert programs, and shop books. The fusion of these documents from her Grandmother Lil’s books reveals an alternate narrative to the “official” history of Gainder’s migration. While travelling with a “band of rands” on the ship to “Chinidad,” the land of sugar, Gainder is attacked by a sailor and protected by a man named Jeevan, who suffers life imprisonment on an island named The Rock. When Gainder arrives, she performs as a singer and dancer at celebrations, and eventually marries a Christian convert who forbids her from participating in public performances.

The recovery of the ancestral narrative is also enabled by present day “rands” who perform at ceremonies and whose shrill and piercing voices have haunted Mona throughout her childhood. When Mona fails to translate the songs recorded by her Grandmother Lil, she takes them to another performer who deciphers their meanings. The novel then reincorporates oral family history into the communal history of Indo-Caribbean women in order to negate the absence of a complete written historical record. In incorporating the oral text, Espinet addresses the “topos of unsayability” (Gilroy 74) produced from multiple horrific histories of dislocation and displacement. Oral language, moreover, is “used to challenge the privileged conceptions of language and writing as

preeminent expressions of human consciousness” (Gilroy 74). The significance of music lies in its historical, material, and political importance of providing expressive power to subaltern groups like “rands” who were forced to negotiate linguistic and semantic indeterminacy arising from imperial powers of control. In this sense, orature accounts for the “give and take of joint transmissions, posted in the past, arriving in the present, delivered by living messengers, speaking in tongues not entirely their own” (Roach 286). By performing multiple pasts in the present and in the presence of other rands, the intersection of imagination and memory redefines cultural identities as transgressive of various spatial boundaries, imagined or otherwise. Although Mona cannot read and write the songs of her ancestral grandmother, their translation and performance by another contemporary performer deessentializes Mona’s own epistemologies of fixed cultural processes that constituted the racial signification and subjectivity of Indo-Trinidadian migration. By accessing history through her ancestral grandmother’s musical culture, Mona realizes that their gendered identities have relied on fictions of racial and cultural purity in order to enforce and sustain heteropatriarchal authority.

Recovering the “coolie” woman through oral rather than textual forms becomes crucial to debunking the authority of male bourgeois history of Indo-Trinidadian migration and disclosing a subaltern history from below. The performance creates “new discursive spaces that allow for recognition of new networks and affiliations; they become crucibles for complex identities in formation that respond to the imperatives of place at the same time that they transcend them” (Lipsitz 6). The formation of new discursive spaces is crucial to both Lipsitz and Gilroy. Lipsitz’s celebratory approach to the erasure of local differences within communities and the achievement of

“emancipatory potential” (14), however, interconnects and complicates the relationship between various diasporas, the cultural space, and the physical places they occupy.

Gilroy’s analysis of the transnational politics of culture, on the other hand, sidesteps the ethnic absolutism in black and white paradigms that reside in traditional narratives of race and cultural production (Gopinath, “Bombay” 305). In his attempt to move beyond the black/white binary, he reinscribes it in his own text by eclipsing the multiple racial and gendered histories that affect the black Atlantic diaspora.

Gilroy’s failure to incorporate Asian histories in his “Black Atlantic” paradigm has been condemned by feminist scholars like Gayatri Gopinath who critique his noncomparative framework and assert that it results in the historical and cultural invisibility of Indo-Caribbean subjects who constitute half of Trinidad’s population. The black/white historical paradigm stresses the primacy of European and African experiences in the archipelago and causes a dialectical imbalance that obscures “the subtle chiaroscuro of brownness that characterizes the Indo-Caribbean presence by promoting cultural invalidation and illegitimacy” (Mehta, *Diasporic* 7). The usage of this paradigm influences the historical invisibility of East Indians, which has been confounded by creolization and its uncontested association with black cultural and expressive traditions. Creoleness has exacerbated the divide between blackness and Indianness by systematically excluding the Hindu experience in order to denigrate Indianness by indigenizing Indo-Caribbean traditions. Mehta states, “this exclusion has, consciously or unconsciously, affirmed the superiority of Creole culture at the expense of the ‘primitiveness’ of ‘coolie,’ or indentured, culture” (*Diasporic* 7).

Gilroy's analysis, moreover, marginalizes gender and sexuality, thereby rehashing a patrilineal and heterosexual construction of diaspora. He posits notions of "genealogy and patrilineality as the underlying logic of diaspora" by privileging masculine sites of cultural syncretism in the production of the diasporic culture, such as the deejay's turntable and the ship (Gopinath, "Bombay" 306).⁷⁷ In the Caribbean, gender and sexuality play an important role in music since the image of the woman is almost always negative. Davies states that the entire Caribbean oral tradition "portrays the woman, in the worst extreme, as an evil, despicable entity or at best, as a malleable, unthinking, submerged personage" (165). In different ways, dichotomized representations of Indo-Trinidadian women as either transgressive or passive place them outside of national culture.

Counteracting Gilroy's "Black Atlantic" paradigm, Mehta conceptualizes a different methodology, "kala pani" poetics, when conducting a feminist reading of *Swinging Bridge*: "kala pani poetics is a gendered discourse of exilic beginnings that simultaneously reclaims and contests otherness by highlighting the traditional invisibility of female historical subjectivity in androcentric colonial and nationalist narratives" ("Engendering" 24). For Mehta, *Swinging Bridge* contests the negation of feminist epistemologies, recovers the loss of the women's histories, and offers a politicized reinvention of Indo-Caribbean women that "negotiates gender liminality within models of Indian nationalism, colonial documentation, and Caribbean legitimacy" ("Engendering" 34). Building on Mehta's analysis, Aliyah Khan is also invested in a "politics of becoming" that occurs through the "interstitial" spaces that lie in between India and the Caribbean. The reclamation of the Jahaji-bahen (ship sister) is the major focus of the

kala pani poetics as they “displace the importance of jahaji bhai (ship brother) ties and legacies” (85). For Khan, the “women’s stories” explore the “metamorphic possibilities of crossing back and forth between psychic and physical locations” (87-88). Through their readings, Mehta and Khan illustrate that disjunction and dislocation mar the history of the Indian rand, which inevitably conceals her from the public purview of the Indian nationalist and Indo-Caribbean nationalist agendas.

Mehta and Khan’s celebration of the “coolie” grandmother as a subversive figure of Indo-Caribbean migration is predicated on the alternative history that she embodies. In other words, they fail to link the history of the “coolie” woman to the current locations of the protagonist, Mona, instead mining her as representing an originary narrative that contests the dominant discourse regarding the “traditional” Indo-Trinidadian woman and reconstructs her as a political actor, a new subject of History. Rather than simply exalting the figure of the “coolie” woman however, *Swinging Bridge*, positions her recovery as a site of contradiction that portrays not only the narrative desire for female agency and autonomy but also the impossibility of its emergence. For the cosmopolitan, diasporic, and western feminist Mona, the “coolie” woman’s history of nonnormativity satisfies the craving for a maternal legacy that resists heteronormative sanctions to transgressions, such as participation in mixed-race liaisons and lack of familial formation and domesticity. These sanctions, moreover, are represented as tumultuous, violent, and ultimately nationalist. The novel, then, stages the household as a significant ideological apparatus for the state to exercise patriarchal control, manage unruly sexualities, and naturalize the right kind of heterosexuality. But while Mona resists the pressures from her father and the Trinidadian community to conform, *Swinging Bridge* ultimately casts

creole family formations as legislating the state's endeavors while douglarization and gay men remain outside of the state's interests. In this context, the "coolie" woman turns into an artifact except for when she can be gleaned in contemporary forms of domestic violence. In this way, the book continues to reinscribe the "coolie" as a continual, perpetual victim whereas the creole legislates the state's power to inculcate heterosexual and productive relations.

Throughout *Swinging Bridge*, Mona feels "'caught in a gigantic bubble, waiting for the real times to come" (Espinet 27). Her stasis results from a history of struggle to move forward, both socioeconomically and geographically. An adult Mona reminisces that she could "understand how life must have been closing in on him – wife, Muddie, children, work, respectability, and the mortgage on his country property draining his lifeblood. To keep the land. Everything for the land. Old-fashioned thinking, completely out of step with progress and modernization" (Espinet 27). The land is binding, immobilizing him from participating in urbanization. His fidelity to Muddie and their kids, "his personal millstones," kept him in "a state of perpetual uncertainty," restricting him from modernization while being forced to anchor himself within their middle-class Presbyterian community in order to build "a slow, deadly respectability" (Espinet 29). This middle-class had been created from the former indentured servants who could now "lift themselves into a space free as air through the hymns they sang at church on Sundays (Espinet 29). For Mona, those old hymns vanished "all the soot and flying dust of burning cane" (Espinet 30), expanding her sense of Caribbean space but never allowing her to make her way to the "center". Unlike the "coolie" woman's raunchy songs, the hymns served to remind them of progress, respectability, and masculinity.

Da-Da's liberation, stemming from a desire to attain a progressive identity and leave the canefields behind, forces him to embrace the ideologies of Indo-Caribbean nationalism. This identity resembles the "big big life on the Hollywood screen" and starkly deviates from his racialized status as a "stupid bong coolie" (Espinet 58). Her parents' relationship exemplifies a "Hollywood pastiche," that excludes any type of resemblance to bonded labor. Although Da-Da subscribes to a creole vision of political unification of Trinidadians, he is an ethnonationalist who is deeply invested in the racialized politics of the emergent postcolonial state, and utterly enraged by the lack of political representation for Indo-Caribbean subjects. Ultimately, his ethnonationalism reinforces Indo-Caribbean *jahaibhai* rhetoric that marginalizes Indian females by imposing patriarchal control, particularly against sexual corruption and douglarization, which became perceived as a threat to the formation of a discrete Indian national group.

Indian women's sexualities were regulated by a nationalism created by "*jahajibhai* bonds of fraternity on the ships of indenture and Hinducentric ideals of femininity" (Mehta, "Engendering" 21). Mona realizes at a young age that her sexuality is linked to her family's migration history. When sent on an errand by her mother, at the age of 11, Mona encounters a man who attempts to rape and murder her. She recalls there were "recent reports about attacks on young girls by unscrupulous taxi drivers" and of a "young girl who had been abducted for a whole day and was then flung out of a speeding car at a busy intersection...her clothing torn, her underwear missing" (Espinet 41). This blatant image of rape reinforces the violence in the larger Trinidadian community towards Indian females and the need to safeguard chastity and innocence. While running her errand, Mona is approached by a man who claims to know her mother and leads

Mona to an open field. At the field, she imagines and narrates herself from an external point of view:

They were all seeing a burly man and a young girl locked in a combat at the side of the road. Locked in mortal combat... The man held the girl's arm and attempted to pull her down the slight slope under the cocoa trees. But the small girl did not budge... The eye of the world was on that scene in a far corner of a cocoa plantation, centred on the stretch of road winding like the body of a macajuel snake around the wealth of cocoa almost ready for cutting. (Espinet 44)

Suspended in the space of the cocoa plantation, the novel synchronizes the present moment with the history of Indian women on the plantation. Mona's rootedness in this colonial/contemporary space reinforces the voyeuristic gaze onto the body of the Indo-Caribbean women. When she arrives home late, Muddie asks if she was touched or kissed, telling Mona that 'nobody will believe you didn't go with that man under that bush... I can't tell him anything. If I tell him anything, Mona will never escape. Mona will never escape...' (Espinet 46). And Mona can neither escape Da-Da and his surveillance nor the entrenched gender biases in Caribbean society.

In addition to the violence outside the home and the lurking dangers that "trap" Mona onto the canefield, Mona's adolescent body becomes the site of Da-Da's aggressions, paranoia, and misogyny. When Da-Da becomes drunk, the sight of her short, above-the-knee dress, puts him in an uncontrollable rage and he rips the dress off her back and shouts, "'You little bitch. You little ho...'" (Espinet 178). Although Muddie shields her from his physical and verbal abuse, Da-Da burns her dress and commands her to kneel on the gravel and cross the yard. When an observer asks her, "'Whey you do? You take man or what?'" she feels "no shame" (Espinet 178-179). Mona's public humiliation, often repeated in multiple public spaces throughout the narrative, is meant to

curb her perceived sexual wantonness. His violent and phallogocentric policing of her sexuality is entrenched with erotic undertones. Mona reflects that in the Caribbean, everyone including creole, mixed-race, and black people, wanted to control Indian women's sexuality. When punished by her schoolteacher for indulging in love comics, the teacher states, "I say allyuh lef dat kinda ting behind on the estate long time! Why all yuh so hot up?" (Espinet 144). Later, Mona remembers the conversations circulating around Indian female sexuality, recalling

talk about how Indian girls were hot hot from small – no wonder they had to marry them off as children, and no wonder wife beating and chopping was so common among those people. They were not civilized or 'creolized' enough. They did not reach the approved standard of proper Trinidad society. We were hot coolie girls who had to be brought in line and who, at twelve or thirteen, were already showing signs of wantonness" (Espinet 144-145).

Da-Da's patriarchy is complicit with Caribbean society's demonization of sexual douglarization, the racial mixture of Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians.⁷⁸ Da-Da resists enforced douglarization by the government as an act of marginalization within the nation-state: "Mother India, with all of its many faults, is still our homeland. We reject coercive efforts to force us to become a mixed race of people. If this happens naturally, over time, all well and good. But national rhetoric that seeks to obliterate Indians – our ways, our appearance, our religion – is an act of racialism" (Espinet 74). Although Muddie often shields Mona from her father's wrath, she fails to protect her when she becomes enamored by Bree, an Afro-Creole boy. Though she tries to keep their relationship a secret, Mona's parents discover the truth. Her relationship with Bree is stifled not just by her parents but also by the colonial history of Trinidadian society that makes their transversal relationship an impossibility. Even when Mona sees Bree in New

York, much later, they can only consummate their relationship as an affirmation of their past desires. Their consummation does not crystallize into domestic bonds, confirming Mona's self-identification as a "nowarian" or wandering subject, lingering between different places and temporalities. Her "nowarian" identity, internalized by an intense desire to escape Trinidad and reflective of Gainder's own escape, sharply contrasts with Muddie's domesticated, stationary, and fixed life, grounded in the very space of Trinidadian's middle class bourgeois society. Muddie is the "force holding together the fragments" of a domestic life that Mona resists (Espinet 39).

The gendered inequalities, the emotional abuse, and the brutal violence Mona witnesses within their home are continually presented as the psychological effects of the "outside" and the turbulent socio-economic and political climate in Trinidad, shattering the romanticism she associates with their "storybook courtship" (Espinet 190).

Articulating her desire to be free from similar domestic bonds infiltrated with Indian nationalist ideologies spouted by her father, Mona hopes for a more equal relationship with Bree, which never materializes due to his irrational, eruptive castigation of her ideas. During a heated discussion over the Trinidadian government's mandates to replace all Western classics with local texts, Bree slaps her repeatedly in public for insisting on keeping the curriculum the same, with its focus on British writers like Shakespeare and Yeats. Her resistance to the creation of a native literature, a perspective commonly held by the colonized middle class, infuriates Bree:

Without warning Bree's hand move to my face and laid the slap on my cheek. Nothing was clear after that...his hand struck my left cheek over and over. Once started he did not stop, could not stop, maybe...the slaps had echoed like gunshots through the small café; it seemed that everyone had stopped talking or serving, but now no one paid the slightest attention..." (Espinet 196)

Bree's nationalist ideologies conflict with her loyalist and colonial position and he administers her transgressive deviance from nationalism with male violence.

Mona discovers there is no physical trace of Bree's hand and her "skin remained unmarked" (Espinet 196). The violence that Bree inflicts on Mona's body, rendered invisible through the absence of its markings, is reminiscent of the patriarchal control exercised by her father and the larger Trinidadian community. She thinks, "Da-Da, and now Bree" (Espinet 197), when reflecting upon the gendered nationalist violence that is disregarded by the onlookers in the café. In adulthood, Mona comprehends the cycle of abuse that Bree was born into with an abusive father and a downtrodden mother but is unable to forget his violent regulation of her sentiments and body. Even though she craves to love him "in the way of the suburbs, the trees, the garden, the children, the two-car garage," she realizes that their political differences in Trinidad created an irreconcilable distance: "Vast and shifting was the sea of desire we had generated between ourselves, vast it would remain, but without motion" (Espinet 198). The motionless sea creates an impossible border zone for Mona and Bree, another form of suspension, where the lack of moving bodies fails to reconfigure the unified national story as one that is multiethnic, transnational, and transbordered. This failure, moreover, secures her in a liminal position because of her inability to form a family, to own property, and to reproduce children. The materialization of her heteronormative desires never comes to fruition, leaving Mona "homeless" in America.

Mona's travels back to Trinidad, the place where Da-Da buried her naval string, aren't simply about recovering a *kala pani* poetics. Mona's escape certainly mirrors Gainder's exilic trajectory in that both women flee the gender oppressive

heteropatriarchies enforced by their families and nations. But whereas Gainder's narrative of migration is an emancipatory promise of departure, Mona's story is one of arrival. Mona reflects upon her arrival to her old home in Trinidad:

I imagine that something of me, and of all our lives here, lies buried in it. I sit on the ground and then lie flat. I press my face into the earth and search for my scent...And I was not disappointed. The smell I had then rose up into my nostrils from the land, up from long ago. The land, the land had remembered. I lay face down on the earth, my first earth, breathing it. (Espinet 270)

While Gainder's story is essential to Mona's understanding of her maternal ancestral history and her "nowarian" manners, the narrative's lack of resolution suggests that recovering this history is not sufficient for Mona to come to terms with her subjectivity. However important it is for Mona to discover her maternal ancestor's *kala pani* trajectory, the novel is equally invested in Mona's ability to recognize that Indo-Caribbean women's autonomy facilitates a more just social order in which women are empowered to exercise their rights. The redemptive alternative genealogy is partial, mediated, and recovered by several generations of women, who are socially deviant, such as Bess. The "absence of the subject of indentureship," is linked directly to Bess's history, whose name is also occluded from the official story because she is an "outside" or illegitimate person. Bess reminds Mona that even though she is illegitimate and creolized, she fought for her inheritance, or the rights to the family property, and won. Bess resists belonging to any notion of a patriarchal line and is "very clear about the fact that life is not fair. No revisionist history for her. She was Grandma Lil's natural inheritor" (Espinet 290). When Bess introduces Mona to her creolized East Indian artist boyfriend, Rajesh, Mona thinks with a "pang how simply and freely they belonged inside each other's world" (Espinet 292), reflecting an ease in tensions between Afro-Caribbean

creolization and Indo-Caribbean diapaora. Espinet describes Rajesh as a “Rastafarian with almost floor length dreadlocks” who is working on mosaic tiles that portray tiny scenes of Trinidad, of “people of all races clashing in minuscule spaces” (Espinete 290-291). This is an idea that he derived from the miniatures done in India on grains of rice (Espinete 291). Rajesh’s creole talents are also expressed in other cultural ways, such as his cooking: “He had made us an oil-down with breadfruit and fish and a trace of callaloo bush, everything in perfect balance” (Espinete 292).

Rajesh and Bess’s union is portrayed as an ideal heteronormative creolized condition: “For the time being they lived separate lives, but they were planning to have a child. Bess’s life was serene, completely suited to her balanced disposition” (292).

Unlike Mona’s imagined union with Bree, the novel implies that Bess will be free of the residual aggressions produced by the history of indentureship because of her integration into the national body. Her belonging is reinforced by her ability to capture the real Trinidad:

She had walked to the boundary lines and taken panoramic shots, and later when I saw the photographs, the place looked even more remote and harshly beautiful that I myself had observed. The instant snapshots had captured the raw beauty of the land, giving itself up to natural terraces and rises. She saw within its contours a housing complex, buttressed and landscaped, using the features of the land itself, its unexpected twists and turns...I saw the properties possibilities. (Espinete 126)

The land with its picturesque scenery and beauty are elements of Trinidad that Mona can never herself capture. In contrast to Mona for whom all the snapshots she wanted “of objects and places and people came and went...in a never ending kaleidoscope, folding and unfolding in crazy sequence” (Espinete 34), Bess and Rajesh are able to secure and

encapsulate a vision of Trinidad that Mona just simply cannot, both through the mosaic tiles and the snapshots.

The novel's predictable staging of creolization and cultural mixing as an avenue of national belonging is reinforced by Bess's attainment of property through the state, which overrides the claims to illegitimacy and grants her autonomy, agency, and power, thereby incorporating and validating her place in Trinidad. For Bess and Mona, this is perceived as a true form of liberation from patriarchal violence. But the notion that true liberation and emancipation of women can be granted by the state, secured by the discourse of legal rights and attainable through the court system, is not only an utopian conception of the power of the state to minimize rather than exacerbate the historical and insidious violence caused indenture but is also dubious considering Trinidad's reliance upon and operation within dominant constructions of a "servile femininity" (Alexander 19). The materialization of her property rights, moreover, disrupts the deployment of sexuality as a mechanism of control in relation to "family," and unsettles the dominant paradigm of tradition, duty, and servitude that has historically dogged the "coolie" woman and submerged her within both Indo-Caribbean patriarchy and Afro-Caribbean nationalism.⁷⁹

This celebratory resolution to the violence of indenture, however, can be understood as undermined by Girlie, Bess's servant from the village, for whom ideologies of creolization do not effect material changes in her daily subjugation to brutality. After Bess stages a creole production that highlights the significance of indenture by showing its cultural artifacts, Bess and Mona are interrupted by Girlie in the middle of the night: "Girlie's face was bloody; one eye was blackened and already

swelling” (Espinet 302). Mona realizes that Girlie’s subjection to domestic violence occurs on a regular basis and it reminds her of “all the scenes of violence and pain those kitchen walls had witnessed” and she knows she would have been subjected the same way if she had stayed in Trinidad. In opposition to Bess’s emancipated condition, Girlie’s oppression continues to script the domestic violence of East Indians as culturalist: “the causes were infidelity, jealousy...” (Espinet 294). In this way, even contemporary manifestations of domestic abuse in *Swinging Bride* reiterate historical official constructions of “sexual jealousy” as the cause of crime, which once “exonerated the plantation labour regime from any role” in wife abuse (Mohapatra 239).

6.3 Going Home: Sexuality and the Family in *Coolie Woman*

Espinet’s *Swinging Bridge* and Bahadur’s *Coolie Woman* share a recurring motif of cultural alienation found in “immigrant” novels or novels of the South Asian diaspora. Their narratives critique neocolonial practices by showing instances of racialization in the U.S. and Canada. While Espinet describes the verbal abuse Mona receives from a white Canadian while aboard a train that effectively suspends her into a state of silence, Bahadur explains the systematic mistreatment of “dotheads” in New Jersey: “In 1987, the same year we moved to our very own house, bigots began terrorizing the neighborhood. We picked up the local newspaper to find their crudely scrawled manifesto. They signed their note “The Dot Busters” (Bahadur 7). She notes that this declaration of violence was followed by racial violence: “three white men assaulted an Indian doctor with baseball bats...Days after the attack, another Indian man was beaten to death less than a mile

away, in an adjacent town” (Bahadur 7). The “outside” constitutes constant danger with the lurking image of racists, which her mother attempts to shield her from by “throwing up ramparts against the world outside her home” (Bahadur 8). It’s not until the narrator visits Guyana that she learns of her heritage – that her great-grandfather was born on a ship and her great-great-grandmother was an indentured servant who gave birth during the passage to Guyana. Learning about her ancestral roots becomes one way of explaining her cultural alienation from both the United States and Guyana. Realizing that she does not fit into the neatly bordered worlds of either nation, Bahadur journeys back and forth between archives and nations, such as Guyana, India, England, and Scotland. Her travels between these national spaces enable her to trace her ancestral grandmother’s footsteps in order to determine her reasons for migration and her paternal line. Her visits abroad to search the colonial archives fail to provide her with the narrative of progress and developmental that she seeks, which tells an alternative story about “docile” women holding on to their traditions and trapped in heteronormative domesticity. Her ancestral grandmother’s history depicts an obscure moment when the “coolie” woman resists the mandates of familial obligation by partaking in forms of unregulated sexualities that are not disciplined by the state.

Bahadur ultimately never recovers the “coolie” woman’s past and instead takes a detour to analyzing contemporary East Indian women in Guyana who live under dire socio-economic conditions created by the history of indentureship. This gesture demonstrates her investment in the visibility of lingering traces of colonial modernity and the languor of colonial spaces, which are the plantations and land that hid the sexual and material labor of “coolie” women as they struggled to satisfy the needs of their colonial

masters as well as fulfill their familial obligations to their husbands. As a cosmopolitan American that easily traverses national boundaries, Bahadur identifies contemporary forms of emigration as a manifestation of colonial violence, identifying the state's complicity in the colonial activities of global capital, which endlessly demands the circulation of laboring bodies.

The emphasis on global restructuring and emigration has contributed to the praise that Bahadur has garnered for *Coolie Woman*, which was recently shortlisted for the Orwell Prize for 2014. *The Guardian* writes that it is “a genealogical page-turner interwoven with a compelling, radical history of empire told from the perspective of indentured women. The collective voice of the ‘jehaji behen’ has been barely audible across the centuries, until now...” *The Independent* states that she “creates a haunting portrait of the life of a subaltern” and *The Philadelphia Inquirer* asserts that its “revealing account” sheds “unexpected life on the origins of sexual violence”. Notable American writers have hailed it as a “historical rescue mission” that has “restored an important chapter in our histories” (Junot Diaz) and is a “pathbreaking book” that “excavates an imperial history of violence and uprooting” (Pankaj Mishra). These reviews make several interesting claims, some of which are that the history of indentureship was buried, that its emergence into visibility is *new*, and that it is part of *our* history, or American history and that American history is entangled with the history of empire. In “recovering” the unknowable – her grandmother’s reasons for leaving, the passage to the West Indies from India, and her assent to family formation – Bahadur articulates the complex and contradictory subject position of East Indian transnational female workers migrating to the New World. While Bahadur certainly does offer a glimpse – through archival

research, literary references, historical facts, and her own travels from Guyana to New Jersey to India to Scotland – it is not really new. The history of indentureship is not particularly buried as it becomes visible and legitimate for the purposes of imperial rule. And Bahadur’s narration from the perspective of a cosmopolitan, “model-minority” and upwardly mobile, immigrant woman, endows her story of discovery with cultural capital. In fact, female writers and historians from the Caribbean, from the 1980s to the present day, have attempted to capture the conditions of East Indian indentureship, portraying the pitfalls of the system that led to the processes of domination and subjugation that positioned “coolies” between white planters and emancipated black workers.

What is new, or significant rather, is Bahadur’s skillful braiding of multiple migration histories as part of a global geopolitics that situates colonial subalterns within empire. Like *Swinging Bridge*, the figure of the “coolie” woman, literally arises in the crux of globality and modernity, energizing reconfigurations of the relationships of power that are present in the West Indies, such as racial tensions and sexual violence that has led to various forms of cultural marginalization and political disempowerment. If the “coolie” woman is figured as revolutionary in these narratives, a gendered and colonized vestige that underscores women’s participation in global cultures and histories, her recovery must then be able to instigate shifts in gender dynamics and colonial and patriarchal violence. For Both Espinet and Bahadur, the “coolie” woman’s partial recovery must motivate social and political change but this impetus becomes co-opted by imperialist rhetoric.

The “coolie” woman’s significance, as Bahadur illustrates, must be understood within the context of the nation-state and the fraught ways that interracial sexuality and

imperial citizenship have marked the invisibility of the Indo-Caribbean woman. Bahadur writes about her discovery of the illicit relationships between the Scottish planter and “coolie” women:

The practice of imperial policymakers had been to treat the affairs of white plantation officials with indentured women as peccadilloes and look the other way, if they could. And since indenture was over, they argued that Indians could no longer claim any special privileges. Even if there was still a shortage of women on the plantations, even if half of estate workers were still immigrants and thus theoretically protected by laws punishing seducers, the government no longer had any power to compel an overseer’s dismissal. (187-188)

Bahadur laments the losses of legal and social rights following the era of indentureship as consequences of contemporary forms of gender oppressions under neoliberalism.

Because Indo-Guyanese women are perceived as lacking in neoliberal potential, with the power to partake in the global economy, they are subject to criminalities that remain uncurtailed by a flaccid national government. She understands the women’s social conditions as another type of disfigurement, one initiated by the colonial government and the carried on by the current national government:

They suffered what their female forebears had. In 2010, the year I returned, at least eighteen women died, allegedly at the hands of intimate partners, in Guyana. Every month from 2007 to 2010, on average, a woman was killed, and her husband or boyfriend implicated. In covering the murders, whatever the victim’s ethnicity, the press resurrected the indenture-era stereotypes of jealous husband and naughty wife. Infidelity by promiscuous women, or the fear of it in possessive men, frames the narrative now as then. Nor has the method changed. Most households in Guyana’s villages possess a cutlass. It’s still the tool to chop cane, and it’s still an instrument to dismember women. (Bahadur 194)

Bahadur’s substantiation of the nineteenth century narrative framings of “jealous husband” and “naughty wife” repeats official imperial discourses regarding wife murders in the colonies. The label “wife murder,” Mohapatra explains, had a series of consequences,

including the collapsing of a variety of relationships not predicated on definitions of marriage and family, the deflection of responsibility onto East Indian morality, the denial of unique circumstances, and the elision of structural inequalities (233). The label, furthermore, enabled officials to rationalize violence by emphasizing the “cultural” characteristics of the East Indian migrant workers. In a similar move, Bahadur’s visualization of the “cutlass” as the primary means to effect brutal violence on wives, not only erroneously conflates the significant differences in colonialism and neocolonialism, but also overlooks how contemporary forms of violence in Guyana are not simply “culturalist” but also a consequence of state economic practices.

This narrative turn from the historical and transnational sojourns to the brutal conditions of South Asian Guyanese women is prompted by her realization that private and familial spaces “have proven to be the most dangerous” because the ideology of the family continues to have currency in the neoliberal economy (197). Bahadur writes:

Year after year, the U.S. State Department consistently cites domestic violence among Guyana’s most serious human rights violations” and ponders why its such a “menacing place” for women. While national poverty and their dire economic situation in the global economy are partially to blame, another factor is emigration, or the “country’s profound loss of human capital...the exodus of Guyana’s best and brightest makes justice more elusive, because police and magistrates fail to enforce laws that protect women. (198)

The narrator asserts that while the fantasy of escape to the U.S. and the U.K. is tenable for male emigrants capable of competing in the global economy, women remain tied to their national territories and are relegated to the familial, domestic space in which they suffer from several physical abuses. Thus, the text’s critique of neoliberal globalization requires the genealogy of gendered South Asian “coolie” labor in order to assert its failure to the female citizenry of the global south. While Guyana, Bahadur asserts,

secures its position in the world economy as a supplier of *male* labor, domestic violence and criminality emerge as residual and damaging effects of neoliberal governmentality.

Bahadur's analysis privileges male migration, which reveals her male bias in the development process and does not account for migration in the lives of Indo-Guyanese women. But her contention regarding the current violence directed towards Indo-Guyanese women from East Indian men that goes unpoliced by the state illustrates a contradiction, which is the desire for the "coolie" woman to exercise autonomy and liberation from traditional gender roles and the supplanting of male patriarchy by state patriarchy as a crucial and necessary site of regulation. That is, Bahadur reinforces the state's responsibility in reconstructing the heteronormative "family" as a safe, stable site that can further the development of women, which then advances the interests of the nation-state. Similar to Espinet, Bahadur legitimates the state's role by advocating for the consolidation of domesticity in the process of nation building.

Her conception that criminalization of East Indian men is the appropriate response to the violence confronting East Indian women is problematic because it can reproduce gender inequality as a strategy to decrease Guyanese men's social and political power.⁸⁰ She situates the state, not as an elaborate system of power and control, but a patriarchal surrogate and the protector or benefactor of women, and naturalizes state containment of criminally violent non-white men. In defining domestic violence as a problem of national import that can be comprehended under the rhetoric of responsibility, family values, and crime control, Bahadur characterizes the state by its ability to keep order, police its citizens, and maintain peace. Her representation then has the effect of assuming a clear

division between private and public spaces, which does not fully account for the state as a perpetrator of violence in women's lives.⁸¹

Gautra Bahadur's *Coolie Woman* invokes the counter-heteronormative figure of the "coolie" woman in order to assert the continuities in gender oppression that dismember East Indian's women's lives in contemporary Guyana. Like Ramabai Espinet's novel, *Swinging Bridge*, the "coolie" woman remains a battered reminder of colonial violence, of imperial subjugation, of patriarchal control, never fulfilling the promise of autonomy and agency that Bahadur and Espinet seek. Bahadur and Espinet's texts fail to see the revolutionary promise of the "coolie" woman whose subjectivity becomes renewed in the open, fluid spaces of the Atlantic. Instead, they locate her "global south" subjectivity within multiple forms of oppression, such as Indo-Caribbean patriarchy and nationalism, Afro-Caribbean nationalism, and state machinations that exerted control and power over racialized constituencies of the Caribbean.

Notes

¹ In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said asserts that a contrapuntal reading demonstrates a “simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts” (51). This is a form of “reading back” from the colonized’s point of view. Its aim is to reveal a hidden colonial history that suffuses nineteenth century European texts. I use this term to indicate that black intellectuals, by employing the figure of the East Indian worker, resist insular and provincial imaginings in favor of recognizing mutually embedded histories.

² I consider “citizenship “ as consisting of rights, participation, and ways of belonging. Citizens, then, occupy the juridical, territorial, and cultural spaces of the nation. It is partly constituted through dialogues, conversations and negotiations. See Lowe’s *Immigrant Acts* and Modood’s “Multiculturalism and Citizenship.”

³ Carby asserts that readings of Pauline Hopkins’s fiction must take into account the work she produced for *Colored American Magazine*. In addition to short stories, she wrote numerous essays, social commentaries and analyses of blacks to the labor and suffrage movements. For more content surrounding the politics of *CAM*, see Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood* 122-123.

⁴ This sentence was part of an editorial in *CAM*, which outlined the journal’s policy. See quotation in Carby 123.

⁵ See DuCille 8.

⁶ For Gruesser’s more thorough critique of Gaines’s argument, see 118.

⁷ Gruesser critiques Gaines’s article “Black Americans’ Racial Uplift Ideology as ‘Civilizing Mission’: Pauline Hopkins on Race and Imperialism” (1993) for overlooking contexts that arise out of empire. Gruesser, furthermore, discusses the context around Hopkins’s statements regarding emasculation and bribery. Hopkins was referring to the bargain that Booker T. Washington made with the “southern-led white power structure to keep blacks in submission and stifle agitation” (116). For more information, see Gruesser, *Empire Abroad* 115-116.

⁸ Jun notes that articles highlighting the “primitive” oriental practices of Chinese subjects illustrate a commitment to the rights of free blacks. She notes that in order to narrative black aptitude for citizenship, articles emphasized male leadership, racial solidarity, family, etc. For more information on the black press and the production of black citizenship, see Jun’s first chapter, “Press for Inclusion,” (15-31).

⁹ Aurin's article explicates the production of meanings associated with opiates and addiction. His crucial intervention – linking opium usage to the consolidation of power bases in the United States – is crucial to connecting U.S. political interests and its anti-immigrant sentiments to Britain, China, and India.

¹⁰ See Ngai 40.

¹¹ Banerjee asserts regardless of whether Indians actually had formal rights, they imagined a familial relationship with British Empire. This relationship delegated Indians to the role of “children” needing protection from Mother England. To read the Proclamation, see Banerjee 22. Ngai's analysis on Asian immigrants makes a similar point. She states that their status as British subjects provided them with protection from racial attacks.

¹² See “Hindus by Thousands Coming to Coast Because the Railroads Want Cheap Labor,” *Seattle Star* (1910).

¹³ See “Planning to Bar out the Hindus,” (Jan. 1910); “California Lures Dark Skinned Subjects of King Edward From Home: Record Number of Men in Turbans on Steamer,” (Jan. 2010); “Motley Raiment is Exhibited by Throng of Dark Skinned Orientals,” (Jan. 1910); and “Turn Back the Hindu Invasion” (Feb. 1910).

¹⁴ See “Color in Question,” *Rocky Mountain News* (1895): 6.

¹⁵ Jensen's text is one of the first and few comprehensive historical studies on South Asian migration to the Pacific coast.

¹⁶ See “The Coolies,” *Farmer's Cabinet* (1867): 1.

¹⁷ See “The Coolies,” *Farmer's Cabinet* (1867): 1.

¹⁸ See “The Coolies,” *Farmers Cabinet* (1867): 1.

¹⁹ See “Slavery and Our West Indian Colonies,” *Caledonian Mercury*.

²⁰ See Yang 66.

²¹ See Hochschild and Powell 73.

²² Many of the newspaper clippings of the time period made claims that due to the “weakness” inherent to the Hindu's character, the Hindu would become the responsibility of the white men in America. This sentiment was also reflected in *United States v. Thind* Case. See Ngai 64.

²³ DuCille calls this space an “unreal estate” and designates it as a formal strategy that dominates the African American novel. For details on her usage of an “unreal estate, see 18.

²⁴ Although Banerjee discusses the “gothic” in terms of Britain, her analysis is relevant to my work on Hopkins since Hopkins employs an English character with gothic traits. Particularly useful is her analysis on how gothic elements are used in Dadabhai Naoroji’s *Poverty and Un-British Rule* (1901) to inscribed Indians as imperial citizens. For more information, see Banerjee 262.

²⁵ Bascara contrasts the short story form with the ethnic bildungsroman that Lowe analyzes in *Immigrant Acts*, in which she argues that the novel is a powerful institution of imperialism. For a further discussion of the politics of form, see 86.

²⁶ Ngai explains that American acquisition of Spanish colonies departed from the tradition of incorporation and promise of statehood. These territories would have permanently unequal status. Ngai states: “A significant faction of anti-imperialists opposed possession of the territories because they would not violate the democratic principle of incorporation, but neither would they support the incorporation of backward colored races into the nation” (98). For more information about expansionism, the place of Social Darwinism and Anglo-Saxonism in new imperialist discourse, see Ngai 98.

²⁸ See Leblanc 7. Leblanc’s analysis on gold is particularly interested in Cameron’s case since gold is the commodity that instigates his violent motives.

²⁹ For an extended analysis, see James and Davis’s discussion on Ida Wells anti-lynching campaigns on 134.

³⁰ Spivak states that the “possession of a tangible place of production in the womb situates the woman as an agent in any theory of production” (quoted in Young 19).

³¹ In using the domestic space, Hopkins utilizes sentimental forms and the family in order to claim the American family for the black woman. She illustrates that black women belong to the nation regardless of race since many families consist of members that are racially different. Thus, she imbues black women with power.

³² See Prashad’s account of racial-nationalist models that attempted to organize the masses: Marcus Garvey and Mohandas Gandhi. For more information on their racial characterizations, see Prashad 92.

³³ Alexander’s argument focuses heavily on tourism and the contemporary problems with the Trinidadian state. She does, however, link the state’s violence towards nonheteronormative subjects to indentureship and relational racialization. See Alexander 13.

³⁴ The TWA's negative attitude towards East Indians emblemizes the differences that divided East Indians from the working class constituency. See Prashad 84.

³⁵ West Indian regiments became dissatisfied by the racism they experienced in Europe. These workers. These workers, Prashad notes, found fellowship and camaraderie with sailors and dockworkers from around the world, which initiated the 1919 international struggle against imperialism. See Prashad 85; also, see Robinson 254.

³⁶ Both Prashad and Robinson note that race became a prominent issue in Trinidad after the First World War. These racial issues surpassed Afro-Trinidadians' loyalty to Britain. Robinson notes that racial discrimination in military service was a rallying point for Captain Cipriani. This postwar black movement occurred in tandem with other kinds of nationalist agitations across the globe and interestingly, they looked toward each other for support. Although Robinson states that James was not politically active or conscious at this point, his literary fiction incorporates many of the same tensions between racialism and class divisions. See Robinson 254.

³⁷ James is cautious about claiming any type of political awareness or consciousness at this point. From the interview, it seems that his primary motive was to leave Trinidad in order to be a successful writer. It was not until he began to listen to Captain Cipriani that he began to think about the political climate in Trinidad. For more about his early life, see Hall 16.

³⁸ In other words, Stephens claims that the state is embodied metonymically in the figure of the black male sovereign (210). One of the crucial differences between Stephens's argument and Carby and Edmonson's arguments is that this figure represents the masses globally instead of just nationally. She asserts that the literary form of drama in *The Black Jacobins* foregrounds the question and position of the black state.

³⁹ Yang understands "convict workers" to represent a labor force that was recruited and organized by the British Empire. His emphasis lies on their role as "productive" laborers rather than criminals and relocates convict transportation into the register of "unfree" labor migration. For more about Yang's intervention into dominant understandings of convict transportation, see 179-208. It is interesting that the convict workers considered themselves "servants of the Company" and defined themselves as workers engaged in honorable service. The distinctions between different categories of workers (convict or indentured, for example) could be elided within empire as Indians melded together in order to develop community ties.

⁴⁰ Kale draws her analysis from the Reporter, which published a discussion on a bill meant to resume indentured migration from Indian to Mauritius. This bill was introduced in Parliament in 1840. John Scoble, the author of the article in the Reporter, published an "incendiary expose" on Indian indentured migration. In his article, Scoble writes: ...however immoral the negro in Mauritius was, he has been rendered more so by this

contact with the Coolies” (quoted in Kale 162). Kale’s historical discovery emphasizes the fear that imperialists felt regarding “coolies” in relation to the black population.

⁴¹ “Types of Femininity,” is just one example of many articles that illustrated the “picturesque” nature of “coolie” women. Most articles in that time period use very similar Orientalist language to describe East Indian women.

⁴² See images of coolie women on postcards, in the digital archives of University of West Indies Library in the *Michael Goldberg Collection*.

⁴³ Prime Minister Gladstone, Secretary of State for the Colonies (December 22, 1845-July 6, 1846), was concerned about the West Indies’ labor problem and how the disproportion between the sexes would cause the destruction of family life for the migrants. He wanted both coolies and Negroes to become self-supporting members of society and told Lord Harris in Trinidad that the transportation of men as “instruments of labour” was unnatural and repulsive. See Alan Shaw’s working paper, “Gladstone at the Colonial Office 1846” Monash University.

⁴⁴ The idea of the “bare-footed man” lingers in all of James’s works. He borrowed this term from Cipriani and often came back to it during his lectures. In his interview with Stuart Hall, James reiterates this point: “But the things that mattered were, he (Cipriani) put himself forward as what he called the champion of the barefooted man. That’s the phrase that must be remembered” (18).

⁴⁵ Volpp situates a discussion of violence within the paradigms of multiculturalism and feminism. For more information about the tensions between these two paradigms, see Volpp 1194.

⁴⁶ Levy’s introduction includes a dialogue between Mendes and James that hints at the struggles between the two writers to come to terms with the politics of form and content in writing about and for the masses in Trinidad. See Levy xvii.

⁴⁷ Levy xviii.

⁴⁸ Wynter’s in-depth analysis interrogates the barrack yard for the type of middle class consciousness that can arise from such settings.

⁴⁹ See Wynter 63-91.

⁵⁰ See Gupta and Ferguson’s discussion of spatiality and national identity. The authors claim “space itself becomes a kind of neutral grid on which cultural difference, historical memory, and societal organization are inscribed (7). They debunk the notion that cultures are discrete and that there is no disjuncture between place and culture.

⁵¹ Recently, scholars have provided materialist readings of sexuality and their economic and political significance during the early part of the twentieth century in the European context. Natalka Freeland, Julia A. Laite and David Bennett have generally examined the role of deviant sexualities, i.e. prostitution in relation to commodification at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Freeland discusses texts that explore the commodification of women and uncovers a conflict between the sexual and market economies. Laite looks at the history of prostitutes and legal identity in Europe through the various legal codes (1824 Vagrancy Act, 1839 Metropolitan Police Act, and the Towns and Police Clauses Act of 1847) which defined prostitutes based on informal and formal meanings of the term. Bennett, moreover, looks at the relation between libido and economy, and traces the trope of the prostitute as a reckless spender. Clearly, in all of these accounts, prostitution was seen as a moral issue for society and was largely attributed to lower class women who wandered the streets. Definitions of prostitutes were fluid, as any female disturbing the peace or spending money on attire and goods could be codified as such.

⁵² See James's introduction in Ramdin 14.

⁵³ For Bernd's discussion on France's adoption of a new constitution, see 84.

⁵⁴ For an extended analysis on civilization and culture and Gabineau, see Young.

⁵⁵ In McKay's response to W.E.B. Dubois, he asserts that he has to be true to his "artistic consciousness" when depicting "the fundamental rhythm of African life." See Draper 1370.

⁵⁶ This raises the question of what is an "Arab" body. Like "black" bodies, these categorization minimizes differences between different kinds of subjects, such as Hindu and Muslim traders or Islamic diasporic groups.

⁵⁷ The beggar was considered a problem in the western world after the Black Death in England in 1348, after which the vagrant was defined, redefined, and then subjected to various laws. The term vagrant was defined in the *British Institute of International and Comparative Law* as "(1) Any Person found asking for alms and (2) Any Person not being physically able to earn or being unwilling to work for his own livelihood, and having no visible means of subsistence." Furthermore, journals tried to understand the history of begging and classified different types of beggars, making distinctions between sturdy beggars, impotent beggars, and religious beggars. Begging went from being a social problem (for religious cultural reasons) to a state problem. J.L. Gillin noted in 1929 that while "earlier labour houses were administered by benevolent societies" (430), later ones were managed by the state, which offered more discipline. One of the more effective ones, the Belgian colony of Merxplas, Gillin argues, was divided up into four sections (old men who cannot work, immoral man, ie. homosexual or visits prostitutes, feeble-minded men, and young adult men). These colonies of vagrants were meant to be reformed through work.

⁵⁸ Smith discusses the Vacher case in France, arguing that this case highlighted the urgency of vagrancy as it could lead to criminal acts. See 830.

⁵⁹ See Smith 831.

⁶⁰ Smith says that across urban France, officials “reduced 300,000 people from the public assistance rolls during the 1890s and 1900s in an effort to weed out the professional cheats who were apparently abusing the system and in an effort to refocus resources on the elderly, mothers and children” (831).

⁶¹ See Camiscioli 19.

⁶² Corbin notes: “if the prostitute was treated differently from the beggar or vagabond, it was because prostitution was recognized as having a social function that necessitated tolerance” (111).

⁶³ Corbin 130. Also, look at Werth, who states: “no new law on prostitution was passed in France in the nineteenth century. This ambiguous legal system provides a rather stark contrast to the explicit character of the Contagious Diseases Acts in Britain” (7).

⁶⁴ For more historical depth about intergenerational narratives of France’s revived future, see Camiscioli 156.

⁶⁵ There is a very interesting scene in the novel where Latnah buys Banjo pajamas. The other vagrants are somewhat jealous and appreciative. She, moreover, gives money to Banjo for him to spend and become incensed when he spends it frivolously.

⁶⁶ Her racial and ethnic ambiguity also links to colonial stereotypes of serpents in South Asian/African bodies, which emerged in the mid to late nineteenth century and continued into the early twentieth century press. These articles stressed awe at serpent worshipping and serpent charming in South Asia and Africa and simultaneously expressed fear at the possibility of serpent attacks. Some examples are: “Serpent-Worship,” *Harper’s Bazaar* (1873): 229; “Boat’s Crew Attacked By a Serpent on the River Ganges,” *The Youth’s Companion* (Oct. 28, 1847): 101; “The Serpent Charmer of India,” *Spirit of the Times: A Chronicle of the Turf, Agriculture, Field Sports, Literature and the State*. (Sept. 14, 1844): 346; Davis, “Serpent Myths.” *The North American Review* (Feb. 1888): 161; Sir Joseph Fayrer. “The Venomous Snakes of India.”

⁶⁷ See Robbins for geopolitical and historical context about Aden, which was considered one of the oldest ports in history. It was situated between India, Europe, and Africa and inhabited by Arabs, Somalis, Jews and Indians. Because of Aden’s equidistant location, there was significant contestation over the legal jurisdiction of Aden and its place in British Empire. Aden was technically part of British India until 1937.

⁶⁸ Many African Americans, such as Frederick Douglass, contested American ethnology, which aimed to provide ammunition to pro-slavery discourses.

⁶⁹ See Stokes 719.

⁷⁰ Like Ray's Haiti, the Panama Canal signifies a meeting place or a bridge for African diasporic cultures. In the novel, Panama Canal is very similar to the port in France in *Banjo*.

⁷¹ See Law 3 of 1885 that was passed in Transvaal that stipulated registration and restricted property rights, Law 9 passed in 1888, Law 15 passed in 1898, Act 25 of 1891, Act 17 of 1895 that imposed taxes on indentured Indians, Franchise Act of 1894 in Natal which disenfranchised Indian merchant class men, Indian Immigrant Act of 1895, and the Black Act in 1906 that required registration of all Asiatics.

⁷² This language comes from the *South African Republic Papers: Papers Relating to the Grievances of Her Majesty's Indian Subjects in the South African Republic*. This document contains information from the Indian petitioners point of view as well. For example, it states, "But your petitioners claim a right to speak for themselves and they have no hesitation in stating deliberately that collectively, though their dwellings may appear uncouth, and...are in no way inferior to the European dwellings from a sanitary point of view...they confidently assert that they use more water and bath much often than the Europeans..." (37).

⁷³ Kelly discusses, more broadly, the ways that colonial agents constructed legal/illegal contracts at the expense of the coolies. See Kelly 28.

⁷⁴ On March 21, 1960, white South African police fired upon an anti-pass demonstration in Sharpeville Township. According to official figures, 69 were dead and 180 were injured. Many of the victims were shot in the back while they were attempting to escape. This demonstration marked the end of passive resistance to racist violence during apartheid. Sharpeville exemplified state violence against peaceful demonstrations and a nationwide state of emergency outlawed antiapartheid organizations.

⁷⁵ I make a conscious shift in this chapter from "East Indian" to "South Asian" when discussing contemporary academic discussions on Indian migration from the east to the west. The reason for this is because "South Asian" includes Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Afghanistan, and Maldives. Using the term "East Indian" or "Indian" does not take into account the distinct identities of Muslims, Hindus and the various nations that arose out of India's independence in 1947 and its violent and horrific processes of nation-building.

⁷⁶ My readings of *Swinging Bridge* and *Coolie Woman* adds to the body of scholarship on Indo-Caribbean women's writing by melding the fields of Asian American studies, postcolonial feminism, transnational feminism, and Caribbean studies and critically

intersecting the history of the Americas with histories of other nations, which compels attention to global interdependencies that account for multiple diasporic crossings across and within nations. These combined theoretical junctures emphasize the forces of global capital that redistributed labor and created multiracial communities that linger as both muted and eruptive effects of colonialism. Bridging these disciplinary divides functions on several levels, first by revealing the “pernicious structures of colonialism on a global scale” (Srikanth 44) as a process of gender and sexualization, and second, by illustrating how the racialized histories of empire are imbricated within the international division of labor, multinational capital flows, and global networks of capitalist and heteronormative patriarchy. For both novelists, the representation of the “coolie” woman who deviates from the cultural norm emerges at this intersection of racial capitalism and patriarchy, crucially symbolizing complex and conflicting desires for an alternative “origins” narrative that disintegrates heteropatriarchal ideologies embedded in nationalism and liberalism. Thus, what is at stake for Espinet and Bahadur is not only the recovery of this disavowed figure, but also their own cravings for autonomy, legitimacy, and freedom. The past, however powerful and important in providing the necessary connections to re-visioning Indian women’s identity, is not sufficient on its own because of the dynamic process of cultural formation that positions the contemporary women anew with alternative or emergent authority to resist domination.

⁷⁷ Gopinath discusses Gilroy’s notion of a “residual inheritance” and how it contributes to the normalization of heterosexuality while simultaneously erasing women. See Gopinath, “Bombay, U.K., Yuba City” 306.

⁷⁸ The category of the *dougla* is where issues of racial ambiguity and Indian women’s sexuality have come to be contested. The racial ambiguity manifests in a disavowal of the *dougla* through discursive repression and marginalization. Because of the historical and material competition between Africans and Indians, the *dougla* occupies a space that disrupts traditional modes of racialization, like creolization, which is more polemical. Indo-Trinidadians often label *douglas* as creoles, attributing in the process, stereotypical characteristics like idleness, mental illness, and vagrancy. Mehta states regarding the silencing of the *dougla* in the political imaginary, “Fetishized for their alterity by serving as visible reminders of a prior taboo, the mixing of black and Indian bloodstreams, *dougla* in-betweenness has often been a source of derision, alienation, misperception, and social rejection” (14). Indians’ disavowal of racial syncretism existing in the *dougla* manifests in the marginalization and systematic negation of difference.

⁷⁹ Munasinghe’s article discusses how East Indians function as limits to creolization, primarily because they are not illustrated as generating new cultural forms. See 553.

⁸⁰ See Richie 162 and her discussion of the gender entrapment model. She claims that regardless of how education African American women are, they still desire the “perfect” heteronormative family.

⁸¹ See Kandaswamy 258-259.

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VITA**Smita Das**

University of Illinois at Chicago
 Department of English
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 Chicago, IL 60607-7120

ACADEMIC PREPARATION

University of Illinois at Chicago, Ph.D. Candidate, English (Defense: December 4, 2014)	2005-Present
The University of Illinois at Chicago, M.A., English	2003-2004
The University of Illinois at Chicago, B.A., English	2002-2003
Northern Illinois University, B.S., Finance	1996-1999

DISSERTATION & SPECIALIZATIONS

Dissertation: *Transatlantic Relations: Race, Labor, and Sexuality in the Afro-Asian Diaspora*

(Committee: Helen Jun, Madhu Dubey, Mark Chiang, Nancy Cirillo, and Gayatri Reddy)

Specializations: Global Anglophone Literatures, Ethnic Studies, Black Diaspora Studies, Asian American Studies, Caribbean Studies, Gender and Sexuality Studies

PUBLICATIONS**Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles**

“Subjecting Pleasure: Caribbean Narratives of Transracial Desire,”
Journal of Black Studies, Vol. 44, No. 7, October 2013

“Space of the Crazy in Saadat Hasan Manto’s ‘Toba Tek Singh’”
South Asian Review, Vol. XXVI, No. 2, December 2005

Peer Reviewed Articles Forthcoming

“Intimate Alterities in Amitav Ghosh’s *Sea of Poppies*,”
Approaches to Teaching the Works of Amitav Ghosh, Edited by Gaurav Desai and
 John Hawley

“Alchemizing the Masses: Alfred Mendes’s Early Barrack Yard Narratives and
 the Figure of the Douglu in Trinidad,”
Interdisciplinary Journal of Portuguese Diaspora Studies

Other Literary Publications

“Elevators”
Crab Orchard Review, Vol. XI, No. 1, Spring 2006

Nominations

“Anita in Bollywood”
 Nominated for *Best New American Voices*, 2007

“The Packed Suitcase”
 Nominated for *Best New American Voices*, 2006

FELLOWSHIPS

UIC Institute for the Humanities Dissertation Fellowship, 2012-2013

AWARDS

Faculty Development Award at Benedictine University, Spring 2015.

Alice Dan Dissertation Research Award (Second), 2012

President’s Research in Diversity Travel Award, Spring 2012

Travel Award by Liberal Arts College at UIC, Spring 2012

PUBLIC and INVITED LECTURES

“SexNationalism,” Center for Research on Women and Gender, University of Illinois,
 Chicago, September 30, 2014.

“From Coolie Convict to Indian Gangster: Styling Citizenship in Colonial and Apartheid
 South Africa,” Institute for the Humanities, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago,
 February 2013.

“Pauline E. Hopkins and the Politics of Racial Ambiguity,” Asian American Studies, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, October 2011.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

“Postcolonial Aporia in the Early Twentieth Century Afrasian Diaspora, ACLA, Seattle, March 2015. Seminar Organizer and Chair.

“Alfred Mendes’s Barrack Yard Narratives and Deviant Douglas,” Exploring the Portuguese Diaspora in InterDISCIPLINARY and Comparative Perspectives: An International Conference, Indianapolis, July 25-July 27, 2013

“Caribbean Writers and Transnational Desires,” ACLA, Toronto, April 4-7, 2013.

“Subjecting Pleasure: Claude McKay’s Narratives of Transracial Desire,” Engendering Change, Chicago, March 14-March 15, 2013.

“New England Writers and Transnational Body Politics,” MELUS and USACLA, San Jose, April 19-22, 2012.

“Immigration, Transnationalism, Diaspora: Issues for Asian/American Communities” by Asian Pacific American Graduate Students Organization, University of Illinois at Chicago, March 16-17, 2007.

* Organized Conference and Chaired “Sights of Social Change: Interventions through Performance.”

MELUS, University of Illinois at Chicago, April 8-10, 2005.

* Chaired “Global Cities and the Remapping of Asian-America.”

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Benedictine University, Spring 2015
(Adjunct Assistant Professor)

Studies in the Novel

LITR 266 -

Texts Used: Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, and Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange*.

American Literature II

LITR -

Texts Used: Henry James’s *Daisy Miller*, Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, Gertrude Stein’s *Three Lives*, Ernest Hemingway’s

The Sun Also Rises, Nella Larsen's *Quicksand and Passing*, John Steinbeck's *The Pearl*, Stephen Crane's *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets*, and Flannery O'Connor's *A Good Man is Hard to Find and Other Stories*.

University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of English, August 2006 to 2014
(Teaching Assistant)

Colonial and Post-Colonial Literature

English 114 - Introduction to Colonial and Post-Colonial Literature.
Texts Used: Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place*, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*, Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*, Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*, and Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

Multiethnic Literatures in the U.S.

English 113 - Introduction to Multiethnic Literatures in the U.S.
Texts Used: George S. Schuyler's *Black No More*, Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao and Drown*, John Okada's *No-No Boy*, Chitra Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*, Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

Asian American Literature

ASAM 123 - Introduction to Asian American Literature.
Texts Used: John Okada's *No-No Boy*, Kim Ronyoung's *Clay Walls*, Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men*, Le Thi Diem Thuy, *The Gangster We're All Looking For*, and Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. (Teaching Assistant)

Nonfiction Prose

English 201 - Introduction to the Writing of Nonfiction Prose.
Texts Used: William Zinsser's *On Writing Well* and Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola's *Tell it Slant*.

Composition

English 160 - Composition I
Texts Used: Chris M. Anson and Robert A. Schwegler's *The Longman Handbook for Writers and Readers* and Ann Merle Feldman, Ellen McManus, and Nancy Down's *In Context: Reading and Writing in Cultural Conversations*.

English 161 - Composition II (Research-based writing):

“Research, Writing, and the Politics of Posthumanism”

Texts Used: Francis Fukuyama’s *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*, Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein’s *“They Say/I Say”*: *The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*, and Stuart Green and April Lidinsky’s *From Inquiry to Academic Writing*.

“Race, Gender and Work,”

Texts Used: Teresa Amott and Julie Matthaei’s *Race, Gender, and Work: A Multicultural Economic History of Women in the United States*.

North Central College, Department of English, Fall 2013
(Adjunct Assistant Professor)

Composition
English 315 -

Advanced Writing

Texts Used: Francis Fukuyama’s *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* and Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams’s *Craft of Research*.

OTHER TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Literature Instructor

Asian Human Services

- Implemented and executed a literature program for bilingual students of all ages.

English as a Second Language Instructor

Indo-American Center

- Assisted students with written and oral communication skills in a classroom setting.

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Board Member

India Development Service

- Manage grassroots projects centering on female empowerment through education and literacy
 - Spread International-Girls’ Hostel
 - Be Schools!
- Design and implemented effective advocacy and communication strategies
- Create and edit communication materials for presentations, web and print.

- Aggregate and present results of various projects to the Board and potential donors.
- Identify and research grants and other possible funding sources

LANGUAGES

- Hindi (native speaker)
- Spanish

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

- Modern Language Association
- The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States
- American Studies Association
- American Comparative Literature Association

REFERENCES

Helen Jun, Associate Professor of African American Studies and English (Director)
 University of Illinois at Chicago (M/C 162)
 601 S. Morgan Street, Chicago, IL 60607
 312-413-2223, Junhelen@uic.edu

Madhu Dubey, Professor of African American Studies and English
 Director of Graduate Studies
 University of Illinois at Chicago (M/C 162)
 601 S. Morgan Street, Chicago, IL 60607
 312-413-2248, madhud@uic.edu

Mark Chiang, Associate Professor of English
 University of Illinois at Chicago (M/C 162)
 601 S. Morgan Street, Chicago, IL 60607
 312-996-2580, mchiang@uic.edu

Nancy Cirillo, Professor Emerita
 University of Illinois at Chicago (M/C 162)
 601 S. Morgan Street, Chicago, IL 60607
 312-413-9798, nancyc@uic.edu

Gayatri Reddy, Associate Professor of Gender and Women's Studies & Anthropology
 University of Illinois at Chicago
 601 S. Morgan Street, Chicago, IL 60607
 312-413-5658, gayatri@uic.edu