
Sex and the Citizen

INTERROGATING THE CARIBBEAN

Edited by Faith Smith

NEW WORLD STUDIES

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friends. *C'est la règle* (2002) explores further the issue of biculturalism, of bridges to allow the Caribbean and French cultures to meet, but also issues of racism, introducing one additional element, that of divorce and children confronting their mothers' new partners. Both narratives bring a sense of validation of a multicultural identity for the characters staying in the Hexagon. It is an identity that embraces both French and Caribbean cultural roots without necessarily experiencing a sense of fragmentation.

10. Similarly, Condé's *La migration des coeurs* can be read as literary reappropriation of Emily Brontë's canonical work, *Wuthering Heights*. For an in-depth analysis of literary cannibalism in Francophone texts, see Reynolds, "Almost the same, but not quite."

11. Similar strategies can be found in Warner-Vieyra's *Quimboiseur* and *Juletane* or Maryse Condé's *Pays mêlé*, where the authors use either the recurrent feature of a diary written by the protagonist or the role of double mirror or counter-mirror played by a social worker or a therapist.

12. Pineau's *L'exil selon Julia* highlights the benefits of the grandmother's presence in the Hexagon, how Man Ya's wisdom enables the narrator to feel connected with her cultural heritage and gives a sense of fulfillment. In contrast, Suzanne Dracius's *L'autre qui danse* shows the devastating effects for Rhevana of an absence of cultural and historical roots.

13. It would be interesting to compare the Francophone Caribbean novel with the Indian Ocean novel and ask the following questions: to what extent does insularity play a key factor vis-à-vis the notion of citizenship? and to what extent do expatriates (from the diaspora of Francophone Caribbeans or from the Indian Ocean) reinforce or dilute the notion of citizenship?

14. On Creolité and the necessity of having Francophone literature acknowledged just as French literature is, see Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant.

Indian Nationalism and Female Sexuality

A Trinidadian Tale

Tejaswini Niranjana

This business about the women is the weakest and the irremediable part of the evil. . . . These women are not necessarily wives. Men and women are huddled together during the voyage. The marriage is a farce. A mere declaration by man or woman made upon landing before the Protector of Immigrants that they are husband and wife constitutes a valid marriage. Naturally enough, divorce is common. The rest must be left to the imagination of the reader.

—M. K. Gandhi, "Indentured Labour"

THE OTHERNESS of the Indian, or sometimes "Eastern," female body is a common enough trope in Orientalisms of various kinds and has been the focus of much postcolonial feminist theoretical intervention in recent years. A more central preoccupation among feminists in India in the last decade or two has been to understand the gendered nature of our (non-Western) modernity and its specific concern with maintaining Indianness or cultural authenticity in the midst of social transformation. Attention has been drawn to the reformulation of patriarchal authority at different moments in the history of anti-imperialist struggle and to the recomposition of "Indian women" through the contests between colonizer and colonized. This process is commonly viewed as part of an Indian history that unfolds in India. My task here is to show that the *constitutive outside* of what we in India see today as normative Indian femininity (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 3) is the figure of the indentured woman laborer who was part of the subaltern Indian migration to the Caribbean (Niranjana).

The aim of this essay, then, is to investigate a conjuncture of modernity, Indianness, and woman that is radically different from our own in India, in the hope that it will de-familiarize our formation as well as throw some new light on the elements that led to its consolidation. I attempt to alter the lens through which we have been accustomed to viewing or framing the

emergence of that discursive subject, the modern Indian woman. In analyzing the formation of "woman" in India, we often use, almost as if by default, the implicit comparisons with Western or metropolitan situations. I want to ask whether our frameworks might look different when the points of reference include other nonmetropolitan contexts, in particular those that are historically imbricated with our own, even if in ways that are obscured by later developments.

My investigation proceeds through an analysis of the early twentieth-century campaign against indentureship in the tropical colonies by nationalists in India. I have chosen this moment for its foregrounding of the question of female sexuality, an issue that is increasingly being seen as central to the formation of gendered citizenship and to dominant narratives of nationhood. Historically, the moment is also one of "Indian" political assertion as well as of the availability of new possibilities for "Indian" women. I put the term *Indian* in quotation marks to signal its double use: marking on the one hand a (future) nationality in South Asia and on the other an "ethnic" category in the Caribbean. Much of the writing in the media, whether in Trinidad or in India, tends to blur the difference between the two usages, a blurring that could well serve to make Indo-Trinidadians invisible both in India and in Trinidad, marking them simultaneously as not Indian enough in the first location and not Trinidadian enough in the second.

The formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 signaled the beginning of a new phase of organization in the movement against British rule in India. Accommodating a wide spectrum of ideological strands and reconciling a host of conflicting interests, the Congress party was able—in the space of the next few decades—to provide focus and direction to the anticolonial struggle, culminating in the final transfer of political power in 1947. Among the many successful initiatives of the nationalists was the early twentieth-century campaign against indentureship, one that contributed in significant measure to building up a moral case against colonialism. However, in the late nineteenth century indenture did not yet figure as a significant anticolonial issue. On the contrary, as B. R. Nanda points out, in 1893 the leading nationalist, M. G. Ranade, actually wrote an article entitled "Indian Foreign Emigration," in which he argued that emigration afforded some "relief" to the growing population of India and that the expansion of the British Empire could be seen as a "direct gain" to the masses of this country.¹

Eventually, however, owing in significant measure to the efforts of an Indian involved in agitations in South Africa, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, a figure who was to rise to great prominence in the nationalist struggle, indentured emigration became an important issue for Indian nationalism.² Born in India and educated as a barrister in England, Gandhi had gone to

South Africa in 1893 to work as a lawyer for a prominent Indian business family and ended up staying there for nearly twenty-one years (Eriksen; Fischer; Rolland). Although the early agitations initiated by Gandhi did not involve indentured workers in Natal, many of them came to participate in satyagraha, Gandhi's passive-resistance campaign against the various legal restrictions imposed on Indians in South Africa. Closer interaction with the indentured increased Gandhi's awareness of their specific problems, which he tried to bring to the attention of nationalists in India. Satyagraha, stretching from 1906 to 1914, was for Gandhi a direct ancestor of the anti-indenture agitation. When Gandhi began the satyagraha campaign in South Africa, in Bombay the Imperial Indian Citizenship Association, a group who expressed explicit concern for Indian immigrants, was founded.

Since the 1890s, Gandhi had attempted to enlist the help of the Congress leaders, and Gokhale in particular was supportive of his endeavors. In 1894 Gandhi had drafted the first petition protesting against the indenture system. After constitutional reforms in 1909, a Legislative Council, which included elected Indians among its members, was formed, dominated by the Congress. As a member of the Legislative Council, Gokhale in 1910 put forward a successful resolution to stop the recruitment of indentured labor for Natal. In spite of his failing health, Gokhale not only visited South Africa at Gandhi's invitation but "attended to the South African business night and day." "Eventually all India was deeply stirred, and the South African question became the burning topic of the day" (Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa* 354, 428). The focus of Gandhi and his European Indophile colleagues (C. F. Andrews, William Pearson, Henry Polak) was indentured hardship in Fiji and South Africa, and while Indian indentureship in the West Indies seldom got special mention in this narrative, it was often subsumed within it.

Indentured Women in the West Indies

The nationalist description of the situation of indentured women drew from missionary accounts, Government of India and colonial administrators' reports, and firsthand accounts of sympathetic Europeans such as C. F. Andrews, who wrote about Fiji. The central concern of all these writers seemed to be the "immorality" caused by the disparate sex ratio of the immigrant laborers. There was also more than a suggestion that the inconstancy of Indian women could be traced to the social composition of the female migrants.

Women evangelicals of the Canadian Presbyterian Church, which began proselytizing among the Indians in Trinidad in 1868, interacted closely with the indentured women and recorded their impressions of what they saw as barbaric "Indian customs" and the reprehensible behavior of the women in particular:

There are no zenanas in Trinidad. Our women immigrants are not recruited from the class that in India are shut up in zenanas. In Trinidad they find themselves of added importance through the small proportion of their sex. They have great freedom of intercourse and much evil example around them. Sad to say they often shew themselves to be as degraded as they are ignorant. On the other hand many are beautiful and lovable, faithful to their husbands and devoted to their children. This, however, is by no means the rule. (Morton 185)

While the planters did not want a permanent community of laborers at first, preferring young male workers who would return to India at the end of their indenture period and make way for a new batch, colonial officials recommended that a certain proportion of women to men be maintained in order to avoid what they saw as social complications. For a variety of reasons, however, recruiters were often unable to obtain a sufficient number of women.

The Trinidadian feminist historian Rhoda Reddock addresses the implications of this problem in her important early work on women under indentureship. Reddock is of the opinion that modern historians do not pay sufficient attention to the disparate sex ratio, although it was a crucial point of contention during the entire period of indenture. In 1884, Government of India Act 21 authorized the resumption of emigration to the West Indies after a long break, laying down as one of its conditions that at least 12 percent of the emigrants be female, a legal proportion that, says Reddock, was rarely enforced. She points to how in a period of twenty-plus years, between 1857 and 1879, the recommended ratio of women to men changed about six times, "ranging from one woman to every three men in 1857 to one to two in 1868 and one to four in 1878-79." Reddock is of the view that these changes in the proportion of women to men were a reflection of the contradictions in recruiting "the right kind of women" (*Women, Labour* 27-29). She concurs with other historians that as early as 1851 there was a recognition of the need for women as a "stabilizing factor on" the male laborers and that by the late nineteenth century planters were convinced that they needed a stable workforce that would not return to India and were therefore willing to create the conditions for the reproduction of Indian families in Trinidad. This need for domestic units coincided, as we shall see, with the Presbyterian initiatives regarding education for Indian women and the range of housewifely skills they were expected to acquire. Among the efforts to increase the number of women emigrants was the 1890s reduction of the indenture period for women, from five years to three, and the promise to recruiting agents of an increased commission for women, sometimes 40 percent higher than that for men. Emigrants were also encouraged to take female children, preferably between the ages of ten and fourteen (29).

As the historian K. O. Laurence suggests, one of the reasons for the lack of women was that few wives emigrated, since their husbands preferred to leave them behind in the protection of their joint family rather than take them to a strange country, especially since the indenture period was presumed to be a short one (Laurence 119). The Government of India tried to set the proportion of women to men at 50:100, but there was opposition to that on various counts, including the argument that this would result, according to a former emigration commissioner, in the recruiting of "bad women" who would "do more harm than good" (123). The concern that the small number of women might lead to immorality seemed to go hand in hand with the idea that these women were in any case innately depraved to begin with and that the real solution was to obtain sufficient numbers of virtuous wives to offset the other kinds of women, who seemed most likely to want to emigrate.

If we look at the number of married women among the female emigrants, it becomes obvious that they were often in a minority. Here are some random figures for Indian female immigrants registered as married upon arrival in Trinidad from 1882 to 1900, taken from G. I. M. Tikasingh's compilation from the General Registers of Immigrants and the Register of Indian Marriage. In 1882, for example, the total number of female immigrants was 662, among whom 133, or about 20 percent, were married. In 1890, out of a total of 713, 291, or 40.8 percent, were married; in 1891, out of 1,091, 470, or 43 percent (the highest figure in the period under consideration), were married; and in 1898, out of a total of 371, 59, or 15.9 percent (the lowest figure), immigrated to Trinidad already married (Tikasingh 262). In 1900, at the beginning of the new century, out of a total of 188 female immigrants, 46, or 24.4 percent, were married. The rest of the women, from 57 percent (1891) to nearly 84 percent (1898), were single, being unmarried, widowed, or deserted. Even as late as 1915, two years before the abolition of indenture, when emigration of families was being encouraged, Commissioners McNeill and Chimman Lal found that a third of the women went to Trinidad as wives, the remainder being mostly widows and runaway wives and a small percentage of prostitutes. Also among them were women deserted by their husbands and some unmarried pregnant women (Reddock, *Women, Labour* 30).

The planters' demand was not just for more females but for the "right kind of women," who would be not only productive laborers on the estates but also faithful wives to the male workers. In response to this demand, the recruiters pointed out that a better class of women could not be induced to emigrate and that in any case they would be no good as field laborers.

As an emigration agent in Calcutta put it in 1915: "In considering this matter it must be borne in mind that genuine field laborers such as the

planters require can be obtained only from among the lowest castes, i.e. from among the non-moral class of the population. A more moral type is found higher in the social scale, but such women would be useless in the fields" (Chancellor to Carnarvon, 1917, CO 571:5, WI 27680, qtd. in Reddock, *Women, Labour* 30). Recruiters also warned that if more women were demanded, they would be sending "non-effective" ones or "objectionable characters" (Laurence 124). As Basdeo Mangru points out in the case of British Guiana, Trinidad's neighbor, "Criticisms regarding the type of women imported had not been wanting. Immigration officials and others often referred to their 'loose and depraved character' and condemned the Emigration Agents for shipping 'the sweepings of the Bazaars' of Calcutta and other large Indian cities" (Longden to Carnarvon, 20 October 1875, CO 384:106, qtd. in Mangru 223–24).

Evidence from another destination of indentured emigrants, the Dutch colony of Surinam, suggests the diversity of occupations of the women who decided to migrate. An emigration agent for Suriname wrote in 1877–78 about the recruits gathered in the depot prior to departure: "Their number was considerably augmented by a batch of dancing girls and women of similar description with their male attendants. These people laughed at the idea of labouring as agriculturalists" (Emmer 192). Other descriptions of female migrants to the same colony indicate close similarities with the British West Indies. The Protector of Emigrants, writing in 1880, was of the opinion that "the class of women willing to emigrate consists principally of young widows and married or single women who have already gone astray and are therefore not only most anxious to avoid their homes and to conceal their antecedents, but are also at the same time unlikely to be received back into their families" (194).

Oral histories of early twentieth-century Trinidad provide the story of Maharani, a young Brahmin widow who ran away to Trinidad, fearing ill-treatment in her in-laws' house:

MAHARANI

I married
me husband dead
* * * * *
milk boiling
dem go want de milk to eat
an ah cat coming to drink
an ah hit im an de milk fall down
I say dem go beat me
because I getting too much lix [beatings]
I say dem go beat me

well I run

I no tell nobody I leaving

only me modder-in-law.

(Mahabir 79)

Given the disparity between wages for male and female laborers, young women like Maharani often found it difficult to manage on the small amounts they earned. To avoid their becoming indebted to grocers and traders, in 1879 the agent-general ordered that rations be given to all first-year immigrants, to be deducted from their wages (in some estates the rations were given free of charge). However, as Judith Weller points out, "The immigrants, especially women, frequently embarked on the second year of their apprenticeship saddled with a considerable debt for the first year's rations. The newly-arrived immigrant was the 'fag' and given the hardest work to perform" (Weller 63). There were skilled, "male" tasks (millwork, forking, truck loading) and less-skilled, "female" tasks (such as weeding, manuring, supplying, and cane cutting), which were also the lowest paid. Even women who did heavy male tasks, such as truck loading, were paid the same as other women. In 1870 and 1875, a fixed minimum wage of 25¢ per day was set for men; for women it was always less. An investigator in 1891 wrote about one estate where women earned from 10¢ to 25¢ per day and men earned from 25¢ to 40¢; on another estate, males earned from 50¢ to 70¢ per day, and all women earned 25¢. In 1913, when the two last commissioners, McNeill and Lal, visited Trinidad, women were indentured for three years technically and earned from half to two-thirds as much as males, that is, from half a crown to three shillings weekly (Reddock, *Women, Labour* 36–38). Low wages drove women to increased dependency on their male partners, although they were sometimes able to negotiate the terms of this dependency.

Maharani the Brahmin widow, for example, did not particularly want a partner but was pressured to acquire one:

an e carry me go
e carry me he room
I no want nobody
I say
I stop alone
but she fadder say
I like you
but I say
me nuh like you
[but he takes her all the same].
(Mahabir 84–85)

Missionary Travails, Marriage, and Morals

The Canadian Presbyterian missionaries who went to Trinidad to work with the indentured Indian laborers were the first to build schools for them. Access to Western-style education was accompanied by exposure to Christianity, to which the missionaries often found the Indians quite resistant. A Girls' Training Home was established in 1890, "for the protection and training of Indian girls." Christian girls aged twelve and up were admitted, to receive instruction that would prepare them to be good wives for "our helpers" (Christian teachers). Apart from Hindi, English, arithmetic, and Bible classes, the girls were taught "washing, ironing, starching, scrubbing, gardening, sewing, and all the housewifely arts" (Morton 348-49). While some of them turned out to be apt pupils, other Indian women presented a puzzle to the Canadians, as the following comments show: "The women, as a rule, are quite as wicked as the men and more ignorant and prejudiced; thus their influence for good or evil is very great" (Morton 186). Sarah Morton wrote that

the loose notions and prevailing practices in respect of marriage here are quite shocking to a new-comer. I said to an East Indian woman whom I knew to be the widow of a Brahman, "You have no relations in Trinidad, I believe." "No, Madame," she replied, "only myself and two children; when the last [immigrant] ship came in I took a papa. I will keep him as long as he treats me well. If he does not treat me well I shall send him off at once; that's the right way, is it not?" This will be to some a new view of women's rights. (342)

It should be added that in some Indian nationalities women are treated with much greater consideration than by others, and that in more than one Sanskrit drama, read and sung every day by the priests among the people, and revered by all Hindoos, beautiful and touching love stories are related with pictures of unspotted purity and supreme devotion in married life. (347)

The rapidity with which Indian women formed new relationships in Trinidad was a matter for comment by contemporary writers as well as latter-day historians. Early twentieth-century visitors to the West Indies, such as the British novelist Charles Kingsley, tended to see women's behavior as stemming from practices such as child marriage, which Kingsley called "a very serious evil" but attributed to customs brought from India: "The girls are practically sold by their fathers. . . . Then comes a scandal; and one which is often ended swiftly enough by the cutlass" (Kingsley 192). Kingsley talked of child brides, although many of the examples in the missionary writings are of older women, who seemed to have constructed for themselves spaces

of negotiation to offset their lack of privilege in the wage system of the plantation.

As Tikasingh remarks, the most common type of union was the "keeper union," "whose stability depended primarily upon the satisfaction of the female partner." He cites the case of a woman named Mungaree, who had an arrangement with one Namoomarlala on Orange Field Estate. He gave her \$150 in clothes and silver, and she lived with him for eight years. She then went to live with another man, Nageeroo, "with the understanding that she could return to her former keeper at any time"; subsequently, at the time of the court case mentioned here, she was living with yet another man, a shopkeeper. "As soon as females were ill-treated by their 'papa,' . . . they were quite ready to break the existing union and form another" (*Mungaree v. Nageeroo*, 13 July 1878, qtd. in Tikasingh 270).

Speaking about British Guiana, Basdeo Mangru points out that the "paucity of women made polyandry almost an acknowledged system. Very often an Indian woman was found to have two husbands and to be unfaithful to both" (Mangru 227, citing *Daily Argosy*, 23 March and 24 April 1913). That this kind of relationship was also common in Trinidad is borne out by the experiences of Sarah Morton and other missionaries. Mangru cites official correspondence that expressed concern about the "loose domestic relations" among the indentured laborers: "It is not uncommon for a woman of this class to leave the man with whom she has cohabited for another, and then for a third, perhaps for a fourth, and sometimes to return to one of those she had previously deserted; and this she does in most cases with impunity" (Mangru 227, citing Scott to Kimberley, 15 August 1870, CO 111:376). As K. O. Laurence puts it, "Women sought to maximize their bargaining power and shifted their allegiance to the male who presented the best offer with great facility." He quotes the research of B. L. Moore on British Guiana, giving the 1887 example of a woman at Bush Lot who was "married with Hindu rites to three different men in a single year" (239). He also points out that "in Guiana polyandry with two or three, sometimes even four men became fairly common. Similar situations were also known in Trinidad, though probably not widespread. Keeper unions however were very common there" (236).

The Anti-Slavery Society proposed banning the recruitment of single women to avoid what they saw as inevitable immorality, but it was pointed out that to circumvent this rule recruits would pretend to be married to each other at the time of emigration. In any case, some opponents of indentureship believed, as Gandhi did, that marriages between recruits were often fictitious. The point is not whether the marriages were false or real, or whether single women were entirely responsible for "immoral relations,"

but how critics and commentators chose to define a situation clearly related to the displacement of men and women to a diasporic condition where new opportunities presented themselves to people married as well as unmarried. Colonial officials persisted in seeing the “notoriously lax morals” of the indentured as resulting from the significant proportion of “sexually permissive women” on the estates, where they claimed the general “level of sexual morality” was lower than in a typical Indian village (Laurence 126).

Wife Murders

The prevalence of “wife murders” by indentured Indians in Trinidad and British Guiana in the nineteenth century was attributed to the inconstancy of the women. According to David V. Trotman, between 1872 and 1880, 27 percent of all murders in Trinidad were committed by East Indian immigrants; between 1881 and 1889, 60 percent; and between 1890 and 1898, 70 percent (“Women and Crime,” *Caribbean Freedom* 252). Tikasingh says that between 1872 and 1900, eighty-seven Indian women were murdered in Trinidad, 65 (74.7%) of which were wives (Tikasingh 272). The majority of the murderers were men, and those killed were women who were either wives, concubines, or fiancées. Although there have been quite a few court cases involving men who killed child brides whose fathers had promised them to several men for a hefty bride price each time, many of the cases have involved men who murdered their wives for having taken up with another man. It was also not uncommon for Indian women to form relationships with overseers and white estate managers, as depicted, for example, in A. R. F. Webber’s 1917 novel *Those That Be in Bondage*. Trotman contends that the women received very little sympathy despite their difficulty in resisting the advances of their employers, most officials choosing to blame “the very loose character of the majority of coolie women, and the temptations to which men in the positions of managers and overseers are subjected” (Longden to Kimberley, 21 August 1873, CO 295:269, qtd. in Trotman, “Women and Crime,” *Caribbean Freedom* 253).

“Wife murders,” D. W. D. Comins wrote in 1891, “form the foulest blot on our whole immigration system” (31; see also Minutes of the Legislative Council, 21 October 1890, qtd. in Tikasingh 272). A variety of explanations were offered for this phenomenon, ranging from the cultural (wife murder as proof of the moral depravity of heathens, as resulting from “Asiatic idiosyncrasies” or from the “constitutional jealousy of Orientals”) to the materialistic (Indian men outraged at having the woman they had paid for become the wife of another man), the psychological (envy, jealousy, rage, and revenge), and the demographic (the disparity between the numbers of men and women). Whatever they saw as the causes of wife murder, the only

possible remedy for the problem, according to some colonial officials, was the introduction of larger numbers of females (Tikasingh 272).

Other colonial officials, however, refused to accept the idea that the shortage of women recruits was at the root of the trouble, “suggesting that it was a question of quality rather than numbers: that the women were of such ‘low class’ that the men regarded them as chattels and treated them as such. Much was ascribed to ‘Asiatic ideas’ of the low value of female life” (Laurence 239). Prison authorities in Trinidad were of the view that “so long as there shall be in the Colony a large body of Asiatics who live as a race distinct from the rest of the labouring classes, keeping their own style of dress and observing their own peculiar traditions, it is useless to expect that the mere risk of death upon the scaffold will prevent their holding in Trinidad the same views with regard to their womankind that exist in the country from which they come” (Council Papers 47, Prison Report for 1885, 618, qtd. in Weller 66).

Charles Kingsley seems to concur: “Wife-murder is but too common among these Hindoos, and they cannot be made to see that it is wrong. ‘I kill my own wife. Why not? I kill no other man’s wife,’ was said by as pretty, gentle, graceful a lad of two-and-twenty as one need see. . . . There is murder of wives, or quasi-wives now and then, among the baser sort of Coolies—murder because a poor girl will not give her ill-earned gains to the ruffian who considers her his property” (192). There is perhaps an additional hint here that the woman’s “ill-earned gains” may be money obtained from another man than her husband.

Oral histories confirm the prevalence of wife murder, as in Fazal’s testimony in Mahabir’s *The Still Cry*:

if e run way nex man daughter
 e go beat e arse too
 if you have to run way wid man wife
 leave one time
 dat man go kill e wife
 kill two a dem. (56)

Much of the information about the nature of the relationships that led to wife murder comes from anecdotal sources. It was not easy to obtain statistical data about wife murder, since, as Judith Weller suggests, most of the time the crime was recorded as murder only when a conviction was obtained, and very often there was not enough evidence to convict the murderer (66). It is perfectly reasonable to imagine, then, that the incidence of wife murder was even higher than the records indicate. Early punishments for those caught enticing women away from their husbands included

flogging, shaving, transfer of guilty parties to other estates, fines, and imprisonment, but these did not bring down the number of wife murders.

The eventual solution to the problem was sought in legislation about marriage, not just in punishment upon the scaffold. There seemed to be agreement on this score between the colonial authorities and the immigrant men. Witness this petition from Indian immigrants, signed by 274 Indians and witnessed by Canadian missionaries, Reverends Morton, Grant, and Christie, seeking enactment of an ordinance for registration of Indian marriages. The purpose of the registration was to enable "any person" to "prosecute an unfaithful spouse and their partner in guilt either in the Magistrates' Court, the Complaint Court or the Supreme Court, according as damages are laid at £10, at £25 or upwards, with provision for imprisonment if the damages be not paid, for the imprisonment of the wife if she refused to return to her husband, and also for the continued prosecution of the parties if the offence be persisted in" (Minutes of the Legislative Council, 28 January 1881, qtd. in Weller 74).

Interestingly, the petitioners did not demand divorce, but "the preservation of their households." Ordinance No. 6, of 1881, was passed to make the necessary provisions for the marriage and divorce of Indian immigrants. This applied only to Hindus and Muslims among the immigrants, since Christians were already covered by the existing laws of the colony (Weller 69). Tikasingh, however, speaks of the problems connected with registration under the Immigrants' Marriage and Divorce Ordinances, Nos. 6 (1881) and 23 (1891), suggesting that the difficulty was in part owing to the framing of the ordinances. "For example, the marriage ordinance of 1881 was really concerned mainly with the prevention of wife-murders rather than with the recognition of Indian marriages" (266). He goes on to say that "the act of registration itself was subject to numerous difficulties such as the age of the bride, *the lack of accurate information concerning the former marital status of either party*, and the refusal or neglect of either party to apply for registration of the marriage" (266, emphasis added).

Other kinds of solutions were sought too. In 1879, for instance, the acting governor of Trinidad, William Young, demanded measures to improve the "moral status of the Coolie woman." Only by recognizing their traits of character, among which he included thrift and industry, and initiating measures to develop them, Young contended, could "civilization and morality" be substantially improved among the Indian population. He maintained that Indian women were not strong enough for strenuous plantation labor but could exert a "civilizing and humanizing influence" if they devoted themselves to domestic duties (Young, qtd. in Mangru 224–25). This impulse coincided with that of the Canadian missionaries who in 1869 started the first schools for Indians, where there were distinctly different curricula

for boys and girls, those for girls focusing primarily on the production of housewives.³ Just a couple of years before Young's statement, the planters had passed a resolution asking for the indenture-free importation of Indian widows and "betrothed women" who had lost their intended husbands. This proposal had been suggested by the emigration agent at Calcutta, who commended the "pure and blameless lives" of these women; other colonial officials agreed that bringing in a higher class of females would ameliorate what they thought was the cause of the problem of wife murder: the immorality of immigrant women. This new scheme of emigration did not find support among recruiters in India, however, and eventually had to be dropped (Mangru 224–25).

Increasingly, the shameless Indian woman was represented as a matter of grave concern not just to colonial officials but also to Indian men, as we see from a 1916 letter written by Mohammed Orfy, who wrote numerous letters to the secretary of state for the colonies, the Indian government, and other authorities "on behalf of destitute Indian men of Trinidad": "Another most disgraceful concern, which is most prevalent, and a perforating plague, is the high percentage of immoral lives led by the female section of our community. They are enticed, seduced and frightened into becoming concubines, and paramours to satisfy the greed and lust of the male section of quite a different race to theirs." Having mentioned the susceptibility of the women to seduction, Orfy goes on to say that "they have absolutely no knowledge whatever of the value of being in virginhood and become most shameless and a perfect menace to the Indian gentry" (CO 571/4, WI 22518, qtd. in Reddock, *Women, Labour* 44).

Between Sarah Morton's comment about the Brahmin widow who took a new "papa" and the reasoning of educated East Indian men as exemplified by Mohammed Orfy, the difference might not be that the first stresses the wilfulness of the Indian woman, while the second is inclined to emphasize her susceptibility to "enticement," as did the colonial authorities who framed the marriage laws. Both Orfy and the colonial authorities were in agreement on the lax morals of the Indian woman immigrant. We might see the two—an emerging East Indian middle class in Trinidad and the colonial rulers—as complicit in the reconstitution of patriarchal structures that had become visible by the early twentieth century. However, it might not be accurate to assert, as Reddock appears to do, that "Indian tradition" simply comes to the fore once indentureship ends.

Let us briefly examine two kinds of approaches to the culture of Indians in Trinidad. The pioneering work of Morton Klass in the 1950s typifies one kind, in which classical anthropological paradigms prevail and indenture is seen as a temporary disruption in well-established patterns of living. In fact, Klass contended that village life among Hindu East Indians in Trinidad was

a faithful reproduction of village life in northern India, whence most of the indentured laborers came. The stress here is on cultural persistence and survival, since culture is framed as that which continues through time and includes characteristics of people, for example, the supposed docility and submissiveness of Indian women (a prevalent stereotype even today among Afro-Trinidadians and other Creoles). The work of Rhoda Reddock typifies another approach, one that employs a consciously historical paradigm and in Reddock's case provides us with a nuanced understanding of women's lives under indenture. The emphasis, however, is on the twentieth-century reconstitution of the Hindu and "Indian" family, with all its patriarchal features, including proscriptions for women. The suggestion here is that "tradition" won out in the end and was able to subjugate women, so that their options today are not very different from those of women in India who have not shared their history. The stories about immoral Indian women result, in Reddock's analysis, in the construction of a new patriarchy and in the closure of the question of women's agency, or "freedom denied." The implicit argument here concerns East Indian women in the present and Reddock's perception that like women in India, they do not live lives that are "free."

It is interesting that although historians and anthropologists are able to document changes in areas such as caste, religion, and customs, they seem to insist that with regard to women there were no changes at all or that if they did occur, they were eventually reversed. Generally, they make a series of culturalist assumptions according to which "Indians," no matter where they are, continue to manifest certain behavioral patterns. Against both these approaches, I would argue that the displacement caused by indenture made for irreversible transformations, and the discursive deployment of the East Indian woman in the anti-indentureship campaign, for example, is an indicator of some of these changes.

Abolishing Indenture

In 1896 Gandhi, who was still living in South Africa at the time, had a meeting with the nationalist leader Gopal Krishna Gokhale to try and interest him in the cause of overseas Indians. In 1901 Gandhi again spent some time with Gokhale, who was to become one of his earliest admirers and supporters in India. At Gandhi's urging, in February 1910 Gokhale guided a resolution through the Imperial Legislative Council, of which he was a member, calling for a complete ban on the recruitment of indentured labor. In 1911 a ban was imposed on recruitment for Natal, and in 1917 the ban was extended to all overseas colonies, but not before Gandhi and a host of other nationalists had mounted a large-scale campaign against indenture.

As the historian Hugh Tinker points out, the campaign was, in fact, Gandhi's first big political intervention in India. He gave anti-indenture

speeches all over the country, wrote about the topic at length in newspapers, and was able to get an Anti-Indenture Resolution passed at the Lucknow Congress in December 1916. By 1915 the indenture issue had become "the central question of Indian politics." Even as emigration itself declined for a variety of reasons, there was widespread nationalist protest, with meetings organized in Hyderabad Sind and Karachi (then in northwestern India), Allahabad (in the central region), Madras (in the south), and parts of Bengal (eastern India) (Tinker 334–47). The agitators called for an end to a system that they said was a "moral stigma" for the country. As Rhoda Reddock reiterates, issues of low wages or poor working conditions were far less important than "women's moral condition" in the campaign to abolish indentureship (*Women, Labour* 45). The historical significance of the anti-indenture campaign lies, Tinker suggests, in the fact that "this was the first major Indo-British political and social issue to be decided in dependent India, and not in metropolitan Britain" (288).

An examination of the nationalist discourse on indenture would reveal the crucial place occupied in it by the question of women's sexuality, helping us to understand why it was believed to be something unspeakable and why, paradoxically, it needed to be spoken about so interminably. Given this campaign's centrality to nationalist thought, it would be interesting to see how women were represented in the criticism of indentureship. I take as my point of departure some aspects of Partha Chatterjee's well-known argument about the nationalist resolution of the women's question. Chatterjee has tried to account for the relative insignificance of the "women's question" in the late nineteenth century by suggesting that nationalism was able to "resolve" the question by this time in accordance with its attempt to make "modernity consistent with the nationalist project" (*Nation and Its Fragments* 121).

In constructing a new woman—the middle-class, upper-caste *bhadramahila* (Bengali for "bourgeois lady")—nationalism in India was able to produce and enforce distinctions between the material might of the colonizer and the spiritual superiority of the colonized. Chatterjee suggests that the distinctions were embodied in new oppositions between public and private, the "world" (*bhaire*) and the "home" (*ghare*). In the former realm the Indian man acquired English education and took on the manners and dress of the British, while in the latter realm the Indian woman took on new markers of ethnicity and new responsibilities for maintaining the sanctity of the home, which was now additionally seen as a refuge from the world where the colonizer held sway, a point also made by Sumanta Banerjee in his study of nineteenth-century popular culture and the emergence of the *bhadralok*, or respectable classes (76). Although both Chatterjee and Banerjee write about Bengal, there are many parallels in relation to women and nationalism in

other areas of India directly ruled by the British. The new woman envisaged by nationalism was “modern” but not heedlessly Westernized. Nor was she like the uneducated, vulgar, and coarse lower-caste/class working woman (Chatterjee 127). The lower-caste woman would be a central figure in the labor migrations of the nineteenth century.

The processes of differentiating the upper-caste woman from the lower-caste woman unfolded in a variety of spheres and were often based on seemingly “natural” categories. A comment in a Brahmo Samaj newspaper, *Tattwabodhini Patrika*, in 1880 opposed a proposal to educate respectable Bengali women so that they would become self-reliant, saying that “they did not have to be self-reliant since they were being looked after by their menfolk, and then added: ‘Only among the women of the lower classes in this country, we come across some sort of self-reliance’” (qtd. in Banerjee 56). Banerjee’s argument is that throughout the eighteenth century, lower-caste groups in Bengal rose in the social hierarchy, in the process distancing themselves from their poor and/or rural kinfolk and becoming a new middle class through access to an English education. “The stratification was ideologically buttressed by the *bhadralok* concept of *itarjan* and *chhotolok*—the pejorative terms used to describe the lower orders and evoke the picture of a lifestyle that was to be scrupulously avoided by the educated and privileged Bengalis” (71–72).

Among the features of a lifestyle to be avoided by the educated *bhadralok* was the close interaction between middle-class women and the wandering female artistes from the lower castes, who were a source of entertainment and education for those confined to the inner space of the courtyard. There was a concerted attempt by the *bhadralok* in the late nineteenth century, for example, to eliminate from the *andarmahal*, or women’s quarters, the *panchalis*, or folk songs described as “filthy” and “polluting” by missionaries. This description was also echoed by Indians such as Shib Chunder Bose, in a book titled *The Hindoos As They Are*: “The Panchali (with female actresses only) which is given for the amusement of the females . . . is sometimes much too obscene and immoral to be tolerated in a zenana having any pretension to gentility. . . . Much is yet to be done to develop among the females a taste for purer amusements, better adapted to a healthy state of society” (qtd. in Banerjee 172). By the end of the nineteenth century, *panchalis* had ceased to be performed. We may speculate whether the de-skilling of large numbers of performers resulted in some of them joining the indentured migration to the Caribbean and elsewhere, as shown by the report on the dancing girls and their troupe waiting to embark for Surinam.

That the making of the *bhadramahila* involved a new domestication is evident from the effort to dissuade women from attending public recitals of epics, or *kathakata*. It was feared that descriptions of the erotic affairs

of the gods, as in the *Krishna-leela*, for example, would be a bad influence on respectable women. According to a commentator in the Bengali journal *Somprakash* in 1863,

Since it [*kathakata*] has become a source of so much evil, it is not advisable for *bhadraloks* to encourage it. Those who allow their ladies to go to *kathakata* performances should be careful. . . . If, during *kathakata* performances, women stay home and are provided with opportunities to listen to good instructions, discussions on good books and to train themselves in artistic occupations, their religious sense will improve and their souls will become pure and they will be suited to domestic work. (Qtd. in Banerjee 171)

The genealogy of the domestic woman has been traced in contexts other than Bengal, as the nationalists attempted to fashion a purified civilizational essence in the face of missionary and colonialist criticism. As Susie Tharu and K. Lalita argue,

In India . . . the middle-class woman’s propriety was also to be vindicated under the glare of the harsh spotlight focused right through the nineteenth century on what was described as the moral degeneration of the Indians. Bureaucrats, missionaries, journalists and western commentators of various kinds filed sensational reports about Indian culture and made authoritative analyses of Indian character, which was invariably represented as irrational, deceitful and sexually perverse. The ultimate thrust of these descriptions was usually quite clear: the situation in India was so appalling that it called out for intervention by rational and ethical rulers [such as the British]. (“Empire, Nation” 208)

Tharu and Lalita wrote this in the context of the controversy about reprinting *Radhika Santwanam* (Appeasing Radhika), by the eighteenth-century Telugu poetess Muddupalani, a *ganika* (courtesan) at the royal court of Thanjavur. In 1911 another learned woman in the tradition of Muddupalani, Bangalore Nagaratnamma, reprinted her predecessor’s poem, only to be charged with obscenity. The poem describes the relationship between Radha and Krishna and the nature of their intimacy and was considered a fine literary work in its time. Copies of the book were seized and their sale forbidden. In an 1887 edition of the poem by the linguist Venkatanarasu, an associate of the lexicographer C. P. Brown, the verses considered sexually explicit and obscene had been removed. Initiatives led by the nationalist upper caste, such as the construction of the good Indian woman, sometimes found unlikely allies, such as the non-Brahmin Self-Respect movement, which in the 1920s provided support to the anti-naught campaign, also setting up as normative “the virtuous domestic woman” (Tharu and Lalita, *Women Writing in India* 13). The anti-naught campaign, which reached its peak in 1911, was initiated by Western-educated reformers in the early 1890s who wrote

about the degradation of women and the threat posed to the purity of family life by devadasis, temple and court artists, often derogatorily referred to as "nautch girls." The bill prohibiting dedication of women in temples was finally passed in 1947 (12–13).

Another figure evolved to complete the picture of virtuous womanhood was that of the upper-caste widow. The historian Tanika Sarkar contends that the Hindu widow emerged as a significant figure in nineteenth-century Bengal because her "purity," chosen consciously by her, "becomes at once a sign of difference and of superiority, a Hindu claim to power" (41). Women's monogamy, then, made possible the existence of the Hindu nation. As a contemporary writer, Srinibas Basu, put it, "This so-called subjection of our woman produces this sacred jewel of chastity which still glows radiantly throughout the civilised world despite centuries of political subjection" (*Hindur Achar Vyavahar*, qtd. in Sarkar 41). Sarkar argues that the ascetic widow was seen as gaining moral and spiritual energy through her "voluntary abdication of all earthly pleasures," thus ensuring "a reservoir of spirituality in each home and for the Hindu order as a whole" (42).

Although in the nineteenth century and later various forms of widow remarriage and cohabitation were prevalent, ascetic widowhood and sometimes sati (immolation with the husband's corpse) came to be seen as the norm in nationalist discourse. This would serve to illuminate Sarah Morton's annoyance and bewilderment at the behavior of her prospective Indian converts in late nineteenth-century Trinidad, who seemed so far removed from ascetic upper-caste norms.

The period when indentured emigration to the other colonies began, the 1830s, was also the period of the initial formation, via the social-reform movements, of nationalist discourse in India. Since the nationalists believed that official modernity would be produced through the project of the future nation, there was no room for formations of modernity other than those involving middle-class, upper-caste Indians. The problem with indentured laborers, both men and women, was that their geographic displacement and the new context they came to inhabit was enabling them also to become "modern." The transformations in the lives of the indentured caused by displacement, the plantation system, the disparate sex ratio, racial politics, and so on, had to be made invisible by nationalist discourse in order for the indentured to be claimed as authentically Indian. This was accomplished, I suggest, by erasing the difference between the agricultural laborer in Bihar and the one in Trinidad ("Chinitat," as the indentured called it) or in other parts of the subaltern diaspora and imaging these latter in particular as victimized, pathetic, lost, and helpless. Even when the changes in the emigrant were acknowledged, they were criticized as "artificial" and "superficial," loss rather than gain. Gandhi writes that the laborer came

back to India "a broken vessel," robbed of "national self-respect" ("Speech on Indentured Labour" 133). Any economic gain he might have obtained could not be set off "against the moral degradation it involves" ("Indentured Labour" 249).

The indentured woman in particular could not be accommodated in the nationalist discourse, again except as a victim of colonialism. By 1910 or so, when the campaign against indenture was gathering momentum, nationalism had already produced the models of domesticity, motherhood, and companionate marriage that would make the Indian woman a citizen of the new India. The question of what constituted the modernity of the Indian woman had been put forward as an *Indian* question, to be resolved *in India*. What, then, of the Indian women who were "becoming modern," but elsewhere? For nationalism, theirs would have to be considered an illegitimate modernity, because it had not passed through, been formed by, the story of the nation-in-the-making. By the late nineteenth century the route to modernity—and emancipation—for the Indian woman in India was a well-established one: education, cultivation of household arts, refinement of skills, regulation of one's emotions. The class-caste provenance of this project, and of the new woman, needs no further iteration here.

What sort of ideological project, then, did nationalism envisage for the indentured woman laborer who was shaping her own relationship with the "West" in a distant land? Reform was not practicable. Disavowal of this figure would not have been possible while the system of indenture still existed. The only solution, therefore, was to strive for the abolition of indenture. The manifest immorality and depravity of the indentured woman would not only bring down the system but also serve to reveal more clearly the contrasting image of the virtuous and chaste Indian woman at home. As Gandhi asserted, "Women, who in India would never touch wine, are sometimes found lying dead-drunk on the roads" ("Indenture or Slavery?" 147). The point is not that women never drank in India and started doing so in Trinidad or British Guiana but that for Gandhi and others this functioned as a mark of degraded Westernization and "artificial modernity." The nationalist reconstitution of Indian tradition, I suggest, was still incomplete when the new phase of the nationalist struggle, marked by the anti-indenture campaign, was inaugurated.

Although according to Chatterjee the nationalists had "resolved" the women's question without making it a matter for political agitation, with the anti-indenture campaign there seems to have been a renewed focus on women. At the end of the first decade of the twentieth century a *political* campaign was undertaken—mobilizing against the colonial rulers "a wider public than any previous protest" (Kelly 48)—to dismantle a system that was said to be turning Indian women into prostitutes.⁴ As Gandhi wrote,

"The system brings India's womanhood to utter ruin, destroys all sense of modesty. That in defence of which millions in this country have laid down their lives in the past is lost under it" ("Speech at Surat" 349). The nationalist discourse on indentured female sexuality, however, veered time and again from denouncing the women as reprobate and immoral to seeing them as having been brought to this state by colonialism.⁵

The Indian nationalists were joined by the European critics of indenture, led by C. F. Andrews, Gandhi's associate, who had worked with him in South Africa and had been mobilized by him to prepare a report on Indians in Fiji. As the anthropologist John Kelly puts it, Andrews and others "portrayed indenture . . . as a degenerating force and blamed it for the moral condition of the 'helots of Empire.' But they accepted the claim that the 'coolies' were degraded, and they agreed especially about what we might call the 'harlots of Empire'" (33-34). Gandhi's focus on the alleged sexual availability of women can also be read as a strategic move to counter the colonial administrative reports that defined, as Susan Bayly puts it, "the dependent status of unclean menial groups . . . in terms of the sexual availability of their womenfolk" (196). If indenture were ended, and the conditions for chastity for women thus provided, they would cease to be available, for instance, to their white employers in the colonies; thus, nationalism could refuse menial status for Indians in relation to the colonizer.

The nationalist campaign to end indenture was supported by a series of developments in Trinidad. By 1870, voices were being raised in the Creole press against importing Indian laborers. There was public criticism of the size of the subsidy for immigration, especially by cocoa interests (who used free labor, compared with sugarcane planters, who used indentured labor) and the professional colored and black middle class. The Creole middle class also sought to diminish the influence of the planters during the campaign for constitutional reform in the mid-1880s. Creoles who feared the influx of Indians into the political system they hoped to capture found new reasons to attack the system of immigration (Laurence 432-34). After the Hosay riots of 1884, when Moharram processionists in Trinidad were killed by the colonial police, the interest of the Indian press in the conditions of indentured laborers began to grow. The Anti-Slavery Society, in England, which had long criticized indenture, renewed its attacks after the 1884 riots (Laurence 448-54).

After immigration to Natal and some other countries was prohibited, Gokhale moved in the Legislative Council on March 4, 1912, that indentured emigration be wholly prohibited. He spoke eloquently of the misery of the immigrants, of the "immorality" resulting from the disparate sex ratio, and of the blow to national self-respect. The agitation to end indenture was fueled by the publication of reports from Fiji. An Anti-Indentured

Emigration League was formed in 1914. As Laurence writes, "Centred in Calcutta, it organized public lectures and the distribution of pamphlets against emigration and tried to discourage recruits on their way to Calcutta from continuing their journey. Soon it also began to operate in the United Provinces" (465). Leaflets were distributed in towns and villages, recruiters were molested, and relatives were brought to Calcutta to secure the release of recruits from the depot.

In 1915 Gokhale died, but Gandhi had returned from South Africa by then to provide leadership to the agitation. On March 20, 1916, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya's motion was discussed in the Legislative Council. He listed all the evils of the immigration system, drawing extensively on the situation in Fiji, and spoke of indenture as "a horrifying record of shame and crime," demanding that "the system . . . be abolished root and branch." In February 1917 Malaviya sought permission to introduce a bill for immediate abolition, which was disallowed. Not being able to obtain a clear assurance from the government about ending indenture, Gandhi toured the country and addressed public meetings, demanding that the abolition be announced before the end of July (Gandhi, "Abolition of Indentured Emigration"). Large demonstrations were held in Madras and Bombay. The viceroy, Charles Hardinge, was "pelted with telegrams," and his wife received many "asking her whether she approves of Indian women being converted into harlots and imploring her to help." Attempts were made to mobilize the opinion of Indian women. An appeal by Andrews to Indian women was printed in several languages and widely distributed in the United Provinces (Laurence 477-78).

As the final phase of the campaign against indenture gained momentum, among the delegations that met with Viceroy Hardinge to press for action were several organized by Indian women's associations. At the meeting between Colonial Office and India Office representatives on May 9, 1917, James Meston, representing India in the War Cabinet, stated that "the women of India" felt "deeply on the question [of indenture]." Satyendra Sinha, the other India representative, declared that "there was an intensely strong feeling of concern," including on the part of "ladies who lived in purdah, but read the news" (Tinker 350-52). In spite of Englishmen such as Alfred Lyall, governor of the North Western Provinces, and G. A. Grierson, who reported on emigration from Bengal and recommended it for its benefits to women, saying that it gave a chance for a new life to "abandoned and unfaithful wives" (Tinker 267-68), Viceroy Hardinge was unwilling to continue supporting a system whose "discussion arouses more bitterness than any other outstanding question." Hardinge was convinced that Indian politicians firmly believed that it "brands their whole race . . . with the stigma of helotry" and condemned Indian women to prostitution (340-41).

By mid-1917 the end of indenture was certain. Historians tend to see it as an issue that brought a new focus to nationalist politics in India and gave it a wider base. I would argue that it was not simply that. We need to reframe the indenture question so that it can be seen as marking the consolidation of the early national-modern, a putting into place of new (nationalist) moralities, new ways of relating between women and men, appropriate "Indian" modes of sociosexual behavior, the parameters for the state's regulation of reproduction as well as sexuality, and the delineation of the virtues that would ensure for Indian women citizenship in the future nation. It should be obvious that the historical formation of these virtues, for example, and the contemporaneity of their description were obscured by the nationalist presentation of them as the essential, and "traditional," qualities of Indian women.

While it is evident that the emigrant female was an important figure invoked by Indian nationalism in India, the centrality of this figure to "East Indian nationalism" in Trinidad has not yet been systematically elaborated.⁶ With regard to the indentured woman too, the immediate contrasting image for the colonialist was the African woman, the ex-slave, the urban *jamette* of Carnival, whose sexuality was othered, and sought to be regulated, by the European ruling class (Rohlehr, ch. 1). The *jamette* was seen as vulgar, promiscuous, loud, and disruptive, and the removal of this figure from Carnival and related activities became part of the project of creating a new urban middle class in Trinidad in the early twentieth century. Charles Kingsley, visiting Trinidad in 1909, sketched his impressions of African and Indian women. Describing the "average negro women of Port of Spain, especially the younger," he called attention to "their masculine figures, their ungainly gestures, their loud and sudden laughter, even when walking alone, and their general coarseness, shocks, and must shock." In contrast to the "the superabundant animal vigour and the perfect independence of the younger [African] women" is the picture of a young Indian woman "hung all over with bangles, in a white muslin petticoat . . . and green gauze veil; a clever, smiling, delicate little woman, who is quite aware of the brightness of her own eyes" (72).

Much of the elite's anxiety surrounding the *jamette* or even the rural Creole woman seemed to hinge on the fact of her being seen as independent, in both sexual and economic terms. The East Indian woman in postslavery society, then, brought in to compensate colonial planters for the loss of captive labor, had to be imaged as completely different from the African woman. For this, "Indian tradition" was invoked by different groups, and indentured women's failure to conform to the virtuous ideal of Indian culture was deplored. In post-indenture society the need to differentiate between the

African and the Indian woman would take on a new kind of urgency, both for the emerging Indo-Trinidadian middle class and for the dominant Creole imaginary. One important mode of differentiation would have to do with denying the obvious similarities between women of all races in Trinidad and emphasizing instead the similarities between indentured women and women in India. However, as I have tried to argue, the indentured woman was a figure that the nationalist construction of Indian womanhood had to disavow precisely in order to ensure its own coherence. If one set of reasons for the disavowal arose from the non-upper-caste provenance of the indentured woman, another set had to do with her incorporation into Creole modernity. But clearly, what placed indentured Indians outside the normative frameworks that were being assembled in India was not one set of reasons rather than another but the combination of both sets.

Thinking about Trinidad might be interesting to those of us investigating the processes by which contemporary feminism in India comes to rest on the historical disavowal of lower-caste/class women even as it claims to speak for them. The Trinidad example shows that for Indians in India this also involves a disavowal of other forms of modernity that have not passed through the anticolonial struggle or participated in its inevitable outcome. As Mrinalini Sinha contends, "The nationalist construct of the modern Indian woman also created the climate both for women's reforms and for women's entry, under male patronage, to the male-dominated public sphere." Sinha describes the early initiatives of Indian feminists as being linked to the "unprecedented mobilization of middle-class women" in the nationalist movement, manifested, for example, in the all-India women's organizations of the early twentieth century (483), many of which would have petitioned the viceroy in support of the campaign to abolish indenture. While nationalism provided the language and the spaces in which the middle-class woman could become modern, it also made her a representative, one who spoke for all other Indian women, who became, as Sinha puts it, "the transmitter of the fruits of modernization" (494). The indentured woman in the subaltern diaspora could never be seen in India as this kind of figure, given her caste/class characteristics and the tangentiality of her modernity to the project of the future nation. It is not just the notion of the female in India today, therefore, that rests on a disavowal of the indentured woman, but also the notion of the feminist, who has crucially been implicated in the project of nationalism even as she tried to formulate a critique of it.

In this essay I have tried to suggest that the present-day critical interventions in relation to the formation of the Indian national-modern might be strengthened by an examination of its illegitimate and disavowed double, "Indian" modernity in the Caribbean. It is hoped that this exercise will

also yield unexpected benefits for those intervening in issues of modernity and gender in Trinidad, affording especially for feminists a different purchase on the production of normative femininities and their complicity with discourses of racial difference.

Notes

1. Ranade's article was published in October 1893 in the *Sarvajanik Sabha Quarterly Journal*, edited by Gokhale. See Nanda, bk. 4, ch. 37.

2. At the Calcutta meeting of the Congress, Gandhi had Gokhale's assurance that a resolution on South Africa would be passed, and when his name was called, Gandhi read the resolution. As Gandhi wrote about that moment, "Someone had printed and distributed amongst the delegates copies of a poem he had written in praise of foreign emigration. I read the poem and referred to the grievances of the settlers in South Africa." Since all resolutions passed unanimously, Gandhi's too was passed, which did not mean that delegates had read and understood it. "And yet the very fact that it was passed by the Congress was enough to delight my heart," wrote Gandhi. "The knowledge that the *imprimatur* of the Congress meant that of the whole country was enough to delight anyone" (Gandhi, *My Experiments with Truth* 341).

3. According to Reddock, in 1891 only 6.2 percent of the female Indians were officially "housewives" rather than estate workers. The later years of indenture saw women's withdrawal into the domestic economy. Depressed wages for Indian laborers were accompanied by permission to produce cane and food crops on a piece of land that would be looked after by the wife and children. Women who worked for the family thus received no wages, although they were involved in "cane farming, market gardening, rice production and animal husbandry" (*Women, Labour* 39).

4. Note that after the end of indenture, the women's question in India became a social issue, to be resolved through legislation, not political mobilization.

5. John Kelly, for instance, points out that in the case of Fiji the critics of indenture stressed the sexual abuse of Indian women (30).

6. Recent unpublished work by Rhoda Reddock and Patricia Mohammed makes interesting beginnings in this direction.

Caribbean Migrations

Negotiating Borders

Evelyn O'Callaghan

Why do they go?

They do not know.

.

What do they hope for

what find there

these New World mariners

—Edward Brathwaite, *The Arrivants*

IN HER STUDY *What Women Lose*, María Cristina Rodríguez unpacks literary accounts of migration—what Alison Donnell calls the condition of "elsewhereness" ("What It Means to Stay")—by Caribbean women writers. However, it is increasingly tricky to distinguish between Caribbean and migrant or diasporic Caribbean writers, since contemporary writers from the region tend to spend extended periods of time "elsewhere" (Europe or North America) as temporary, permanent, or "strategic" migrants. But returning to Rodríguez's title, it is necessary to clarify that she also speaks to what Caribbean women are seen to *gain* "elsewhere," mainly in the British and North American cities where they have made a space for themselves. I want to make a connection between constructions of home and "elsewhere" for Caribbean women and permissible sexual subjectivities in and between both sites. Specifically, this essay suggests that women's narratives frame the West Indian home space as a place where traditional gender roles are rigidly upheld and transgressive female sexualities are punished, via rejection by the national body and/or violence against the woman's body. By contrast, the texts construct metropolitan centers as offering options for the "freeing up" of alternative sexual subjectivities. But if the fictions indict the heteronormative patriarchal structures of Caribbean nation-states, do they also imply that women who claim a certain kind of sexual freedom must explicitly or implicitly qualify their Caribbean citizenship? Put simplistically, do the writers depict Caribbean women as forced to choose between exploring unorthodox or non-normative sexualities and