



Protest and Punishment: Indo-Guyanese Women and Organized Labour

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If you happen to be born into an Indo-Caribbean family, an Indian family from the Caribbean, migratory, never certain of the terrain, that's how life falls down around you. It's close and thick and sheltering, its ugly and violent secrets locked inside the family walls. The outside encroaches, but the ramparts are strong, and once you leave it you have no shelter and no ready skills for finding a different one.

—Ramabai Espinet, *The Swinging Bridge*

Abstract: The participation of Indo-Guyanese and Indo-Trinidadian women in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sugar estate strikes and in the interwar development of trade unionism has been underestimated by colonial authorities, indentured men and historians. This essay combines historiography and literary analysis to contend with gendered archival gaps. First, I chronicle elided instances of Indo-Caribbean women's participation in labour organizing, with a focus on British Guiana. I then argue that the Guyanese writer Ryhaan Shah's novel *A Silent Life* (2015) is a *jahaji bahin* — “ship sister” — narrative that recovers the Indian ancestress as she was: not the Ramayanic Sita, wifely ideal adopted by Indo-Caribbean migrants, but a woman like the historical Sumintra, a martyred woman strike leader. I show that real women's labour protests and fictional stories of their descendants speak to each other in a nonlinear, genre-defying way across the spatiotemporal gap of archival absence, reshaping traditional narratives of Indo-Caribbean women.

Keywords: Indo-Caribbean, Guyana, trade union, *jahaji bahin*, indenture

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In 1939 British Guiana, weeder and alleged protest leader Sumintra was one of four striking workers killed at Plantation Leonora, West Coast Demerara, by colonial police for demonstrating against low pay and poor working conditions on her post-indenture sugar plantation (Ishmael 2014, 356). Sumintra, a Rajput woman (Tiwari 2013, 39), was neither the first nor last Indo-Guyanese¹ woman to play a role in anticolonial labour strikes or lose her life protesting on sugar estates in the interwar and post-World War II pre-independence periods.

As early as 1872, fifty indentured women were said to have protested alongside their husbands for better wages and working conditions in a revolt at Plantation Devonshire Castle (Roopnarine 2015, 179). In his seminal *History of the Guianese Working People, 1881-1905* (1981), labour activist and historian Walter Rodney writes of the role of a re-indentured woman named Salamea in a disturbance at Plantation Friends, Berbice, in 1903. Said one driver:

I know a bound coolie woman named Salamea. She has been on the estate for three years. I heard that she told her shipmates on the Thursday to go fight. She was at Friends before and she went to Calcutta and returned to Friends. Salamea, I hear, urge the coolies who had assembled to fight. (1981, 157)

The Pathan Salamea (Tiwari 2013, 39) was one of a minority of indentured Indians who returned to India after their initial labour contract expired, but later decided to re-indenture themselves and remigrate to the Caribbean. Female remigrants sometimes had enough of a command of English and knowledge of their legal rights to protest planters' and Indian men's treatment of themselves and other indentured women (Shepherd 2002, xxv). Plantation Leonora, where Sumintra was killed, was a major site of Indo-Guyanese female militancy and violence associated with interrelated sugar worker and independence protests: after Sumintra, there was Kowsilla, killed in a Leonora strike in 1964,² two years before British Guiana became the independent Cooperative Republic of Guyana on May 26, 1966.

The roles of Indo- and Afro-Guyanese women in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sugar estate and other anticolonial strikes, and in the development of trade unionism, are vastly understudied and underestimated. Indian women's

roles in colonial labour revolts were “doubly silenced, first by the colonial regime, and second by indentured men...their actions were recorded as supporting Indian men to carry their grievances” (Roopnarine 2015, 179). Records of women’s participation in indentured worker revolts tend to be confined to notations of the women’s deaths and injuries and passing mention of their roles in specific protests. Rodney’s attention to women workers is the most comprehensive exception. Of Indo-Guyanese women estate workers he writes:

the spirit of rebellion...revealed itself within the ranks of the outwardly placid Indian women whom management, as well as male workers, apparently expected to remain isolated from social decision making...During the 1890s, there was increased awareness of the adverse conditions under which indentured females worked—including field labor performed in advanced stages of pregnancy. From time to time, estate disturbances started in the weeding gang, which was essentially the women’s sphere. (1981, 157)

Neither plantation managers nor Indo-Guyanese men expected the involvement of women in labour disputes, even when protests revolved around gendered issues like pregnancy and sexual assault, and even though some Indian women who had completed at least a first five-year term of indentureship occupied *sadarine* plantation headwoman positions under male supervisors (Roopnarine 2015, 180).³

The familial and social consequences of Indo-Guyanese women workers’ participation in the public sphere and in labour and protest activities are also far less explicit in the archive and in Indo-Caribbean historiography than in Indo-Caribbean literature. In this essay, I combine historiographic and literary analysis to contend with archival absence. Following Anjali Arondekar, and as I have shown elsewhere in the case of performing archival “recoveries” of elided Caribbean stories like those of queer subjects (2016), we, the post-colonized search-and-rescuers, seek “salvific truths” when we might instead accept the singular stories we find as less proof of loss than evidence of a quotidian “radical abundance” (Arondekar 2015, 107, 110). Such a combined historiographic and literary method is not simply recuperative, for a rediscovered singular instance or a collection of singular instances does not necessarily constitute a historical

phenomenon, nor is a literary story generalizable or proof of the motives and life experiences of long-dead persons. Historical accounts of Indo-Guyanese women's labour protest activities and fictional stories of the haunting of their descendants by their ancestral pasts speak to each other in a nonlinear, genre-defying way across the spatiotemporal gap of archival absence.

Methodologically, what I present here is a flowering of *possibility*, and avenues for reshaping traditional narratives of Indo-Caribbean women's agency through informed imaginings of what was, what could have been, and what could be—as has always been the cultural function of the myth, the story, the fable. After giving account of elided instances of Indo-Caribbean women's participation in labour organizing, I argue that the Guyanese writer Ryhaan Shah's novel *A Silent Life* (2015) is a *jahaji bahin*—"ship sister"⁴—narrative predicated on a rejection of Indo-Guyanese heterosexist morality and the concomitant remembrance of the Indian ancestress as she was: not the Ramayanic Sita ideal of sainted mother and submissive wife adopted by Indo-Caribbean migrants, but a woman like Sumintra, a labour leader and resister of imperialism. *A Silent Life* details the haunting of a postcolonial Muslim Indo-Guyanese woman, Aleyah Hassan, by her grandmother Nani's interwar, 1930s-era story of labour organizing in conflict with marriage and Indo-Caribbean traditional cultural values. But it is not a Caribbean story that simply memorializes community suffering; instead, the novel suggests that Indo-Caribbean women's historical plantation labour activism is a precursor to their descendants' long-awaited political participation in and leadership of the postcolonial nation.

Shah's *A Silent Life* is characteristic of a growing canon of Indo-Caribbean "women's narratives," written mostly by Indo-Guyanese and Indo-Trinidadian women at home and abroad, that acts as a supplement to the traditional androcentric, exilic model of the Indo-Caribbean novel promulgated by writers like V.S. Naipaul, Samuel Selvon and David Dabydeen. Narratives that instead centre the lives and experiences of Indo-Caribbean women include fiction by Trinidadians Ramabai Espinet, Lakshmi Persaud, Shani Mootoo and Lelawattee Manoo-Raming, and Guyanese Ryhaan Shah and Narmala Shewcharan; plays

by Guyanese Paloma Mohamed; and poetry by Trinidadians Vahni Capildeo and Rajandaye Ramkissoon-Chen, and Guyanese Rajkumari Singh, Mahadai Das and Lakshmi Kallicharran.

The postcolonial Indo-Caribbean novel modeled by male writers like Naipaul—so influential and foundational is the only Indo-Caribbean Nobel Prize in Literature winner that he cannot be escaped or ignored—responds to twentieth-century Caribbean national struggles with the despair of the embittered man who is either emasculated and isolated at home (as typified by Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*, 1961), or dislocated in permanent geographic exile in the cosmopolitan colonial centre (as exemplified by nearly all of Naipaul's works except his earliest, most humorous writings like the collection *Miguel Street*, 1951). The exile is emotionally and physically separated from his natal family, rarely returns to his homeland, and he and the novel offer little hope for an uncorrupt Caribbean political future. There is often an implied disavowal of the Indian indentured ancestor by his nominally civilized, urban Indo-Caribbean descendant, and “country coolies” are typically portrayed as still living in the ignorance and poverty of the village or plantation.

By contrast, narratives that revolve around the lives of Indo-Caribbean women centre the past in a familial, gendered way: women protagonists tend to remain embedded in their families regardless of whether they live or travel abroad, and women's stories almost always contend with the figure of the migrant ancestress and the intersection of her perceived sexual morality with Indo-Caribbean community (re)formation.

Shah's *A Silent Life*, like other Indo-Caribbean women's novels notably including Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge* (2003), Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996) and Valmiki's *Daughter* (2009), and Persaud's *Daughters of Empire* (2012), episodically moves back and forth in time and place between colonial and postcolonial periods in the Caribbean, and England (in Espinet's and Mootoo's works, Canada). Shah's later novels *Weaving Water* (2013) and *A Death in the Family* (2014) also focus on Indo-Guyanese women's stories; the former engages

with indentured women's marital and labor struggles aboard ship and on the plantation, and the latter returns to one minor theme in *A Silent Life*: the interweaving of Islam and Indo-Caribbean family identities in the present day.

As scholars and writers like Patricia Mohammed (2004), Mariam Pirbhai (2010), Peggy Mohan (2007) and Tejaswini Niranjana (2006) show, such women's narratives call implicitly for a *jahaji bahin*, "ship sister" gender politics commensurate with the heterosexual *jahaji bhai*, "ship brother" migrant story that functions, Sean Lokaisingh-Meighoo (2000) argues, as the originary Indo-Caribbean familial relationship, and thus as a totalizing historical narrative of all Indo-Caribbean people.

Jahaji bhai describes the bond formed between mostly male indentured Indian shipmates bound for the New World. This bond was sustained in the early generations of indenture and sometimes beyond, when men, and later their families, attempted to maintain relations with those "relatives" dispersed to distant plantations. I argue elsewhere that

the *jahaji bhai* narrative of survival gives Indo-Caribbean people their own heterosexual, transoceanic story of labor and racial oppression with which to counter and parallel the nationalist discourse of Afro-Caribbean slavery and postcolonial entitlement to land and rule. Indo-Caribbeans are thus maneuvered into the hybrid, ocean-crossing paradigms of Caribbean area studies because the *jahaji bhai* suffered a "Middle Passage" voyage too. (2016, 251)

In pursuit of an Indo-Caribbean origin myth, the *jahaji bhai* narrative erases Indo-Caribbean women's agency, non-marital romantic and sexual relationships, and friendships with other women, to rehabilitate the women's non-normative origins. The fact that the majority of indentured Indian women were single women travelling alone to the New World was perceived as shameful by their male contemporaries and their descendants.

Shah's novel, which won the 2007 Guyana Prize for Literature first book award, displaces the importance of *jahaji bhai* ties and legacy in favour of inventing

and incorporating the *jahaji bahin* into the story of the Indo-Caribbean, but emphasizes that the maternal ancestral legacy must be both recognized and resisted in the pursuit of contemporary Indo-Caribbean women's self-development. The novel is cosmopolitan; set in Guyana and London in the second half of the twentieth century, it exhibits the characteristic Caribbean literary engagement with London or North American exile and diaspora, as established by the earlier generation of male Caribbean novelists and Afro-Caribbean women writers like Jamaica Kincaid and Paule Marshall. But it is also a story about Indo-Guyanese women's ancestral legacy of rural plantation work, and its implications for their labour and leadership in the future.

Indo-Caribbean Women Workers in Colonial Modernity

The Indo-Caribbean was slow to gain full political participation in Guyana and Trinidad. Intra-community reassertion of gender strictures, however, began soon after Indian indentured labourers realized they would be settling permanently. I propose at least four definitive periods in Indo-Caribbean ideologies of gender in relation to labour. These periods are somewhat generalizable to both Trinidad and Guyana, with their similar and roughly equivalent proportions of Indo- and Afro-Caribbean citizens, their gaining of independence and birthing of postcolonial ethno-nationalism in the same twentieth-century period (Trinidad became independent in 1962 and Guyana in 1966), and the ongoing familial, musical, culinary and other cultural exchanges between Indo-Trinidadians and Indo-Guyanese, who also choose to live together in the same diasporic immigrant neighborhoods in London, Toronto, and New York.

First, as I will discuss, the nineteenth century from 1838 onward was defined by an extreme imbalance in the number of male and female Indian migrants that resulted in a spate of "coolie wife murders" and accusations by both white planters and Indian men of Indian women's alleged sexual immorality (Bahadur 2014); second, Rhoda Reddock points to an early twentieth-century period around 1913 in which Indian women's roles began shifting from plantation

worker to “housewife” as Indian men in Trinidad and elsewhere “withdrew ‘their’ women from wage-labour but not to look after the house, as was officially stated,” but as part of a colonial state-sanctioned patriarchal project to reproduce the labour force (1994, 38); third, in the 1960s, the major period of Anglophone Caribbean independence from Great Britain, a growing number of Hindu and other Indian women in the Caribbean began completing primary and some secondary education and working outside of the home, often to great controversy (Singh 2012, 164); and fourth, the 1980s-90s saw the beginnings of Indian women’s governmental participation—as demonstrated in Shah’s novel—that culminated in the election of Kamala Persaud-Bissessar as seventh Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago in 2010.

This last period overlaps with a first move in Caribbean feminist historiography to “recover” Indian women’s stories in an attempt to account for their differences from Afro-Caribbean women’s histories and to counteract “stereotypes of passivity” and intra-community patriarchy (Mohammed 2003, 117). Beginning with the work of Mohammed, Reddock, Rawwida Baksh (Soodeen), Nisha Haniff, and others, and culminating recently in Gabrielle Hosein’s and Lisa Outar’s groundbreaking edited collection *Indo-Caribbean Feminist Thought: Genealogies, Theories, Enactments* (2016), feminist scholars of the Indo-Caribbean have shown that in Trinidad and Guyana, the bodies of Indo-Caribbean women function as the loci and repositories of Indianness, contra Africanness, in both colonial and postcolonial national rhetoric. Familial life becomes repressive, especially when Indian women and men are taught that the price of seeking recourse outside of that inflexible structure is the total loss of it. As Espinet writes in *The Swinging Bridge*, her novel of an Indo-Trinidadian woman’s coming of age during the 1960s independence period and after, “the outside encroaches, but the ramparts are strong, and once you leave it you have no shelter and no ready skills for finding a different [life]” (2003, 15).

In general, intra-group social control of Indo-Caribbean women provided a twentieth-century alternative to national political participation by producing a community that embraced its distinctiveness from the Afro-Caribbean, rather

than mourning its lack of inclusion in the public sphere. Gender-normative, heterosexual Indian women were at the centre of the idealized Indo-Caribbean familial and domestic sphere, which is typically portrayed in postcolonial Caribbean literature as a space of entrenched traditional, religion-enforced patriarchal mores that are coded by the community as racially Indian values. Adherence to normative gender roles ironically becomes the definition of being Indian in exile and the major avenue of rejection of racial and cultural assimilation into the African-majority Caribbean.

The active participation and leadership of Indo-Guyanese women workers Sumintra, Kowsilla, and Salamea in sugar plantation strikes of the twentieth century were preceded by the complicated colonial case of Jamni, a weeder and child minder, who was the purported catalyst for the 1896 indentured worker uprising at Plantation Non Pareil, East Coast Demerara, in which five Indian men including her husband were killed. Based on the accounts of his Non Pareil indentured grandfather and other eyewitnesses, Rampersaud Tiwari relates that:

The uprising began when Jamni the wife of Jangli was abducted and allegedly raped by Gerad Van Nooten, the Deputy Manager of the estate...Jamni who said that when he attempted to rape her, she struck him in his face with the heavy steel *berwas* or *karas* (bangles) she was wearing on her wrists. (2013, 40)

Non Pareil harboured several overseers and managers “who were habitual violators of immigrant women and girls on the estate” (ibid). Historically, this tale becomes one of the righteous angers of the emasculated Jangli and four other Indian men martyred by the colonial militia for protecting their women from white sexual depredations—with a few intriguing details that undermine the primacy of the gendered familial honour narrative and make it instead a story of imperialism and labour oppression.

First, the protesting men were accused by Immigration Agent Henry J. Gladwin, whom they had approached with their complaints, of being treasonous Indian deserters of the British Army and thus subject to deportation. Second, after these accusations, the men “concede[d] the uprising as an industrial one; and as a

reward for their coerced agreement, they agreed to accept certain very small increases and to return peacefully to work” (ibid). There is evidence that wage disputes, not Jamni’s assault, were the underlying reason for the protest; and the agreement with Gladwin was predicated on the Indian men’s tacit acceptance of Gladwin’s assertion that Jamni had no cause for protest because “coolie women were living freely with overseers” (ibid). Jangli was indeed “a disbanded and exiled VCO of the Indian Army,” which is perhaps why, following the temporary resolution, he and the four other Indian men were nonetheless shot and 59 others injured by cavalrymen sent to arrest them (41).

Jamni reported she was capable of resisting and physically defending herself, as she struck the overseer in the face with her bangles even though he may have succeeded in raping her (that is unclear). But in male witnesses’ accounts of the 1896 Non Pareil events, she is framed as a passive body and event catalyst: neither empowered protagonist nor martyr. Her husband and other indentured Indian men are the ones remembered as heroes and colonial resisters, though they were apparently willing to compromise her defence for increased pay. There is no record of what happened to Jamni after her husband was killed; presumably she remained indentured, subject to violences of various kinds.

Gladwin’s impugning of Indian women’s morality and the indentured men’s seeming preoccupation with Jamni’s honour recall that among the incarnations of the *jahaji bahin* is the *rand* or *randi*, a Hindi (Hindustani, on the estates) word that originally meant “widow” or “woman,” but that in India, before indenture, tellingly came to mean “prostitute” (Hock and Joseph 2009, 231). It is the spectre of this *rand* that results in the eliding of the diverse histories of Indo-Caribbean women. The term signified, in the Caribbean plantation era, a widow, harlot, both, or simply an Indian woman of allegedly loose morals (Espinet 2003, 275). Brinda Mehta (2004) and Mohammed (2004) argue that indentured Hindu men, having already been disenfranchised in India by the upper castes, had much to gain from emigration. Nonetheless, Hindu women “had the most to gain by crossing over to different lands because their confinement within Hindu patriarchal structures in India made them victims of abusive family and

communal traditions" (Mehta 2004, 5). As Gaiutra Bahadur (2014) shows in her archival history of indentured women on Guianese plantations, the first Hindu and Muslim women migrants found themselves with theretofore-unknown freedoms, notably an extensive choice of sexual and marital partners. Indian women in the Caribbean thus acquired from both Indian men and the colonial British an early reputation for having "loose morals" (Kempadoo 2004, 38-39). Every Indian woman was automatically assumed to be a *rand*.

The Caribbean decline of caste strictures precipitated by the *kala pani* "black water" voyage often led to the unusual Caribbean arrangement of lower-caste male recruits marrying higher-caste women—but higher-caste women who were perceived as cut off from their families and irredeemably sullied. These women, including many widows, were ideal female recruits for the Indian *arkatiyas* (recruiters) hired by the British to solicit Indians into indenture in the Caribbean (including Suriname), Fiji, Mauritius, and East and South Africa. It was quite difficult to recruit Indian women, and men who were already married did not want to bring their wives. Hugh Tinker, Madhavi Kale, Marina Carter and Khal Torabully, Verene Shepherd, Bahadur, Niranjana, and other historians of indenture observe that "fallen" higher-caste women were the best British officials could hope for when "[t]he planters demanded not only more women but the 'right kind of women,' who would be not only productive labourers on the estates but also faithful wives to the male workers" (Niranjana 2006, 61). The "right kind of women" generally meant upper-caste and other non-Dalit women, as emigration agents equated lower caste with lower morality. Many women who emigrated were nonetheless not the desired Brahmin widows, as "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" (ibid).

Violence against women began as soon as ships embarked upon the *kala pani*. Not only were Indian women subject to the advances of sailors, but they "also suffered abuses at the hands of Indian men on board as domestic violence was not unheard of in instances where people tried to live as couples and families on board" (Shepherd 2002, 31). The British East India Company and its affiliates

attempted to guard their female investments from male crew, indentured men, and the women's own purported "loose" tendencies (23). As on sugar estates, sexual assault aboard ship was blamed not only on men and on the small number of women, but on Indian women's alleged promiscuity.

The disparate sex ratio of indentured labourers was of concern not just to Indian men, but to British colonial officials. There were only fourteen women among the 1838 "Gladstone arrivals" that constituted the first batch of Indian indentured labourers to British Guiana (5). By the 1890s, Caribbean planters wanted a stable domestic workforce, leading to increased attempts to recruit women and a reduction of women's indenture period from five to three years (Niranjana 2006, 59). Planters assumed that marriage and family were the keys to domesticating their male labour force, and that jealous violence against Indian women would lessen if there were enough wives to go around. The British Caribbean issue commonly referred to by planters as the "coolie-woman problem"—uxoricide and domestic violence against the small minority of Indian women on the sugar estates—was grave enough to warrant a relaxation of "standards" and admission of almost all female comers.

The statistics of Indian male violence against Indian women were grim. At the height of the epidemic of indentured violence, 70% of all murders in Trinidad between 1890 and 1898 were domestic incidents committed by Indians against Indians, with the majority of murderers being male and the victims female, including child brides.⁵ British colonial authorities blamed the "coolie wife murders" on the inherent moral defects of "jealous" Indian men and Indian women of "low character" (Carter and Torabully 2002, 52). In contrast to some European orientalist and later Caribbean stereotypes of the docile Indian woman "with no mind, personality or significance of her own" (Kempadoo 2004, 38), British planters and Indian men assumed that

many of the female immigrants were prostitutes, social outcasts, and women who had abandoned marriage and domesticity...The skewed perception of Indian women held by the British reinforced patriarchal tendencies within the Indian community in both India

and the Caribbean, which found the women not only “immoral” but corrupted sexual servants to non-Indian men (Ibid) Indian women migrants thus faced discrimination and abuse from mutually reinforcing British and Indian patriarchies.

The violence of the plantation was not confined to abuses of plantation managers against indentured workers and to men against women. One documented response to plantation working conditions was suicide, a theme that, as I will discuss, Shah takes up in her novel. Mohammed writes that the high male suicide rate was worrisome to colonial officials, who blamed it, again, on the immorality of women (2004, 60). The indentureship legacy of suicide haunts Guyana to this day: The World Health Organization reported in 2012 that Guyana had the highest suicide rate in the world. In a nation of less than a million people, Guyana had an age-standardized suicide rate of 44.2 per 100,000 inhabitants.⁶ This phenomenon has been poorly studied, but reports seem to indicate the population at highest risk is (still) rural Indo-Guyanese men.⁷ Long before 2012, the alleged “coolie people” tendency to kill themselves—usually over family rows or failed love—was a source of gallows humour in Guyana, where Indians were said to be always “drinking Malathion” (an insecticide), and in Trinidad, where they were always “drinking Gramazone” (Gramoxone, an herbicide). Both of these poisons are older agricultural pesticides to which estate labourers had access. The substances are capable of killing all Caribbean “pests”—taking any kind of life that was an impediment to sugar plantation economics, from weeds to weevils to workers.

Today, domestic violence rates in the Caribbean, in the Indo-Caribbean and in Caribbean diasporas remain abysmally high. The first recorded murders of both 2017 and 2018 in New York City occurred in the Indo-Caribbean enclave of Richmond Hill, Queens; in the 2018 incident, 26-year-old Indo-Guyanese immigrant mother Stacy Singh was brutally killed by her abusive 46-year-old Indo-Guyanese husband Vinny Loknath, who then committed suicide.⁸ The gendered links between colonial plantation violence and high contemporary

rates of domestic violence and suicide in Caribbean communities remain undertheorized.

Indian indenture in the Caribbean ended in 1917, but many Indians remained wage labourers on sugar estates (and cocoa estates in Trinidad). The 1930s were a pan-Caribbean period of labour unrest in which strike participation of Indian women and Indians in general was newly visible in both Trinidad and Guyana. In Trinidad, Indian women, including one female organizer “Naidu” who exposed “the practice of company officials taking girls to their bungalows ostensibly to ‘scrub floors,’” (Reddock 1994, 154), were specifically targeted for their involvement in the 1934 Sugar Workers’ Strike, when, peculiarly, wages were raised for every striking Indian sugar worker in Chaguanas except persons who wore jewelry. This obvious discrimination against bangle-wearing Indian women resulted in further protest and a reversal of the wage raise exception (155).

Reddock’s work on the participation of Trinidadian women in labour activities sheds light on the fact that, though Trinidad and Guyana are often rightfully compared to each other as postcolonial Anglophone nations with large Indo- and Afro-Caribbean populations (as I have suggested, there are for example historical similarities in the way Indian women’s social behaviour is policed in both countries), there are differences in the countries’ labour organizing trajectories that stem from Guyana’s larger, continental arable land mass and ability to sustain rice farming, and the development of Trinidad and Tobago’s oil and gas industry.

During the 1898-1938 period in Trinidad,

Wage-labor relations became more generalized and replaced indentured/contract labor on the plantations[,] and industrial production, based on small-scale manufacturing and petroleum production, was to replace agriculture as the main contributor to national income. The foundations for the long-term process of proletarianization, and its eventual corollary, “housewifization,” were firmly established, facilitated by increased unemployment especially during the post-war depression. (69)

Trinidad's Education Code of 1935 explicitly re-oriented the education of girls toward a "housewife" curriculum, and except under special circumstances forbade the employment of married women as teachers (49). Trinidad was becoming a petroleum-producing country that encouraged the nuclear family model where women's role was domestic support of the masculine industrialization project, while British Guiana remained agricultural—but the crop diversified.

The pre- and interwar periods saw the development of the Guianese rice industry by formerly indentured small farmers, who were at first still part-time estate labourers dependent on sugar planters willing to lease land (Rodney 1981, 87). Between 1895 and 1920 these rice growers became a "paddy proletariat" that "fitted more closely the definition of 'proletariat' than 'peasant'" (88) and eventually became the Indo-Guyanese middle class. Rice, unlike oil and gas, was an agricultural product that even when cultivated for export perpetuated the colonial legacy of agricultural land use and labour. The large-scale production of sugar also continued on the far-flung plantations of British Guiana. In sum, before and after World War I, British Guiana remained an agricultural colony—with some timber and mineral resources—while Trinidad entered a different type of modernity with global oil at its centre. In industrializing Trinidad, women found work as oilfield domestics—though Reddock notes that few domestics were Indian, and many were from other Caribbean countries (82).

When Critchlow Got the Boys Together: Anticolonial Trade Unionism in Guyana

After Jamni, women's roles in British Guianese labour strikes and in the trade union movement of the early twentieth century continued to be subsumed into narratives of anticolonial heroism by brave Guianese men. The 1905 Georgetown dockworker strike for higher wages and fewer working hours that was the catalyst for the eventual 1919 formation of the first trade union in Guiana, the British Guiana Labour Union (also known as the British Guiana Trade Union), was characterized by organizer Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow as the story

of how he “got the working men and boys together” at the Georgetown waterfront (1945, 49). And yet, Critchlow notes,

at that time I did not know that all the estates in the country followed us and struck on account of low wages. At a particular estate, the Ruimveldt estate, they shot at the people as they came down to the town...They were shooting the people coming down from the estate. At the news of the shooting, the women started a riot. The magistrate ordered the women’s hair to be cut off. They “catted” the men and sent them to prison. (Ibid)

“Catting,” as the right Reverend and Wesleyan missionary H.V.P. Bronkhurst described in 1883, was the practice of publicly whipping indentured labourers (and previously slaves) in British Guiana with the cat-o’-nine tails to deter murder and other crimes. According to Bronkhurst, who bloodthirstily and “respectfully suggest[ed] the adoption” of catting and the implementation of “decapitation” if catting did not work as a criminal deterrent, catting was a particularly effective punishment for the “Indian Coolie,” who

detests with perfect hatred and with indescribable horror the public catting in the presence of all his countrymen. He would sooner prefer death by strangulation, hanging, or decapitation, to his bare back being torn by the ‘CAT-O’-NINE-TAILS.’ *So intolerable is the disgrace, so intense the shame.* (1883, 399)

It is the affective, vengeful, and easily gendered qualities of shame and disgrace that were visited as punishment upon the free and indentured people convicted in the 1905 strike: men were to be shamed with a public whipping, and women who rioted had their hair cut off, ostensibly depriving them of a physical marker of femininity for the unfeminine actions of starting a riot and challenging the order of the colonial economic system. And there were many women involved in the rioting. Rodney attests that 41 of the 105 convicted of involvement and 19 of the 45 whose charges were dismissed were women, arguing that “the implication could well be that at least one in every three ‘rioters’ was a woman, a credible ratio given the large proportion of women in the city of Georgetown at the time” (1981, 206). Rodney is also clear that

Women from all levels of the working people were involved in the 1905 riots. Court records do not sustain the slur that even those arrested were all rowdies, viragos, prostitutes and the like. One

encounters reference to a “badly clad ‘lady’ of the centipede⁹ class” and to one “Daisy, the Centipede Queen;” but in general, the absence of such appellations is striking, because the prosecution would presumably have been at pains to point out where persons charged had criminal records—whether they were men or women. There were a few women who participated in the East and West Bank labor struggles, and these were undoubtedly genuine wage laborers. (207)

The majority of women wage labourers involved in the 1905 strike were likely domestics, as according to the 1891 census, the number of domestics was 7,432 out of a female population of 28,355, and in the 1905 riots, “it is a plausible inference that many of those who took to the streets were themselves domestics, especially in view of the fact that almost one in four women in the city was a domestic” (206). In Georgetown, the striking women were mostly Afro-Guianese; on the sugar estates, Indo-Guianese.

In the later interwar period, the worldwide impact of the 1929 United States stock market crash extended to British Guiana in the form of a “serious economic crisis” between 1930 and 1935 that caused many rural people to move to Georgetown in search of already scarce urban work. The result was vicious job competition, rioting, and strikes. Odeen Ishmael writes that “the chairman of Bookers, the main sugar company, reported to his directors in London that the strikes were organized by ‘communist agitators’” (2014, 353). This report echoed a growing U.S.-driven hemispheric narrative about the evils of communism, but early labour unions in Guiana could not be described accurately as communist or socialist. They were primarily anticolonial and anti-imperialist; Critchlow describes, for instance, his arrest in 1919 for quoting in a handbill the “two lines which were a call to arms” from the *Marseillaise* (1945, 51).

At the time of the 1939 riot in which Sumintra was killed, the 1838-1917 transoceanic period of Indian indenture in the Caribbean had ended, and though there was a nascent Indo-Guianese Georgetown middle class—led by, among others, journalist and community advocate Joseph Ruhomon, famed for

his 1894 racial uplift lecture “India—the Progress of Her People at Home and Abroad and How Those in British Guiana May Improve Themselves”— many Indians in British Guiana still lived and worked on rural plantations under the auspices of the planter group the Sugar Producers Association (SPA). Rodney and Guyanese politician and anticolonialist Cheddi Jagan observed that in the first half of the twentieth century, Afro- and Indo-Guyanese men and women were mostly united in their hostility toward the plantation system. Though the two groups were used as mutual strikebreakers by planters, Jagan argued:

Up to the mid-1920's, they had a common enemy—the white planters. At that stage, the Indian sugar workers accepted the African militant trade union leader, Hubert N. Critchlow, as their “Black Crosby;” the class struggle then tended to take on the racial appearance of black against white, and African and Indian against European. It was only when the Indians began to climb out of their “logie” environment and to compete at the middle-class level for jobs and positions of prestige that conflict began, clearly indicating the economic basis for racism. (2006, 82)

In the 1930s, the heyday of trade union formation in British Guiana, the Indo-/ Afro-Guyanese racial strife that destructively characterizes postcolonial Guyanese politics was not yet the defining issue it was to become, as all workers were united in their complaints against the British.

British Guianese sugar workers' grievances were many: they worked long hours, they were underpaid, they were not informed what they would be paid before the day's work was over, and they, especially women, were subject to racist and degrading language and treatment by overseers and drivers (Alexander and Parker 2004, 347). Populist strikes on rural sugar plantations were common, and not directly orchestrated by Critchlow and other Georgetown trade unionists: “The sugar strikes of the early and middle 1930s occurred without there being in existence any organized union to direct them. Although...the British Guiana Labour Union had some influence, it had little formal organization outside the city of Georgetown” (348). The urban-rural divide meant in essence that sugar workers, who were then mostly Indian, did not have unions that directly represented their interests until the 1936 founding of the Man Power

Citizen's Association (MPCA) by Ayube Mohamed Edun, a middle-class Indo-Guianese goldsmith and writer (ibid, Benjamin et al. 1998, 41).

In their editorial preface to an excerpt of Edun's 1938 "curious and eccentric political manifesto *London's Heart Probe and Britain's Destiny*," Joel Benjamin, Lakshmi Kallicharan, et al. imply that Edun's attention to his own educated intellectual prowess and his conceptualization of the ideal post-imperialist state as one "ruled by a benign dictatorship of the intelligentsia" (1998, 41) meant the MPCA was a vanguardist organization. Edun did have a non-worker leadership role in ending the February 1939 Leonora strike; after Sumintra and three other strikers were killed, MPCA members were permitted by planters to enter the estate in an attempt to defuse the situation. Edun "was able to talk with the strikers at a nearby Hindu temple, and the following day the workers returned to their jobs" (Alexander and Parker 2004, 349).

The Sugar Producers Association agreed, in May 1935, to recognize the MPCA as the first Guianese union representing sugar workers, "for purposes of collective bargaining, giving it the right to negotiate in any case of dispute, and to hold meetings on the plantations" (ibid). The influence and membership of the MPCA expanded greatly, though by the late 1940s, amidst allegations of planter collusion and the incorporation of bauxite and other workers into the union (350), Indo-Guianese sugar workers had shifted their allegiances to the Guyana Industrial Workers Union (GIWU). GIWU was not recognized as a negotiating body by the SPA, and this and other conflicts led to the infamous June 16, 1948, killing of five striking Indo-Guianese sugar workers, the "Enmore Martyrs," as they are still symbolically called in Guyanese national discourse (Jackson 2012, 204).

Killing Men: Silence and Suicide

Salamea, who encouraged the indentured to strike, and Jamni, the proximate reason for the colonial militia's killing of five indentured men, are construed not as rebels in their own right but as responsible for the deaths of labouring Indian

men. The structuring familial “violent secret” of Shah’s novel *A Silent Life* is just that: that the Indo-Guyanese woman Nani, by dint of her anticolonial labour organizing and participation in public life, caused not simply the death, but the suicide of her husband, cursing her female descendants to a life of gendered unhappiness.

A Silent Life follows the life of Muslim protagonist Aleyah Hassan, who leaves British Guiana as a young adult on the eve of 1966 independence to study in London. She stays and marries a well-off Indo-Guyanese man in England, but she is continually haunted by the life and secrets of her grandmother Nani (“maternal grandmother”), to whom she had been very close as a child. These hauntings occur in a series of temporally disrupted, nonlinear dreams and interludes of “madness,” where Aleyah “sees” terrible historical events and family incidents. She begins to chafe at her own matrimonial bonds and oppressive husband, and eventually experiences a stereotypically hysterical feminine nervous breakdown. The breakdown causes her to divorce her husband and leave her children to return to Guyana in the 1990s, when the nation too is experiencing a time of political turmoil and transition: in 1992, after 28 years of rule amidst allegations of fraudulent voting and rigged elections, the Afro-Guyanese-dominated People’s National Congress (PNC) lost the national election to the Indo-Guyanese-majority People’s Progressive Party (PPP). Upon Aleyah’s return to Guyana, her grandmother Nani divulges the secrets of her own and her female indentured ancestress’s lives, then dies.

Through the telling of the women’s *jahaji bahin* stories, *A Silent Life* attempts to move beyond static memorialization of a *jahaji bhai* Indo-Caribbean community. As Judith Mizrahi-Barak writes, though *A Silent Life* revolves around “the disjunction and conjunction of voice and silence” (2009, 251) in the hidden history of the subaltern, the “reconstruction of self is also made possible through the written word of the text” (257). Shah’s novel is a historicizing text; characters draw together orally recovered fragments to recount and therefore (re)create female ancestral Indo-Caribbean history as they imagine it happened, as it may well have happened.

The history of the Hassan family is tied to Plantation Leonora, that traditional locus of female sugar worker resistance. Though their indentured Indian progenitors were initially sent to Plantation Versailles, the first female member of the family born in British Guiana ends up married, as a weeder and a cane-cutter, at Leonora; that woman is described as one who had a hard life but accepted it with a sort of resignation that, rather than bravery, becomes the Indo-Caribbean female inheritance. So Aleyah theorizes that her grandmother Nani got her spirit from the progenitors who actually made the ship journey, as “[t]hat would take spirit and daring—to stand at the stern of a sailing ship and watch the land of your ancestors disappear from view, possibly forever. It had to be their blood that made fists of their hands and placed the fight in her shoulders” (Shah 2005, 72). Once on the estates, the intrepid migrants revert and turn inward, raising their children to be quiet and keep their heads down.

Marriage is of primary importance in *A Silent Life*. Aleyah’s entire female lineage is haunted by her grandmother Nani’s inability to be a community-approved “proper wife,” and Aleyah herself, in leaving her emotionally abusive husband, acquires the same stigma. Though the family is Muslim, the majority Hindu Indo-Caribbean idealization of the Ramayanic Sita applies; as Sherry-Ann Singh writes, “the essentially patriarchal family system that developed during the early post-indenture period held Sita—chaste, submissive, faithful, and loyal to her husband—as the highest ideal of womanhood” (2012, 95). Valmiki’s ancient epic *Ramayana* and Tulsidas’ 16th-century Ramayanic *bhakti* (devotional) poetic retelling the *Ramcharitmanas*, in their attention to the themes of exile and overcoming material, familial, and spiritual hardship, are the most important religious texts in Indo-Caribbean Hinduism. Hindus in the Caribbean diaspora accounted for the seemingly unjust behavior of Rama, avatar of the god Vishnu, toward his wife Sita—testing her virtue and banishing her—by explaining that “Rama’s status as a king duty-bound to his subjects took precedence over his role as a husband” (135). The Sita ideal of Indo-Caribbean women persisted until at least the 1970s (96), and it is never entirely absent from discussions of Indo-Caribbean women’s public and private behavior that continue to frame the community’s self-perceptions at home and abroad.

In 1930s British Guiana, Aleyah's grandmother Nani is no meek Sita—though married, Nani is an outspoken young woman who acquires a reputation for helping poor Indian women and men sugar and rice workers by offering them the vision of organized labour. Nani acquires socialist principles from the mysterious Pandit Seecharan, a Hindu religious leader—even while fraternizing with Hindus is frowned upon for a Muslim woman. Nani is bright enough to understand workers' rights ideologies and fiery enough to electrify others when she repeats them. In her old age, she tells Aleyah that she wanted to help other women in more destitute positions and alludes to historical incidents in which “strikers were shot in the back,” requiring revenge and restitution (Shah 2005, 182).

Nani's problem is that she literally outstages her husband Nazeer, a quiet man who is talented in the implied feminine pursuit of dancing. She speaks on stage at unionizing meetings and is far more articulate than he. Despite the presence of vocal women in Guianese labour movements, in Nani's village, labour organizing is “man's work. The managers dealt with men” (24). At her final workers' rally, Nani answers political questions her husband cannot; the crowd murmurs and laughs, and Nazeer walks away. He stays out lying in a punt trench¹⁰ until dawn and his hair turns white overnight. When he comes home, Nani—then called “Baby,” a typical feminine, affectionately infantilizing “call name” (nickname) for Indo-Guyanese women—is so panicked at the idea of losing her husband, her social net, and legitimacy as an Indian wife, that she apologizes repeatedly and cries,

Nazeer, Nazeer, I'm going to stop all this now. All the books and leaflets—look, I am tearing them up. They're dead. I'll burn them. I'll bury them. I'll be a wife to you and a mother to Shabhan, that's what I'll be from now on. (27)

Burning books on colonialism burns history, and burning the promises of socialist pamphlets burns the present of labour organizing and the future of postcolonial independence. Nazeer believes it is futile to disavow reality by destroying the words that signify it. Baby's invocations fail when Nazeer refuses her promises of change, saying:

If you ever stop-up your words they'll choke you. You aren't like the other women round here who just keep to their skirts and their kitchens. I like the fire in you, but I can't be who you want. You want to change the world. Me, I just want to enjoy it. You push me how you want to go and I try to speak your words and fight your fights. Now I'm "Baby's boy." That's what the men call me. That and worse...Shame's gone deep to the roots. (28)

Personal, gendered shame has gone literally to the roots of Nazeer's hair, which turns white with inadequacy; but he also implies that all the ancestral roots of Indians in the Caribbean are besmirched by his wife's lack of submission to him. He wants to be a proper patriarchal *jahaji bhai*. Nazeer hangs up his dancing bells, takes to his room, and never emerges again. The social and marital damage has been done. Nani gives up her organizing work and goes as far as to remove Shabhan, Aleyah's mother, from school, declaring that books and learning cause unnecessary heartbreak for women. Nani's granddaughter Aleyah is in turn also bookish, causing an elderly female relative to say "It's the books that worry me...The words are heavy-heavy." They "carry the weight of the world and can 'crush and kill'" (52). That is what happened to Nani: her voice and learning crushed her husband and ultimately killed him. Women's non-adherence to traditional gender roles, it is suggested, actually causes men to die.

The great reveal of *A Silent Life* is Nani's secret that she enabled her husband to kill himself by literally giving him the rope to hang himself. It is the inverse of the plantation "coolie-wife murders," when Indian men killed their wives and sexual partners. Nazeer first threatens to kill himself when his wife Baby/Nani offers to help a poor Indian woman receive compensation from the manager of the sugar estate on which her husband had died. Nazeer is terribly offended that Baby would have the temerity to speak up to a white man. He says, "I'm not going to stand by and watch. Not this time...I'll kill myself, I tell you. I'll hang myself first" (184). The exasperated Nani, it seems, eventually hands him a rope, and he hangs himself in depression, and perhaps, spite. Aleyah's family and neighbours all know the story, but no one will repeat it until confronted by Aleyah, who experiences a dream-vision of the event the night before leaving

her homeland for London. That night she hits Nani, who says nothing. In the morning after the dream, Aleyah feels as if nothing has happened,

But as I cross the floor, I tread on something soft. I reach down and pick up a small bundle of threads. They are pale gold and coarse. Directly overhead is the beam where my grandfather threw the rope. I take these strands of rope to my room and put them away carefully in a corner of my suitcase. (57-58)

The rope represents the possibility of escape from the world via suicide, in a continuation of gendered plantation violence. Linear temporality is disrupted when women usurp their husbands' roles; the golden rope is always there, haunting women, waiting to be used by men. Indeed, in the 2018 Indo-Guyanese immigrant murder-suicide of Stacy Singh, her killer husband hung himself. In the novel, Nani goes hysterically and temporarily blind after she finds Nazeer's body, and gives up all participation in the world. She "took to her rocking chair and turned herself into an old woman, killing herself with her memories," and seeing only "a long piece of rope" (35).

The community was not without feeling: "People felt so sorry for us. A dead that got carried off with a rope round his neck is not supposed to get prayers said for him, but the moulvi came. He felt so sorry for us, and said the prayers asking Allah's pardon" (30). Individual pity for the man who committed suicide and for his bereft family—which is left without a male protector and provider—does not preclude assigning the incident to its proper place of disgrace in the community narrative. The entire township considers Nani's lapse into silence "rightful penance for her sin," and Aleyah says "they look on my mother and father as good children who are taking care of their family worries with correct fortitude: they have not bruised the neighbourhood with bitter talk, or thrown their mother out to suffer among strangers" (45). Nani and women like her are hitches in the group transformation into a spotless Indian-Caribbean community ripe for the national stage.

On her deathbed, after Aleyah returns to independent Guyana, Nani whispers to Aleyah, "Now that you are home, daughter, the rope will never again throw itself over..." and Aleyah responds, "No, no! No, Nani, not that! Never! I could never have done..." Nani shushes her, and with her dying breath, says, "Safe. We are all safe, safe, safe" (185). It is unclear who or what is "safe" in this moment. Nani may be safe in death, and Aleyah is safe because she has just finally filed for divorce from her husband and returned to Guyana, exercising agency over her own life for the first time. As the Indo-Guyanese *jahaji bahin*, inheritor of the courage of Nani and other female plantation workers who protested colonial labour conditions, Aleyah must actively take part in the nation's destiny.

Aleyah's private realization of her family history is perhaps the first step in giving postcolonial Indo-Guyanese women a voice in the public sphere. Her education, life experiences, and eloquence thrust her into a leadership role. Like her grandmother, she becomes an advocate for Indo-Guyanese women, exposing sexual crimes formerly deemed unspeakable because they intersected with racial violence. At a multi-ethnic meeting of younger educated people, Aleyah says she heard "Not just about the burning of buildings and the looting and beatings, but of Indian women being stripped in the streets while the opposition thugs—including women—stood about laughing" (164). The group falls silent and she becomes acutely conscious that she is the only woman and one of only a few Indians in the room. Finally, "one young black man says in a low voice, his head in his hands, 'It shames us all.'" Conciliatorily, those assembled then agree that racism was "the tool of the colonizers" who "taught us well," thereby absolving themselves and postcolonial historical perpetrators of responsibility (164-65). The gathered men also do not apologize for sexism.

Every social issue in this postcolonial Guyanese context is problematically reduced to race and the political struggle between Indo- and Afro-Guyanese. Aleyah, however, may have the power to overcome racial differences by becoming Ma Sita again, this time by employing the trappings not of individual wifedom, but abstract, public maternity. One young man urges Aleyah to run

for office as a potential “Mother to a troubled nation” (166). Having rejected being a mother to her sons, Aleyah is encouraged to be a mother to her people and her nation. But at the close of the novel, she remains uncertain about re-assuming the mantle of any kind of motherhood. The transition from the traditional female indentured migrant’s occupation of plantation weeder to postcolonial contender for the presidency need not be framed in gendered terms or as a return to Sita’s idealized domestic womanhood. If Aleyah is to be a politician and leader, it will be on her own terms, in the spirit of her revolutionary grandmother and other women who raised their voices in colonial protest. The *jahaji bahin* narrative of Shah’s novel thus posits Indo-Caribbean female subjects who are not defined by rupture from India or by the reassertion of traditional gender mores, but rather by a mode that is both continuity and invention, insisting on its Indo-Caribbean historical and cultural particularity while accommodating the plurality of the nation, and driven by the ostensibly invisible and powerless woman worker in the field and at home upon whose foundational presence the community and the state rest.

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¹ I use "Guianese" to denote national identity in colonial British Guiana before May 26, 1966, when the country gained independence from Great Britain and renamed itself the Co-operative Republic of Guyana and its citizens "Guyanese."

² Kowsilla (also called Alice) was murdered by a later-acquitted Afro-Guyanese scab driving a tractor in 1964. Though she became known as a martyr to the causes of Indo-Guyanese sugar worker rights and national independence, she may have been a "market woman," rather than an estate worker and union member—which does not negate her involvement (Waters and Daniels 2010, 545).

³ *Sadarines* also informally supervised Indian women's affairs like the Guyanese *boxhand* or *throwing box* and Trinidadian *susu*, which were communal, peer-to-peer rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs) that allowed indentured women to pool 10 cents of their \$2.00 earnings each week, then give the sum to each woman in turn (Roopnarine 2015, 181; Haniff 1988, 43).

⁴ The term *jahaji bahin* ("ship sister"), with variant spellings, is newer to popular usage than *jahaji bhai* ("ship brother"). See Khan (2016) for further description of contemporary uses of the term.

⁵ Niranjana writes: "The prevalence of the 'wife murders' by indentured Indians in Trinidad and British Guiana in the nineteenth century was represented as due to the inconstancy of the women...Between 1872 and 1880, 27 percent of all murders in Trinidad were committed by East Indian immigrants; subsequently, East Indians accounted for 60 percent of the murders between 1881 and 1889 and 70 percent between 1890 and 1898...The majority of the murderers were men, and those killed were women who were wives, concubines, or fiancées. Although there are quite a few court cases involving men who had killed their child brides whose fathers had promised them to several men for a hefty bride price each time, many of the cases were against men who had 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" (2006, 69).

⁶ "Suicide: Desperate Measures: When It Comes to People Taking Their Own Lives, Guyana Leads the World." 2014. *The Economist*, September 13. <http://www.economist.com/news/americas/21616972-when-it-comes-people-taking-their-own-lives-guyana-leads-world-desperate-measures>.

⁷ "The 'Werther Effect' in Juvenile Suicide in Guyana." 2014. *Kaieteur News*, June 8. <http://www.kaieteurnews.com/2014/06/08/the-werther-effect-in-juvenile-suicide-in-guyana/>.

⁸ Thomas Tracy, Kerry Burke and Larry McShane, "Woman Fatally Stabbed in Queens Home, Abusive Husband Found Hanging from Tree in Suspected Murder-Suicide." 2018. *New York Daily News*, January 1. <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/queens/queens-woman-found-stabbed-death-home-article-1.3731590>.

⁹ At the turn of the twentieth century, "centipedes" described "a small quasi-criminal segment of hustlers who were resident in Georgetown—the products of rural-urban migration and unemployment both in the countryside and in the city" (Rodney 1981, 205).

¹⁰ A "punt trench" is an open tunnel filled with shallow water through which oxen and/or tractors pull "punts," flat vessels loaded with cut sugar cane stalks. They generally run on streets between the roadway and homes, and during the colonial era, stretched all the way from plantations to coastal ports. Nowadays the trenches remain but are filled with garbage and wastewater.