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# **Networks of Empire and the Representation of the ‘Queen of Sheba’ in W.H. Angel’s *The Clipper Ship ‘Sheila’***

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## **Abstract**

“Her earnings are worn on her person, the silver coins melted into ornately wrought jewellery made in the style of villages in India, where the goldsmiths in the southern towns had learned their craft” (Espinet 2003, 249).

Captain Angel’s *The Clipper Ship Sheila* (1921) charts the launch, preparations, outward and return journey of the ship which brought more than 600 indentured labourers to the Caribbean in 1877. This article analyses the representation of indentured migrants, Indian subjects, passengers, and other subjects on the periphery of indentureship; these are considered in terms of the overarching theme of the author’s imaginative relations to his surroundings. The article begins by providing some examples of Angel’s world outlook and how his text includes elements of the network of systems behind Britain’s global imperial presence; it is within this context that any other representation in the text should be viewed. The central focus of the paper is an extended analysis of Angel’s perspective of one particular subject, whom he chooses to single out and elaborate on in his text.

Angel introduces her to the text by saying that “Amongst our coolie passengers (she paid her own passage money down) was a fine looking woman about forty years of age” (Angel 1923, 185). She is a formerly indentured Indian woman who travels on Angel’s ship as a free passenger. No research in the field has yet uncovered her name; Angel does not provide this in the text and so female nomenclature—for example, ‘the free Indian woman’—is used to identify her.

Angel’s text seems to be of cumulative value and importance for Indo-Caribbean Studies, not least because of the presence of the free female passenger. A copy of the 1920s publication was drawn to the attention of Brinsley Samaroo and Ken Ramchand who edited and republished it in 1995 with an introduction and an afterword that framed the text from an Indo-Caribbean perspective. Samaroo and Ramchand’s edition also featured the photograph of the free East Indian woman on the front cover, whereas in Angel’s earlier editions, the photograph faced page 185, more or less in the middle of the book. This shift of the East Indian woman to the foreground is perhaps emblematic of the aims of this article—to re-read Angel’s text in the light of this ideological shift, foregrounding and repositioning the free female passenger. Even though the above suggests that she is peripheral or marginalised in Angel’s text, she is still represented to an extent far beyond any other indentured subject (male or female) in the other extant journals and diaries of the colonial agents who worked on the other middle passage<sup>1</sup>. This perhaps begins to provide some measure of the importance and value of the Indian woman’s presence in the text. As other scholars and artists engage with Angel’s text dialogically, understanding the free East Indian woman will become more vital as she grows in significance and aids research that repositions the existing knowledge within the field. Joy Mahabir has said recently that Ramabai Espinet’s *The Swinging Bridge* (2003) “relie[s] heavily on Captain Angel’s account in the section of her novel where the ship from India stops at St. Helena”<sup>2</sup>. In the light of this information, a detailed analysis of how Angel positions the East Indian female migrant in the text and a reading of the meanings she produces seem timely if not somewhat overdue.

Angel’s text needs to be seen in the context of British imperial presence across the globe. The large outline of his text traces the journey of the *Sheila* from its launch in 1877 in Glasgow to Calcutta, from where it travels to Trinidad and British Guiana, returning to

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a modified extract from my PhD thesis, which, in part, examines the journals and diaries of the captains and surgeons aboard the boats that came to the Caribbean from India and China. The other eyewitness accounts that I am referring to here and elsewhere in this article are Theophilus Richmond, *The First Crossing being the Diary of Theophilus Richmond, Ship’s Surgeon Aboard the Hesperus 1837-8*, eds. Dabydeen et al. (Guyana: The Caribbean Press, 2010); Captain and Mrs. Jane Swinton, *Journal of a Voyage with Coolie Emigrants, from Calcutta to Trinidad* (London: Alfred Bennett, 1859); and Dr Edward Ely’s journal account of Chinese migrants, *Abstract of the Surgeon’s Journal of Proceedings on Board the Ship ‘Samuel Boddington’ During a Voyage from China to Demerara*, which can be found in Parliamentary Papers 1852-1853, (1986), Encl. in No. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Joy Mahabir, e-mail to Mark Tumbridge, 13 September 2010.

Merseyside just short of a year after its launch. The text therefore describes the other trade triangle that emerged as the British Empire expanded beyond the more heavily used sea routes to Africa. Along the way, Angel discusses details that reveal the circulation of goods and capital flows, communication routes, technological and other developments of the empire, as well as European hegemony. For example, the *Sheila* takes “dry goods cargo” (1923, 46) (that is, pig iron and bricks) to Calcutta and the indentured labourers—“our living freight”<sup>3</sup> as Angel says—to the Caribbean, from where it collects sugar and rum for Liverpool. One gains a sense of how the capital of the ship as a trading resource was fully maximised for the benefit of the owner and the empire. However, the systems that Angel operated within are unrepresentable because there is always some dependent element of capitalism that cannot be traced—what one sees, according to Jameson, is capitalism’s symptoms<sup>4</sup>. A sign of the British overseas presence is a newly laid telegraph cable, which the *Sheila*’s anchor is caught on when the vessel leaves Trinidad (1923, 197); the development of the telegraph would enable high speed communications between the British-“owned” islands—a crucial capability, especially during a time of insurrection. Indeed, in the aftermath of the 1857 Anglo-Indian war and the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica, defence against such resistance was an urgent need in a time of “crises in imperial power”<sup>5</sup> (Gilroy 1993, 11). Angel’s support for the British Empire is strong—he speaks of “the unfair competition of the German, Austrian, and French systems of granting bounties, [and their] cartels” (1923, 240), bemoans the lack of intervention and the laissez-faire attitude of the home government. He thoroughly commits himself as a colonist and is open in his pro-slavery opinions. “African negroes,” Angel says, “kept as slaves, were first class working material”. He continues, “...but when the great scheme of manumission set in, and they were made free—the promoters of that made one mistake, at any rate—the sugar estates were practically ruined” (1923, 201). The foregoing takes account of the wider British imperial presence, the unrepresentable network of systems, Angel’s world outlook and his imaginative relations to his surroundings as they are played out in the text within. The foregoing is essential to understanding representations generally within Angel’s text, but particularly so for the main focus and analysis of this article.

Nearly a page-and-a-half is given over to the East Indian woman as part of Angel’s episodic narrative; he chooses to enclose the section related to her within chapter 26,

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>4</sup> This is what Jameson refers to as “the question of capitalism as a totality”. One can conceive of it as a dialectically constructed complex whole, but “No one had ever seen that totality, nor is capitalism ever visible as such, but only in its symptoms...Every representation is partial...” So Angel’s text depicts the accumulation or circulation of capital, but those goods and capital do not stop there—they move beyond the periphery of the text’s representation (Jameson 2011, 6).

<sup>5</sup> Gilroy highlights the close historical proximity of these two insurrections that shook the assurance of metropolitan power to its core.

which begins with the *Sheila* anchoring at the mid-Atlantic island of St Helena<sup>6</sup>. Parts of her story displace the continuity of the time in the narrative—the chronological flow is interrupted by external and internal analepsis<sup>7</sup>. This formal feature enables a reading of the time-structure of Angel's inclusion of the Indian woman passenger within his chapter on St Helena. St Helena is a temporary stopover for shipping in the mid-Atlantic, and even though the open sea is the most liminal of places for a ship, the island is the halfway point in terms of dry land. When organising his narrative, Angel seems to have chosen to place her story within the St Helena cycle and not at any other point in the narrative because he associates her particularly with that time and place. It is this sense of the East Indian woman being positioned 'in-between' and the palpable feeling of division and displacement that both enters the narrative with her presence and features so strongly in the following extended analysis. As the *Sheila* arrives in St Helena, Angel is forced into an analepsis in order to "fill in" her story-events. The only reference that confirms to any degree her former position as an indentured labourer is when Angel says, "She had returned to India from Trinidad, *having completed her term entitling her to a free passage*" [my italics] (1923, 185). This suggests she had finished the required ten years' "industrial residence" (Tinker 1993, 99), the qualifier for the "free" journey for labourers in British colonies. So, she was indentured in India, migrated to Trinidad, then repatriated to India before boarding the *Sheila* to return to Trinidad—this draws in threads and elements from *outside* of the narrative's time frame. The book begins in January 1877 with the launch of the *Sheila* and ends just short of a year later, but her story extends to at least a decade before that to around 1866 when she entered the indentured system. In terms of time, she is the major disruption of the narrative's chronological progress and flow. Madhavi Kale's observation that migrants and their descendants "exceed the narratives that have been proposed to contain them" (Kale 1996, 111) seems wholly applicable to the free Indian woman as she problematises and troubles the time and space of the narrative in this way<sup>8</sup>.

Although the foregoing and the implications of this analysis suggest a refocusing of the power relations in favour of the free female migrant, there are still huge imbalances. She

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<sup>6</sup> St Helena can be viewed, like the Caribbean, as an interstice, an intervening space, not least, in this instance, because of the presence of the East Indian woman. Perhaps symbolic of its importance in the Atlantic crossings, St Helena has subsequently become the name of a village in Trinidad. Another correlation or convergence is Joy Mahabir's observation that Ramabai Espinet used Angel's text as a reference in particular to the St Helena stopover in *The Swinging Bridge*. Angel's reference to a diminutive St Helena as "a tiny little dot of an island" (1923, 184) takes up a similar focal point to V.S. Naipaul's reference to Trinidad as "a dot on the map of the world" (Naipaul 1992, 237).

<sup>7</sup> This is the formal vocabulary suggested by Gérard Genette and elaborated on by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan to describe what were traditionally known as flashbacks or retrospectives. Internal analepsis is a back-shift of time that stays within the notional time frame of the overall narrative. External analepsis goes beyond that frame to "precede the starting point of the first narrative" (Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 48).

<sup>8</sup> This suggests a similar situation to that which Homi Bhabha encounters in respect of Fanon. She too emerges from "a signifying time-lag of cultural difference...a structure for the representation of subaltern and postcolonial agency" (Bhabha 1994, 340).



is made exotic by captain and crew, and her identity is displaced and relocated through multiple dimensions into black Jewish biblical tales: Angel says that she “got the name among us of the ‘Queen of Sheba’” (1923, 185). Renaming the Indian woman in this way is akin to an assault on her identity as it displaces her through dimensions that are not only mythic, but also religious, linguistic, historical, spatial, social and ethnic<sup>9</sup>. Omitting her name textually uncouples her from her ancestral past; it makes tracing her through the archive incredibly difficult<sup>10</sup> and stresses the importance of oral history for the migrants and their descendants. Naming someone is a fundamental ideological act of recognition of the subject’s irreplaceable identity in that if “you ‘have’ a name of your own...you are recognized as a unique subject” (Althusser 2001, 117). This not only completely decentres her identity entangling it amongst those different dimensions listed above, but in doing so it also offers the reader a particular perspective of reality which is mediated and fed through all that mythology; one has to be a critical reader to disentangle her.

The free Indian woman remains unnamed throughout the text, but the reader is told the name she has been given by others. Even on the accompanying photograph<sup>11</sup> of her, in which she confidently and seriously holds the gaze of the camera, she is described as “Coolie passenger on board” (1923, 184-185). At the time of travelling on the *Sheila*, she is not an indentured labourer, but she remains a “coolie” (but also a queen) to Angel. Angel includes the free female migrant with the other indentured labourers when he says she was “Amongst our coolie passengers”<sup>12</sup> (1923, 185). So, Angel is careful to ensure that social distance is maintained by including her with the other “coolies”, despite her status as a free passenger, while also complimenting her. Angel immediately establishes her status in his eyes as well as her appearance and age, and creates another image of her beside the photograph. He tries to make her image strange, shocking, and excessive—she “was a sight to look at”. He re-establishes and extends that social distance by saying that she dresses “according to her ideas” (1923, 185), and in doing so obeys Westminster<sup>13</sup>. Combining a regal name with the image of her ears which have “holes big enough to admit bottle corks” (1923, 186) suggests Angel stereotypes her as a “noble savage”. If he is using the polite form in referring to the East Indian woman on the *Sheila* as a lady, he also inserts her (or at least awkwardly equates her) to a level in the stratification of the

<sup>9</sup> These spheres are suggested by Edith Bruder in the “complex search for origins” (Bruder, 2008, 98) of the Lost Tribes of Israel. They apply equally to the displacement being applied by Angel. The biblical Queen of Sheba appears in 1 Kings 10 v.13 and elsewhere in the Bible.

<sup>10</sup> Efforts to trace documents relating to her are underway at the time of writing.

<sup>11</sup> See appendix 1.

<sup>12</sup> In the absence of any other evidence in the text to suggest there were more free passengers besides the one Indian woman, this assumes that Angel is including her with the newly recruited indentured labourers on board.

<sup>13</sup> Ronald Hyam refers to strident “governmental demands of the maintenance of ‘social distance’”. In the interests of establishing an unimpeachable imperial ruling elite, close contact between rulers and ruled was progressively reduced everywhere” (Hyam 1990, 201).

British class system: “lady” connotes respectability. Then, there is a rhetorical move in describing her clothing: “I must plead,” he says, “inability to describe the intricacies of ladies’ apparel” (1923, 186). On the one hand, this seems typical masculine posturing, but perhaps it is also related to the idea of the inscrutable oriental. In an attempt to make up for his inability, Angel interpellates<sup>14</sup> the reader and tries to suggest that his view can be relied on; he only goes as far as saying “*you* may depend on it, she was in the height of fashion”[my italics] (1923, 186). These descriptions of the so-called “Queen of Sheba” that construct the textual image beside the photograph are perhaps what led Ken Ramchand to suggest that Angel was “facetiously making more of a spectacle of her than she could possibly have made of herself” (Ramchand 1995, 170).

In the page and a half devoted to her, Angel neglects to mention approximately twenty-six silver dollars that appear on the person of the free Indian woman in the photograph although he does make a passing reference to it later in the text. In the only other mention of her in the book, Angel highlights how important circulation is to the acute capitalist, that is, the government of British Guiana, Trinidad, and Britain, and the planters. In discussing her appearance, which he calls “the rig-out of the ‘Queen of Sheba’”, and other indentured labourers more generally, he says

Their wages were paid to them in English silver coins, which they promptly put out of circulation by melting them into personal ornaments of all kinds... It is one of the grievances of the government that owing to this they have constantly to import silver coins to keep pace with the loss...(1923, 200).

Angel’s words seem to suggest that the labourers melted *all* their cash which seems to ignore their need of money for everyday survival. But there is something much more complex at work here. Angel uses “circulation” to describe the flow of money that the indentured labourers interrupt by melting some of their coins; this idea of circulation has a particular set of assumptions or ideological relations attached to it. As discussed in the introduction, this is part of the vast, unrepresentable and globalising form of the network of systems that were involved in extracting profits from the very soil of the plantations. The surplus capital not only from the Caribbean, but also the other colonies of Empire, was continually moving through these systems; the surplus was thrown back into circulation ceaselessly in order to provide more surplus and augment value<sup>15</sup>. The Indian

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<sup>14</sup> Interpellation is theorised by Louis Althusser. This is when an author (the police in Althusser’s usage) hails the reader using “you”. “I have called,” Althusser says, “*interpellation* or hailing...which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: ‘Hey, you there!’” [Althusser’s italics]. This functions to draw subjects into an ideology in a powerful way. Althusser adds that this occurs “in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects” (Althusser 2001, 118).

<sup>15</sup> Karl Marx: “His [the capitalist’s] aim is rather the unceasing movement of profit-making. This boundless drive for enrichment, this passionate chase after value, is common to the capitalist and the miser; but while the miser is merely a capitalist gone mad, the capitalist is a rational miser. The ceaseless augmentation of value, which the miser seeks to attain by saving his money from circulation, is achieved

woman on the *Sheila* and other indentured labourers interrupted this huge process by taking silver coins out of circulation and hoarding them in the form of jewellery; this was seen as being unfair or a permanent annoyance (“one of the grievances”) to the colonial authorities and the planters who supported them because it was seen as an act of resistance. As Clem Seecharan has pointed out, this “was, and still is, a sensible form of saving”, but it also kept the money out of the banks. “Many clung tenaciously to the ancestral idea that their wealth was safer in their homes” (Seecharan 1997, 252). Those who were in a position to accumulate enough cash (like the “Queen of Sheba”) could throw that into their own businesses, which might compete with the planters; it might even put them in a position to channel cash or capital towards other forms of resistance. To bring some perspective to the silver dollars that the free East Indian woman wears around her neck, these are roughly equivalent to about two months’ wages for the average labourer at the time in Trinidad<sup>16</sup>. The foregoing argument has placed the free East Indian woman’s jewellery within the context of circulation and the wider capitalist systems; this section of the analysis can be extended by turning to the work of Joy Mahabir.

Throughout the period of the indentureship system, Indo-Caribbean women had *some* of the silver shillings they were paid melted down in order to make jewellery. They were able to take their money to the local silversmith and “dictate the designs and patterns of the pieces”(Mahabir)<sup>17</sup>. The photograph of the East Indian woman that accompanies Angel’s text can be compared on the one hand to colonial postcards in which indentured women were “made to pose in their jewelry”, and on the other to “images of black women laborers surrounded or overwhelmed by tropical landscape and crops” (Mahabir). Mahabir’s analysis of these images highlights this “distinct shift in the representation of Indian women laborers” in that “the images of land and agricultural produce are absent”. These postcards, therefore, replicate the staging of the photograph of the free East Indian woman, and in doing so “deliberately render invisible the labor” (Mahabir) that she performed; it effaces her relationship to her “real conditions of existence”<sup>18</sup>, that is, the dangerous environment of the sugar plantation, the poverty and harsh work, and the bad conditions of housing that labourers inherited from slavery. And yet, when Angel lists the East Indian woman’s jewellery, he uses words of excess:

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by the more acute capitalist by means of throwing his money again and again into circulation.” (Marx 1990, 254-55)

<sup>16</sup> I am indebted to John Gilmore for this observation. Hugh Tinker also states that as late as the 1890s in Demerara and Trinidad, the average wage of a labourer was still 1s. a day (1993, 185).

<sup>17</sup> At the time of writing, Joy Mahabir’s article (“Alternative Texts: Indo-Caribbean Women’s Jewelry”) was unpublished, but was due to appear in a forthcoming volume of the journal *Caribbean Vistas: Critiques of Caribbean Arts and Culture*. An abstract of the work can be found on the Indo-Caribbean Studies Association’s website as follows: Silent Archives: Indo-Caribbean Women’s Jewelry (abstract), May 2009. <<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/ccs/icsa/contributions/paperabstracts/>> 15.09.2010.

<sup>18</sup> This is engaging with Althusser’s two-stage definition of ideology. The two stages are “Thesis I. Ideology is a ‘representation’ of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (2001, 109). “Thesis II. Ideology has a material existence” (2001, 112).

...she was *loaded* with jewellery *all over* her person—*immensely heavy* silver bracelets from elbow to the shoulder, also from the wrists to the elbows on both arms; similar from ankles to knees; a kind of diadem on the forehead; *a lot* of rings of all sorts on her toes and her fingers; a pendant nose ring... (1923, 186) [my italics].

If his words point to an excess, he also exaggerates the amount of bracelets she has on her arm in the photograph, which might suggest that Angel views her, or is trying to position her, as culturally inferior, even if, as Mahabir highlights, Indo-Caribbean women preferred “an aesthetic of excess”. Mahabir realigns our perspective on the free Indian woman by highlighting that

Indo-Caribbean women consciously used jewelry to emphasize their role in the economic and social relations of the system of indentureship...[This created] an alternative visual archive through the practice of a materialist visuality that immediately referenced the invisible relations of indentureship.

Mahabir’s analysis allows us to resituate and relocate the free Indian woman’s subject position as a formerly indentured servant. Her analysis not only helps us think about the similarities and differences between the images of black and indentured women, but also suggests another aspect of the symbolic importance of the East Indian woman. Mahabir’s work provides a good segment of the corrective lens through which the rest of Angel’s depiction of this subject must be viewed.

Of all those subjects that appear in the diaries and journals of the colonials who worked on the other middle passage, the free female passenger in Angel’s text is one of the few—if not the only—(formerly) indentured East Indian subjects whose speech is represented by directly quoting their voice rather than filtering it through reported speech. While discussing the experience of her return to India, Angel says, “her expression and verdict on the subject [is], ‘India only fit place for coolie.’” This is as much of her voice as the text allows. She can hardly be said to have escaped the realms of subalterneity. On the contrary, the representation of her speech that emerges is brief and enigmatic when compared with the rest of the information in the text. The quotation seems to displace her identity again into a third space that matches the liminality of St Helena—it does not confirm her pride over the land of her birth, nor does it seem to include her amongst the other migrants. And yet, while in Trinidad as a labourer she had memories of the India that she had once lived in and a desire to see it again—“a longing came over her to return to the land of her birth” (1923, 185). On her arrival, not only had her imagined India<sup>19</sup> changed significantly, but so had she. Having made the return journey to India, she was not inclined to “do heavy penance, and pay a lot of money to get her caste back” (1923,

<sup>19</sup> This is Benedict Anderson’s idea of the nation as an “imagined community” (Anderson 1991).

185), and paid out of her own pocket for the journey back to Trinidad on the *Sheila*<sup>20</sup>. She does identify with the labourers though, making “a corner in fresh fish at St Helena by buying up all the fisherman’s catch for the day, as a treat for the coolies on board” (1923, 185). She takes charge of the situation and buys the fish and it is her money and action that make the difference not the captain’s nor the owner’s coffers; this is the only part of her story that Angel connects to St Helena, and it is, therefore, her agency and freedom to act in support of the newly indentured labourers that is central to locating her portrait alongside St Helena. She would have been in a position to tell newly recruited migrants what they could expect on the plantations, to give them tips, specialised knowledge, shortcuts, to warn them of the shortcomings of the system. The Trinidadian authorities grew to abhor returnees and found them subversive<sup>21</sup>; she is on the border between “inside” (though she was never fully that) and outside the indentured system. So, although she does not care to regain her caste or stay in India (she no longer fits into the patriarchal/caste system), her autonomy, agency, and affiliations to both the migrants and Trinidad are not in question.

The quotation attributed to her, “India only fit place for coolie” (1923, 185), seems to reflect both the contradictions of Angel’s text and her position as an in-between, liminal subject negotiating her space between inside and outside. Numerous meanings and different perspectives can be constructed around the quotation itself. Firstly, depending on the emphasis one puts on the sentence, either India or Trinidad emerge as the better place to be or live for a “coolie”. If one takes the word “fit” to be the adjectival form, she could mean, in a positive sense, that India is the only place suitable for “coolies”, but this would place the emphasis on a country which she is keen to leave. Or perhaps she is being derogatory both to India and/or to “coolies”—“only coolies would live in India”. This latter suggestion seems to correspond with her preference for Trinidad. Secondly, another meaning emerges if her intentions were to use the word “fit” as a verb—this

<sup>20</sup> The majority of migrants stayed in Trinidad once they got there: of the 143,939 migrants to Trinidad, 110,645, or 78 per cent, remained. The free East Indian woman was not part of that majority. There was “an annual average of 700 repatriates from Trinidad” to India (Ramesar 1996, 193) The number of people returning to the Caribbean after having taken advantage of the “free” passage home was not large either. In the fifteen years after the so-called “Queen of Sheba’s” return to Trinidad (that is, from 1877–1892) only 757 re-emigrated a second time (Ramesar 1996, 193). In the light of this information, she seems to fit into a small group who do not let fear guide their decisions but rather make their choices as adventurous risk-takers.

<sup>21</sup> Marianne Soares Ramesar describes the “tightening of opposition to return-immigrants re-engaging as indentureds”. They became “steadily unwelcome”, “deplored by both Protector and planters”. By 1895, a motion had been passed by the Trinidad Immigration Committee to stop the recruitment of returnees. This arose from the Trinidad Protector’s complaints “that these were undesirable recruits, who knew too much, and no doubt were less docile, than the new indentureds. They allegedly gave ‘bad’ advice to shipmates and fellow workers, and instigated disturbances”. They could not object to “those few who could afford to pay their way”. This is not the case with British Guiana where returnees “were regarded as experienced and valuable workers.” All of the information in this note is either paraphrased or quoted from Ramesar (1996, 194).

shifts the meaning from being one that suggests suitability for a purpose to one that aims to describe compatibility of shape and size between two things. Under this meaning, “India only fit place for coolie” would suggest some correspondence between India and a “coolie” akin to the idea of synecdoche, but based more on equality and direct comparison rather than the part standing in for the whole. And as Angel singles out the so-called “Queen of Sheba” in his narrative and refers to her more than once as being a “coolie”, the East Indian woman’s words seem to equate her symbolically with India.

Her sexuality is similarly symbolic of her agency and independence on the one hand, while on the other hand, the narrative also attempts to envelop and relocate this aspect of her identity. A reading of the text seems to suggest that, in the Caribbean, she became accustomed to sexual freedom, her own choice of partners and husbands, and became a shrewd operator in money matters—she accrued her fortune through “judicious marriage, and partly in her widowhoods, and as a trader”; in keeping with Angel’s thoroughgoing capitalist ideology, he domesticates and normalises her trading ability and entrepreneurial skills as “a natural inclination” (1923, 185)<sup>22</sup>. As outlined above, details in the text suggest her experience of creolisation in Trinidad shifted and realigned her perspective on women’s place in life and on their right to challenge male authority. Her withdrawal of her labour-power from the very indentured system that Angel so thoroughly supports is a challenge in itself. When he located her image amongst the black people of the Bible (not aligned with those in bondage, but placed on a queenly throne), he also tapped into a powerful seam in Old Testament patriarchy<sup>23</sup>.

Having discussed the East Indian woman in the photograph and the text, a number of unanswered questions remain concerning the East Indian woman’s background, identity and the circumstances that brought the text together. Is the woman in the photograph the same one that is in the text? One cannot be certain of this. The placing of the photograph in the original text faces Angel’s discussion of the woman he calls the “Queen of Sheba” and part of the caption reads “to face page 185”; this suggests that the two are connected but Angel is not explicit beyond these measures. We only have his word that there ever was such a woman on his ship. Where was the photograph taken and who organised this? Most likely, the photograph was taken in a photographer’s studio. At this time, taking a photograph required a whole set of heavy equipment and so it would have been impractical to have all of this lifted out on to the ship. One would imagine that, if there was a camera near the ship, Angel would have had photos of the *Sheila* taken, in keeping

<sup>22</sup> At this point, class, gender, and “race” are beginning to seamlessly segue and mingle into each other. A comment from Robert J. C. Young elaborates the point. “The conflictual structures generated by its [the patriarchal drama called ‘culture’] imbalances of power are consistently articulated through *points of tension* and forms of difference that are then superimposed upon each other: class, gender and race are circulated promiscuously and crossed with each other, transformed into mutually defining metaphors that mutate within intricate webs of surreptitious cultural values that are then internalised by those whom they define” [my italics—I refer back to these points of tensions below] (Young 1995, 182).

<sup>23</sup> Paul Gilroy discusses patriarchy in close connection with the Solomon and Sheba myth. (Gilroy 1993, 207)



with his bias towards it in the narrative, before he thought of taking a picture of the East Indian woman. The very first picture in the book is an artist's impression, a sketch or water colour, of the *Sheila* which takes pride of place opposite the title page. It is possible that the photo of the East Indian woman was taken in a studio either in India or the Caribbean. If the studio was in India, then it seems logical that the East Indian woman had photograph(s) of herself already in her possession when she boarded the ship and gave one to Angel. He would not have known her before she boarded the ship; if the photos were taken in India, it seems more probable that she organised them there. Or the studio could have been in the Caribbean. Angel may have asked her to sit for the photographs after their arrival—this seems to fit more closely with Joy Mahabir's comparisons with a range of photos of female labourers in the Caribbean. The other possibility is that the photo is just a recycled one or a postcard that Angel randomly selected to fit in with his narrative; this seems to fit with Ramabai Espinet's observation that this photograph became an "iconic, early and much-circulated postcard" (Espinet 2010).

The East Indian woman just discussed returns to the creolised community of Trinidad. What happens to her after she leaves Angel's ship is a mystery at the present moment. Perhaps research in the future will uncover further details of her life. Angel treats her in a similar but different way from other women in his narrative. Not only in Trinidad, but also elsewhere throughout his book, Angel keeps coming back to a transgressive obsession with inter-racial sex, but also directly links this to the means of production, and, therefore, economic exchange and colonial relations<sup>24</sup>. After reaching Trinidad and landing in Port of Spain "to see the sights", he suggests "The greatest of all [sights] from the human standpoint was the full-blooded negroes, male and female":

As a whole they were here, as physically perfect as human beings can be. The women especially. Their training, and habit of carrying heavy weights of all sorts poised on their heads from early childhood, gives them a perfect carriage, their chests well out (1923, 221).

While there are points of comparison, this construction differs in many ways with his view of the East Indian woman. His biological determination ("full-blooded") speaks of a difference set up around a pure cellular continuity uninterrupted by fluid transactions

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<sup>24</sup> Robert J.C. Young frames the argument of colonial desire well: "For it is clear that the forms of sexual exchange brought about by colonialism were themselves both mirrors and consequences of the modes of economic exchange that constituted the basis of colonial relations...The history of the meanings of the word 'commerce' includes the exchange both of merchandise and of bodies in sexual intercourse. It was therefore wholly appropriate that sexual exchange, and its miscegenated product, which captures the violent, antagonistic power relations of sexual and cultural diffusion, should become the dominant paradigm through which the passionate economic and political trafficking of colonialism was conceived" (1995, 182). This also relates to Tinker's assertions that the migrants were "articles of commerce" (1993, 38) and "units of production" (1993, 38).

from the outside<sup>25</sup> (Wright 1994); this coupled with his emphasis on complete (“As a whole”) physical perfection reveals Angel’s dialectically constructed inferiority complex immersed in desire and fear, on the one hand, while positing cultural superiority and repulsion on the other<sup>26</sup>. This is why when the Barbadian crew member suggests the possibility of marriage with a migrant Angel expresses his displeasure. Angel links their physical form with the work they do and thus associates the plantations to sexuality in keeping with Young’s observations above. Mariam Pirbhai’s articulation “that sexual transactions are the primary arena in which racial prejudice is most openly pronounced” (Pirbhai 2009, 63) seems to fit with this particular aspect of Angel’s text as well. Angel singles out the women (‘women especially’) and later devalues the men; the women are inaccessible to him in the way they would be if he worked on a plantation, but he makes clear his desire. He goes on to describe “the country ladies... tramping along with their dress skirts, as a sailor would say, ‘brailed up’ tight above their most ample hips, no shoes on, but affording a liberal display of fine bare legs” (1923, 222). In devaluing the men, Angel believes the women are “more inclined to work than their men folk—whom they maintain as often as not” (1923, 223). He reveals his fear of the men by saying, “there is no race alive that can be so contemptuously insulting as a truly angry negro; and they can be dangerous, too, not caring a rap for consequences” (1923, 225). In keeping with the ambivalence of colonial discourse, Angel can moralise about other sexual issues in his narrative. He criticises “our Government” for allowing “licenced brothels...carried on by Germans” with “sinks of debauchery and prostitution [that] flaunt[s] itself”; these have an “evil repute” in Calcutta and “other Indian and Eastern seaports” (1923, 127).

Although his opinions are shot through with ambivalence, Angel is transgressive for his time. By the 1870s, attitudes that had prevailed in the mid-eighteenth century that were marked to a greater degree by the absence of a “specific colour prejudice” (1990, 200) had changed completely. An example in this respect is Theophilus Richmond’s view of the “Original Native or Negro who are detestably ugly and resemble a combination of Ourang Outang and Nigger, a cross breed as it were between Man and Monkey, more than anything else that I can think of” (Richmond 2010, 35). This is much more in keeping with the changed discriminatory perspective of the mid-nineteenth century, which had intensified by Angel’s time and continued to harden while being accompanied

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<sup>25</sup> This is reminiscent of that most fanatical and bitter of contamination ideas the “one-drop rule”. Although Lawrence Wright says that it was a “peculiarly American institution”, Angel’s words suggest that the idea was present and circulating in the British imagination by the 1870s, so it had its equivalence of meaning and usage in Britain even if it “congealed” in America. Wright continues: “...known informally as ‘the one-drop rule,’ [it] defines as black a person with as little as a single drop of ‘black blood.’ This notion derives from a long discredited belief that each race had its own blood type, which was correlated with physical appearance and social behaviour” (1994).

<sup>26</sup> Ronald Hyam’s work has been useful in unpacking the “push and pull of an irreconcilable conflict, between desire and aversion for inter-racial sexual union; desire (which was biological) and aversion (which was cultural) ...perceived black men as *alike* in wanting white women, *different* in being more likely to give satisfaction, in being socially inferior but sexually privileged” [Hyam’s italics] (1990, p. 206).

by a similar gradual movement in attitudes toward sexuality<sup>27</sup>. There is no evidence that Angel's male gaze went beyond the imaginary sexual encounter to anything physical: an important point to note here is that the captain's wife accompanied him on the journey<sup>28</sup>. His wife's presence seems to create one of the points of tension that Young speaks of above. One wonders what she would have thought if she had read Angel's narrative or heard him speak about the black women as he does in the narrative.

In conclusion, Angel's inclusion of the East Indian woman in his narrative is without comparison in any of the other existent eyewitness accounts. One is left at the end of Angel's narration about her with a sense of absence; a lost opportunity for words that might have gone further towards standing in for her. While her image is distorted on the surface to a destructive extent, if one can untangle her from so much misrepresentation, a marvellous portrait begins to emerge of a strong, shrewd, fearless woman, who went out of her way to use the freedom she had become accustomed to in order to provide a meal for her newly indentured *jahaji-bahins/bahais* (ship-sisters/brothers).

Angel's writing reflects his belief in slavery and the indentured system; the above analysis takes those beliefs and reveals his imaginative relation to his surroundings. One of Madhavi Kale's wider observations seems to fit Angel's world outlook which he defined quite clearly: Empire, she says, was "predicated on naturalising and reproducing hierarchies of race, class, gender and nation along which ethnically-constituted populations in the colony were continuously, contradictorily evaluated" (1996, 110). The colony that Kale refers to is Trinidad. In the case of Angel, of course, the evaluation

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<sup>27</sup> The broad ideas expressed in this paragraph so far have been constructed from a reading of Hyam and Lorimer. Hyam traces these changing attitudes with regard to "race", sex and empire. He says, "The erosion of *respect*, which took place roughly between 1790 and 1840, was followed by the erosion of *sympathy* and the growth of prejudice, which mainly occurred between the mid-1850s and the late 1860s" [Hyam's italics] (1990, 200). While "interracial sex remained common until the 1860s", by the 1880s a watershed had occurred which ushered in "the inauguration of a fanatical Purity campaign" (1990, 201). Hyam is in agreement with Douglas Lorimer. While Lorimer notes the presence of prejudice as "outbursts of individuals, rather than a consequence of institutionalised discrimination", he sees "a larger measure of toleration" in the eighteenth century, with the strict bar existing "not against the marriages of blacks and whites, but against the miscegenous unions between Irish Catholics and English Protestants" (Lorimer 1978, 27). So, Angel is crossing the boundaries of acceptance for his time.

<sup>28</sup> The effects and impacts of the correlation between the presence of wives overseas accompanying their husbands, who were colonial agents, and the emergence of social distance is a point of contention. Ronald Hyam refines the argument by saying that even if "the arrival, in numbers, of resident wives, and the development of 'social distance' (or even an actual colour bar) is a contested conjuncture, the timing remains evidence of a remarkable correlation, to say the least" (1990, 208). Lorimer comments on English wives abroad, too. "Faced with a riotous mob of blacks," Lorimer says, "Englishmen would be forced to follow the precedent of British officers in India. They would have to shoot their wives to save them from a fate worse than death itself" (1978, 194). This begins to highlight the perceived sexual threat that colonials imagined while abroad with their wives and the overtly excessive reactions alongside the degree of fear that this instilled.

started before the migrants even reached the colony, so one can stretch that geography to incorporate the areas analysed above. Angel's is a romanticised and sexualised view; his text can help us to discover the tragedies of indentureship, but can also open up aspects that are less unfortunate.

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COOLIE PASSENGER ON BOARD.

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