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Race, Gender, and Visuality: Regulating Indian Women Subjects in the Colonial Caribbean

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Abstract

As scholars in Caribbean Studies struggle to deconstruct the complicated cultural history of colonialism, visual representations — such as painted imagery, sketches, photographs and lithographs, often accompanied by “word imagery”ⁱ (i.e. elaborate word descriptions that are meant to stand in for the image) — are increasingly recognised as valid and unique sites that challenge the story of Western modernity in its ontological relationship to the Caribbean. Recent works by Patricia Mohammed, Krista Thompson, Mimi Sheller, and Beth Fowkes-Tobinⁱⁱ have illuminated the construction of colonial regimes of visibility that aimed to discursively construct, position, and regulate colonized subjects and to produce a seemingly coherent, intimate and consensual code of social relationsⁱⁱⁱ. They have also thought about the multiple gestures of resistance, accommodation, assimilation, mimicry, ambivalence and transculturation that trouble the visual contract between colonial subjects and their landscapes, producing counter histories that complicate the ways in which contemporary post-colonial subjects are imagined. Aside from Mohammed’s recent work, very few studies in this emergent strand of Caribbean cultural studies address the issue of gender and its intersection with other sites of constructed difference such as race, ethnicity and sexuality. In addition, visual studies on

the colonial Caribbean, remaining very much an Afro-centric discourse, are yet to take seriously the iconography of East Indians in the region as a relational and constitutive category of consciousness as it glimpses into and questions the historical construction of identity, social structure and power relations.

Introduction

In this paper I would like to continue to address both these gaps by looking at how East Indian women were visualised in Caribbean colonial discourse in ways that discursively constructed, positioned and regulated them within a colonial Creole social hierarchy.^{iv} Like anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler, I see the colonial archives (in this case, the visual) as part and parcel of colonial “disciplinary regimes that have produced subjugated bodies and the sorts of identities created by them” as “strategies of rule”.^v Looking at paintings, sketches, postcard photographs, and word paintings in colonial travelogues and catalogues, the main thesis of this paper is that East Indian^{vi} women in the colonial Caribbean were discursively produced and managed on the registers of labour and culture: as a specific category of labour with differential implications for social mobility and freedom, and as a distinct cultural other within the matrix of colonial social relations. Moreover, these visual registers allow us to contemplate “the relationship between visible characteristics and invisible properties, outer form and inner essence”^{vii} that rationalised the optic governance of Indian women in the West. As racialized/ethnicized and gendered subjects, East Indian women were visualised in distinct ways in relation to colonial men and other categories of colonial women that ensured their double marginalization. Images that focus specifically on Indian women or set them at the peripheries of the composition can be regarded as tenuous visual contracts between Indian women as depicted objects (objectified) and the colonial gaze that strategically depicted and forcefully legitimated these representations. As a result, the primary visual regime of representation that allows us to view the Indian woman subject in the colonial Caribbean also reflects the regulation and discipline of Indian women in line with colonial rule and rationality. Nowhere in the colonial archives has the author found evidence of Indian women attempting to re-vision and re-cast themselves in the visual catalogues of the nineteenth century. It is only by reading the second glances and slippages of the colonial eye with or against the grain of historical context that we might illumine an *other* radar of consciousness and self-determination on the part of Indian women. This paper, therefore, admits to retelling part of the story from the perspective of the colonizing gaze, while at the same time challenging the seeming coherence and claims to the all-encompassing power of this hegemonic gaze. It first sketches the socio-historical context which positioned East Indians in the colonial Caribbean and then focuses on how colonial travelogues and catalogues represented and naturalised Indian women as labouring and cultural subjects.

Historical context: Positioning Indians in the colonial Caribbean

According to anthropologist Viranjini Munasinghe,^{viii} the “material and ideological coordinates” for positioning East Indians in places like Trinidad, British Guiana and Jamaica emerged from the existing colonial context even before they began arriving. The immediate post-emancipation (post-1838) period in the Anglophone Caribbean was characterised by a decline in the economic prosperity of plantations, exacerbated by concerns about labour shortage in what was generally referred to as the “West Indian labour question”.^{ix} The period was marked by a transition to wage labour, efforts to curtail African ex-slaves’ self-reliance and symbolic ascendancy, fears about the rise of an Afro-peasantry separate from the plantation, increasing pressures from the planter class to secure inexpensive and immobile sources of labour, fluctuating incomes from the

sugar industry, and planter advocacy for the importation of substitute labour from China, Europe and India. British colonials and planters regarded this overturning of the established order symbolically as a “return to barbarism” as African ex-slaves withdrew from the plantation and set up peasant and urban communities.^x This marked an inversion of planter-labour relations whereby planters were now in a situation of industrial dependence on waged ex-slaves.^{xi} According to historian Verene Shepherd, planters in Jamaica resorted rather unsuccessfully to coercive tactics and unacceptable labour terms such as anti-settler laws, lower wages, destruction of ex-slaves’ property, and prevention of ex-slaves’ land purchases to keep African ex-slaves bound to the plantation.^{xii} This manoeuvre was however coded in British administrative and planter colonial discourses as the fall of the Negro from the labouring grace of the plantation. Africanist discourses double registered black urban communities as signs of urban degeneration, peasant communities as squatting, and above all, any off-plantation activity as idleness and non-entitlement to colonial citizenship. This regime of representation served to bolster the new scheme of labour substitution in which, after an initial period of experimentation in Mauritius, East Indian indentured labourers were first brought to British Guiana (1838), Trinidad and Jamaica (1845) and later to eleven other Caribbean colonies (British, French and Dutch) between 1838 and 1917.^{xiii} While British colonial discourse asserted that emancipation from the plantation resulted in the “negro’s” retrogression into depravity, it simultaneously claimed that the incoming “coolie”^{xiv} or East Indian immigrant labour force was necessary for stabilising the sugar industry and restoring British hegemony.

Indentured “coolies” were therefore symbolically cast as saviours of the plantation in colonial discourse, as they not only signalled a return to labour, but also a return to a mode of rationality that restored white *and* Creole planters and merchants as the rightful owners of capitalist enterprise and modernity in the region. This restoration depended on the strict regulation, through indenture contracts and legal arrangements, of indentured Indian labourers within the confines of a cheap, docile, immobile and controllable quasi-proletariat that would not threaten or dare to revolutionise their relation with capital.^{xv} In this new labour regime, indentured Indian women were gauged as problematic as they were initially viewed by planters as economic liabilities; on the Victorian yardstick of industry Indian women were assumed to possess an inferior capacity for plantation labour. This resulted in their being assigned to what the planters considered as “easier” tasks that “reasonably” deserved lower wages.^{xvi}

This hierarchy of plantation work was not only disadvantageous to Indian women in terms of their earnings, but also structurally positioned them as subordinates to Indian men with whom they worked side by side, and with equal effort. In the initial phase of indentureship, women’s reproductive capacity was also seen as a liability as planters imagined that reproduction and child rearing would extract women from the workforce, and coerce planters to incur maintenance costs for what they regarded as idle labour. As we shall see later in this article, it was, however, Indian women’s sexuality about which planters and colonial officials were mostly concerned, as it was an important rationalising strand in the stabilisation of the predominantly Indian male workforce as the crucial vertebra of the plantation-capitalistic enterprise. Disciplining Indian women’s sexuality

was more about securing a sexual contract between Indian women and multiple patriarchies in the name of both Victorian morality and economic rationality.

In addition to these disciplinary gestures that re-rationalised the relation between labour and capital, post-emancipation colonies, especially Trinidad and Jamaica, were in the midst of a cultural crisis due to the increasing contestation from the free coloured middle-class for self-determination and cultural dominance. Within this early emergence of what some have identified as the articulation of nationalist sentiment,^{xvii} colonial subjects were imagined and evaluated in relation to Creole^{xviii} culture that was in itself quite complex and multiply-configured, combining cultural characteristics of European and African cultures as the extremities of a scale of indigeneity. All Creole subjects were considered to be inside the *imaginative* boundaries of the colony, but were ranked against each other according to their approximation to the European end of the continuum of mixture. In colonies such as Trinidad and Jamaica with an unusually large free coloured middle class, the power of this group to determine the terms of inclusion implied a strict and selective process of admission and access to indigeneity.^{xix}

If black ex-slaves occupied the lowest position in the Creole social hierarchy, East Indians or “Coolies” were placed totally outside this structure as they did not embody a mixture, biologically or culturally, of either of the primary Afro and Euro ingredients of Creole culture. In fact, East Indians were cast as cultural aliens who were saturated with an ancestral culture that was not of the New World.^{xx} This cultural and ontological separation was further structured and naturalised by spatial and occupational segregation of “coolies” from the rest of Creole society. According to Munasinghe, the second half of the nineteenth century entailed a legal and spatial differentiation of East Indians through occupational segregation as settled workers near to the plantation while segments of the black population “gravitated to what they perceived as higher-status occupations.”^{xxi} In this period of differential freedoms, Creole and Indian cultures maintained predominantly exclusive relations within the confines of plantation society, although Indian indentureship was deemed necessary for the partial recuperation of the plantation in the midst of a growing economic crisis in the global sugar industry. Historian Brigid Brereton claims that although the Trinidadian Indian population had increased to one-third of the island by the 1920s, East Indians were still kept separate from the other social tiers by language, culture, religion, and ethnicity.^{xxii} More significantly, contrary to the ways in which East Indians were treated as a homogeneous alien social category (the fourth tier at the bottom of society), Brereton states that socioeconomic differentiation had begun within the Indian community in the late nineteenth century^{xxiii}. This differentiation also occurred on the basis of gender relations, in which Indian women were not only viewed as cultural aliens as a result of Anglo-orientalist positionings but especially as subjects who were simultaneously outside of Creole notions of respectability — as women who did not nor could truly ever meet, and who therefore threatened, the standards of colonial womanhood.

Masking alienation: Indentured women as feminised underclass

The category “coolie” was used in the nineteenth century to denote labourers, especially from Asia, who were contracted both coercively and voluntarily for work in the New

World. The term is historically racialized and troubles the division between slave and migrant labour. Moreover in colonial discourse, the “coolie” was a constructed category of labour and culture allotted a very calculated degree of freedom and limited authenticity in the social hierarchies of colonial societies. According to literary critic Lisa Lowe, it is important to demarcate this category of labour as one in “a range of intermediate forms of coercive labour”.^{xxiv} If we are to take seriously the claims of Lowe and Moon-Ho Jung^{xxv} about indentured labour as a specific category of restricted freedom, how might we extend and further nuance this argument in relation to the differential placement of “coolie” female productive labour within the context of West Indian indentureship? Perhaps in the colonial visual catalogue we might glimpse this intricate construction of the labour contract with its unique implications for the conditional freedom of East Indian women and the casting of these women “in the epic story of world-historic capital”.^{xxvi}

East Indian women were initially positioned on the Caribbean landscape, first and foremost as labouring subjects, symbolically restoring order and stability to plantation society. Yet the images of women predominantly in plantation spaces indicate her spatial confinement and limitation to a particular set of social relations. These images suggest that as labourers, Indian women worked exclusively with Indian men, with very limited mobility as bound labourers, and with little access to extra-plantation (especially urban) relations with Afro-Creole men and women. In addition, Indian women are depicted working alongside Indian men, as if they were equal in the ranks of this captive indentured quasi-proletariat. Visually, gendered differences of labour were carefully masked in sketches such as *Coolies A-field* in which both the male and female Indian figures are depicted working alongside each other, without much hint of how they might be positioned vis-à-vis each other on the wage scale. Are these visual mementos indicative of the levelling of East Indian men and women as equal members of the indentured underclass or are they suggestive of the will to efface the double marginalization of indentured women as a feminised underclass of recruits?

As mentioned above, Indian women were often positioned in jobs such as weeding and cleaning that were viewed as less demanding and remunerative than the jobs of digging and loading which were valued as male work. According to historian Madhavi Kale, the Demerara planter of British Guiana, John Gladstone, recommended that indentured women be paid at a lower rate than Indian men, which “evidently assumed that the women would be less productive labourers than Indian men would be... Even if women worked as many hours as men did, they would be paid less, on the grounds that labor itself (classified as ‘light’ work, or ‘women’s’ work) was of less value or less onerous than that performed by men.”^{xxvii} Tejaswini Niranjana claims that “there were skilled ‘men’s’ tasks (milling, forking, truck loading) and less-skilled ‘women’s’ tasks (such as weeding, manuring, supplying, and cane cutting, which were also the lowest-paid tasks). Even when women did heavy men’s tasks like truck loading, they were paid the same as other women. In 1870 and 1875, a fixed minimum wage was set for men at 25 cents; for women it was always less.”^{xxviii}

The gender wage disparity also placed indentured women in debt to traders and grocers, and in certain situations their rations were deducted from these already miniscule

wages.^{xxix} Indian women were therefore alienated from their labour in much larger measure than Indian men as much of their work was undervalued. Hidden in these images of Indian men and women working side by side is therefore the possibility of an economic contract in which Indian women, as subordinated labourers, were compelled into economic dependence on men. According to Niranjana, “low wages drove women to increased dependence on male partners, although they sometimes were able to negotiate the terms of such dependence.”^{xxx} This translated into a greater degree of marginalization and dehumanization as Indian women were constituted as a racialized and gendered underclass.

Making respectable “wives” out of “whores”

The many paintings and postcard photographs of Indian women in the West Indies, especially from the 1870s onwards, reveal much more about the evolving power of colonial media forms to frame the projects of history. While it is difficult to dispute the rising importance of visual currency in the late nineteenth century, images of “coolies” reflected the social and historical context of indentureship as a laboratory for re-making Indian women in Western-Creole society. Images of Indian women in sketches of “coolie families” or postcard photographs reveal less about their natural ontological selves than it does about their constructedness as regulated subjects in the context of Victorian codes of gender rationality, especially regarding respectability.^{xxxi} Images such as *Coolie Family* and *Coolie Woman*^{xxxii} painted by Michel Jean Cazabon, a Trinidadian Creole artist in the 1880s, are resonant with the project of constructing Indian women’s respectability. In the midst of growing opposition in India to indentureship these images might be considered colonial propaganda of a restored “sexual contract” between East Indian indentured men and women.^{xxxiii} By casting “coolies” as immoral subjects of the East, made respectable by Western modernity (in this case specifically under the indentureship system), these images served to neutralise any criticisms about the (Anglo) civilising power of the indentureship system.

According to Prabhu Mohapatra, the 1850s to 1870s witnessed an increasing spate of “wife murders” among the East Indian population in Trinidad and British Guiana, as “promiscuous coolie” women were murdered by their “cuckolded coolie” husbands.^{xxxiv} By casting Indian women as lecherous whores and Indian men as violently jealous,^{xxxv} official and lay colonial discourse viewed the moral depravity of “coolies” as justification for colonial intervention.^{xxxvi} Indian women, more so than Indian men, were however held accountable for this depravity, and as such required a specific regime of regulation that aligned them with Victorian measures of womanhood. The response by colonial official discourse to the incidence of murders of Indian women was to categorise this violence as “wife murder,” which according to Mohapatra, “collapsed a variety of relationships between plantation men and women”. Indian women were thus expected to be and referred to as “reputed wives” and the men, “reputed husbands”, under colonial marriage laws (1880s).^{xxxvii} Within this simplistic logic, murdered Indian women were viewed in official discourse as “unfaithful wives” deserving punishment while Indian men were referred to as “cuckolded husbands” driven by a certain essential nature. The discourse of moral bankruptcy of the “coolie” is echoed and reinforced throughout the colonial archive. Captain and Mrs. Swinton, in their *Journal of a Voyage with Coolie*

Emigrants from Calcutta to Trinidad (1859) had already begun to impress on British audiences the idea of “coolies” as cultural others by constructing a case around “immorality”. Mrs. Swinton wrote as follows:

They have no morality whatever: if they fancy each other, they become man and wife for the time being, and change again when they please. The parents of girls will sell their children for a few rupees. I may here mention that in the island, and on the plantations which I visited, I found the same immorality was carried on, and no provision for instructing them in Christianity; on the contrary, their own heathen processions were allowed to be carried on, but good care was taken of their bodies, as there was a doctor to take charge of them.^{xxxviii}

Similarly, J. A. Froude exclaimed that “the coolies have the fiercer passions of their Eastern blood. Their women being few are tempted occasionally into infidelities, and would be tempted more often...”^{xxxix} Unwilling to admit that this trend was in main caused by the conditions of indenture, colonial officials resorted to Orientalist (i.e. culturalist) and naturalist explanations that explained “wife murder” either as an East Indian phenomenon or *naturally* the result of a high male-to-female ratio.^{xl} Rather than suspect the indenture system, Mohapatra claims that official discourse “staged the phenomenon of wife murder as a morality play” between “unfaithful wives” and “cuckolded husbands” caused by “natural cultural traits of the Coolies and the natural consequence of an unbalanced sex ratio on the plantations”.^{xli} These explanations served to discursively manage “coolie” men and women in distinct ways so as to restore the ideal of the Indian family as a rational element of colonial governance. The Protector of Immigrants in Trinidad declared in 1881 that unchaste women were actually recruited from India, denying any claims that indenture could have any part to play in the situation.^{xlii} Indian women (by nature) were scripted as chattel, unchaste and morally depraved in an effort to naturalise colonial culturalist claims and justify the colonial civilising agenda. Similarly, Indian men were constructed as prone to jealousy and naturally violent. On the other hand, the murder of Indian women was seen to be a “natural” result of the low proportion of women to men, despite the ratio of imported indentured women to men being raised from 25% to 40% in 1868.^{xliii} Mohapatra emphasises that the phenomenon of “wife murder...was represented, and therefore understood, in a manner which denied the uniqueness of the circumstances, elided the disruption caused by indentured immigration, and emphasized continuities, both cultural and psychological.”^{xliv}

Reddock locates “wife murder” discourse within a larger area of concern known as the “Indian Woman Problem”.^{xlv} She claims that changes in recruitment of women vis-à-vis men “reflected the difficulties and contradictions in recruiting *more* women at the same time as recruiting ‘the right kind of women’.”^{xlvi} These “contradictions” emerged in relation to “the planters’ short-term preference for adult male migration and their long-term need for a self-producing, cheap and stable labour force.”^{xlvii} Reddock further adds that “single pregnant women,” “known prostitutes” and “coarse low caste females” were disqualified in favour of a “better class of women”.^{xlviii} Culturalist and naturalist

arguments made way for disciplinary discourses and institutional arrangements which invested colonial officials and the indenture system with the power to restore the sexual contract between Indian men and women. Mohapatra claims as follows:

Marriage laws were formulated to ensure orderly access to women's bodies, by curbing the 'immoral' nature of the women and channelize [sic] the violent instincts of men. The image of the family that the colonial state gradually inscribed into the law of marriage was a patriarchal one which assigned to the woman the role of reproducer.^{xlix}

By legally bolstering the image of the Indian family, colonial discourse sought to restore the moral contract between Indian men and women. This contract was bolstered by another contract between two co-present patriarchies, one European and the other more subordinated, racialized, "coolie" patriarchy. By reconstructing Indian women as respectable subjects, European patriarchy, though not giving up full control over women's labouring and reproducing functions, acquiesced to Indian men limited custodial control over Indian women's bodies and mobility, while retaining the power to regulate Indian patriarchy in the name of moral governance. This contract aimed to foreclose the possibility of sexual liaisons between Indian women and Afro-Creole men, especially since ethnic miscegenation between the two colonized groups would threaten the rationalisation logic of morality for both patriarchies — it would threaten Indian men's control over Indian women, which would in turn destabilise the former's labour efficiency. In addition, the increasing costs of importing fresh labour were offset by the pressure exerted on Indian women as "reputed wives" to literally reproduce plantation labour. These measures imposed a Victorian regime of domesticity on Indian women. Discursively contained and managed as "wives" and mothers, the respectability of Indian women was premised on their unfreedom — the possibilities for mobility, self-determination, and sexual agency were severely curtailed by legal and customary disciplinary measures that made them tentatively rational subjects.

M. J. Cazabon's paintings of "coolie" families and women were produced at the height of this colonial anxiety as colonial propaganda that reflected the restoration of the East Indian family and the moralising claims of indenture. Cazabon's portrayal of the well-dressed "coolie" woman in the *Coolie Family*^l served to invert the distorted image of the morally depraved "infidel" as a means of imaging the return to moral order via respectability. According to Mohapatra, these colonial images of "coolie" families also reflect the discursive "creation of a family from an amorphous mass of coolies".^{li} In the colonial archive, word images abound of happy "coolie" families, chaste-looking "coolie" women, and "coolie" gentlemen, accompanied by "coolie" children that frame Indian women's respectability in terms of regulated sexuality i.e. mothering, sexual control (acquiescence?), and implied heteronormativity. Victorian travel writer Charles Kingsley made numerous references to "coolie women" as "clever and delicate little women"^{lii}, "bedizened in jewels, bangles, and long graceful Indian shawls of harmonious hues", possessing "every attitude, gesture, tone, ...full of grace; of ease, courtesy, self-restraint, dignity..."^{liii} Likewise, he scripted coolie men as "graceful, pleasant and fond of children" which tentatively recuperated their image as paternal subjects aligned with

Victorian codes of respectability. Hence, while these word descriptions and images worked to instantiate the coolie as a contained cultural outsider, they also double-registered as a mark of the success of indenture in civilising coolies through the institution of the nuclear family. The images are therefore reflective of the discursive disciplinary apparatus of colonial rule and its gendered nuances.

Ranking colonial women: Respectability and corruptibility

On his 1888 travelogue *Down the Islands*, E.A. Paton orients himself in relation to the many colonial women he encounters, doing so by marking the differences between these categories of women. According to Mimi Sheller, “Paton’s photographic eye aligns the Coolie woman alongside the similarly posed Martinican woman, who serves as a point of reference so that their differences can be compared. The crucial points of comparison for him are their clothing, jewellery, skin tone, facial features, and style of movement.”^{liv} Racial and ethnic differences were therefore important to the gendered calibration and positioning of colonial subjects. Conditioned by the British colonizer’s intent on reducing wages via labour competition, both “Hindoos” and “negroes” in Trinidad and British Guiana were measured on the Victorian yardsticks of industry. Rationalising the indentured system of labour, Charles Kingsley’s symbolic elevation of the labouring “coolie” subject was made possible by his vilification of the “negro.” This symbolic manoeuvring also reconstituted and relied on the inscription of a moral discourse that conditionally conferred civilised status upon “coolies,” while “negroes” were denigrated as lazy and morally degenerate. On the grounds of labour and culture, therefore, both “negroes” and “coolies” were constructed and managed vis-à-vis each other, as inhabiting a comparative difference from two contentious positions. While the colonial visual archive does not seem to depict moments and scenes of co-presence of Indian women with women of different ethnic groups, the juxtaposition of separate images produced within the same period might allow for a relational reading of the ranking of Indian women vis-à-vis other groups of colonial women.

Hierarchies among women in colonial society were gendered derivatives of the general social structure in Creole society. White women were tentatively positioned at the very apex of a morally sanctioned ladder of femininity^{lv}, while Creole women were viewed as closely approximating standards of respectability. At the bottom of this hierarchy, Chinese, Indian and black women competed for the next ranking, a sort of approximation to subaltern-rank respectability,^{lvi} and were ostracised in measure with their risk of corruptibility in certain situations. As a result of the disciplining of Indian women’s place in the nuclear family, their respectability was used to measure black women’s respectability. This antagonistic definition of femininity between black and Indian women could only be defined in proximity to the unattainable measures of white and Creole women’s subjecthood; their tentativeness evaluated on their risk of transgressing Creole society’s codes of respectability. Captioning the image *Waiting for the Races*, Charles Kingsley substitutes the “Hindoo woman” for the “negress” as the new visual icon of subaltern-rank respectability:

The hobby-horses swarmed with Negresses and Hindoos of the lower order. The Negresses, I am sorry to say, forgot themselves, kicked up their legs, shouted to the bystanders, and were altogether incondite. The Hindoo women, though showing much more limbs than the Negresses, kept them gracefully together, drew their veils round their heads, and sat coyly, half frightened, half amused, to the delight of their ‘papas,’ or husbands...^{lvii}

If we are to take Kingsley’s codes of respectability seriously, the relative postures of the Indian and black woman suggest that respectability is not only conformity with Eurocentric notions of feminine roles, but intricately tied to representational cues such as dress, comportment, and particular nuances of interaction. The burden of respectability is placed specifically on “coolie” women, in direct opposition to Kingsley’s “negress” of ill-repute. For example, the Indian woman stands “gracefully” as opposed to the “negresses” who “kicked up their legs”. At the same time the Indian woman is symbolically elevated as a disciplined feminine subject, Kingsley expunges the “negress” from the ranks of feminine respectability, making her sub-human, by masculinising her. In other parts of his visual verbiage he gender-bends the “negress” as “coarse” and possessing “super abundant animal vigour”, as the referent against which Indian women’s “grace” is measured. In this antagonistic manoeuvre it appears as if there is little conceptual space even within subaltern-rank respectability for multiple and equal subject formations. Alternatively, Mimi Sheller claims that Kingsley’s descriptions of “coolies” and “negroes” were aimed at “representing degrees of racial difference”.^{lviii} Another interesting observation in *Waiting for the Races* is that the Indian woman faces away from the image interface while the black and Chinese women are in conversation, though in their own racialized groups. Encased by her children and “papa”, as mother and “wife”, she is left faceless, voiceless, expressionless, implying unquestioned consent with this casting. Yet Kingsley reminds us that even in her silence, her respectability is tentative, made so, only by a measurable and comparable other, for her limbs are more exposed than those of the “negress”. Her exposed limbs call attention to the possibility of moral slippage and sensual corruption by inviting male fantasy. This slippage is also bolstered by the cultural otherness of Indian women, whose *oriental* dress define her as a culturally saturated alien, with little ability to adapt to the appropriate cultural codes of femininity in a Creole society.

If in the pro-establishment eyes of colonial travellers we read the project of ranking Indian women above black women, the paintings of Creole artist M. J. Cazabon of colonial women reflect the flip side of this dynamic, in which black women were conceded greater access to respectability than Indian women. Daniel Segal argues that “though ‘Africans’ and ‘East Indians’ were both deemed inferior to ‘Europeans’, their subordination differed in semantic structure.”^{lix} Specifically resonant with Kingsley’s *Waiting for the Races* and Cazabon’s portraits of colonial women is Segal’s point, that while the “Negro” was culturally empty and prone to approximating “respectability”, the “Coolie” was viewed as culturally saturated and in contrast to the “Negro”. It is on this scale of cultural contrast that Segal allows us to assess Cazabon’s portraiture in terms of the relative greater access of black women than Indian women to Creole femininity. One

might even argue that Cazabon's catalogue, distinct from Kingsley's imagery, could also be bolstered by an impulse to normalise Creole derivatives of respectability as a narrative of indigeneity, in which case the Indian woman becomes the sole indispensable other against which to configure this project.

Beth Fowkes-Tobin who analyses the "semiotics of clothing" in Agostino Brunias's eighteenth-century images of mulatresses in the British and French West Indies, opines that his ethnographic art "are taxonomic images of specimens, not representations of individuals".^{lx} Similarly M. J. Cazabon's repeated portrayals of Trinidad's coloured Creole women^{lxi} is quite striking not only from the perspective of exoticizing women of the mulatto segment (to which Cazabon belonged), but as a form of classification as an almost-ideal supplemental social type of feminine respectability i.e. the Creole "lady," against which to calibrate "negro" and "coolie" women. Paintings like *Creole Woman with a Parasol* not only depict the clothing styles of a cultured Creole segment, but are an attempt to impose distinctly European conventions of representation (particular styles of comportment, for instance) on Creole women — a sort of compromise or derivative of European codes, as a means of naturalising and normalising Creole codes of feminine respectability. Cazabon's images of free coloured women with parasols and gala dresses served to frame them within very European conventions of portraiture — their posture, comportment and Creole dress code as powerful subtleties of West Indian respectability. Read within the context of an incipient Creole nationalism in the nineteenth century, Cazabon's Creole ladies sought to establish Creole femininity as the indigenous referent against which other social types of women were evaluated and about which a hierarchy of social types would be ranked in relation to Creolist agendas. Yet at the same time images like *Creole Woman with a Parasol* disturb and tentatively displace the hegemony of white female respectability, while they continue to entrench mainstream colonist productions of subaltern black and Indian women.

Cazabon's renditions of *Negress in Gala dress* and *Old Negress, French*,^{lxii} *in Gala Dress* in clothing similar to the coloured Creole woman collapses the social distinction between these two groups (Negress and Creole woman). Implied in this comparison is the "negress" as aspiring to subjecthood through a Creole feminine sensibility (though this might be read beyond unconscious mimicry). The effect of this visual comparison translates into a blurring of the cultural and class distinctions between the coloured Creole woman and the Negress, probably as a means of visually amalgamating coloured and ex-slave segments in the interest of widening the platform for nationalist claims. If Cazabon's Creole women and "negresses" come into close alignment to support a coloured nationalist agenda, this registers in relation to the East Indian woman in Cazabon's painting *Coolie Woman*. At the same time Cazabon extends his exoticizing gaze on the "coolie woman" as a social type, his depiction of her Oriental dress stamps her as culturally inferior, beyond the codes of Creole respectability. Here the Indian woman's alienness is not only assessed in relation to the "negress", but in relation to the rank and file of Creole womanhood. Though her deflected gaze suggests restraint, Cazabon's subtle visual cues of the "coolie woman's" partial head coverage and the short length of her skirt (in relation to the depicted Creole and Negro women) hint at the ease of slippage into sexual corruption and moral depravity, posing, from the perspective of

the Creole gaze, questions about the tentativeness of Indian women's respectability. These questions of feminine quality and suitability resonate with already circulating ideas of Indian women's immorality in the context of "wife" murder discourse.

These visual distinctions beg an extended inquiry into whether the rise of Creole nationalist agendas, in competition with Anglo-hegemony, was premised on the deployment of Orientalist discourses,^{lxiii} setting East Indians as the prime cultural others against which coloured and black segments amalgamated claims for self-determination. In this vein, Cazabon's catalogue of colonial women bears testimony to the dynamic and ambivalent positioning of Indian women in relation to complex and entangled colonial projects. Though anti-colonial in terms of symbolically elevating, normalising and indigenizing Creole women's respectability, Cazabon's images are reflective of a desire to re-position the "negress" in close proximity to a culturally-encoded configuration of respectability, coupled with another desire to distance the "coolie" woman from the very same benchmark of indigenized female subjecthood. This re-mapping of indigeneity on the basis of gender and race not only re-fixed these women in a social hierarchy aimed at bolstering Creole nationalist claims, but also extended to Creole men the privilege of ranking racialized women and possibly reconfiguring colonial relations.

The provisional Sable Venus: Indian women as sensual fetish

At the same time that colonial discourse sought to measure, control, and rationalise Indian women's sexuality, it paradoxically fetishized them as innocent for the consuming phallo-centric gaze of white masculinity as male British travel writers unleashed their own sexual and sensual desires on "coolie" women. These racially coded constructions of intimacy and desire were underwritten by regimes of truth that Ann Laura Stoler has referred to as the "carnal knowledge of race and the intimate in colonial rule".^{lxiv} Similarly, Sheller claims that these women's bodies were used to gauge the "relative distance between places, and *orient* the male traveler".^{lxv} This "distance between places" is both physical and ideological, as colonial anthropologists struggled to define the relation between East and West in ways that authenticated a westernised story of modernity. The configuration of relations between European male travellers and Indian women in the West (Indies) is therefore a worldly matter of reiterating and compounding grand narratives, though these relations must confront the nuances of geographical and historical specificity. The frontispiece to Edward Paton's 1888 travelogue, *A Hindu Cooly Belle*, portrayed a young East Indian woman in sari, bedizened with jewelry, her gaze deflected away from the gaze of the viewer, and walking in the town of Demerara, British Guiana.

Paton repeatedly referred to her as "a young girl", "a young Hindoo lady", and an "Aryan kinswoman", which not only sensualized the "cooly belle" but also conferred on her a mark of respectability. His detailed catalogue of her Aryan-like physiognomic features and her numerous "quaint" adornments made her "ethereal" and a "Goddess of the Dawn". At the same time, threatened by the implications of being "bewildered and bewitched", Paton referred to the "cooly belle" as "a typical woman of an ancient race" and remarked that "*except for her sable colour she might have served for a Caucasian beauty.*"^{lxvi} It is this exceptionality that naturalises her approximation to Paton's Victorian

codes of feminine beauty and respectability, always a degree removed from the ideal of the authentic (white) Venus and, in this particular context, another degree removed from the already enchanted Creole woman (the original Venus supplement). Perhaps it is in the context of competing hegemonies, one Anglo and the other Creole,^{lxvii} that Paton is scanning the landscape for a more malleable and innocent sable Venus subject who will be compelled into his “in-cumming” gaze. Yet, in light of the previous discussion, we must understand the Indian woman’s “sable-ness” as provisional, a move that reveals more about the speculative nature, rather than the ontological power of colonial discourse. The real “sable” is that which is in part constituted and naturalised by whiteness. This tentativeness is possibly related to the tension between the demands for Indian women’s respectability (depicted as clothed figures) and the opposing desire to pornographize her i.e. to imaginatively undress her as a sexual object devoid of agency. Yet the coolie Sable Venus is not portrayed naked as the white or mulatto Venus^{lxviii}, though there is some hint of exposure, for example in Cazabon’s *Coolie Woman*, in which her arms and lower legs/feet are exposed. It is this subtle visual tentativeness that calibrates coolie women on the continuum of respectability and sensual fetish, constructing a permeable boundary, permitting an opportunity for intimacy that transgresses both moral and racial boundaries.

In her analysis of West Indian colonial iconography, Patricia Mohammed illumines the ways in which the colonial gaze slotted racialized women (the indigenous woman, the black washerwoman, the mulatto woman) into a hierarchy of Venuses for the purposes of rationalising fantasies of intimacy.^{lxix} The figure of the “coolly belle” signals an attempt by the male colonial gaze to insert the new contender for the position of Sable Venus (previously occupied by mulatto women) within this racialized and gendered continuum of what Mohammed refers to as an evolutionary series of “analogous” Venuses, as a way of entitling and regulating intimacy with the feminised other. In fact, Paton’s “coolly belle” represents a deliberate attempt to set up an unfettered government of intimacy as the East Indian Sable Venus is brought into sharp focus at the same time that black and mixed women, as well as male others are deliberately made absent in the scene of Demerara. He reveals this strategy of interpellation as he encounters the “coolly belle”: “I should have passed her, had I not slackened my gait ... measuring my paces by hers, (I) followed behind the unknown wayfarer — respectfully and at a proper distance — to study and admire her...”^{lxx} Using one of Lowe’s definitions of intimacy as that of privacy,^{lxxi} I imply that Paton seems to desire a tentative interruption of public space (the Demerara street) so as to contemplate and sensate his more private desires (based on Victorian codes of desire). The power of Paton’s fetishizing gaze to suspend the rationality of moral codes and naturalise his flirtatiousness, without self-discipline (a sort of sexual licence), is testament to a tenuous double standard^{lxxii} encoded with assumptions of entitlement to asymmetrically frame and regulate the Sable Venus as a quasi-pornographic object.

Despite his attempts to frame the “coolly belle” as a tentative object of the traveller’s sensual pleasure, he mentioned that “she caught me looking at her, and smiled quizzically, as if she found me grotesque or outlandish in appearance”,^{lxxiii} implying that she was scrutinising and challenging his sensualizing gaze, even visually disciplining

Paton within the very contract of Victorian respectability. In Paton's *A Cooly Woman*, the woman returns the gaze with a sense of suspicion and a refusal to recognise Paton's attempt to fix her into the mould of the respectable and docile "Hindu lady" or "Sable Olympian goddess". Comparing this image to Paton's *Hindu Cooly Belle*, Sheller similarly asks whether the *Cooly Woman* is returning the "tourist gaze", for "she gazes steadfastly at the camera, she lifts her long hair provocatively, with hand on hip, and her skin tone darker and features less delicate."^{lxxiv} Paton, himself, and the British audience he is privileging through his gaze are made vulnerable and objectified by the *Cooly Woman*, i.e. he is disoriented. In fact, Lisa Lowe has argued that even within the folds of Orientalist thought there are particular locations for challenging colonial hegemony which occur in response to "an anxiety about, or consciousness of," the gaze of the Oriental.^{lxxv} Moreover, the "cooly woman" is expressing a certain degree of agency by refuting the strictures of respectability (e.g. her *active hands* drawing attention to her *unveiled* hair; *her gaze* returned at the voyeur^{lxxvi}), refusing sexual scrutiny by the colonial eye — she actively deploys "vanity" as resistance and self-determination as if to reclaim her own narcissistic power.^{lxxvii} Perhaps it is this antagonistic gaze which, if directed in unity with those of other Sable Venuses (and there is a noted absence of images of co-mingling among colonial women), might render impotent the interpellative and regulative power of this regime of colonial intimacy — producing what Lowe refers to an "other valence of intimacy"^{lxxviii} and perhaps, even more what Stoler refers to as a "racialized assessment of danger".^{lxxix} It is important to consider that this returned gaze is what suspends (albeit temporarily) Paton's sensualizing gaze, as it possibly forces him to also confront and honour the contract between Anglo and Indian patriarchies^{lxxx} in West Indian society that collaboratively governed East Indian women as respectable subjects. According to Stoler's work on the genealogy of the intimate, "the colonial measure of what it took to be classified as 'European' was based not on skin color alone but on tenuously balanced assessments of who was judged to act with reason, *affective appropriateness*, and a sense of morality"^{lxxxi}.

Perhaps one might glimpse East Indian women's agency as partly possible where boundaries are transgressed and there is a possibility to suspend or denaturalise dominant configurations of race and sexual intimacy. As mentioned earlier, Prabhu Mohapatra reads the plethora of images of "coolie" families as indicative of a "restored sexual contract" between Indian men and women. The contract was also one between European and Indian men to regulate Indian women's sexuality and mobility, as well as to address fears about subaltern racial intermixture between blacks and Indians. For Indian men this fear was entrenched within colonial stereotypes about the moral depravity of blacks and anxieties about inter-ethnic competition, while for white men, this fear was heightened by the implied exclusivity of non-European constitutions of sexual intimacy and ethnic miscegenation. In the context of creolization, Sheller claims that miscegenation threatened the "racial order and the gender order" which underpinned white colonial privilege. The systematic absence of images of ethnic co-mingling might be interpreted as a repeated and conscious anxiety about illicit sexual "mixture and unstable boundaries".^{lxxxii} Indeed, the very image of proximity between Indians and racialized others in the West Indies could threaten the claims about cultural imperviousness and anti-miscegenation that were rationalising strands of "coolie" governance.

In the painting entitled, *View of Port-of-Spain from Laventille Hill*, M. J. Cazabon provocatively illuminates this threat of sexual (and possibly cultural) miscegenation and at the same time recirculates assumptions about the immoral “coolie” woman transgressing geographical, racial and sexual boundaries. Sited at the right lower margins of Laventille Hill, a distinctly black suburban space, is a faint figure of an Indian woman. Given that the labouring Indian population was settled on or around the plantations and segregated in main part from the black population, it is interesting to the author why Cazabon should deliberately image such an unnatural intimacy between racialized and gendered others. The limited restoration of Indian patriarchal control in the “coolie” family naturalised black men and Indian women as co-present sexual strangers. *View of Port-of-Spain from Laventille Hill* is perplexing and ambiguous in this regard, yet it provokes a questioning about the seemingly dangerous proximities of colonial others and especially the implications for Indian women transgressing racially gendered boundaries. This sense of danger is evoked in one of Kingsley’s word images in which he encounters an Indian woman in the urban space of Port of Spain:

When you have ceased looking — even staring — at the black women and their ways, you become aware of the strange variety of races which people the city. Here passes an old Coolie Hindoo, with nothing on but his lungee round his loins...contrasting strangely with the brawny Negroes round. There comes a *bright-eyed* young lady, probably his daughter-in-law, hung all over with bangles, in a white muslin petticoat, crimson cotton-velvet jacket, and green gauze veil, with her naked brown baby aside on her hip; *a clever smiling delicate woman, who is quite aware of the brightness of her own eyes.*^{lxxxiii}

Kingsley’s casting of the “bright-eyed” and “clever” young lady who is “aware of the brightness in her own eyes” registers the possibility of lessened restraint and a risky moral corruptibility in a space of dense co-presence with “the black women and their ways”. In light of the foregoing discussions about the ethnic antagonisms within the ranks of subaltern respectability, this unnatural co-presence, even between black and Indian women, needs to be further investigated in relation to processes of interculturalisation, assimilation, and negotiation. As one of the few lingering images of co-mingling between blacks and Indians, Cazabon’s *View of Port-of-Spain* animates numerous questions about the meanings and constitutive power of bracketed and unnatural intimacies (sexual and otherwise) within the discursive formation of what one might view as a peculiar West Indian derivative of Orientalism.^{lxxxiv}

Conclusion

This article has explored, through the use of nineteenth-century images, the optic construction and disciplining of indentured Indian women in the Anglo-Caribbean in relation to British and Creole notions of femininity. While images of labouring Indian women place them alongside Indian men, they mask the complexities of labour relations and the greater degree of alienation and fetishism of Indian female labour (the lowest category on the wage scale) as a commodity within the relations of plantation production.

Images of co-labouring also naturalise Indian women's marginal freedoms implied through their economic dependence on Indian men, who were rationalised as more crucial labouring subjects (though Indian men's wages were still lower than wages of free labourers). These seemingly neutral images are ideological formations in which both race and gender categories of otherness are organised and ranked within a moral economy of what might be termed "the rightful place of land, labour, capital"^{lxxxv}.

This moral evaluation extended to the realm of culture and social life, especially in the context about concerns about Indian women's sexuality. The imaging of Indian women in families or as respectable subjects points to a project of optic surveillance and regulation, containing their freedom of mobility, sexual licence, and choices of survival. This served to bolster not only Anglo and possibly Creole hegemonies, but also restored to Indian patriarchy some measure of control over Indian women's bodies and lives. When M. J. Cazabon's paintings of the *Coolie Family* and *Coolie Woman* were featured at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in 1886 in London, the figure of the Indian woman was indeed an exhibit of her disciplinary containment, reflective of the rationality of colonial governance and possibly her imposed self-governance as a consensual gendered subject — a sort of optical signature of colonial biopolitics. Yet, my reading of Cazabon's *View of Port of Spain* provokes a more disturbing reading about possibilities for agency, accommodation, assimilation and negotiation between Indian women and Creole society that might have contested dominant codes of respectability and selfhood.

The possibility of counter-narratives compels us to consider how we might magically excavate and reconfigure the colonial visual archive to reassemble optical regimes of truth that have eluded the dominant retina. In constructing Indian women as marginal and tentative members of colonial society through discourses of labour, respectability and sexuality, these visual catalogues calculatedly managed the moral contours of subaltern womanhood and possibly inscribed the limits of self-governance. Such a charged yet interested interpellation of the Indian woman as a category in colonial genealogy poses many challenges for how we might further manoeuvre optical discourses within the limits of a particular valence of modernity.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Charles Kingsley uses these “word paintings” to either interpret a lithograph or to selectively highlight the features of a scene as if the description was actually its total composition. Charles Kingsley, *At Last: a Christmas in the West Indies* (London: Macmillan and Co. Limited, 1871; reprint 1910).

ⁱⁱ Patricia Mohammed, “Gendering the Caribbean Picturesque”, *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* 1, no. 1 (2007); Krista Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006); Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean* (Routledge, London and New York, 2003).; and Beth Fowkes-Tobin, *Picturing Imperial Power: Colonial Subjects in Eighteenth-Century British Painting* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999).

ⁱⁱⁱ While these scholars represent work on the Caribbean, the study of race and colonial visualities is marked by a spate of prior theoretical insights in such works as Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); and Frederick Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture: Imagining Mesopotamia in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Malek Alloula’s *The Colonial Harem* looks at colonial postcards and the ways in which they systematically framed Algerian women in differently exotic ways that constructed “the Orient” as a gendered and sexualized phantasm. One important analytical vein shared with this paper is the voyeuristic control and management of women’s mobility and sexuality as a process of naturalising (i.e. disciplining) colonial women as accessible, credible, and profitable. At the same time, this paper is also interested in the ways, similar to Alloula, in which the colonial eye is “dispossessed of his own gaze” that reveals its obsessive fetishism rather than realism (1986, 14). Focusing on the repertoire of Orientalist art in Britain and France, Reina Lewis’ *Gendering Orientalism* complicates the colonizing gaze through the works of Henriette Browne, to question the masculinist assumptions of the Orientalist gaze, differently registered by women artists. For Frederick Bohrer, nineteenth-century visual culture filtered, revised and reconstructed Assyria as a comprehensible category of knowledge in Western European consciousness. The author’s focus is on exoticism as a binaristic system of codes that produces and regulates subjects similar to Said’s work on Orientalism.

^{iv} The paper concerns specific moments pertaining to initial experimentation with Indian indentureship in the 1840s, the instability caused by the “wife murder” crisis of the 1860s, and re-stabilisation of the Indian family in the late nineteenth century. These three major moments illustrate the tension between the order and crisis imposed by the representational systems of indentureship.

^v Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995), 1. According to Lowe (2006, 196), “The British colonial archive is not a static, comprehensive collection of given facts or a source of recorded history. Following Foucault and Said, we must consider the archive as a site of knowledge production, ‘reading’ it as a technology for administering and knowing the colonized population that both attests to its own contradictions and yields its own critique.” This is not to suggest that colonial documents do not contain traces of, or even systematic, counter-knowledge formations, but they rather focus on the dominant production of colonial knowledge as a regulative practice that was moored in particular social institutions, exerting certain governing forces over the subjects produced within these discursive regimes. Lisa Lowe, “The

Intimacies of Four Continents”, in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006).

^{vi} In this article I use the terms Indian and East Indian, at times interchangeably, while in particular instances designating Indian women as East Indian is meant to underscore their categorical status as migrant women not from the West. At other times, the term Indian is used to call attention to more generic colonial attitudes, though not ignoring its inferior status in the East-West binary.

^{vii} Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, 8.

^{viii} Viranjini Munasinghe, *Callaloo or Tossed Salad?: East Indians and the Cultural Politics of Identity in Trinidad* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 43.

^{ix} This is also connected to what was discursively debated at the time and referred to as “the negro problem.” See J. Millette, “The Wage Problem in Trinidad and Tobago 1838–1938”, in *The Colonial Caribbean in Transition: Essays on Postemancipation Social and Cultural History*, ed. Bridget Brereton and Kevin Yelvington (Trinidad and Tobago: The Press, the University of the West Indies and Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999).

^x Selwyn Cudjoe, *Beyond Boundaries: the Intellectual Tradition of Trinidad and Tobago in the Nineteenth Century* (Massachusetts: Calaloux Publications, 2003), 65.

^{xi} Millette, “The Wage Problem in Trinidad and Tobago”.

^{xii} Verene Shepherd, *Transients to Settlers: The Experience of Indians in Jamaica 1845–1950* (University of Warwick: Centre for Research in Asian Migration and London: Peepal Tree Books, 1994).

^{xiii} During the period 1838–1917, 238,909 indentured labourers from India were brought to British Guiana, 143,939 to Trinidad, and 37,027 to Jamaica, initially all under five-year labour contracts. Donald Wood, *Trinidad in Transition: The Years After Slavery* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 107.

^{xiv} The category “coolie” was used in the nineteenth century to denote labourers, especially from Asia, who were contracted both coercively and voluntarily for work in the New World. The term is historically racialized and troubles the division between slave and migrant labour. In colonial discourse, the “coolie” was a constructed category of labour and culture that was allotted a very calculated degree of freedom and authenticity in the social hierarchies of colonial societies. See Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006). Lowe, “The Intimacies of Four Continents”, 194, views the term as one in “a range of intermediate forms of coercive labour”. The term was derogatory by default, and its use in this article signals its significance as a historically situated social category of power relations.

^{xv} Despite the legality of contracts ensuring humane labouring conditions, East Indian indentureship was suspended between 1848–1851 as a result of anti-slavery sentiments in the colony and Britain claiming that the new labour arrangement bore abuses similar to slavery. Donald Wood, *Trinidad in Transition*.

^{xvi} Walter Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881–1905* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).

^{xvii} Cudjoe, *Beyond Boundaries*.

^{xviii} The term, “Creole”, refers to a person of mixed African/European ancestry, a person who is born in the New World, and/or a person of mixed cultural backgrounds. According to Brereton, nineteenth-century Trinidadian Creole Society was divided into three broad sectors, as a “useful organizational framework”, with a “dominant culture and subordinate culture” (1979, 7). At the top were French Creoles and British Whites, followed by an unusually large free coloured and black middle class, and then black and creole peasants at the bottom of the hierarchy. In her introduction to *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad*, Brereton details the complex ways in which these groups were distinguished from each other, while they experienced anomalies that made

them similar in some instances. Bridget Brereton, *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad 1870–1900*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). She also suggests that there were stratifications within each tier based on “cultural orientation, colour (shade), economic position, educational levels, and occupation.” Bridget Brereton, “Social Organisation and class, racial and cultural conflict in 19th century Trinidad,” in *Trinidad Ethnicity*, ed. K. Yelvington (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 40.

^{xix} This particular group was partially slave-owning, and though quite complex in its formation, derived its power socially and politically from its access to capital (especially plantations) and social institutions such as education and the government administration. Though biologically and culturally mixed, the free coloured segment regarded those aspects that were more European (e.g. white skin colour, European dress, etc.) as more civilised. Their capacity to exert power over the social hierarchy in an officially administered British colony was due in part to their large demographic size, their positioning as middle managers in the colony, and their incipient struggles for entitlement and colonial citizenship. See Brereton, *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad*.

^{xx} Munasinghe, *Callaloo or Tossed Salad?*

^{xxi} Munasinghe, *Callaloo or Tossed Salad?*, 77.

^{xxii} Brereton, “Social Organisation and class”, 36.

^{xxiii} *Ibid.*, 41.

^{xxiv} Lisa Lowe, “The Intimacies of Four Continents”, in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 194.

^{xxv} Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

^{xxvi} Madhavi Kale, *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor Migration in the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 156.

^{xxvii} Kale, *Fragments of Empire*, 160.

^{xxviii} Tejaswini Niranjana, *Mobilizing India: Women, Music, and Migration between India and Trinidad* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2006), 64

^{xxix} *Ibid.*

^{xxx} *Ibid.*

^{xxxi} I use the term “respectability” in relation to Peter Wilson’s co-framing and gendered concepts of “reputation” and “respectability.” Wilson defines “respectability” as the aspiration of Afro-Caribbean women toward European norms or a closer proximation to the master class. Peter Wilson, *Crab Antics: The Social Anthropology of English-Speaking Negro Societies of the Caribbean* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973). Jean Besson, “Reputation and Respectability Reconsidered: A New Perspective on Afro-Caribbean Peasant Women,” in *Women and Change in the Caribbean*, ed. Janet Momsen (London: James Curry Ltd., Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 6. Besson claims that the notion is premised on “class, colour, wealth, Eurocentric culture, lifestyle and education.” (*Ibid.*) Wilson contrasts this notion with that of “reputation” whereby he claims that Afro-Caribbean men struggled for more indigenous/autonomous modes of self-fashioning that were anathema to the master class. However, Besson’s (1993) analysis of these two concepts in the case study of Providence critiques the strict gendering of these concepts, while maintaining that they are imbued with power. Not only does she question whether reputation is exclusively a male domain, but she re-reads women’s lives to show how they also engaged in performances of reputation. Minimal work exists on the racialized construction of “reputation-respectability”. Segal (1993, 92) also writes that “respectability” was “a measure of approximation to whiteness” although his definition is based solely on skin colour.

^{xxxii} Both these paintings were exhibited at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London in 1888.

^{xxxiii} Prabhu Mohapatra, “Restoring the Family: Wife Murders and the Making of a Sexual Contract for Indian Immigrant Labor in the British Caribbean Colonies, 1860-1920”, *Studies in History* 11, no. 2 (1995): 227–260.

^{xxxiv} In Trinidad, “between 1872 and 1879, of the 102 total murders seventy-six were of women, of which fifty-nine were of wives.” Mohapatra, “Restoring the Family”, 232.

^{xxxv} While there is need for more in-depth analysis of the specific processes of racialization and engendering of East Indian men as a specific social category, some studies illumine their particular positioning as a racialized/ethnicized masculinity in the colonial hierarchy. See Patricia Mohammed, *Gender Negotiation among Indians in Trinidad 1917-1947* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

^{xxxvi} Not only did this image of depravity threaten the moral underpinnings of the picturesque labouring coolies, but it also sparked heated opposition by the Anti-Slavery society in London and the Government of India, strengthening the latter’s pro-independence platform.

^{xxxvii} Mohapatra, “Restoring the Family”, 233.

^{xxxviii} In Selwyn Cudjoe, *Beyond Boundaries: the Intellectual Tradition of Trinidad and Tobago in the Nineteenth Century* (Massachusetts: Calaloux Publications, 2003), 140.

^{xxxix} Froude, *The English in the West Indies or The Bow of Ulysses*, 67.

^{xl} According to Reddock (1994, 27) this ratio fluctuated “from one woman to every three men in 1857 to one to two in 1868 and one to four in 1878–79.” Rhoda Reddock, *Women, Labour and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago* (London: Zed Books, 1994).

^{xli} Mohapatra, “Restoring the Family”, 233.

^{xlii} *Ibid.*, 235.

^{xliii} *Ibid.*, 231.

^{xliv} *Ibid.*, 233.

^{xlv} Rhoda Reddock, “Freedom Denied: Indian Women and Indentureship in Trinidad and Tobago 1845–1917”, *Economic and Political Weekly* 20, no. 43 (1985): 27.

^{xlvi} *Ibid.*, 29. Also see Tejaswini Niranjana “Left to the Imagination: Indian Nationalisms and Female Sexuality in Trinidad”, *Small Axe* (September 1–18, 1997). Niranjana reflects on the other side of the argument in late nineteenth-century India, when Indian women’s sexuality became a key consideration for a mounting nationalist critique of indentureship.

^{xlvii} *Ibid.*, 30.

^{xlviii} *Ibid.*, 29.

^{xlix} Mohapatra, “Restoring the Family”, 250.

¹ Thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers of this article, it should be pointed out that the narratives of these images are never closed and totalizing, but are always suggestive of multiply-nuanced readings. While this paper is emphatic about the control and governance of East Indian women as a visually discursive category of colonial regulation, it does not imply that images such as *Coolie Family* and *Coolie Woman* do not also reflect the struggle for cultural retention (i.e. agency). For example, Cazabon’s *Coolie Family* might also speak to the regeneration of the Indian family in ways consistent with that social institution in India that might demand a more nuanced discussion of the interaction of different systems of respectability. It is possibly this route that demands urgent further exploration to shift the dynamic from an imposed European code of respectability on a seemingly morally depraved group to the (asymmetrical) co-existence of several variants of respectability.

^{li} Mohapatra, “Restoring the Family”, 227.

^{lii} Kingsley, *At Last!*, 72.

^{liii} *Ibid.*, 100.

^{liv} Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 128.

^{lv} Though this is not to suggest that the colonial positioning of white women was not also based on the same patriarchal system of knowledge that subjected and regulated all women in the colony.

^{lvi} I employ the term subaltern-rank respectability *here* to imply that there was a specific ceiling of respectability permitted for women in the lower ranks of Creole society, and not to develop its other possible implication that these women might have also invented their own forms of respectability, counter to the dominant register (i.e. reputation). Within this subaltern rank, the “coolie” woman and “negress” are cast as competitors as they are indexed vis-à-vis each other through contradistinction.

^{lvii} Kingsley, *At Last!*, 305.

^{lviii} Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, 126.

^{lix} Daniel Segal, “‘Race’ and ‘Colour’ in Pre-Independence Trinidad and Tobago,” in *Trinidad Ethnicity*, ed. K. Yelvington (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 94.

^{lx} Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Picturing Imperial Power: Colonial Subjects in Eighteenth-Century British Painting* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), 139.

^{lxi} For example: “Creole Woman with a Basket”, “Creole Woman in Green Dress”, “Creole Woman with a Parasol”, “Creole Woman seated”, “Blanchisseuse and Child”, “Blanchisseuse and Cows on Cocoa Estate”, “Seated Mulatto Beauty”, “Portrait of a Creole Lady”, etc.

^{lxii} It is possible that Cazabon aimed to draw rank distinction between black women who were in some way linked to the French Creole segment (to which Cazabon also belonged) and other black women.

^{lxiii} There is a well-documented history of the resistance of Creole society to the indentureship system, and the former’s endorsement and deployment of Orientalism as a discursive strategy of defence and management. See Viranjini Munasinghe, *Callaloo or Tossed Salad?: East Indians and the Cultural Politics of Identity in Trinidad* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Ron Ramdin, *Arising From Bondage: A History of the Indo-Caribbean People* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2000); Verene Shepherd, *Transients to Settlers: The Experience of Indians in Jamaica 1845–1950* (University of Warwick: Centre for Research in Asian Migration and London: Peepal Tree Books, 1994); Walton Look Lai, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar: Chinese and Indian Migrants to the British West Indies 1838–1918* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); and Walter Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881–1905* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).

^{lxiv} Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press).

^{lxv} Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: from Arawaks to Zombies*, 124.

^{lxvi} Paton, *Down the Islands*, 178.

^{lxvii} This period is marked by the increasing advocacy on the part of Creole society for self-determination, part of which entails the contestation of Eurocentric conventions of framing and ranking colonial others. Though subordinate to and in competition with whites, the Creole middle class, especially, also benefited from and in many instances reinforced their dominant position over blacks and Indians within their own narrative of self-determination.

^{lxviii} The white Venus in *The Birth of Venus*, by Sandro Botticelli c. 1485–1486 and the brown Venus in Agostino Brunias’ *The West India Washerwoman* (late eighteenth century) are both depicted with some element of skin exposure.

^{lxix} Mohammed, “Gendering the Caribbean Picturesque”.

^{lxx} Paton, *Down the Islands*, 177.

^{lxxi} Lowe, “The Intimacies of Four Continents”, 195.

^{lxxii} Stoler also discusses this double standard regarding concubinage of colonial women in Asia. Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002)

^{lxxiii} Paton, *Down the Islands*, 177.

^{lxxiv} Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, 128.

^{lxxv} Lowe, *Critical Terrains*, 110.

^{lxxvi} The words in italics are meant to suggest the contestatory and renovative gestures by the “coolly woman” to re-organise herself in the History of the gaze.

^{lxxvii} Mohammed, “Gendering the Caribbean Picturesque”, 13. Mohammed sees this narcissistic sentiment in her analysis of the mulatto washer woman in the paintings of Agostino Brunias in Barbados whereby the Sable Venus (the mulatto washer woman) wishes the “viewer to see her as *she* sees herself.”

^{lxxviii} Lowe, “The Intimacies of Four Continents”, 203.

^{lxxix} Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 58.

^{lxxx} This is not to assert that both patriarchies were always cooperative, as according to Stoler, the assertion of white supremacy required the “demaculization of colonized men” at the same time that it afforded the “hypermasculinity of European males”. What is important, however, is that these racialized patriarchies were coterminous in sometimes cooperative and at other times competitive ways. Stoler claims that the casting of colonized women “was concerned with the psychological salience of women and sex in the subordination of men by men.” Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 46.

^{lxxxii} Italics are mine and meant to underscore the calculability and regulation of desire in relation to a wider referential regime of rationality. Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 6.

^{lxxxiii} Lowe, “The Intimacies of Four Continents”, 203.

^{lxxxiiii} Italics are mine. Kingsley, *At Last!*, 72.

^{lxxxv} For example: Which subject is historically constituted as the ultimate stranger in this racialized and gendered visual grammar, and how does Orientalism cooperate with both dominant colonial and Creole discourses as an allied offensive intent on denying claims to indigeneity and notions of the ultimate sexual stranger?

^{lxxxvi} K. Darian-Smith, L. Gunner and S. Nuttall, *Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature and History in South Africa and Australia* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 241.