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Life, Labor, and a *Coolie* Picturesque in Jamaica

Jenny Sharpe

Jamaica's plantation system did not end with the 1834 Slavery Abolition Act despite vocal complaints about idle estates and the financial ruin of the planter class. *Stark's History and Guide to Jamaica*, published in the late 1890s, uses the legal phrase "in ruinate" for the sight of plantations retired from sugar production. The travel guide's British American author, James Stark, describes motoring through a Jamaican countryside dotted with one or two working sugar estates but only the remnants of others detectable through the thick growth of trees and weeds. The unruly tropical shrubbery, which had been cleared for planting sugar, was reclaiming its island birthright. No longer under the management of their plantation masters, Afro-Jamaicans, Stark observes, "were rapidly relapsing into a state of savagery again." Peeking from the thick undergrowth was a chimney or an aqueduct; a great house on a hilltop was moss covered and in a state of disrepair. He laments the former orderliness of neatly planted rows of sugar cane having vanished with the abandonment of estates, the sight of which would instill in any traveler "a feeling of desolation." But suddenly, the "wild growths" give way to a new order of banana palms being worked by a "larger and thriftier" people, the sight of which breathes life into a landscape of waste and decay. "The old order of things has changed," Stark triumphantly declares. "The banana has succeeded in supplanting the sugar-cane."[1] Bananas, which were first introduced into Jamaica in 1872, had replaced sugar as its major

1 James H. Stark, *Stark's History and Guide to Jamaica (Illustrated)* (Boston: James H. Stark, 1898), 144–45. Because the title page reads as *Stark's Jamaica Guide*, I will hereafter be using the contracted title.

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export crop by 1880. Their cultivation was largely undertaken by indentured workers imported from India; however, the workers' identities are not provided in this initial sighting, since they blend into the landscape as part of its pleasing scene.

In order to alleviate fears of anarchy (especially after the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion), Stark assembles the full repertoire of an imperial picturesque in his travel book. As an aesthetic style that originated in late-eighteenth-century English landscape paintings, the *picturesque* was extended to the British Empire as a visual affirmation of civilization and control.[2] Krista A. Thompson's *An Eye for the Tropics*, the most extensive study of a West Indian picturesque, reveals how the Jamaican landscape itself was transformed for tourism through a process she calls "tropicalization," which involved making plant life conform to imperial fantasies of nature's beauty.[3] Not only were nonnative plants introduced as new cash crops but photographers were invited during the 1890s for the specific purpose of creating a visual portfolio of idyllic rural life that would dispel the common perception of an island in ruins. In the resulting photographic work, a painterly picturesque of rolling hills and pastoral scenery became replaced with calming vistas of imported tropical plants: tall, graceful coconut trees, the geometrical symmetry of pineapple groves, and the interlaced canopies of banana palms.[4] Because tourism was developed by the United Fruit Company through their desire to maximize cargo ship capacity by carrying passengers on the upper decks of their steamers, the picturesque photographs of rural landscapes, agricultural crops, and tourist sites drew on an interconnected visual idiom for presenting the Jamaican land and its people.

The late David Boxer, a Jamaican artist and former chief curator of the National Gallery, identified over fifteen hundred photographic images, including those that were reproduced as postcards, lithographs, stereographs, and lanternslides.[5] While the majority of these photographs are of scenery and colonial buildings, some feature the working poor posed in a variety of urban and rural settings. A new imperial picturesque was created for tourism, one in which Black Jamaicans served as props for the real subjects of the photographs: sugar canes, coconuts, pineapples, and bananas.[6] In their portraits of estate workers' everyday lives, photographers provided cultural contexts for the manual labor in lieu of depicting the work itself.[7] The two

2 See Geoff Quilley, "Pastoral Plantations: The Slave Trade and the Representation of British Colonial Landscape in the Late Eighteenth Century," in Geoff Quilley and Kay Dian Kriz, eds., *An Economy of Colour: Visual Culture and the Atlantic World* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 106–28; Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 46–70; Jeffrey Auerbach, "The Picturesque and the Homogenisation of Empire," *British Art Journal* 5, no. 1 (2004): 47–54; Patricia Mohammed, "Gendering the Caribbean Picturesque," *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* 1, no. 1 (2007): 1–30; Kay Dian Kriz, *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement: Picturing the British West Indies, 1700–1840* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 157–93; and Tim Barringer, "Land, Labor, Landscape: Views of the Plantation in Victorian Jamaica," in Tim Barringer and Wayne Modest, eds., *Victorian Jamaica* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 281–321.

3 Krista A. Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 5.

4 See ibid., 27–91.

5 David Boxer, "Collecting Early Jamaican Photographs," in David Boxer and Edward Lucie-Smith, eds., *Jamaica in Black and White: Photography in Jamaica, c.1845–c.1920; The David Boxer Collection* (Oxford: Macmillan Educational, 2013), 9.

6 Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, 55–64.

7 David Boxer, "The Duperlys of Jamaica," in *Duperly: An Exhibition of Works by Adolphe Duperly, His Sons, and Grandsons, Mounted in Commemoration of the Bicentenary of His Birth* (Kingston: National Gallery of Jamaica, 2001), 16.

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leading Kingston-based photography studios were A. Duperly [Armand Duperly Sr.] and Sons, which displayed its work at the Jamaican Exhibition of 1891, and James Valentine and Sons, whom the governor invited to prepare a Jamaican exhibit for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago.[8] During the early twentieth century, a selection from the Duperlys' 1891 exhibition was published as a large photobook, *Picturesque Jamaica*, with their most popular photographs being reproduced as inexpensive postcards and in travel guides.[9] The original silver gelatin prints, the development of which involves a layering process, have a particularly magical quality. Boxer, who owned one of the largest private collections of the photographs, describes his initial viewing of one of the Duperlys' prints in this way: "Technically, it astounded me, the beauty of the actual silver gelatin print. They called it a black and white print. But these were purpley plum-blacks of myriad tones and creamy whites."[10]

It is perhaps the illusion of reality coupled with the visual artistry, tactile quality, and stunning beauty of the photographs that account for their continued reproduction long after accomplishing their desired goal for tourism. In a companion essay to *An Eye for the Tropics*, Thompson is critical of a photograph from James Valentine and Sons' *Cane Cutters* series being used for the cover and frontispiece of a history book on British slavery and its abolition. Because photography was not introduced in the anglophone Caribbean until after the Slavery Abolition Act, a late-nineteenth-century composition of sugar cane workers serves as visual evidence in the place of missing photographs of enslaved Africans. Thompson argues that scholars who use the photographs in this way "telescope between slavery and the era of tourism" because their picturesque scenes of Afro-Jamaican sugar cane workers are designed to elicit nostalgia for pre-emancipation plantation life in the very act of promoting a New Jamaica for commercial investment and tourism. Her essay makes a compelling case for adopting "a more radical reformulation of the 'evidence of things unseen' and unphotographed" by making photographic absences integral to the archival record.[11]

But what if the evidence of things unseen refers less to what is unphotographed than to what is present but overlooked? Unlike Afro-Jamaicans who serve as props for agricultural products, Indian field workers are the subject of photographs that include props from their culture, such as artisanal tools, heavy jewelry, and religious curiosities, in the creation of a different kind of imperial picturesque, one that is unique to the presence of Indians in the Caribbean. Between 1837 and 1917, approximately 430,000 indentured workers journeyed

8 The other invited photographers were James Johnstone, John Cleary, and J. W. C. Brennan.

9 A. Duperly and Son, *Picturesque Jamaica: With Descriptive Text of the Island* (Kingston: A. Duperly and Son, n.d. [1908]). While the photo studio carried the name A. Duperly and Sons, because one of the sons, Armand Jr., died in 1903, the photobook appeared under the name A. Duperly and Son. The initial edition was followed by a series of reprints with extra pages of photographs added. All editions were published under A. Duperly and Son, despite Armand Sr.'s death in 1909. See Boxer, "The Duperlys of Jamaica," 18.

10 Boxer, "Collecting Early Jamaican Photographs," 8.

11 Krista Thompson, "The Evidence of Things Not Photographed: Slavery and Historical Memory in the British West Indies," *Representations* 113, no. 1 (2011): 57, 63.

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from British India halfway around the globe to labor on West Indian plantations.[12] Because the large mechanized estates required an intensive work force that could be easily managed and disciplined, Amar Wahab traces the emergence of what he calls a "coolie–West Indian" picturesque that emphasizes the migrant workers' heathen religion and exotic culture as a form of containment and social control.[13] Indians are depicted as a quaint race that is inferior to Europeans but superior to Africans in disposition, morals, and appearance. Owing to indentured workers being from India's peasant class, Orientalizing tropes were filtered through an ethnographic style. The cultural props are so compelling that even when attired in Western clothing or shown living alongside Afro-Jamaicans, Indians are identified as new arrivals or as *coolies*, an undesirable and derogatory label. In order to maintain the semblance of their enduring culture, evidence of the fruit estates to which they were contractually bound is minimized. Rather than telescoping time by invoking nostalgia for slave plantations, as is the case with the picturesque photographs of Afro-Jamaican cane field workers Thompson identifies, photographs of Indian estate workers telescope the geographical distance of imperial spaces by creating the appearance of the photographer having chanced upon an Indian village in rural Jamaica. Indians were not the only migrants, whose numbers in Jamaica included around 10,000 West Africans imported between 1841 and 1867 and around 2,000 Chinese. But totaling 37,027, Indians did constitute the largest group of newcomers. Because of the relative invisibility of African and Chinese indentured workers, since Africans blended with Afro-Jamaicans and the Chinese population had dwindled to 481 by 1891, Indians came to serve as the face of imported labor in the late-nineteenth-century photographs produced for Jamaican tourism.

This essay argues that a "coolie picturesque" simultaneously reveals even as it conceals the permanent settlement of Indians and their racial mixing with Afro-Jamaicans. Wahab declares to have searched for but not found any photographs of Indian men and Black women together during the period of indentureship.[14] "Indeed," he concludes, "the very image of proximity between East Indians and racialized others in the West Indies could threaten the claims about cultural imperviousness and antimiscegenation that were rationalizing strands of Orientalist arguments to enact regulation of East Indian indentured immigrants."[15] Anna Arabindan-Kesson similarly observes that the nineteenth-century Jamaican photographic archive seldom shows South Asians and Afro-Jamaicans together.[16] Instead, images of Indians are ethnographic in nature, since they "dr[a]w on both anthropological photography of India and picturesque

12 See Madhavi Kale, *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor in the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). Noting the transference of people from one end of the British Empire to the other, Kale identifies the indentured system as "imperial labor reallocation rather than labor migration" (5).

13 Amar Wahab, "Mapping West Indian Orientalism: Race, Gender, and Representation of Indentured Coolies in the Nineteenth-Century British West Indies," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 10, no. 3 (2007): 283–311. See also Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, 122–34; and Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, 79–85.

14 See Wahab, "Mapping West Indian Orientalism," 311n88.

15 Ibid., 306.

16 See Anna Arabindan-Kesson, "Picturing South Asians in Victorian Jamaica," in Barringer and Modest, *Victorian Jamaica*, 397.

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conventions that revolv[e] around the body of the Indian peasant and artisan."[17] Arabindan-Kesson mines this anthropological approach for recovering missing stories of Indian exiles who maintained a connection with their homeland through cultural and social practices that permanently transformed the Jamaican landscape. I, on the other hand, examine the same photographic record for how an imported Indian labor force is made to appear as autonomous communities despite residing on the same plantation and working alongside Jamaicans. Once the term of their indentureship expired, Indians moved into nearby Afro-Jamaican villages, where the two groups loosely self-segregated except in cases where Indian men entered into informal marriages with Black women.[18] A few photographs of Indians and Afro-Jamaicans living and working together do exist. However, this cohabitation and racial mixing is not self-evident because of the Indian settlers' Jamaican identities being overwritten by a coolie picturesque. The illusion of self-contained Indian villages in the photographic archive is informed by, even as it reinforces, a colonial requirement of the separation of the races.

For working against a colonial logic of racial segregation, I deploy Viranjini Munasinghe's idea of a "dougla logic."[19] *Dougla*, a derogatory Bhojpuri word (*dogala*) for "bastard" or "half caste," was used in Trinidad and Guyana for the mixed-race children of Indian and African descent.[20] A dougla logic is not the same as creolization, since Indians were regarded within a "colonial racial order" as "unmixables" and, as a result, were historically excluded from the category of "creole."[21] Dougla exists as a *flaw* within a colonial order because it represents the racial degeneration of Indians and religious contamination of Christianized Jamaicans. Despised for their inferiority by both Indo- and Afro-Caribbeans, douglas were historically confined to a space of nonexistence. More recently, the label has been claimed as a source of pride and identity. There is little indication that the term was used in Jamaica, where the mixed-race population was more likely to be absorbed into an Afro-Jamaican majority as a result of a higher percentage of Indian males partnering with Black Jamaican women.[22] For this reason, information on the mixing of peoples of African and Indian descent in Jamaica is often difficult to find. My purpose in invoking a dougla logic is not to uncover a Jamaican mixed-race identity so much as to deploy its language as a reading strategy against a hierarchy of race that frames our understanding of colonial archives. As Lisa Lowe observes about British civil servants policing the boundaries that divided the people they governed, "The racial classifications in the

17 Ibid., 411.
18 See Verene Shepherd, *Transients to Settlers: The Experience of Indians in Jamaica, 1845–1950* (Leeds, UK: Peepal Tree, 1994), 209.
19 Viranjini Munasinghe, "Dougla Logics, Miscegenation, and the National Imaginary," *South Asian Review* 27, no. 1 (2006): 204–32.
20 *Dougla*, as an antimiscegenation term originating from within the Hindu community, reveals their internalization of a racial hierarchy based on an Orientalist classification of India's ancient Aryan civilization, to use Romila Thapar's phrase, "almost as a lost wing of early European culture." Romila Thapar, "Interpretations of Ancient Indian History," *History and Theory* 7, no. 3 (1968): 319.
21 Munasinghe, "Dougla Logics," 210. Also see Shalini Puri, *The Caribbean Postcolonial: Social Equality, Post-nationalism, and Cultural Hybridity* (London: Palgrave, 2004), 193.
22 Shepherd, *Transients to Settlers*, 209.

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archive arise, thus, in this context of the colonial need to prevent these unspoken 'intimacies' among the colonized."[23] As I already mentioned, photographs of Indo- and Afro-Jamaicans living together do exist; however, the mixed communities are identified by one racial group or the other but not both. The composition of the photographs, being informed by a colonial racial order, distracts a viewer from seeing the evidence that is in plain view, even today.

Deploying a dougla logic involves resisting the aesthetic lure of a coolie picturesque by focusing on photographic flaws that offer the potential for an alternative view of the past. The first half of my essay examines defects in the photographic archive, along with efforts to remove them, for widening preexisting cracks in the smooth surface of the picturesque. I call these flaws *time* and *motion* because they disrupt the fabricated temporality of preindustrial village life that places Indians outside of Jamaican history. Examining two different photographs from the same photo shoot introduces movement into frozen tableaux while revealing how the photographer derived his desired staging of the scene through a removal of perceived imperfections. Reading across different versions of the same scene also allows me to detect an early-twentieth-century revisionist history based on the particular photographs selected for reproduction in the Duperlys' *Picturesque Jamaica* and on postcards. The second half of the essay focuses on the place of Indian women in the coolie picturesque. Photographs of female indentured workers show them engaged in domestic tasks such as washing, cooking, and husking rice but not in the harsh manual labor of estate work.[24] I supplement the Jamaican photographic archive with Trinidadian studio portraits of "coolie belles" and "Indian types" in order to demonstrate how a white male fantasy was transposed onto Jamaican Indian women, thereby pushing their visual representation even further into the shadows. I read the studio portraits through a dougla logic by identifying their signature of Oriental beauty—an adornment of the pure-blooded Hindu female with rich jewelry—on the mixed-race bodies of Jamaican dougla women. My essay concludes with inexpensive, mass-produced stereo cards that depict Indians laboring alongside Afro-Jamaicans and Indian women engaged in estate work. The movement of my study of a late-Victorian photographic archive from silver gelatin prints to studio portraits and mass-produced postcards and stereo cards is in the interest of breaking the illusion of a coolie picturesque.

Intimacies of the Colonized in a Coolie Picturesque

The conditions of "free" and "unfree" waged labor reinforced the dynamics of the "savage/civilized" characterization of Jamaican freemen and Indian indentured workers in the description from *Stark's Jamaica Guide* with which I open this essay. In his study of the emergence of a "coolie–West Indian" picturesque, Wahab observes a reinvention of colorfully dressed and

23 Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 35.
24 See Arabindan-Kesson, "Picturing South Asians," 403–5.

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happy slaves for presenting Indians as compliant and industrious workers.[25] He proceeds to argue that because of the presence of Black freemen, the new plantation picturesque goes even further in showing Indians to be civilized and morally upright. Thompson devotes only a few pages to photographic images and travel accounts of Indians in *An Eye for the Tropics*, in which she argues that "the traits of civilized subjects—industriousness, morality, and beauty" make them "more picturesque than blacks."[26] While acknowledging that the depiction of Indians as attractive and industrious constitutes an aesthetics for controlling free Black workers, particularly those who protested the importation of foreign workers, Thompson does not investigate the descriptions of Indians as racial stereotyping. Wahab, on the other hand, reminds us that Indians, as "Orientals," were previously regarded as "indolent or irrational" and that the positive qualities were attributed to them only after they arrived in the West Indies.[27] His words alert us to Stuart Hall's demand that we attend to the social conditions responsible for transforming or activating racial stereotypes.[28]

The picture that Stark and other travel writers presented, often borrowing from the same repertoire of observations and told stories, is one of the lazy and wasteful lifestyles of Black Jamaicans contrasted to the hardworking inclination of Indians whose thriftiness allows them to save enough money to return home.[29] What none of these authors mention is that indentured workers were bound to the estates, with their daily routines being organized around strict schedules that were enforced through criminal punishments like beatings, fines, and imprisonment. Two-thirds of the Indians transported to Jamaica became permanent settlers because of the cost for repatriation being shifted from the planters and government to the migrants themselves.[30] In 1868, the residency period of their contracts was extended from five years to ten as Indians were encouraged to settle on the island. By the 1890s, when pamphlet writers commissioned by the United Fruit Company were praising the ability of Indians to save enough money to return home, the possibility of return existed largely in the imagination. Once indentured workers' contracts ended, they became known as "time-expired," joining Afro-Jamaicans as waged laborers but not in an entirely harmonious relationship. The infamous British colonial strategy of "divide and conquer" was deployed in the West Indies between peoples of African and Asian descent as much as it was in India between Hindus and Muslims, and this strategy pitted Afro-Jamaican waged workers and Indian indentured workers against each other. Members of each social group saw themselves as superior to the other, with

25 Wahab, "Mapping West Indian Orientalism," 289–91.
26 Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, 82.
27 Wahab, "Mapping West Indian Orientalism," 291.
28 Stuart Hall, "Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media" (1981), in Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, eds., *Selected Writings on Race and Difference* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 97–120.
29 A few of the other travelogues using the "lazy Negro / industrious Coolie" racial stereotyping include Mabel B. Caffin, *A Jamaica Outing*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Sherwood, 1900); Edgar Mayhew Bacon and Eugene Murray Aaron, *The New Jamaica* (New York: Walbridge, 1890); Bessie Pullen-Burry, *Jamaica as It Is* (London: T. F. Unwin, 1903); Alfred Leader, *Through Jamaica with a Kodak* (Bristol: John Wright, 1907); and I. P. Mills, *Jamaica Tourist and Motor Guide* (Boston: Ainslie and Grabow, c1908).
30 See Shepherd, *Transients to Settlers*, 92–104.

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Indo-Jamaicans echoing the colonial stereotype of "Negro wastefulness and laziness" and Afro-Jamaicans redefining "coolie thrift" as stinginess and selfishness.[31]

While a change in the legal status of Black Jamaicans from enslaved to freemen is clearly marked by the historical date of 1838, which formally ended their four-year apprentice period as a form of indentureship, the change in the status of Indians after their terms expired is less clearly defined. This lack of clarity is further complicated by the fact that Indians were brought to the island over a period of seventy-one years, from 1845 until 1916, when the importation of workers formally ended in Jamaica. The absolute identification of Indians with the label of *coolie* resulted in time-expired workers being indistinguishable from newly arrived ones, those who were island-born perceived in the same way as those who were not. I prefer to call time-expired Indians "Indo-Jamaicans," but the latter is illegible within a colonial imaginary of the coolie picturesque, which not only Orientalizes Indians but also minimizes signs of their indentureship. While the name *coolie* identifies a people with a bonded form of labor as much as the word *slave* did for West Africans, photographers like the Duperlys and Valentines go to great lengths to avoid any semblance of Indians at work on fruit plantations. A coolie picturesque emphasizes Indians' foreignness by focusing on simple clothing and strange customs to make it seem as though their villages have been transplanted wholesale from South Asia to the West Indies. In reality, Indians and Afro-Jamaican plantation workers lived on the estates in cramped barracks segregated from each other because of a colonial fear of the migrants' heathenism being a corrupting influence.[32] All photographs, closely cropped so as to elide their estate locations, either present Indians as exotic outsiders and ethnographic curiosities or show them engaged in domestic tasks, such as James Valentine's albumen print *Coolies Preparing Rice*, which depicts preindustrial peasant labor rather than modernized plantation work, since Indians grew rice for their own consumption.[33] As *Stark's Jamaica Guide* declares about Jamaica's Indian communities, "Here the habits of the natives of India may be studied as well as on the banks of the Ganges or Indus."[34]

The photograph *Coolies at Worship*, published in the Duperlys' *Picturesque Jamaica*, gives the impression of a group of men and women (several holding babies) and a young girl having assembled to pray (fig. 1).[35] The location is not identified, but the banana palm leaves behind the group and the large trunk of a banana tree in the foreground indicate that the subjects are on a banana estate. Indians are so strongly identified with their religion that the photographer

31 Allen S. Ehrlich, "Race and Ethnic Identity in Rural Jamaica: The East Indian Case," *Caribbean Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (1976): 22.

32 See Shepherd, *Transients to Settlers*, 62; and Laxmi Mansingh and Ajai Mansingh, *Home Away from Home: 150 Years of Indian Presence in Jamaica, 1845–1995* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1999), 55.

33 Only the wooden barracks, not entirely self-evident because of their thatched roofs, betray the Indian group's location on a Jamaican plantation.

34 Stark, *Stark's Jamaica Guide*, 193. A similar phrase appears in Bacon and Aaron's *The New Jamaica*: "Here the habits of India (at least of its laboring castes) may be studied as well as on the banks of the Ganges or the Indus" (99).

35 Duperly and Son, *Picturesque Jamaica*, plate 74. This photograph, along with *Me and My Family*, plate 67 (fig. 4), do not appear in the original edition, which has only 65 plates. It is difficult to establish exactly when the additional plates were added because none of the editions have publication dates.

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enlisted a *tadjah*—a large structure used for the Muslim festival of Hosay—to give the appearance of the group having assembled in front of a sacred shrine, an Orientalizing gesture that makes the specificities of Eastern religious practices immaterial to the photograph's composition. The photograph centers on the man seated in a half-lotus position whose full body clothing and rudraksha seed *mala* (prayer beads) around his neck suggest he is a *pandit*, or Hindu priest. The man to the right is holding a *dholak* drum, while behind them is the tadjah float, a paper and bamboo replica of the tomb of the martyred grandsons of the Prophet, Hassan and Hosain, used in street processions for Hosay. Because there were few Muslims in Jamaica, once Indians moved off the estates and into villages, Hindus and even Black Jamaicans joined in the festivities as the street procession became more carnivalesque.[36] While most of the men in the photograph are wearing only *dhotis* (loin cloths), the two positioned in the center wear *khurtas* (shirts), denoting a difference in status, while three others are wearing Muslim

Figure 1. A. Duperly and Sons, *Coolies at Worship*, ca. 1900. Photographic plate 74 in A. Duperly and Son, *Picturesque Jamaica: With Descriptive Text of the Island* (Kingston: A. Duperly and Son, n.d.)

36 Shepherd, *Transients to Settlers*, 170–75. The observation of Mansingh and Mansingh that "Muslim nawabs (feudal lords) incorporated the Hindu tradition of using floats" points to the porousness of cultural and religious practices in precolonial India (*Home Away from Home*, 71).

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prayer caps. The women are all dressed in humble hand-spun cotton saris rather than the usual elaborate jewel-bedecked clothing associated with the Orientalizing portraits of Indian women. The man wearing a hat and jacket and sporting a handlebar moustache might even be a *sirdar*, an Indian “driver.” Drivers were selected not for their religion or caste but their ability to organize work gangs, with tasks distributed by age and gender just as they were during slavery.[37] In addition to the half-lotus seated man, three other men are holding books as if to suggest the pandit is leading them in a recitation.

Did the photographer chance upon a Hindu religious meeting or a Muslim preparation for Hosay? Or was the estate work of these Indians interrupted so they could be provided with books, tadjah, and dholak as props? Indian estate workers, not being permitted to build places of worship, were obliged to convert outside spaces by cordoning them off with bamboo poles decorated with banana, mango, and banyan leaves. The space in which this group is assembled appears to be cleared in this way, but the ambivalence to the religion being depicted in the photograph might explain why Laxmi and Ajai Mansingh describe it as a “plantation Puja,” while Patricia Mohammed identifies the majority of the people in the photograph as Muslim.[38] With its mixed religious signifiers, the image *Coolies at Worship*, then, is not the desired one of worship, or even one of work. Rather, it depicts “coolie life” reduced to a single ethnographic instance of Indians’ defining identity as non-Christians.

The countdown to the camera’s shutter release belongs to the same disciplined time as the worker’s schedule of nine hours a day, six days a week, for a fixed number of years. Elizabeth Edwards explains that anthropological images capture more than what photographers intend for them to display, since they also convey a subject’s experience of being photographed. “It can be argued,” she writes, “that a rethinking of the photographic trace beyond the merely appropriative to the intersubjective allows for the possibility of thinking about photographs as moments of experience that real people actually lived through.”[39] In this regard, *Coolies at Worship* has captured the labor regimen that its staging works so hard to circumvent. Except for the young girl seated in the front, everyone is staring straight at the camera until the shutter is released. The signs of the harshness of estate labor are present in the men’s and women’s sullen expressions and the shirtless boys’ emaciated bodies and tired, sunken eyes. Even the babies appear unhappy, perhaps resulting from their mothers’ firm grips to prevent their movement from ruining the photograph. In fact, so many of the people in this photograph, more so than those in any other images I have seen, wear expressions of discontent. It is possible the tableau has captured their objections to the photographer’s engineering of a worship scene in his attempt to expose to the tourist gaze the most private and presumedly autonomous

37 Shepherd, *Transients to Settlers*, 57.

38 Mansingh and Mansingh, *Home Away from Home*, 66–67; Patricia Mohammed, *Imaging the Caribbean: Culture and Visual Translation* (Oxford: Macmillan, 2009), 257.

39 Elizabeth Edwards, “Anthropology and Photography,” in David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates Jr., eds., *The Image of the Black in Western Art: The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 55.

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Figure 2. [A.] Duperly and Sons, *Coolies*, ca. 1900. Silver gelatin print. Collection of the National Gallery of Jamaica (Note that the NGJ incorrectly attributes this photograph to Adolphe Duperly, Armand Sr.'s father)

aspect of their lives. Introducing the faintest blur of motion into the stillness of the photographic encounter, the young girl seated in front glances down and away from the camera. Her blurred face, which constitutes a photographic flaw, draws attention to her Western clothing, which is shared by a barely visible female figure standing to the right of the group. Despite the effort to crop the figure out of the photograph, the visible ruffled puffed sleeve and printed skirt suggest a clothing style that would have disrupted the desired effect of "coolie" authenticity. The dresses worn by the young girl and this unknown female, with their floral prints and ruffles, do not conform to the plain frocks issued to female indentured workers; rather, they resemble the Victorian-style dresses worn by Indian women living in Jamaican villages.[40] I have chosen to work with the reproduced image from *Picturesque Jamaica*, despite its diminished quality, because of the effort to crop this figure completely from the silver gelatin photographs archived

40 In *Transients to Settlers*, Shepherd describes estate-issued women's clothing as "made from brown calico and striped Holland" fabric (56–57).

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in the National Gallery and National Library of Jamaica. While we as scholars privilege the original silver gelatin or albumen photographs for their detail and sepia tones, in this instance a mechanically reproduced copy is preferable for its archival value.

A smaller group of subjects selected from those in *Coolies at Worship* appears in a second tableau titled *Coolies* (fig. 2). The postures of the subjects, with two squatting in front, do not suggest life or even labor; the photograph is instead an ethnographic portrait of their quaintness. The young girl who ruined the careful staging of *Coolies at Worship* is now standing in the protective arms of a similarly dressed woman, most likely her mother. Unlike the other females in the photograph, mother and daughter are wearing headwraps tied in the style of Black Jamaican women. Their creolized attire suggests they could be time-expired or Jamaican-born Indians. Indentured and time-expired Indians often worked alongside each other, and time-expired workers could even re-indenture themselves if unable to find outside employment.[41] The banana palms, bucket, and *lota* (water urn) behind them suggest they are near the workers' living quarters on a banana estate. However, the Jamaican identities of the Indian settlers are coded as foreign through the label of *coolie* that freezes time and place at the moment of arrival. This freezing of time is reinforced in a United Fruit Company tourist book that uses the same image but bearing the caption "A Group of New Arrivals," which overlooks the different time of arrival for the woman in the headwrap as well as the probable island-born status of her daughter.[42] A different configuration of the group, one in which the Western-dressed mother and daughter have been removed, was the preferred photograph for early twentieth-century postcards.

A coolie picturesque perpetrates the idea of exclusive "Indian villages," which did not exist in Jamaica as they did in Trinidad and Guyana.[43] After being dispersed across different estates, Indians in Jamaica moved into nearby Black villages once their indentureships ended. Because Indian men in Jamaica significantly outnumbered Indian women, they were more likely to enter into relationships with Black women than did the Indian men in Trinidad and Guyana (although scholars are now questioning the denial of such unions in those places). The Duperlys' photograph *Me and My Family* (fig. 4), published in *Picturesque Jamaica* and reproduced on postcards, depicts an Indo-Jamaican man standing with a leg up on his mule; beside him are two women and several children.[44] A near-identical silver gelatin photograph, with the exception of a Black man standing on the other side of the mule, is titled *Negro Village* (fig. 3). The Afro-Jamaican man's presence combined with the photograph's title reframes the scene; the viewer begins to notice that the women and children standing beside the Indo-Jamaican man

41 See ibid.

42 The United Fruit Company, *Jamaica: The Summer Land* (Boston: United Fruit Company Steamship Lines, 1904), 38. The book, along with its misleading caption, was reprinted in 2019.

43 The smaller number of Indians imported to Jamaica is because of the extensiveness of its plantation system prior to emancipation. The manumitted slave population of Trinidad was 17,439 and in Guyana, 70,000, compared to Jamaica's 255,290 enslaved adults, of whom 218,455 constituted field labor. Allen S. Ehrlich, "History, Ecology, and Demography in the British Caribbean: An Analysis of East Indian Ethnicity," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 27, no. 2 (1971): 166–80.

44 Duperly and Son, *Picturesque Jamaica*, plate 67. See note 35.

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Figure 3. A. Duperly and Sons, *Negro Village*, ca. 1900. Silver gelatin print, reproduced from David Boxer and Edward Lucie-Smith, eds., *Jamaica in Black and White: Photography in Jamaica, c.1845–c.1920; The David Boxer Collection* (Oxford: Macmillan Educational, 2013), 161

are both Afro- and Indo-Jamaican, and some of the children might even be dougla.[45] The two photographs belong to the same shoot, with *Negro Village* having been taken first, and, when examined side by side, the movement in their still images becomes apparent. One girl is raising her hand to cover her face, while the other fidgets with her dress; the small child being carried turns her head. The white dog walking toward the camera in figure 3, sits down in figure 4; the brown dog walking between the whitewashed walls of the two huts has walked out of the frame. The Afro-Jamaican man casually standing with his hands in his trouser pockets is not in motion; he simply disappears. The defining figure of *Negro Village* has been removed so that the photograph can be recomposed as *Me and My Family*; the racial makeup of the village—or the Indian man's family—is no longer its identifying mark. In this way, a colonial order of racial separation has been restored, as the *Me and My Family* version is the photograph selected for reproduction and circulation on early-twentieth-century postcards.

45 As Boxer and Lucie-Smith note, "This so-called 'Negro Village' clearly accommodated some East Indian and mixed Black/East Indian residents" (*Jamaica in Black and White*, 161). Despite this observation, racial mixing and cohabitation in the photographic archive has not received scholarly attention.

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Figure 4. A. Duperly and Sons, *Me and My Family*, ca. 1900. Photographic plate 67 in *Picturesque Jamaica*

An acknowledgment of the intimacies of the colonized changes the way we view the more popular photographs reproduced as inexpensive postcards with titles like "Coolie Village" or more generically "Native Village" or "Native Huts." Representative of photographs revealing the cohabitation of Afro- and Indo-Jamaicans is *At Rest, Banana Plantation* (fig. 5), which is featured in the Duperlys' *Picturesque Jamaica*; as a postcard, the image was popular for its glorification of poverty.[46] The Indian family's Western clothing and humble quarters on the edge of a banana field suggest its members are plantation workers who are not first-generation migrants. The two women seated in the foreground next to the Indian male are not Afro-Jamaican but dougla, so identified by their jewelry—thick silver bangles, necklaces, finger rings, and earrings—which is a uniquely Indo-Caribbean style. Yet it is the pure-blooded Hindu woman rather than her mixed-race sister who is the defining figure of Indian jewelry in the countless studio portraits created for postcards. In this colonial imaginary, excessive jewelry by way of elaborate headpieces and bangles, thick arm and ankle bands, necklaces of silver and gold

46 Duperly and Son, *Picturesque Jamaica*, plate 59, with the caption "After a day's work on a Banana Plantation." I am in possession of an original postcard of the image, mailed from France in 2002. Its sender mentions a 1981 visit to Jamaica, saying that very little has changed since the time when the photograph was taken.

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Figure 5. A. Duperly and Sons, *At Rest, Banana Plantation*, ca. 1898. Silver gelatin print. Collection of the Onyx Foundation

coins, large nose rings and earrings, and multiple finger and toe rings is synonymous with the women themselves. The next section discusses a female-gendered picturesque, which belongs to a visual idiom of "belles" that Mohammed identifies as "marrying beauty with race, and positioning hierarchies of class with skin colour."[47]

The "Coolie Belle" as an Orientalizing Male Fantasy

The European male fantasy of "coolie belles" was fabricated in urban West Indian studios that paid working-class Indo-Caribbean women to dress up as "nautch girls," Hindu dancers viewed as seductive temptresses by Western travelers to India. The jewelry worn by rural Indian

47 Mohammed, "Gendering the Caribbean," 3–4.

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Figure 6 (*above*). "Coolie Belle," unnumbered photographic plate in James H. Stark, *Stark's History and Guide to Jamaica* (Boston: James H. Stark, 1898), between 192 and 193. Figure 7 (*above right*). "Indian Type Trinidad," a postcard from the author's private collection

and dougla Caribbean women was far more modest than that worn by the women appearing in these studio portraits, yet it is the latter that comes to represent them in travel guides. The same photograph of an Indian girl labeled "Coolie Belle" is featured both in *Stark's Jamaica Guide* and in *Stark's Guide-Book and History of British Guiana* (fig. 6).[48] And the same girl from Stark's travel books, though in a slightly different pose, appears on a Trinidadian postcard labeled "Indian Type Trinidad" (fig. 7). Her awkward smile on the postcard betrays her age to be no more than fourteen. The more serious pose of the "Coolie Belle" image reveals a touch of sadness in her face, which makes it seem as if the photographer had asked her to smile for the "Indian Type" version. When viewed side by side, it is apparent that the two portraits belong to a single photo shoot in a Port of Spain studio. Because the same Indian girl appears in travel books on Jamaica and British Guiana, a Trinidadian studio portrait is tasked with representing Indian women across the Caribbean. If diverse women in the myriad "Coolie Belle" creations seem interchangeable, it is because the photographs are the product of the same colonial male imagination.

48 Stark, *Stark's Jamaica Guide*, 193; James Rodway and James H. Stark, *Stark's Guide-Book and History of British Guiana* (Boston: J. H. Stark, 1895), plate between 42 and 43.

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Figure 8 (*above*). The watercolor *A Cooly Woman* (artist not named), unnumbered plate in William Agnew Paton, *Down the Islands: A Voyage to the Caribbees* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), between 180 and 181. Figure 9 (*above right*). Undated photograph labeled "Types of Trinidad Coolies." Courtesy of Jefferson Clarke

The "coolie belle" type appears in the descriptive text and the accompanying image *A Cooly Woman*, a watercolor portrait of a youthful Indian woman who caught the eye of William Agnew Paton, author of the travel book *Down the Islands* (fig. 8). Paton gushes over his sighting of a "Hindu beauty" who emerged like an "Oriental vision" in the streets of Georgetown, Demerara (the former name of British Guiana).[49] The richness of her clothing—"red India silk, trimmed with narrow braids of gold lace"[50]—and heavy girdle of linked silver half-crowns and Spanish dollars suggests (if indeed he saw her) she is not an indentured worker, which is what the name *cooly* implies. His detailed description of the delicate shape and size of each of her facial features and smooth texture of her long black hair, which Paton claims to have

49 William Agnew Paton, *Down the Islands: A Voyage to the Caribbees* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), 180.
50 Ibid., 179.

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observed and recorded in his notebook, constitutes a racial classification of the "pure-blooded Hindu" as an "Aryan kinswoman."[51] Observing that the painting follows the visual conventions of West Indian "belles," Mimi Sheller explains that the artist most likely based it on Paton's photograph labeled "A Martinique Belle."[52] The artist did use a preexisting photograph as a template for *A Cooly Woman* but not that one. Although I have been unable to identify with complete certainty the studio responsible for the photograph on which the watercolor is based (fig. 9), the painted backdrop with pillar and railing appears in other portraits by the French photographer Felix Morin, who owned a Frederick Street studio in Port of Spain. Morin was fond of photographing Madras women as a black-skinned variant of the Aryan Indian type and, as such, a more racially acceptable alternative to dark-skinned "belles" of African descent. Also, as Gaiutra Bahadur observes about the Port of Spain studio portraits, the Indian women all "appear to be wearing the same flowered *orhni* or veil draped over their heads and across their waists."[53] Whereas more affluent Indian women were off-limits to American and European men (it is telling that Paton makes a point of saying the Hindu girl finds him "grotesque or outlandish in appearance"), the women that photographers dressed and posed for their cameras offer themselves to the male gaze.[54] It is highly unlikely that monied Indo-Caribbean families would permit their women to pose in photographs for circulation on postcards and in travel books. If commissioned studio portraits—like the one of an Indian shopkeeper's daughter on her wedding day or a rich merchant's wife—did end up on postcards, they were most likely reproduced without permission.

Because it was less common for late-nineteenth-century Indo-Jamaicans to migrate to urban areas, they did not dress in the more opulent style of the upwardly mobile Indo-Trinidadian women. The only photograph of an Indo-Jamaican woman who comes close to wearing similar fineries, "Woman Sitting with Hat," is characterized by Arabindan-Kesson as "one of the few surviving images of Jamaican East Indians that is neither a familial, laboring, nor village scene."[55] She notices the uniqueness of a photograph that is staged as a studio portrait except that its subject is sitting in a field. The woman is as elegantly adorned with jewelry as are the postcard "coolie belles." However, the rows of silver rings and bangles accompanied by a heavy necklace weighted down with large silver coins and Indian-style pendants are incongruous with her dark ruffled embroidered dress trimmed with white lace and accessorized with a white lace handkerchief clutched in her hands. Instead of the elaborate Orientalizing headpieces worn by "coolie belles," this woman wears a wide-brimmed white-lace-trimmed hat. Her semi-European/semi-Indian fashion is an indication of how Indo-Jamaican women created their own creolized style, while maintaining a distinctive Indian identity through their jewelry.

51 Ibid., 178.
52 Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean*, 128. The photograph appears on 130.
53 Gaiutra Bahadur, "Postcards from Empire," *Dissent* 62, no. 2 (2015): 52.
54 Paton, *Down the Islands*, 177.
55 Arabindan-Kesson, "Picturing South Asians," 406. The photograph appears on 405.

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Joy Mahabir identifies an "alternative text" in the extravagance of Indo-Caribbean women's jewelry by tracing the style to Indian peasant women's practice of using personal jewelry as collateral for small loans. Indo-Caribbean women "banked" their earnings or dowry by wearing silver shillings around their necks or had them melted and fashioned into arm bands, rings, and bangles.[56] Because the jewelry was made from the coins workers received as payment, Mahabir argues, it symbolized the women's financial independence. From the incorporation of cacao pods and tadjah domes into the end pieces of Trinidadian bangles, Mahabir concludes that rather than indicating the women's foreignness, as an Oriental picturesque would have us believe, the body ornaments signify their Caribbeanness. I turn now to photographs of Indian women engaged in Jamaican estate work for the signs of the alternative text that Mahabir proposes we derive from the wealth they wear on their bodies.

After searching for the ever-elusive image of female indentured workers engaged in estate work, it took a trip to New York's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture to find this representation in turn-of-the-century black-and-white stereo cards. The appeal of the mass-produced cards often lay in a stereograph's ability to convey the illusion of the camera not being present; its three-dimensional effect is designed to place the viewer within the scene. Because of the small size of their images, stereo cards were less successful in recreating the full panoramic scale of the picturesque scenes achieved by the photographs of a Kingston studio like A. Duperly and Sons. But what stereography lost in quality and size over photography, it made up for in its ability to capture motion without blur and to create the illusion of depth when its "double" images are viewed with a stereoscope.[57] As the inventor of a handheld stereo viewer explains, "The first effect of looking at a good photograph through the stereoscope is a surprise such as no painting ever produced. The mind feels its way into the very depths of the picture."[58] One stereograph I found of a Jamaican coconut plantation shows workers walking away, such that all the viewer can see are their retreating backs (fig. 10). The Indian woman in the foreground, carrying a large stack of coconuts on her turban-wrapped head, is wearing a dhoti, the work attire for peasant women as well as for men. She and the woman walking in front of her are wearing large bangles. To their right are Afro-Jamaican men loading coconuts onto a cart, while to the far right an Indian man (so identified by his dhoti) is resting against a coconut tree. Scarcely visible, because the women are obscuring him, is a man on a horse or mule who appears to be in charge of a work gang, in which the women have been assigned the lowest-ranked task of carrying heavy loads of coconuts. This stereograph is remarkable for its depiction of Indians and Afro-Jamaicans on the same work gang, even though its subject is the pile of coconut husks, which is the image's

56 See Joy Mahabir, "Alternative Texts: Indo-Caribbean Women's Jewelry," *Caribbean Vistas Journal* 1, no. 1 (2014): 1–18, caribbeanvistas.wordpress.com/?attachment_id=2153. Because the ratio of Indian women to men was low, a man's family would pay the woman's family a dowry rather than the reverse, as was the case in India; see Shepherd, *Transients to Settlers*, 210.

57 See Mary Warner Marien, *Photography: A Cultural History*, 4th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2014), 81–83.

58 Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Stereoscope and Stereoscopic Photographs," *Atlantic Monthly*, 3 June 1859, 744.

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Figure 10. *Cocoanut Plantation, Jamaica*, a stereograph by Carleton H. Graves, 1899. Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library

focal point when viewed through a stereoscope.[59] The Indian women who are walking away from the camera recede into a vanishing point between the coconut palms in the background and stacked husks in the foreground. My eyes, however, are drawn to the woman who is closest to the camera and has balanced on her head a large stack of husked coconuts to be dumped on the ground for the men to load into a cart. It is the movement of this photograph, when compared to the stillness of the silver gelatin prints, that I would like to use for framing a motionless image of the same woman.

The woman in a stereograph titled *Coolies, Man and Woman, Jamaica* is most likely the same one carrying coconuts in the plantation stereograph: she wears the same dhoti, khurta, and headwrap and is standing in a coconut grove scattered with husks (fig. 11). The androgyny of her clothing, when viewed alongside that of the man beside her, makes this image strikingly different from any other photographs I have seen of indentured Indian women. With the exception of the different style of tying her headwrap and dhoti, the only gender distinction of the woman's clothing is the more feminized khurta, her thick bangles, and a silver necklace displaying a dozen or so large silver coins unevenly arranged as the sign of her financial

59 I am grateful to the Schomburg Center for providing an original stereoscope for viewing the cards.

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Figure 11. The right-hand image of *Coolies, Man and Woman, Jamaica*, a stereograph by Carleton H. Graves, 1899. Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library

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independence rather than feminine beauty. (Her toes are devoid of rings, which would interfere with field work.) In contrast to the cleanliness of coolie picturesque tableaux, both the man's and the woman's legs are crosshatched with scratches, while their light-colored clothes are flecked with dirt. Because of its ethnographic intent and purpose, signaled by the couple's awkward pose with hands dangling by their sides, this stereograph makes them the subject of its image; positioned slightly closer to the camera and more centered, the woman constitutes its focal point. What is of interest to me is her body language and facial expression, which are even more astonishing in stereo view, in which her personhood leaps out of the picture. The woman exists as ethnographic evidence, yes, but she can also be seen beyond the image's frame. Unlike her partner, who stares blankly into the distance, she looks more relaxed, her head ever so slightly turned to suggest she is scrutinizing the photographer and his camera box. Stereo photography involves two separate lenses, with each capturing a slightly different angle, to simulate the distance between human eyes. When the two images of *Coolies, Man and Woman, Jamaica* are viewed separately, however, the woman's penetrating gaze is more apparent in the one captured by the right lens. The two slightly different two-dimensional photographs on a stereo card are intended to produce a three-dimensional view. But when also considered as a series, in the ways I have been viewing other still photographs, we witness a deflection of the disciplining effect of the ethnographic camera eye.

As a visual archive, photographs reveal more than their picturesque scenes because they also are snapshots of the experience of being photographed. The photographic trace of this experience exists in the bodies and facial expressions of people expected to perform for engineered tableaux of their lives. But even when following the photographer's instructions, as the young girl posing for the Trinidadian "Indian Type" postcard attempts to do, her forced smile reveals a vulnerability under the layers of ornamental jewelry and fine clothes. The photographic traces of Jamaican lives are also to be found in those small disruptive acts outside the photographer's control. There is the unhappy Indo-Jamaican girl who glances away from the camera to introduce the wrinkle of a blurred face into the smoothness of the *Coolies at Worship* tableau. There is the Afro-Jamaican man who plants himself firmly in the picture of an Indo-Jamaican man with his family because he belongs in the village scene as much as they do. And then there is the uncanniness of the stereograph of an androgynously dressed indentured peasant woman who emerges from the depths of the past to contemplate us as we examine her.

Acknowledgment

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