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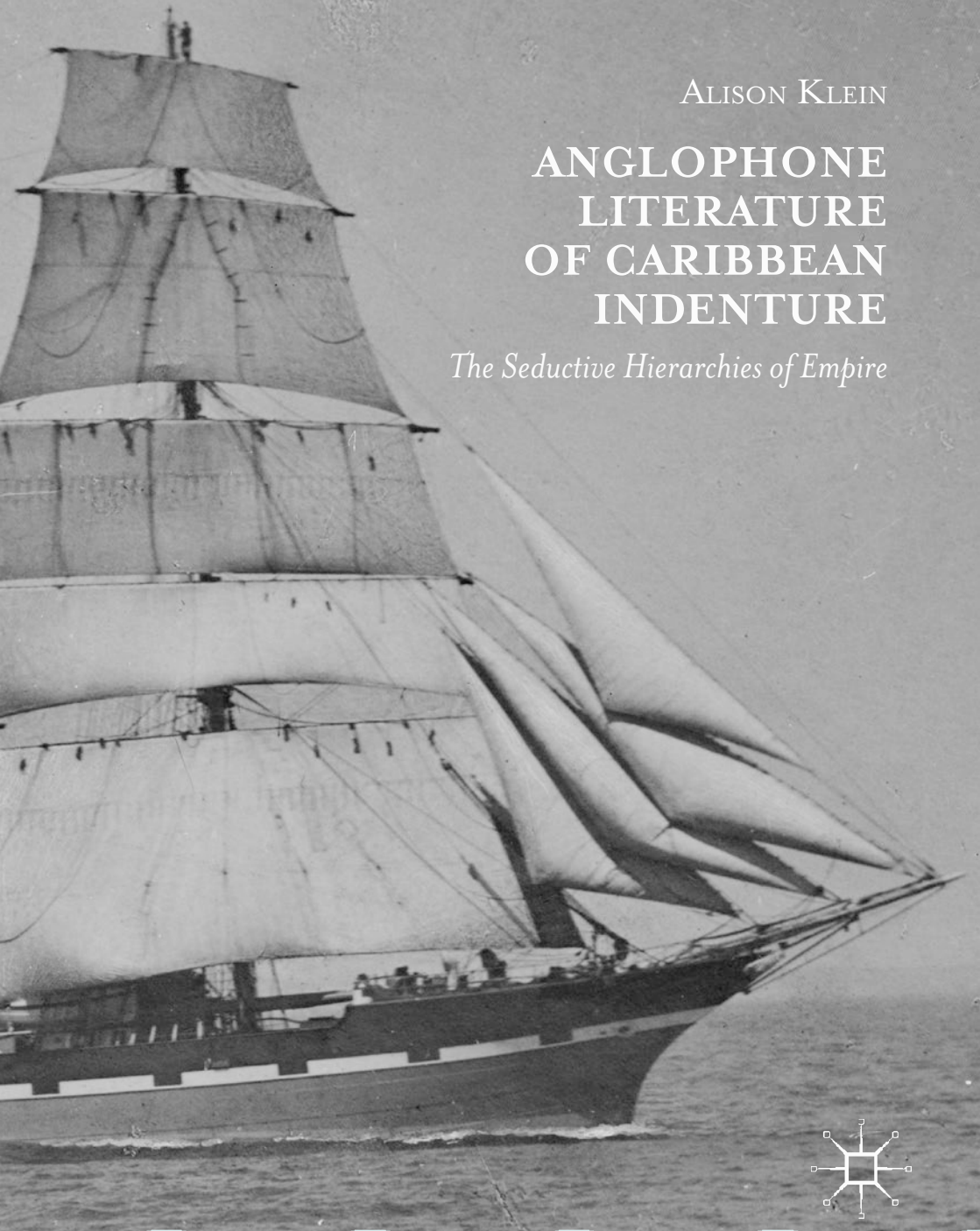

Alison Klein

ANGLOPHONE LITERATURE OF CARIBBEAN INDENTURE

The Seductive Hierarchies of Empire

New Caribbean Studies

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Anglophone Literature of Caribbean Indenture

The Seductive Hierarchies of Empire

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Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The Ties That Bind

Liminal Laborers

For English speakers, so many metaphors that relate to marriage, intimate connections, and family relationships involve rope in some way: "tying the knot," "family bonds," "the ties that bind." The same is true of terms and metaphors having to do with indentured labor. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Indian indentured laborers were referred to as "bound coolies," and woodcuts and caricatures of the laborers, such as the one below, often show immigrants with their hands tied in order to demonstrate their indentured status (Fig. 1.1). It seems to me that this is not a coincidence; ties of love and ties of labor are not as separate as we might imagine. Exploring the literature of indenture, we see that sexual relationships are used as metaphors for struggles between nations, while imperial hierarchies of gender, race, and class impact even supposedly private relationships such as that of a husband and wife.

The short story "Boodhoo," by Alfred Mendes, is a prime example of this. Published in 1932 in *The Beacon*, the first literary magazine of Trinidad and Tobago, it is a striking piece, depicting a sexual relationship between the British wife of a planter and her servant. Written shortly before the fracturing of the British Empire, "Boodhoo" challenges the view of the British as a noble, civilizing force, and it draws attention to the complex interactions of gender, race, and labor in the colonies of the

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Fig. 1.1 A woodcut depicting indentured laborers on an estate in British Guiana. Image from: Jenkins, Edward. 1871. *The Coolie, His Rights and Wrongs.* New York: George Routledge & Sons.

Caribbean, as well as the impact of the British imperial indenture system of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Minnie, who has come to Trinidad as the wife of Henry, a plantation owner, is initially "nauseated" when she hears talk of planters having children by their Indian laborers (Mendes 1979, 145). Yet, she is lonely and isolated, and is drawn into a love affair with her half-Indian, half-British servant, Boodhoo. In the course of this affair, she learns that Henry is actually Boodhoo's father, while Boodhoo's mother was a laborer on Henry's plantation. The story ends with these issues unresolved: Minnie dies in childbirth, terrified that her child will be dark-skinned and give away her infidelity. "Boodhoo" is unusual for its time in several ways: it offers a sympathetic depiction of a woman's infidelity, it features a love affair between a British woman and a half-Indian man, and it highlights the ways that planters often abused their

power over their laborers. Most importantly, it demonstrates the destruction created by imperialism and indenture, not just to the colonized, but to the colonizers as well. Henry's liaison with an Indian woman in his youth leads to his wife's affair and death, illustrating the cross-generational damage of these systems of power.

This book addresses these systems of power, what I call "the seductive hierarchies of empire." The term "seductive" applies in three respects to the ideologies of gender, ethnicity, and class that developed under imperialism and indenture. Firstly, this book deals with the intimate relationships, often sexual in nature, between colonizers and colonized, and between colonized citizens. It explores the ways that those relations reflected and wrestled with issues of nationalism, colonial and anti-colonial sentiment, and struggles for power. Secondly, the term refers to the lure that such hierarchies held for colonizers. The belief in one's eminent superiority and fitness to rule over others, thereby justifying the domination of millions of people, must have held great appeal indeed. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the term refers to the pervasiveness with which these hierarchies are replicated within the colonized and formerly colonized peoples, for generations after the end of imperialism. The categorization of people, it seems, is a hard lesson to unlearn.

To consider the role that indenture played in the British Empire and the Caribbean, and the role of gender and racial dynamics in imperial and anti-imperial discourse, I examine novels, autobiographies, interviews, and poems that depict the system of indentured labor in the Caribbean. In these texts, tensions around colonialism and race are often mediated through gender, and particularly through the absence or presence of South Asian and Chinese women. Representations of women and their relationships in these narratives demonstrate that for British authors, power over women laborers bolstered the masculinist enterprise of empire; for anti-colonial authors, the abusive treatment of women laborers acted as a catalyst for nationalist arguments; and for feminist authors, relationships between women offered an escape from concentric cycles of patriarchal oppression and suppression.

In the texts that effectively challenge these destructive hierarchies, what emerges is a poetics of kinship, a focus on the importance of building familial ties across generations and across classifications of people. Novels such as Cristina García's *Monkey Hunting* (2003) and poems such as Lelawattee Manoo-Rahming's "Incarnation on the Caroni" (2000) advocate a deep engagement with one's kin as a way of acknowledging the

trauma of the past, recognizing the hierarchies that helped perpetuate those traumas, and moving forward—shaking off the bonds, so to speak, of empire. I differentiate here between "family," which generally refers to ties of blood or marriage, and "familial," or, "kinship," which I use to refer to the consciously chosen ties that arise sometimes from shared genes but sometimes through shared experience. There are family ties, such as between an abusive husband and his wife, that are just as damaging and repressive as colonialism and indenture.

These and other patterns emerge most clearly when analyzing texts across time periods and geographic boundaries, and so I compare works by authors writing at the time of indenture to works by contemporary authors, works from Trinidad, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname, Cuba, Britain, and the United States, and works that depict both Indian and Chinese indenture. Authors writing at the peak of indenture, such as Edward Jenkins, depict it as a system that benefits all involved parties, while authors writing after the collapse of British colonialism, such as David Dabydeen, focus on indenture as one of imperialism's cruelest forms of control. Authors depicting Indian indenture, such as A.R.F. Webber, tend to focus on relations between the British managers and the Indian laborers. By contrast, authors who focus on Chinese indenture, which in some places existed coterminously with slavery, devote more attention to the associations between the Chinese laborers and the Afro-Caribbean citizens, as in García's *Monkey Hunting*. Indenture played a less formative role in the development of Jamaican society than that of other Caribbean nations such as Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana, which is reflected in its lack of representation in literature about Jamaica. When indenture does appear in such texts, such as in Patricia Powell's *The Pagoda* (1998), it plays a relatively minor role. My analysis is also comprehensive, considering, to the extent possible, each Anglophone novel, poem, and nonfiction text that directly depicts the colonial system of indenture in the Caribbean. My hope is that this undertaking will draw attention to the importance of this time period and the literature that imagines it.

Much attention has been paid, with good reason, to the role of slavery in imperial history. Indentured labor, which, for 75 years was the primary movement of people to the colonies and the primary labor force on the plantations, receives much less attention, especially in literary theory. Between 1838 and 1918, approximately 500,000 Indians and 200,000 Chinese were brought to work in the Caribbean, a massive movement of

people at a time when the voyage took three months (Roopnarine 2009, 71; Look Lai 2006, 9). This immigration is a critical aspect of colonial history, as it dramatically altered the ethnic makeup of the Caribbean, the cultural norms and traditions of those who migrated, and the structure of British imperialism. Yet, the history of indenture and its effects remain invisible in many ways; those outside of the Caribbean generally think of it as a region populated by people of African descent, yet in some nations, including Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana, Indo-Caribbeans make up the largest ethnic group.

A crucial aspect of this migration is the way that gender roles shifted under indenture. As indenture migration was, in theory at least, voluntary, far fewer women than men indentured, with the disparity ranging from 2:1 to 5:1 for Indian laborers (Mohammed 2002, 37–39), while hardly any Chinese women migrated. Initially, women who traveled under indenture from traditional societies like India may have gained some freedoms. As they were able to earn wages, they had more economic independence, and their scarcity meant that they could choose a mate. As a result, migrants adapted some gender-related traditions: dowries were reversed, so that money went from the groom's family to that of the bride, rather than the other way around (Mohammed 2002, 47).

At the same time, the few women who traveled to the colonies were seen as the protectors of Indian civilization, culture, and tradition, which led to limitations on their freedom. Historian Patricia Mohammed notes that most cultures view men's honor as dependent upon the control of women's sexuality, and, as a result, conflicts between ethnic groups often play out as men attempting to protect women against the perceived threat of other men (Mohammed 2002, 9). This was especially true far from home, when one's culture seemed in peril. As a result, women's access to education was restricted, and once their period of indenture had ended, they were often confined to the home. The majority of indentured Indians lived in barracks on the estates. After they had completed their contracts and had chosen to remain permanently, villages and communities were reconstituted, and, with this, the reemergence or consolidation of many of the customs and traditions brought from India.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of these shifts is the increased level of violence against women during this time period: a man who believed his wife had consorted with another man often chopped off her arm or nose, or murdered her. Colonial authorities blamed this and many of the other

ills of the system on the gender disparity, citing men's sexual frustration and jealousy as a cause for the violence. They also blamed the quality of women, claiming that the only women who were willing to indenture were of low moral character and therefore more likely to choose more than one mate and stir hostilities.

Due to these factors, women, especially women of Indian, Chinese, and African descent, take on a metaphoric weight in the narratives of indenture, acting as a site of contestation. Feminist scholars such as Gayatri Spivak and Anne McClintock have pointed to the symbolic position that women hold in imperialism, noting that one of the major justifications for empire has been the protection and civilization of colonized women. However, during Caribbean indenture, colonized women took on an even greater representational significance for both the British and the colonized peoples, due to the disparity in the ratio of male to female laborers. In power struggles between the British managers and the laborers, as well as between different ethnic groups in the colonies, gaining control over the female laborers was a demonstration of dominance and superiority. Authors writing in favor of indenture and colonialism often use female laborers as scapegoats, the cause of the ills of the system. Authors writing against indenture and imperialism depict colonized women as the bearers of culture and tradition and portray colonizers desiring female laborers as an indication of their greed. By contrast, female authors writing about indenture veer away from such metaphors, emphasizing instead the cyclical nature of various forms of oppression.

As with slavery, a major justification for indentured labor was the improvement of inferior races. Laborers would not only enjoy good food, medical care and an escape from the poverty of their home country, they would be exposed to Christianity, morality, and the technological and organizational advancements of the West. In reality, the civilizing mission was a justification for the economic exploitation of the laborers, and indenture, which developed directly out of slavery, extended the life of the plantation economy that was a major source of Britain's wealth. The system was brutal and corrupt at nearly every stage: planters typically provided inadequate food and housing, worked the laborers far beyond the hours set out in the contracts, and cheated them of their wages. As abuses became public, indentured labor became a controversial topic in Britain and its colonies, and after some temporary halts, the system ended for good in 1920.

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

To justify slavery and indenture, British imperialists developed a teleological view of labor that was linked to hierarchical views of civilization and race. In keeping with Hegel's understanding of history as a linear evolution of cultures, African, Asian, and European nations represented stages in a progression of civilization. Similarly, slavery, indentured labor, and wage labor were depicted as progressive steps necessary to civilize undeveloped races. The stagist view of civilization has been effectively attacked and dismantled, but the teleological view of labor still permeates many discourses on labor. To suggest that systems of labor have become increasingly humane as we have moved from slavery to indenture to wage labor ignores the forms of exploitation that exist in each system. While it should be noted that there were significant differences between these forms of labor, Hugh Tinker calls indenture "a new system of slavery" (Tinker 1993), and Cedric Robinson suggests that indentured labor, "wage slavery…peonage, share-cropping, tenant-farming, forced labor, penal labor, and modern peasantry" (Robinson 1983, 219) all share qualities of slavery.

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

[1] See Lisa Yun, *The Coolie Speaks* (2008), and Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane* (2006).

development. Literature reveals a society's views and prejudices on an intimate level; it both shapes and is shaped by the prevailing norms and values of a people.[2]

There is a growing body of novels and poetry about the indenture system, and these texts draw attention to the damaging hierarchies of labor and race that indenture perpetuated. By my count, only two novels were written in English about indenture between 1834 and 1917, the peak of the system: Edward Jenkins' *Lutchmee and Dilloo* (1877) and A.R.F. Webber's 1917 novel *Those That Be in Bondage* (1988). However, 12 novels have been written between 1976 and today, not to mention the many novels that touch on indenture or its aftereffects.[3] Poetry about indenture also blossomed in this time period: in the last 60 years, Rajkumari Singh, Mahadai Das, David Dabydeen, and Lelawattee Manoo-Rahming all wrote verses reflecting on the labor of their ancestors. As third- and fourth-generation South Asian and Chinese diasporic citizens explore their history and the reasons for the migration of their ancestors to the Caribbean, Africa, and the Pacific Islands, indentured labor is becoming a more and more common topic of literature. This interest has been fueled by the rise in the last few decades of Caribbean-centered publishers like Peepal Tree Press, and the expanded publishing opportunities that these presses offer. Unfortunately, there are few texts by the laborers themselves, who tended to lack the education or leisure time necessary to record their experiences, and so we must rely on interviews and testimonials to hear their stories directly. As part of this project, I explore these oral narratives in order to bring attention to such underrepresented accounts and the insights they offer.

[2] Elizabeth E. Weber summarizes the argument of literary intellectual Liang Qichao, who suggested in 1902 that literature had the power to move the masses: "In the creation of provocative…and enchanting fictional worlds, authors could stealthily inculcate with particular social values those readers who might be less receptive to more overtly political tracts and nonfiction essays" (Weber 2016, 304).

[3] Deepchand Beeharry: *That Others Might Live* (1976); Sharlow: *The Promise* (1995); David Dabydeen: *The Counting House,* published in 1996 (2005); Roy Heath: *The Shadow Bride* (1996); Patricia Powell: *The Pagoda* (1998); Cristina García: *Monkey Hunting* (2003); Helen Atteck: *Bound for Trinidad: An Historical Novel* (2004); Ron Ramdin: *Rama's Voyage* (2004); Ryhaan Shah's *A Silent Life* (2005); Peggy Mohan: *Jahajin* (2007); Amitav Ghosh: *Sea of Poppies* (2008); Khalil Rahman Ali: *Sugar's Sweet Allure* (2013).

Theorizing Indenture

The Caribbean is a growing but still underrepresented area in the field of postcolonial studies, as scholars tend to focus on Southeast Asia and Africa, and the role of indentured labor in both Caribbean history and worldwide migration is relatively understudied. This is especially true in literary criticism; indenture narratives are not generally included in the canon of Caribbean literature, and almost all of the work being done on indenture is in the field of history. For example, Patricia Mohammed's *Gender Negotiations among Indians in Trinidad, 1917–1947* (2002) examines the ways that gender roles shifted in the new environment, while in *Coolies and Cane* (2006), Moon-Ho Jung notes that after emancipation, Chinese indentured laborers in Louisiana were used to strengthen notions of whiteness and white supremacy. Walton Look Lai's seminal book *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar* (1993) offers a comprehensive historical overview of Indian and Chinese indenture in the Caribbean, while Lisa Yun's *The Coolie Speaks* explores written and oral testimonies of indentured laborers in Cuba and notes ways that these testimonies challenged dominant paradigms such as racial hierarchies. Lisa Lowe's *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015) demonstrates that nineteenth- and twentieth-century European liberal notions of freedom, wage labor, and free trade were inextricably tied to oppressive practices of colonialism, slavery, and indenture. Gaiutra Bahadur's book, *Coolie Woman* (2014), part memoir and part history, is a thorough exploration of the experiences of indentured women, built around Bahadur's research into the story of her own great-great-grandmother, who indentured in British Guiana from India.

Mariam Pirbhai is one of the few scholars to conduct an extended analysis of literary depictions of indentured labor. In *Mythologies of Migration, Vocabularies of Indenture* (2009), Pirbhai emphasizes key themes in indenture narratives, such as the tension between forming alliances with other oppressed races versus seeking strength in one's community. While her examination centers on Indian diasporic texts from across the globe, this book concentrates on literature depicting Caribbean indenture of both Indian and Chinese laborers. Such a focus allows for an exploration of the shifting significance of indenture in literature across time periods, as well as of the parallels and divergences between the experiences of Indian and Chinese migrants.

Other critics who have explored indenture have built theoretical frameworks to draw attention to the contributions of different ethnic groups to

Caribbean culture. Shalini Puri introduced the term "dougla poetics" (Puri 1997, 143), borrowing a word used to identify a person of mixed Indian and African descent. The theorization of "dougla poetics" is meant to acknowledge and increase acceptance of cultural hybridization, but some have argued that the term elides other groups, such as those of Chinese or Amerindian descent.[4] On the subject of Chinese contributions to the Caribbean, Ann-Marie Lee-Loy describes the way that poets such as Easton Lee have created "a new creole melody" (Lee-Loy 2010, 114), adding Chinese music to the cultural melody of Jamaica, so that Chineseness "no longer represents alien or outsider; rather it is just another way of 'being Jamaican'" (Lee-Loy 2010, 115).

Feminist critics have further built on the model of dougla poetics with the concepts of "*kala pani* discourse," "*jahaji*-hood," and "post-indentureship feminisms." Brinda Mehta, who coined the term "*kala pani* discourse," draws on the Hindu belief that those who crossed the *kala pani*, the dark waters of the ocean, lost their caste (Mehta 2004, 10). She does so to highlight the vital role of Indian women in Caribbean culture and to build a transnational feminist framework based on the shared experience of migration and struggle rather than ethnicity. Similarly, Mariam Pirbhai employs the phrase "*jahaji*-hood," which refers to the familial bond that develops between those on the same ship voyage, to evoke "the labor diaspora's shared sense of bondage, cultural affinity, and spiritual fraternity as it was initiated by the traumatic and perilous journey" (Pirbhai 2012, 25). Finally, Gabrielle Jamela Hosein and Lisa Outar offer the framework of "post-indentureship feminisms," which draws on the shared experience of indentureship and its aftermath rather than national identity (Hosein and Outar 2016, 9).

These approaches highlight the importance of building solidarity across traditional lines of classification such as nationality and ethnicity, but the texts discussed in this book offer a vital addition: the importance of building solidarity across *time*. Equally imperative to crossing spatial and societal borders is the need to cross temporal ones, to develop a sense of kinship with previous and future generations. Ramabai Espinet's novel *The Swinging Bridge* offers a useful demonstration of this in the character of Bess, the narrator's cousin: "Bess had a notion of family that transcended the immediate: she dealt in lineage and posterity and generations and

[4] Puri has stated that she "had not intended (indeed, had cautioned against) constructions of douglaness that were idealizing, paradigmatic, or prescriptive" (Puri 2016, 322).

descendants. Family was not just breeding and reproducing—it was a work of art in itself, as carved and sculpted as any other legacy one could leave behind" (Espinet 2003, 123). This quote is particularly meaningful, referring as it does to a character who is a marginal figure in her own family because she is the child of an extramarital affair. With her growing awareness of Bess' emphasis on posterity over blood ties, Mona, the narrator of *The Swinging Bridge*, begins to acknowledge the importance of this approach in remembering the past and preventing it from repeating, and begins to rediscover her own sense of self.

My analysis of the narratives of indenture also builds on Foucault-inspired postcolonial critics who challenge the notion that public and private domains are divisible. For example, Robert J.C. Young's *Colonial Desire* (1995) suggests that the imperial obsession with racial classification and miscegenation is a result of the colonizer's suppressed desire for the colonized, Ann Laura Stoler's *Carnal Knowledge* (2002) examines the connections between colonial policies around child-rearing and intimate relationships and imperial views of a racial hierarchy, and Alys Eve Weinbaum's *Wayward Reproductions* (2004) argues that discourses of biological reproduction have been employed to support ideologies of racism, nationalism, and imperialism. Additionally, in *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (2002), Amy Kaplan shows that domestic issues are closely linked to foreign policies in the United States. These theorists tend to focus on the colonizers, using these relationships to explore the colonial mindset or the implementation of colonial power. While this is an important aspect of understanding imperialism, it brushes aside the experience of the colonized. I examine relationships between the colonizers and the colonized, as well as between the colonized people themselves, which reveals the insidious ways that imperial rhetoric impacted these connections.

Exploring literature from a range of authors, we see the ways that intimate relationships act as metaphors for larger conflicts of ethnicity and class. In most indenture narratives, particularly those written by men, the central conflict revolves around a female laborer involved in a sexual relationship (either consensual or nonconsensual) with a man outside of her ethnic group. An especially frequent trope is a relationship between a British man and a female Indian laborer. By most accounts, such connections between managers and laborers were common, but this does not explain the prevalence of this trope. These relationships act a focal point, a catalyst within the plot for tensions around colonialism, both by

pro-imperial authors advocating Britain's power and civilizing influence, and by anti-imperial authors attempting to demonstrate the selfishness and brutality of the colonizers. Writing at the time of indenture, Edward Jenkins and A.R.F. Webber use this relationship as a stand-in for Britain's relationship with India, suggesting that Britain was raising India out of darkness and into civilization. The metaphors in these texts equate Indian women with children or animals, vulnerable beings who need to be protected: in *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, Craig thinks of Lutchmee, "Was she not a pretty animal?" (Jenkins 2003, 130). Later authors Dabydeen and Sharlow use this same relationship to attack imperialism, showing Britain taking advantage of India. Yet, in these texts, women are still depicted as possessions to be controlled: they are compared to treasure, or land being pillaged by other ethnic groups. When Vidia suspects Rohini of sleeping with an African man, he screams, "Niggerman digging in your belly for gold that belong to me" (Dabydeen 2005, 87).

When viewing fictional characters as allegories for their nation, we run the risk of reducing the complexity of the work. In his controversial essay, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," Fredric Jameson does just that, suggesting that "Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private…necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory" (Jameson 1986, 69). Aijaz Ahmad famously attacked this essentialist view, arguing that it makes sweeping generalizations based on a binary view of a capitalist first world versus a precapitalist third world, and that it defines third world nations by their experience of colonialism. It is the aim of this project to avoid such overgeneralizations while still drawing attention to the ways that authors themselves sometimes rely on such essentializing allegories.

An investigation of these texts also demonstrates that the complex, interwoven hierarchies of race, class, and gender within the indenture system permeate literature by both European authors and authors of Indian and Chinese descent, authors writing a century ago and contemporary authors. For example, early authors Edward Jenkins and A.R.F. Webber, but also the contemporary author Sharlow, describe their Indian protagonists as high-caste, light-skinned, and European-featured, while the Indian villains are invariably dark-skinned. Helen Atteck's novel *Bound for Trinidad* (2004) criticizes the racism faced by Chinese laborers, but the characters of African descent veer toward stereotypes and appear only in servant roles. Such hierarchies appear in the nonfiction texts as well. In

Munshi Rahman Khan's autobiography, he is proud of his high status as a scholar, and he shows great respect for European women and Indian women with wealth and high caste, whereas African women and the Indian women of the working class are described as greedy, dishonorable, and coarse.

Further, the bleakness of the narratives points to the violence that is often inherent in the creation of diasporic populations. Authors who focus on literary depictions of emerging nationalisms, as Doris Sommer does in *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (1991), offer a somewhat romantic view of these movements, suggesting that there is a redeeming quality to the violence of nation-making. Indenture narratives tend to deny this sense of redemption, ending in tragedy and destruction. Death is a common theme in these texts: *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, *Those That Be in Bondage*, *The Counting House*, and *The Promise* all include the violent death of one of the main characters. In addition, the prevalence of children dying suggests a lack of hope for the future. In *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, Lutchmee has a miscarriage because she is forced to continue working in the fields, while in "Journey Across the Black Waters," a woman named You throws her baby overboard on the voyage to Trinidad rather than have it suffer the experience of being the child of a single female laborer (Bain 2013).

The content of indenture narratives shifts over time from supporting imperialism to promoting nationalism in former colonies, from perpetuating hierarchies to attacking them. The form of the narratives and the authors' styles shift as well, which can be attributed in part to changes in literary techniques over the 150 years that the texts cover, but also to the differing purpose of each author. Early authors Jenkins and Webber write in a third-person omniscient point of view, aiming for a sense of objectivity as they capture the benefits of imperialism on the Indian laborers. Their stories are chronological, moving from cause to effect to show the rationality of the plantation and the inevitableness of imperialism. In *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, Dilloo becomes an agitator and rebels against management, and so he must die. Lutchmee recognizes the worth of the Scottish overseer and supports the management against Dilloo, and so she lives.

David Dabydeen, on the other hand, employs a fragmented storyline to show the damaging effects of imperialism. *The Counting House* moves back and forth between Rohini and Vidia's lives in India before they indentured and their experiences as laborers in British Guiana. These shifts emphasize the ways that British colonialism weakened the Indian economy

and led to an increase in indenture and also the forms of oppression that laborers faced once they arrived on plantations. The novel follows the perspective of three different characters in order to capture the full experience of the colonized peoples: Rohini, a female Indian laborer; Miriam, a black servant; and Kampta, an unbound Indian laborer. Two sections of the novel are told in third-person point of view, while the third is in first person. These techniques, which jar the reader, defamiliarize the text and force the reader to consider his or her own subject position while reading haunting descriptions of the trauma of colonialism.

The novels and poetry by women authors tend even further toward fragmentation, reflecting their desire to demonstrate the insidious effects of indenture on the descendants of laborers. Both *Monkey Hunting*, by Cristina García, and *Jahajin* (2007), by Peggy Mohan, follow several generations of a single family. The storyline cuts back and forth between an indentured laborer and his or her descendants in order to capture the ongoing impact of indenture and imperialism and repeating patterns of oppression. These novels, like *The Counting House*, each focus on three different storylines; three seems to be a common choice by contemporary authors, perhaps seeking to avoid binaries and trouble neat categorizations. Similarly, poems by Mahadai Das and Lelawattee Manoo-Rahming intersperse their own experiences living in Guyana and Trinidad, respectively, with the traumatic experiences of their female ancestors who migrated as indentured laborers. They employ enjambed lines, disjointed imagery, and synaesthetic descriptions to convey the horrors of indenture and the distance the poets must reach across to understand the lives of these ancestors.

The differences that arise in the texts by male versus female authors point to the differences in the lived experience of men and women in post-indenture nations. The male authors tend to work metaphorically, using intimate relationships as a symbol to demonstrate the impact of imperialism. Female authors such as Cristina García and Peggy Mohan, on the other hand, tend to hone in on the intimate relations as subjects in and of themselves, with the structures of imperialism and indenture as a backdrop for these interactions. They seem to work from the public to the private, rather than the other way around, focusing on how issues of nationalism and imperialism play out in close quarters, rather than using intimate relationships to make statements about larger issues of colonial rule. This suggests that Caribbean women, who have gained many public rights in the

last century, but who are still at high risk for domestic violence in private, may be more concerned than men with how issues of domination play out in the domestic sphere.

The nonfiction narratives, by contrast, reflect the challenges of penning one's story when one lacks education, or time to write. Munshi Rahman Khan, the only known Caribbean laborer to write an autobiography, was a well-educated Muslim man who came from relative wealth and indentured out of a sense of adventure and an attempt to escape his family obligations. His tone is formal and didactic, and his autobiography is multigenre, equal parts journal, poetry chapbook, and history lesson. He shares his experiences as a laborer in order to solidify his reputation as an intellectual and tell the Muslim side of the Muslim-Hindu conflicts that erupted in Suriname in the mid-twentieth century. Alice Singh, whose journal provides interesting insights into women's experience of indenture, was not a laborer herself. Her father and grandmother were Brahmins who indentured when they became separated from their family in India, and with their education and high caste, they had little trouble entering the middle class of Suriname. Singh wrote her journal without the intention of publication, hoping more to share her experiences with her family, and so it is casual in style and content, reflecting largely on domestic matters. The interviewees, who were uneducated and never escaped a subsistence lifestyle, succinctly describe the challenges of indenture decades later. They tend to concentrate on issues of survival, which highlights the reason that so few laborers recorded their experiences.

Yet even the nonfiction texts contain metaphors around intimate relationships that reveal much about the laborers' views. Rahman Khan, who had been an indentured laborer in Suriname, describes marriage as a binding force, much more so than indenture itself. Upon arriving in Suriname, a female laborer claims to be his pregnant wife, and the estate manager forces Rahman Khan to support her financially. When he manages to move out of his lodging with her, he writes, "The chains that had bound me broke and I was set free" (Rahman Khan 2005, 96). The manager's insistence that Rahman Khan take responsibility for the woman reflects imperial anxiety about single women laborers, and Rahman Khan's response indicates his view of women as little more than a burden. By contrast, Alice Singh, whose parents had a cross-caste marriage, describes their marriage as "a ship sailing smoothly across the sea" (Singh 2011) indicating that marriages were sometimes viewed as

a way of breaching religious and caste divisions, and also that metaphors of the ocean and of boats hold a strong place in the Indo-Caribbean imaginary.

Comparing these nonfiction texts to slave narratives, a genre that may be more familiar to North American readers, we see that Caribbean indenture narratives serve a fairly different purpose. Autobiographies by formerly enslaved persons like Frederick Douglass in the United States, and Mary Prince and Olaudah Equiano in the Caribbean, tend to describe the horrors of slavery as a call to arms to end the practice, and often follow the narrator's journey from slave to fugitive to free person. While such testimonials about indenture exist, such as Totaram Sanadhya's *My Twenty-One Years in the Fiji Islands* (1991), there are no known equivalents in the Caribbean. Munshi Rahman Khan's *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Laborer* details some of the abuses of the system, but does not attack the practice of indenture. This may be because indentured laborers who were educated, like Munshi Rahman Khan, may have had a less brutal experience of indenture, as their skills allowed them to reach positions of management. In addition, they were better placed than their uneducated counterparts to enter the middle class after their period of indenture was over. Thus, the educated immigrants might have had less interest in abolishing the system and less incentive to record their stories, though they had more ability to do so. Early novels depicting indenture illuminate problems with the system but do not call for its end, and these texts tend to focus on the time of the laborer's indenture. It is only in later fictional texts, such as Sharlow's *The Promise* (1995), that we see an excoriation of the system itself and the same progression from bound laborer to freedom that appears in many slave narratives.

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

Chapter Summaries

Chaps. 2, 3, and 4 address the pervasiveness of the hierarchies of empire within both colonial and anti-colonial writings. Chap. 2 focuses on nonfiction narratives from the laborers and their descendants—autobiographies, testimonials, and interviews. I begin with these texts in order to reverse the tendency to treat with primacy the voice of the colonizers, and to demonstrate the ways that laborers suffered under, perpetuated, and resisted categorizations along gender, ethnic, and class lines. In particular, I examine colonial legislation around marriage and the impact of that legislation. Marriage, the publicly recognized institution of a private relationship, was a flashpoint for religious, ethnic, and class tensions in the Caribbean colonies. To explore the broader implications of these tensions, I analyze Rahman Khan's *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Labourer*, the only published first-person account of indenture, and *Autobiography of Alice Bhagwandy Sital Persaud* (2011), by the daughter of an indentured laborer. I also examine the few available interviews with and testimonials by indentured laborers, including an unpublished interview (held by the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine) with a 109-year-old woman named Doolarie. These texts demonstrate that the British legislation of marriage, meant to impose Victorian ideals and justify imperialism, tended instead to support the view of women as contested property and to solidify existing class and racial hierarchies in both the colonizers and the colonized. Further, these texts demonstrate a colonial anxiety around single female laborers, who challenged the justification that colonialism brought comfort and safety to the helpless and victimized colonized women.

The third chapter examines two novels by authors writing at the time of indenture, Edward Jenkins' *Lutchmee and Dilloo* and A.R.F. Webber's *Those That Be in Bondage*. In both, a British man in power develops a relationship with a beautiful young Indian woman, raising her out of the degradation and harsh life of field labor and into a world of civilization and refinement. This represents the primary justification of colonization: Britain would protect its helpless colonies and civilize them. Both authors wrote their novels to suggest that the system of indenture needed corrections, but was generally beneficial to Britain, India, and the Caribbean nations involved in the system. Yet Jenkins and Webber reveal more than they perhaps intended. The tragic ending of *Lutchmee and Dilloo*, for example, in which a noble Indian man is turned vicious by the evils of the

system, counters Jenkins' argument that indenture benefits the Indian people. In *Those That Be in Bondage*, Webber, who was of African and European descent, reveals an ambivalence toward empire. Though he was an advocate of Guyanese independence, the depictions of his characters suggest that he accepts the colonial notion of a racialized hierarchy of civilization, with Britain at the top.

In the fourth chapter, I turn to contemporary anti-colonial texts that nonetheless replicate some of the ideologies of empire, David Dabydeen's *The Counting House* and Sharlow's *The Promise*. Both novels contain the same trope that appeared in the earlier texts, a British man in power developing a relationship with a young Indian woman. However, these authors deploy this trope to attack empire; the British male takes advantage of the Indian female, using her for sexual favors and giving little in return. This again represents the relationship of Britain to India, suggesting violent, greedy motivations for imperialism, as opposed to noble, altruistic ones. While Dabydeen and Sharlow restructure the metaphor of the British man/Indian woman relationship, they fail to dismantle the traditional patriarchal view of gender that underlies this metaphor. By using female characters to represent India, they support the notion that women are the bearers of tradition and culture, that they are not individuals in their own right, and that their sexuality must be controlled and protected. As a counterpoint to these novels, I consider depictions of a similarly exploitative relationship in Patricia Powell's *The Pagoda*, which touches on Chinese indenture in Jamaica. Rather than using her characters as representatives of their nation, Powell explores the ways that colonized individuals were trapped within yet transgressed repressive gender and racial categorizations, offering a critique of imperialism without perpetuating the ideologies that underpin it.

The fifth chapter focuses on the poetry of indenture, and acts as a transition of sorts. In it, I examine the work of five contemporary authors: Guyanese poets Rajkumari Singh, Mahadai Das, and David Dabydeen; Jamaican poet Easton Lee; and Trinidadian poet Lelawattee Manoo-Rahming. Woven through their poems are images of the female ancestors who voyaged to the Caribbean under indenture, particularly images of their bodies: eyes, feet, foreheads, and wombs. For Das and Singh, who wrote in the 1970s, this focus on the body demonstrates anti-colonial, nationalistic sentiments, while for Dabydeen, Lee, and Manoo-Rahming, whose poems were published in 1988, 1998, and 2000, respectively, the emphasis on the body shows a sense of displacement. Poems written by

Rajkumari Singh and Mahadai Das in the early, still hopeful days of Guyanese independence, draw attention to the colonial view of female migrants as mere bodies, useful for labor or sexual gratification, but also celebrate the fertile possibilities of the people and the land. That they do so through the metaphor of Indo-Guyanese women's capacity for reproduction is at times problematic. In contradistinction, for authors David Dabydeen and Lelawattee Manoo-Rahming, writing in the wake of violent and dictatorial political movements in Guyana and Trinidad, the sense of hopefulness has dissipated. These authors, disillusioned by the political upheaval and autocratic regimes that followed independence, seek to reembody their ancestors as way of grounding themselves, finding a connection to the land of their birth by strengthening a sense of lineage. Tracking the images of the female laborer across decades, we thus see a move away from the often-problematic nationalist sentiments and toward a poetics of kinship.

In the final chapter, I extend this exploration of the poetics of kinship, considering how such an approach can be used to recognize and move beyond the hierarchies of empire. I examine the cyclical nature of trauma as depicted in two novels by contemporary women writers: Cristina García's *Monkey Hunting*, and Peggy Mohan's *Jahajin*. While Monkey Hunting focuses on Chinese indenture in Cuba and Jahajin explores Indian indenture in Trinidad, both novels weave together narrative strands from different time periods in order to demonstrate the ongoing impact of indenture on generations of a single family and the dangers of a nostalgic approach to the past. Additionally, both novels draw parallels between family dynamics, such as unhappy marriages and parents abandoning their children, and national upheavals, such as revolutions and uprisings. I argue that García and Mohan use these parallels to advocate an active engagement with the past in order to break cycles of trauma on both an individual and a national level. While García depicts the dangers of erasing the past, Mohan primarily warns against romanticizing the past in the form of nostalgia.

Boundaries of the Project

This exploration is limited to Anglophone texts about Caribbean indenture in order to examine the changing role of indenture and gender roles in a single geographic location, as much as one can call the Caribbean such a thing. Novels written about the British imperial system of indenture in