

Black Atlantic Resource Debate

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The Brown Atlantic: Re-thinking Post-Slavery

No longer is Atlantic history available in any color [*sic*], so long as it is white.¹

The void left by the banning of the slave-trade [*sic*] was to some extent being filled by transports of 'indentured' labour, mainly from India and China, whose conditions were scarcely better.²

How is the reproduction of labour power ensured? It is ensured by giving labour power the material means with which to reproduce itself: by wages.³

Following a recent workshop, 'The French Atlantic: A "Tricoloured" Ocean', held at the International Slavery Museum (ISM), Liverpool, I was kindly invited to contribute to this 'Black Atlantic Resource Debate'.⁴ One of the rationales of the inter-institutional project at the ISM was to develop greater recognition of Liverpool's post-Slavery trading past. It is little known that four years after Emancipation, the first ships for South Asian Atlantic Indenture would embark from the city's ports. The possibility of a site to reflect Liverpool's continuing post-Slavery role was raised at the workshop. It was discussed that such a site would reflect the historical nexus between the metropole and the country of origin, India, in the legacies of Slavery. In Benjamin Disraeli's 'jewel in the crown', a memorial plaque in Kolkata was inaugurated in January 2011 to commemorate Indenture. The site of museums as an interface between research, academia, and the public that can inform of the events and processes of Atlantic Slavery and its aftermath, led to positive discussions.

Writing for this website, visitors will note that two years ago, again in partnership with National Museums Liverpool, seminars were held on the subject of 'Re-thinking Post-slavery [*sic*] in the Francophone Caribbean'. Addressing that theme, within the scope of this essay, three main arguments will be attempted. In a three-fold approach, this essay will firstly introduce the new concept of the tri-partite 'Brown Atlantic'. Thereafter, the first dimension of the concept, 'Past' will map the phenomenon of South Asian Atlantic Indenture. Thirdly, from this arena, study will focus on the Francophone and Creolophone mid-Atlantic island of Martinique. It will be discussed how we might 're-think post-Slavery' by evaluating the impact of the Brown Atlantic, and by examining possible future avenues of exploration in the post-Slavery Atlantic world.

¹ David Armitage, and Michael J. Braddick, eds, *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 17.

² Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital: 1848–1875* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975; Abacus, repr. 2010), p. 229.

³ Louis Althusser, *On Ideology*, trans. not cited (London: Verso, 2008), p. 4.

⁴ < <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/events/displayevent.aspx?eventID=9421> > [accessed 1 June 2012].

The rationale of this study is also three-fold. By widening the aperture of the analytical lens used, it will be argued that the concept of the Brown Atlantic addresses lacunae in the field of Atlantic Studies. In mapping its phenomenon, the distinctiveness of the Brown Atlantic will highlight its necessary requirement in the field of Caribbean Studies. Finally, it will be shown that without incorporation of the Brown Atlantic, analysis of post-Slavery society remains reductionist.

In order to address the above aims and rationales, the methodology of this study will firstly introduce the new concept of the Brown Atlantic in the intellectual genealogy of Atlantic Studies from which it stems, and in which it is posited. Thereafter, key interconnecting components of the phenomenon of the Brown Atlantic will be mapped in the mid-Atlantic, Britain, and India. The final part of this essay will seek to move from the 'theory' of the concept and phenomenon, to its 'lived experience' in post-Slavery society by examining inter-ethnic relations in Martinique.

The Brown Atlantic: Concept and Phenomenon

In the aftermath of Emancipation in the British Black Atlantic, the lesser-recognised phenomenon of Atlantic South Asian Indentured Labour occurred to replace slave labour. Sugar, known as 'White Gold', was the determining factor behind the desire to continue to import such contracted labour. It may be observed that whilst Black Atlantic labour built the master's house, Brown Atlantic labour maintained it. Despite South Asian Indenture being an important component in the Atlantic world, its history and historiography remain largely unrecognised. In his observation of Haitian slave historiography, Michel-Rolph Trouillot states that, 'French historical writings reveals [sic] multiple layers of silence'.⁵ So too might we observe of Brown Atlantic Indenture, as opposed to South Asian Indenture of the Indian Ocean.

In Atlantic Studies, whilst key texts privilege the British and the sub-Saharan African actors of Anglophone America, the Franco-, Hispano-, and Lusophone Atlantics of the other major colonial empires, are denied centre stage. Relative newcomers to the 'multi-coloured' Atlantic ocean, such as the Green of the Irish; the Red of the Native American; and the Tartan of the Scottish, remain in the wings. What may be observed is the privileged Euro-Afro binary in a synoptic 'bi-coloured' ocean. The cultural imperialism of Anglophone America is reflected in academia. Whilst 'most work on Atlantic history has focussed on the North Atlantic and to a lesser extent the white North Atlantic', its history is now available in other colours.⁶

The current lacuna of recognition denied Atlantic South Asian Indentured Labour, of a pre-dominantly Dravidian people, is addressed in the new concept of the Brown Atlantic. The rationales of the concept are to broaden the current Euro-Afro dichotomy, which is still highly influential, but selective in its analysis of the Atlantic world. Furthermore, the exploratory model of reference does not accurately reflect the ramifications of Abolition. The concept seeks to offer notions of time and space to actors, experiences, and voices that have been silenced, marginalised or ignored in the transoceanic story of the post-Columbian colonial Atlantic world.

The concept is conceived in a distinctive tri-partite structure. It addresses the Past, Present, and Future transcolonial and transnational dimensions of, respectively: the history, historiography, and impact of Indenture; its colonial legacies for Caribbean-born descendents; and ensuing socio-economic factors for metropolitan-born generations. The Brown Atlantic does not posit itself as a 'stand-alone' concept. The interconnectedness of Indenture with Atlantic colonialism and Slavery requires its necessary inclusion, which in turn develops necessary and relevant research.

Factors such as nineteenth-century Atlantic Emancipation and sugar production; the twentieth-century decline in sugar profit that led to migration to the 'mother country'; and

⁵ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), p. 100.

⁶ David Eltis, 'Atlantic History in Global Perspective', *Itinerario*, 23 (1999), 141–161 (p. 142).

questions of cultural memory, and subjectivity in the twenty-first century reflect some of the aspects of the concept of the Brown Atlantic. Capitalist and materialist factors of Indenture; racial tensions that continue in many of the former colonies; and socio-economic marginalisation in the former metropolises are some examples of work and social life that were directly changed by the phenomenon, whose impact continues in the contemporary, both east and west of the Atlantic.

Geographically the Brown Atlantic commences from ‘the shipping stations established on St. Helena, at the Cape of Good Hope (the “Tavern of Two Seas”), [...]’.⁷ Conceptually it incorporates both the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. In his comparative approach to eighteenth-century British Atlantic and British Asia, Philip J. Stern states that ‘moving “beyond the Atlantic” to Asia can forge historiographical relationships that help scholars better understand the Atlantic or Asia as well as draw historical connections that transcend them both’.⁸ Britain’s dominating presence in its Atlantic and Indian oceanic empires cannot be examined individually, as two separate colonial phenomena. The ‘push-and-pull’ factors in both worlds require an analysis that incorporates and reflects history. Furthermore, it may be acknowledged that ‘Europe’s trade with Asia may even have surpassed trade across the Atlantic. Africa too stretched well beyond the Atlantic, and it had been connected to Asia for centuries by trade across the Indian Ocean’.⁹ The ‘other’ triangle of (western) Europe, (sub-Saharan) Africa, and (South) Asia did not cease in the mid-nineteenth century Atlantic. Both goods and people continued to be shipped for colonial trade and economy.

The concept of the Brown Atlantic recognises that just as Abolition of Slavery ‘must have been critical to ending or transforming the Atlantic World itself’, so too was its aftermath in the phenomenon of South Asian Atlantic Indenture.¹⁰ The result of economic changes was that ‘European empires (including the British) had changed their focus to Africa and Asia. [...] Cotton from India [...] (and, of course, sugar beet), helped to wean Europe from its dependence on products from the Americas [...]’.¹¹ The aim of the Brown Atlantic thus is not ‘to supplant the concept of the Atlantic world but to make space for alternate conceptions of the ocean that made the creation of this world possible’.¹² In the European New World, the Brown Atlantic addresses individually the fourteen colonies that requested Indentured Labour. The concept recognises the interconnectedness of the four empires in both the Atlantic and Indian Ocean. Alison Games has observed that a Eurocentric

⁷ Joyce E. Chaplin, ‘The Atlantic Ocean and its Contemporary Meaning, 1492–1808’, in *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. by Jack P. Greene, and Philip D. Morgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 35–51 (p. 46).

⁸ Philip J. Stern, ‘British Asia and British Atlantic: Comparisons and Connections’, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 63 (2006), 693–712 (p. 698).

⁹ Donna Gabaccia, ‘A Long Atlantic in a Wider World’, *Atlantic Studies*, 1 (2004), 1–27 (p. 6).

¹⁰ Aaron Spencer Fogleman, ‘The Transformation of the Atlantic World, 1776–1867’, *Atlantic Studies*, 6 (2009), 5–28 (p. 7).

¹¹ J.R. McNeill, ‘The End of the Old Atlantic World: American, Africa, Europe, 1770–1888’, in *Atlantic American Societies: From Columbus through Abolition, 1492–1888*, ed. by Alan L. Karras, and J.R. McNeill (Abingdon: Routledge, 1992), pp. 245–268 (p. 265).

¹² James Taylor Carson, ‘When Is An Ocean Not An Ocean?: Geographies of the Atlantic World’, *Southern Quarterly*, 43 (2006), 16–45 (p. 17).

perspective in Atlantic Studies can divide and disconnect colonial histories, which is '[...] most apparent, perhaps, in studies of the islands of the Caribbean, each of which existed within its own imperial trajectory even while sometimes sharing space with a rival power and participating in common regional transformations'.¹³ The Brown Atlantic offers Indenture an inter- and transnational platform on which it does not remain secondary to Slavery.

Trevor Burnard perceives that there is an 'increasing pressure for British Atlantic historians to master the languages and histories of other European nations and of West Africa [...]'.¹⁴ The same observation may be made for the study of Atlantic Indenture. In a multi-lingual and multi-cultural approach, knowledge of English, French, and Danish can overcome language barriers to facilitate better understanding of original archival material in both former colony and metropolis. Collaborative research with scholars in Surinam (spelt as Suriname in Dutch) and Holland, along with recognition of Holland's East India Company in India, can enrich and bring to the fore, study of the Dutch Brown Atlantic. By incorporating India, whose administrative and academic working languages of English as *lingua franca* reflect its former colonizer, greater understanding of castes, languages, and ethnicities can be attempted. Enquiry into the Hindu and Muslim components of the Brown Atlantic, for example, and ensuing questions of Indian and so-called diasporic 'Indianness' may be better deconstructed and informed.

In the hydroscape, as opposed to the landscape, of intraoceanic 'dialogues', thus, in the confluence of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, we may adduce that conceptions of the Atlantic world, be they historical, geographical, or cultural, offer a methodological model for a mode of enquiry, which is not that of a single empire, or of a monolingual history. The concept of the Brown Atlantic examines around the Atlantic by incorporating the country of origin, India. Further, it develops Atlantic Studies by including its White and Black Atlantic predecessors in the history of the Atlantic. From this ensuing development, Atlantic Studies is challenged and enriched by not remaining within confines, which risk stagnating the field, and hindering the longevity and relevance of a dynamic scholarship.

¹³ Alison Games, 'Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities', *The American Historical Review*, 111 (2006), 741–757 (p. 744).

¹⁴ Trevor Burnard, 'The British Atlantic', in *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal*, pp. 111–136 (p. 130).

In the 'human history' of the Atlantic, to borrow from Marcus Rediker, those of the European diaspora of immigrants, refugees, enslavers and colonizers who imposed their societal transplant in the transoceanic world, would reinvent themselves as American, Canadian, and so forth. In a mythic metanarrative that informed to settlers, pioneers, and adventurers, most were seeking better socio-economic prospects in 'new money' as opposed to 'no money'. In the invisibility of normative 'whiteness', which declines to see itself as also 'coloured', too often the non-white 'other' is forced to remain 'ethnic'. In the late twentieth century, James Baldwin would lament that 'most white Americans were trapped in some stage of infantilism, which wouldn't allow them to look at me as though I were a human being like themselves'.¹⁵ In this limiting analysis of White Atlantic colonialism and imperialism, too often is denied the wealth and diversity of non-European history in the 'old world'. Instead, recognition commences with colonialism, or is cursorily acknowledged as pre-colonial. Dipesh Chakrabarty has astutely observed that 'there is a peculiar way in which all [...] other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called, "the history of Europe"'.¹⁶ It is obvious, but important to state, that the continent of Africa, and the sub-continent of India have a history of millennia, not of centuries.

Furthermore, in the 'human story', too often, non-white actors are placed 'from the bottom up'. One must ask, according to whose perspective? Were such important players, without whom the Atlantic world could not have been constructed or maintained, not instead to the side? It is often the case that Africa and the 'slave' are referred to homogenously. Differentiation between, for example, North and sub-Saharan Africa is one key as to how we move beyond such casual categorisation. The Atlantic world of Morocco and France is one such possible example. The same recognition is to be afforded to the subsuming marker of 'Asia'. The concept of the Brown Atlantic recognises the history and actors of South Asia, of a pre-partition India, in its sub-continent. It differentiates, for example, from those of 'the Chinese (Yellow?) Atlantic' of East Asian Indentured Labour. The concept offers recognition to a phenomenon that is often interchangeably mistaken for that of European Indentured Servitude. The Brown Atlantic differentiates from the 'Indian' of the Red Atlantic Native American, but converges in its recognition of South Asians as actors who were 'self-determined and not simply selves-determined'.¹⁷ In the bloody Red Atlantic of the proletariat, and '[...] indentured servitude, plantation slavery, and ultimately the entire project of transatlantic settlement, production, and trade – in a word, colonization as a whole', the often dismissed violence and agency of those of the Brown Atlantic peasantry are explored.¹⁸ The concept offers a microphone through which to 'answer back' to essentialising colonial discourses, and to 'post-colonial' mis/representations that perpetuate the ventriloquizing myth such as the docile one-dimensional 'coolie'.

¹⁵ James Baldwin, and Margaret Mead, *A Rap on Race* (London: Michael Joseph, 1971), p. 25.

¹⁶ Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for "Indian" Pasts?', *Representations*, 37 (1992), 1–26 (p.1).

¹⁷ Jace Weaver, 'The Red Atlantic: Transoceanic Cultural Exchanges', *American Indian Quarterly*, 35 (2011), 418–463 (p. 456).

¹⁸ Marcus Rediker, 'The Red Atlantic; or, "a terrible blast swept over the heaving sea"', in *Sea Changes: Historicizing the Ocean*, ed. by Bernhard Klein and Gesa Mackenthun (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 111–130 (p. 120).

In her focus on India, Gayatri Spivak asked the question, 'Can the subaltern speak?'. Almost thirty years later, perhaps we should now be asking, how does the subaltern speak? By imposing a voice on those who are denied cultural imperialism, it may be observed that 'an important point is being made: the production of theory is also a practice'.¹⁹ At present, *Brown Atlantic Indenture* is not a teaching module in Atlantic Studies. By producing an Atlantic theory that denies part of its history, do we then in practice deny those in that world? Many British-born offspring, for example, 'have now begun to teach in the universities, thus helping to form an impressive postcolonial intellectual front with an agenda aimed at systematically studying the effects of imperialism in the former colonies and at the heart of Empire itself'.²⁰ One such pertinent example is of course Paul Gilroy, born and bred in London, of an Afro-Guyanese mother, and white English father, who like C.L.R. James *et al* contributed to their historiography by writing themselves into their history, and in the process reclaiming a dignity often denied to the 'negro'. Including *Indenture* as a teaching module in the future of Atlantic Studies offers not only a production of theory, but also a practice that is enriching for student and teacher, which in turn contributes to the continuing invigoration of significant and rigorous scholarly endeavour.

¹⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson, and Lawrence Grossberg (London: Macmillan Education, 1988), pp. 271–313 (p. 275).

²⁰ William Boelhower, 'The Rise of the New Atlantic Studies Matrix', *American Literary History*, 20 (2008), 83–101 (p. 88).

Past: Mapping Indenture 1837–1920

In the second epigraph to this study, it is noted that the Atlantic emancipated slave labour force had been replaced partially by Indentured Labour from South, and East Asia. Between 1838 and 1920, under the four colonial empires of Britain, France, Denmark, and Holland, approximately 500,000 men, women, and children were recruited from India as field or plantation labour for fourteen sugar-producing mid-Atlantic colonies.

Prior to the commencement of the Brown Atlantic, the phenomenon of Apprenticeship had been '[...] invented to add to the slave owners' compensation package by ensuring them, for a limited period, a secure labor [sic] supply'.²¹ To employ David Eltis' phrase, such a 'slave-free paradox' preached human liberty, but practised a continued enslavement. Upon cessation of Apprenticeship, plantation owners again found themselves bereft of sugar-producing labour. Furthermore, they 'wanted only those freedmen to live on their estates who intended to provide more than an occasional day's work'.²² This perceived unreliability, along with the wage demands that were considered as unprofitable, led planters to look to Europe; sub-Saharan Africa; and to Asia for a cheaper sources of contracted labour. In a climate of socio-economic changes, 'the purpose of indenture was thus not simply to solve a labour shortage but was seen as a means of acquiring that labour more cheaply'.²³ However, such demands could not have been met without the 'benevolent neutrality' of India.²⁴ Even before the commencement of Brown Atlantic labour, Britain had profited from a 'tried and tested' labour supply to its Indian Ocean colony of Mauritius from as early as 1829. Furthermore, compared to China and sub-Saharan Africa, Britain's pan-dominance in India through its East India Company, then through government, guaranteed a large supply of labour.

Connecting such factors in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds were those in Europe. The Industrial Revolution had introduced machinery that was capable of mass-producing domestic goods for export. Britain was now in the position of exporting cheaper textiles to India, instead of importing comparatively less profitably. Combined with ongoing economic and governmental impositions, centuries'-old tradition of livelihood in the local cloth cottage industries were thwarted: 'this specialized home manufacturing sector of traditional India, which had supplied both domestic and export markets and provided employment for millions of artisans in towns and villages, gradually crumbled against the onslaught of British trade policies'.²⁵ Further consequences of Britain's colonial occupation of India were that

²¹ Michael J. Craton, 'Reshuffling the Pack: The Transition from Slavery to Other Forms of Labor in the British Caribbean, ca. 1790–1890', *New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids*, 68 (1994), 23–75 (p. 24).

²² Pieter Emmer, "'A Spirit of Independence" or A Lack of Education for the Market? Freedmen and Asian Indentured Labourers in the Post-Emancipation Caribbean, 1834–1917', *Slavery & Abolition*, 21 (2000), 150–168 (p. 157).

²³ Marina Carter, 'Indian Indentured Migration and the Forced Labour Debate', *Itinerario*, 21 (1997), 52–61 (p. 58).

²⁴ Basdeo Mangru, *Benevolent Neutrality: Indian Government Policy and Labour Migration to British Guiana, 1854–1884* (London: Hansib, 1987).

²⁵ Walton Look Lai, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar: Chinese and Indian Migrants to the British West Indies, 1838–1918* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 23.

intra-regional migration placed pressure on the ratio of population to rural land. In the ensuing competition for urban paid work, there developed '[...] the emergence of plantation labour and the indenturing of labourers to destinations elsewhere in the world'.²⁶

Later, factors such as the passing of Act V in 1843 which forbade Indian inter-caste slavery and servitude would offer a loosening of social constraints. However, a traditional form of stable protection, under which slaves who belonged to a family were seen as a mark of respect, also ceased. Indian officials had previously warned the British government that to 'use them for profit, would transform the Indian system into one akin to that in the West Indies and the United States', under which they would similarly become exploited as chattel.²⁷ In 1853, the introduction of British railways would further serve to flood cheaper textile imports into rural India. Socio-politically, 'it was no accident that South Asian migration peaked in 1858, a year after the eruption of the so-called Sepoy (Indian) Mutiny against the British overlords'.²⁸ Such elements contributed to and encouraged emigration. As with the European diaspora, 'this view of emigration – which one might describe as the 'American dream' version – as an escape to opportunity [...]' was held by many, both British and Indian.²⁹

In 1836, however, despite a compensation package of £20,000,000, one planter who remained especially dissatisfied with Abolition was John Gladstone. A Liverpool-based Scotsman of the mercantile diaspora, and father of William, the 'Great Reformer', Gladstone Snr. was mindful of his plantation wealth in Guyana. Seeking to overcome reliance on Black Atlantic 'free' labour, he stated in a letter dated 4 January 1836 that "'it is of great importance to us to endeavour to provide a portion of other labourers, whom we might use as a set-off, and, when the time for it comes, make us, as far as possible, *independent of our negro population*"' [original emphasis].³⁰ Gladstone further noted:

In Bengal there were still men without 'inflated ideas' of the value of their labor who could be hired for the admirably small sum of two pence per day. Could these [...] be brought to the West Indies under indenture for a term of years to work for a fixed wage, plus the offer of a free passage and return passage if required?³¹

²⁶ Crispin Bates, 'Coerced and Migrant Labourers in India: The Colonial Experience', *Edinburgh Papers in South Asian Studies*, 13 (2000), 1–33 (p. 5).

²⁷ Lionel Caplan, 'Power and Status in South Asian Slavery', in *Asian and African Systems of Slavery*, ed. by James L. Watson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 169–194 (p.186).

²⁸ Douglas R. Egerton, and others, *The Atlantic World: A History, 1400–1888* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2007), p. 489.

²⁹ Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas 1830–1920*, 2nd edn (London: Hansib, 1993), p. 60.

³⁰ Cited in John Scobles, 'Hill Coolies: A Brief Exposure of the Deplorable Condition of the Hill Coolies in British Guiana and Mauritius, and of the nefarious means by which they were induced to resort to these colonies', *Wilson Anti-Slavery Collection* (1840), 1–32 (p. 4).

³¹ Cited in David Hollett, *Passage from India to El Dorado: Guyana and the Great Migration* (London: Associated University Presses, 1999), pp. 52–53.

As David Hollett observes, ‘and so it was that the “coolie trade” started, [with] an order in council in 1837 to permit the West Indies’ planters to ship coolies from India’.³²

In order to avoid a repetition of the savagery that had been endured across the Middle Passage, one of the stipulations of the ‘Other Middle Passage’ was that there be an on-board surgeon.³³ John Gladstone would employ Theophilus Richmond, a doctor newly-graduated from the University of Edinburgh. Richmond’s diary of the first Brown Atlantic crossing informs us that on 23 June 1837, the *Hesperus* ‘sailed at 2P.M. from Liverpool, the day very fine and the Sun [*sic*] smiling most auspiciously on us’.³⁴ Voyaging from Liverpool to Kolkata, via Mauritius before heading to Guyana, Richmond noted that en route, ‘it was intended at first that we should go into the Cape to get water, but it was afterwards decided to call at St. Helena instead [...]’.³⁵ Gladstone would commission a second ship for Guyana, the *Whitby*, which departed from Liverpool in January 1838. Both ships would arrive on 5 May 1838.

From the foregoing historic instigation behind the phenomenon of the Brown Atlantic, the next eighty years would witness an indenture system of ‘stops and starts’ due to ongoing mistreatment. Nevertheless, as numbers of emigrants increased, so too did the ports from which they disembarked. For the nine British colonies that received Brown Atlantic labour, emigrants would depart from present-day Kolkata, Mumbai, and Chennai in the former ‘British India’. France, the second main recipient of Brown Atlantic labour, after Abolition of its Slave Trade in 1848, would ship from its ports in Puduchery and Karaikal (also spelt Karikal). The five enclaves in ‘French India’, which included Yanaon, Mahé, and Chandernagore, would provide labour for their three mid-Atlantic colonies until 1873. Thereafter, ‘les établissements français de l’Inde ne possédaient en effet qu’environ 130 000 hommes et femmes de plus de quatorze ans. Il fallut recruter en territoire anglo-indien’.³⁶ France would increasingly recruit from Kolkata, which would provide ‘the French Caribbean colonies with about half of all the Indians recruited between 1871 and 1888’.³⁷ Economic migration would be greater in the North, with ‘[...] Aryans from the north of India, Dravidians from the south, tribal labourers from the hills of Chota Nagpur in Northern Bihar, Muslims from Afghanistan and Bengal and hill people from the Indo-Chinese border lands’ comprised those who would increasingly become homogenised as ‘coolie’, ‘Indian’, or ‘East Indian’.³⁸ For the French colonies, ‘the vast majority of Indian immigrant coolies were of Tamil origin:

³² Hollett, *Passage from India to El Dorado: Guyana and the Great Migration*, p. 53.

³³ Ron Ramdin, *The Other Middle Passage: Journal of a Voyage from Calcutta to Trinidad, 1858* (London: Hansib, 1994).

³⁴ Theophilus Richmond, *The First Crossing, being the Diary of Theophilus Richmond, ship’s surgeon aboard the Hesperus, 1837–8*, ed. by David Dabydeen and others (Trowbridge: Cromwell Press, 2007), p. 67.

³⁵ Richmond, *The First Crossing, being the Diary of Theophilus Richmond, ship’s surgeon aboard the Hesperus, 1837–8*, p. 161.

³⁶ Laurent Farrugia, *Les Indiens de Guadeloupe et de Martinique* (Basse-Terre: Desmarais, 1975), p. 10. [‘the French enclaves in India only had a population of approximately 130,000 men and women over 14 years of age. It was necessary to recruit from British India’].

³⁷ David Northrup, ‘Indentured Labour in the French Antilles’, *Revue française d’histoire d’outre-mer*, 87 (2000), 245–271 (p. 250).

³⁸ Brinsley Samaroo, ‘The Immigrant Communities’, in *General History of the Caribbean: The Long Nineteenth Century, Nineteenth Century Transformations, vol. IV*, ed. by K.O. Laurence (London: UNESCO Publishing/Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 2011), pp. 223–258 (p. 248).

practically all in Martinique [...].³⁹ One example of castes across the French Brown Atlantic in the 1870s is as follows:⁴⁰

Hindus, Brahmans, High Castes	410
Agriculturalist	799
Artisan	292
Low Caste	1249
Muslims	487
Christians	1

The general features of Brown Atlantic Indenture were a five-year contract, during which 'the employer was under a legal obligation to provide fixed wages, free housing, medical attendance and other amenities'.⁴¹ Recruitment of Brown Atlantic labour was carried out by agencies for colonial companies. Paid per head, 'it was also discovered that the trade of kidnapping coolies had been extensively carried out in the villages in later years in order for the agents to meet their quotas of immigrants; [...]'.⁴² An account of the time states that 'the manner in which the coolies are collected together in Calcutta is from native travellers being sent out into the country and villages, to induce them to emigrate by fine promises'.⁴³ After 1858, 'British Guiana and Trinidad each had a separate agency at Calcutta, and in 1860 an Anglo-French convention permitted the French colonies to recruit indentured Indians on terms similar to those offered by the British [...]'.⁴⁴ As a consequence, 'even those who went to French and Dutch colonies were largely subject to conditions of travel and labor set down in treaties and other agreements with Britain'.⁴⁵ From 1862, it was decreed in Article XXIII that 'the labour regulations of Martinique shall serve as the basis for all the regulations of the French Colonies into which Indian emigrants, subjects of Her Britannic Majesty, may be introduced'.⁴⁶ Denmark, which had also abolished its use of Slavery in 1848, would receive only one shipment of labourers for St. Croix, due to its mistreatment of Britain's 'Indian subjects'. 321 people, the majority of who 'were low caste

³⁹ Pierre Singaravélou, 'Indians in the French Overseas Départements: Guadeloupe, Martinique, Reunion', in *South Asians Overseas: Migration and Ethnicity*, ed. by Colin Clark, Ceri Peach, and Steven Vertovec (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 75–87 (p. 75).

⁴⁰ Lomarsh Roopnarine, *Indo-Caribbean Indenture: Resistance and Accommodation, 1838–1920* (Kingston: The University of the West Indies Press, 2007), p. 66.

⁴¹ C. Kondapi, *Indians Overseas, 1838–1949* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 8.

⁴² Bibi H. Khanam, and Raymond S. Chickrie, '170th Anniversary of the Arrival of the First Hindustani Muslims from India to British Guiana', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 29 (2009), 195–222 (p. 204).

⁴³ Captain and Mrs Swinton, *Journal of a Voyage with Coolie Emigrants, from Calcutta to Trinidad*, ed. by James Carlile (London: Alfred W. Bennett, 1859), p. 12.

⁴⁴ K.O. Laurence, *A Question of Labour: Indentured Immigration into Trinidad and British Guiana, 1875–1917* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers; and London: James Currey Publishers, 1994), p. 43.

⁴⁵ David Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 60.

⁴⁶ Parliamentary Papers 1861 (C.2887): Convention between Her Majesty and the Emperor of the French, Relative to the Emigration of Labourers from India to the French Colonies, 1 July 1861.

Hindus while a smaller number were high caste and Muslims',⁴⁷ 'were recruited, brought to Calcutta and despatched by the steamship *Mars* on 29 February 1863'.⁴⁸ Holland, which ended its Slave Trade in 1863, would be permitted an agency to recruit for Surinam by 1873. Brown Atlantic labourers for Surinam 'mostly came from the Bhojpuri area of British India, now covering the western part of Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh'.⁴⁹

Following recruitment, the indentured labourers would be kept in a depot, which served as a clearing process to ascertain both if they were healthy enough for the transoceanic journey, and able to carry out the work of cutting sugar cane once on *terra firma*. The on-board surgeon was required to 'medically inspect the intending coolies, and reject those whom he considered unfit'.⁵⁰ Conditions across the Brown Atlantic 'tended to be variable, unpredictable and while some journeys were tedious, others were a haunting nightmare for when the emigrants were not devastated by the weather at sea, cholera took its toll'.⁵¹ In another rare diary of the time, Munshi Rahman Khan, a Muslim and literate, destined for Surinam, noted that 'on board, there were no distinctions between high castes and low castes, Hindus or Muslims or other racial distinctions'.⁵² For female passengers, there was the added potential danger of sexual attacks. The account of a journey to Guyana records the death by rape of one Maharani, although the captain stated that 'I had no suspicion while Maharani was alive that any of the crew had anything to do with her'.⁵³ The oft-repeated 'double colonisation' of the female might instead be described as a double commodification of male-initiated colonialism: firstly, as a cheap source of labour; and secondly as sexualised and objectified chattel. Indenture would continue 'until this was legally barred, due to Indian pressure, in 1917'.⁵⁴ By 1 January 1920, the system ceased to exist with the termination of all contractual obligations.

The following Table A depicts key data of the Brown Atlantic, namely: its four colonial empires; its fourteen colonies; the chronological order of arrival; and the approximate quota of labourers who survived the transoceanic crossing:

⁴⁷ Lomarsh Roopnarine, 'The First and Only Crossing: Indian Indentured Servitude on Danish St. Croix, 1863–1868', *South Asian Diaspora*, 1 (2009), 113–40 (p. 125).

⁴⁸ Kalyan Kumar Sircar, 'Emigration of Indian Indentured Labour to the Danish West Indian Island of St. Croix, 1863–68', *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 19 (1971), 133–148 (p. 139).

⁴⁹ Munshi Rahman Khan, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Labourer 1874–1972*, trans. by Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff, Ellen Bal, and Alok Deo Singh (Delhi: Shipra Publications, 2005), pp. xvi–xvii.

⁵⁰ Basil Lubbock, *Coolie Ships and Oil Sailors* (Glasgow: Brown, Son & Ferguson, 1935; repr. 1955), p. 54.

⁵¹ Ron Ramdin, *Arising from Bondage: A History of the Indo-Caribbean People* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), p. 58.

⁵² Khan, *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Labourer 1874–1972*, p. 83.

⁵³ Verene A. Shepherd, *Maharani's Misery: Narratives of a Passage from India* (Kingston: University of The West Indies Press, 2002), p. 89.

⁵⁴ S.L. Engerman, 'Economic Change and Contract Labour in the British Caribbean: The End of Slavery and the Adjustment to Emancipation', in *Abolition and Its Aftermath: The Historical Context, 1790–1916*, ed. by David Richardson (Abingdon: Frank Cass & Co., 1985), pp. 225–244 (p. 233).

TABLE A

EMPIRE	COLONY	DATE OF FIRST ARRIVAL⁵⁵	APPROXIMATE TOTAL QUOTA⁵⁶
BRITAIN	Guyana	1838	238,960
	Trinidad	1845	143,939
	Jamaica	1845	37,027
FRANCE	Martinique	1853	25,504
	Guadeloupe	1854	42,236
	French Guiana	1854	8,500
BRITAIN	St. Vincent	1856	3,200
	Grenada	1857	3,000
	Belize	1857	2,300
	St. Lucia	1858	2,472
	St. Kitts	1861	361
DENMARK	St. Croix	1863	325
HOLLAND	Surinam	1873	43,404
BRITAIN	Nevis	1874	342

⁵⁵ Frank Birbalsingh, ed., *Indenture and Exile: The Indo-Caribbean Experience* (Toronto: Tsar, 1989), p. 9. [Other sources give different dates, thus one author is cited.]

⁵⁶ Lomarsh Roopnarine, *Indo-Caribbean Indenture: Resistance and Accommodation, 1838–1920*, p. 6. [Other sources give different figures, thus one author is cited.]

The preceding sweeping overview maps the phenomenon of the Brown Atlantic Indenture the scope of this essay. It has already been substantiated that the concept of the Brown Atlantic in Atlantic Studies is needed. It will now be argued that the concept, not merely 're-packaging', or 'an old wine in new wineskin', also addresses lacunae in Caribbean Studies.

Methodical and thorough research in the field of Caribbean Studies highlights an arena in which privileging of the Anglophone colonies is accorded. Further within this focus, the smaller British colonies, with regard to quotas of Brown Atlantic labour, are marginalised. The result of this so-called 'numbers' game', is that information is markedly negligent for the colonies that received fewer labourers. When recognition is offered to the smaller colonies, investigation uncovers a generalising pattern in which they become subsumed, losing a sense of their particular history. In any field, research engenders research. Investigation into Caribbean Studies, however, uncovers smaller Brown Atlantic descendents and generations remaining excluded from current research. Past research might not necessarily be relevant to contemporary generations. The wealth of published work that is afforded to Guyana, Trinidad, and Jamaica, in comparison to the remaining British Brown Atlantic colonies is paltry. In the non-Anglophone former colonies, the French Atlantic being an example, Guadeloupe and Martinique are afforded greater research, to the detriment of French Guiana, which is almost 'hidden' from view. Dependent on translations, different working languages can hinder access to archives in the original language. Such factors combine to render a fragmented, discrepant, and/or self-repeating field of study. Contradictory historical information, such as dates, quotas of labourers, and mis-spelling of vessels and names ensue, and are unknowingly perpetuated.

Why is it important that the concept of the Brown Atlantic address such oversights? It is to move a field of study from the wings to centre stage. It is to invigorate and challenge a field that remains discretely in its corner. It is to offer recognition, inclusion, and incorporation in the new directions of research. How does the concept aim to achieve such aspirations? Collaboration in the 'academic community' that connects India, Europe, and the mid-Atlantic can overcome language barriers. The Brown Atlantic recognises the phenomenon as a whole, but also individually. Its transcolonial and transnational dimensions offer equal recognition. Archival and field research, be it ethnographic and/or anthropological, places a foot in the past, and one in the present. Such an approach respects history, and keeps research contemporary and reflective of its subject matter in the present. Possible differences for example in the duration of contracts according to the colonial empire; living conditions; and labour requirements can be addressed comparatively. Individually, by involving the actors, it offers recognition also to the 'minor' players. An example of this is Belize, the former British Honduras, whose first shipment of Brown Atlantic labourers hailed from India, but whose second group of labourers were sent from Jamaica. In the example of the lesser-known 'Danish India', Denmark, and St. Croix, now part of America and purely Anglo-/Creolophone, new and/or different avenues of exploration and discovery may result. Seeking to explore uncharted and perhaps choppy waters can lead to shipwrecks, but attempting to navigate new territory can lead to discovery, which is all the more thrilling and exciting.

Post-Slavery Martinique

Having substantiated the need for the concept of the Brown Atlantic, and of the contributory factors behind its phenomenon in the worlds of both the Atlantic and Indian Ocean, the final part of this study will focus on Martinique as case study. It will offer a brief pertinent depiction of its post-Abolition society, before attempting to broaden how we might further 're-think post-Slavery'.

Colonised by France in 1635, Emancipation was promised to the black islanders in 1794. However, it was not implemented due to British invasion and occupation. After the second Abolition of French Slavery, which was decreed in France on 27 April 1848, the slave population did not wait until 4 June when the decree was due to be implemented. Instead, on 22 May 1848, 'les esclaves obligent l'administration locale à les émanciper sur le champ'.⁵⁷ In a first-hand account, the planter Pierre Dessalles noted in his diary on 30 May 1848 that 'on fait courir le bruit que les nègres ont l'intention d'incendier la ville : ils veulent piller et voler'.⁵⁸ In defiant action, thus, Black Atlantic Martinicans snatched at a future of self-determination.

Assuming that the motto of Revolution France, *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*, applied to them also, the freed slaves envisaged an economic future independent of the White Atlantic plantocracy (known as *Békés* in Martinican Creole). One of the hoped for outcomes of Emancipation was the potential to demand better wages as a bargaining tool against the withdrawal of labour from the plantations. There ensued 'struggles with the planters over time, wages, and conditions of work in which the labouring population was able to assert a great deal of independence and initiative'.⁵⁹ It appeared that there was a reversal in the power structure as the *Békés* became increasingly dependent on the black workforce, whose labour now decided if sugar could continue to be produced. Bargaining with the *Békés*, however, was to be dashed prevented. With subsidies from France to facilitate immigration, 'the planters were aided and abetted in their attitude by the metropolitan administration, particularly during the Second Empire' of 1852 to 1870.⁶⁰ Focusing mainly on Trinidad, Eric Williams cited Jules Duval to observe that 'immigration as a solution demanded that no account be taken of the former slaves and their descendents'.⁶¹ This observation however,

⁵⁷ Jean Meyer and others, *Histoire de la France coloniale: des origines à 1914* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1991), p. 412.

['the slaves forced the local administration to emancipate them immediately'].

⁵⁸ Pierre Dessalles, *La vie d'un colon à la Martinique au XIX^e siècle: journal 1848–1856* (Paris: Henri de Frémont, 1986), p. 44.

['rumours are being spread that the negroes intend to burn the city: they want to rob and steal'].

⁵⁹ Dale W. Tomich, *Slavery in The Circuit of Sugar: Martinique and The World Economy, 1830–1848* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 280.

⁶⁰ Rosamunde Renard, 'Labour Relations in Martinique and Guadeloupe, 1848–1870', in *Caribbean Freedom: Economy and Society from Emancipation to the Present*, ed. by Hilary Beckles, and Verene Shepherd (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers; and London: James Currey Publishers, 1993), pp. 80–92 (p. 80).

⁶¹ Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean, 1492–1969* (London: André Deutsch, 1970), p. 360.

was not particular to Trinidad, but applied also to the black population of post-Abolition Martinique.

The aforementioned phenomenon of Apprenticeship, which ‘se donne pour premier objectif la protection des esclaves qu’une liberté immédiate ne manquait pas de détruire [...]’, was justified to prolong the hoped for socio-economic aspirations of the former slaves.⁶² Steps to address the objections to Abolition had already been taken when the black population witnessed the arrival of contracted labour from Madeira (1847), which would later be followed by labour from sub-Saharan Africa (1857), and China (1859). France would also reinstitute the practice of *le rachat préalable* in Senegal. However, in the Atlantic, the metropole ‘demeurait fort réticent à l’égard d’une immigration qui aurait accru l’importance numérique de la population Africaine : [...] les colons se tournaient plutôt vers l’Inde’.⁶³ However, not particular to Martinique immigration ‘was seen as one vital part of the desired recovery of the French West Indian economy’.⁶⁴

The first Indenture ship, *L’Aurélie*, ‘quitte Karikal le 5 février 1853 avec 322 émigrants’, arriving three months later on 6 May 1853 at St. Pierre.⁶⁵ Until cessation of French Brown Atlantic labour in 1889, 25,509 Indians would be introduced between 1853 and 1884.⁶⁶ When Indenture was finally abolished in 1920, a total of 11,077 repatriations from Martinique to India would take place between 1858 and 1895.⁶⁷

After medical clearance from the depot, ‘l’insertion indienne à la Martinique s’effectua dans le cadre de l’habitation, laquelle, fortement marquée par son proche passé esclavagiste, représenta pour les engagés une institution totalitaire [...]’.⁶⁸ In post-Slavery Martinique, those of the Brown Atlantic were placed at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. The labourers would be segregated from the black workforce, and initially placed in the huts used to house the former slaves. Over time, ‘Indian villages’ could be constructed to house the increasing number of labourers being shipped to the island. However, their *raison d’être* in post-Slavery Martinique was to provide cheap labour for the planters. The *Békés* ensured that their Brown Atlantic workforce was confined to the allocated rural plantation. If labourers escaped to the town, they could end up vagabonding and begging.

⁶² Caroline Oudin-Bastide, *Travail, capitalisme et société esclavagiste: Guadeloupe, Martinique (XVII^e–XIX^e siècles)* (Paris: Éditions la Découverte, 2005), p. 323.

⁶³ François Renault, *Libération d’esclaves et nouvelle servitude: Les rachats de captifs africains pour le compte des colonies françaises après l’abolition de l’esclavage* (Abidjan: Les Nouvelles Éditions Africaines, 1976), p. 35.

⁶⁴ Rosamunde Renard, ‘Immigration and Indentureship in the French West Indies, 1848–1870’, in *Caribbean Freedom: Economy and Society from Emancipation to the Present*, pp. 161–167 (p. 163).

⁶⁵ Jacques Weber, *Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde après Dupleix* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1996), p. 159. [*L’Aurélie* left Karikal on 5 February 1853 with 322 emigrants’].

⁶⁶ André Calmont, and others, ‘Histoire et mémoire des immigrations en régions Martinique-Guadeloupe’, Report for *L’Agence nationale pour la cohésion sociale et l’égalité des chances* (2008), 1–153 (p. 37).

⁶⁷ Pierre Singaravélou, *Les Indiens de la Caraïbe, 3 vols, I* (Paris: Éditions L’Harmattan, 1987), p. 102.

⁶⁸ Gerry L’Étang, *La grâce, le sacrifice et l’oracle: De l’Inde à la Martinique, les avatars de l’hindouisme* (Lille: Atelier National de Reproduction des Thèses, 1997) p. 135.

[‘Indian insertion in Martinique was achieved in the framework of the plantation, which, strongly marked by its recent slave past, represented for the indentured a totalitarian institution {...}’].

However, they would always be disallowed free repatriation for breaking their five-year contract. If they sought to escape to another plantation, often the whites would ‘close ranks’ and refuse to help. If accepted to work on another plantation, they could be used even more harshly as punishment. Constrained to remaining on the plantation, thus, ‘the two characteristics, which strike most forcefully about the East Indian plantation labour force in the nineteenth century, are its insulation and its immobility’.⁶⁹ However, as one survival mechanism, ‘il est aussi vrai que, lorsqu’il était encore un immigré, l’Indien a usé de toutes les règlementations visant à le protéger contre les abus des propriétaires békés’.⁷⁰ Acts of rebellion such as theft and arson would occur, according to Schoelcher’s account.⁷¹

It is often the case that new ‘[...] migrant workers have a different language, a different culture and different short-term interests. They are immediately identifiable – not as individuals, but as a group (or a series of national groups)’.⁷² Even before their arrival, Brown Atlantic labourers had been known as ‘coolie’ labour, the pejorative word borrowed from those in ‘British India’, and used on a par with ‘negro’. When the first Brown Atlantic labourers arrived, becoming the largest and most preferred group of the foreign workers introduced into the island, they became the scapegoat for much of the oppression borne by Afro-Martinican population. More often than not, the burden of responsibility for the hindering of post-Emancipation development was placed firmly on the shoulders of the Brown Atlantic labourer. The cost of Indenture, borne by the metropolises, is further blamed for delaying the progress of the non-white population. In the social sphere, tensions due to dashed aspirations and frustrations of an illusionary Emancipation became the burden of the newcomers. The imbalance of male to female Brown Atlantic emigrants led to sexual competition, and sexual frustrations amongst the Black and Brown male population vying for the all-important female attention (the female *Bekée* being placed above and beyond all non-whites). As mentioned in the double commodification of the female labourer, gradually, it would be required that greater numbers of Brown Atlantic females be imported as a source of sexual supply, as well as that of labour supply.

In labour relations, the brown workforce was viewed as being complicit with the White Atlantic plantocracy for accepting to work for a pittance of the wage demanded by the former slaves. However, underlying the resulting and growing animosity between the ethnic labour groups, ‘un des buts de l’immigration est de créer une concurrence entre Indiens et travailleurs créoles et d’amener ainsi une baisse des salaires (ou tout au moins d’en limiter la

⁶⁹ Alan H. Adamson, ‘The Impact of Indentured Immigration on the Political Economy of British Guiana’, in *Indentured Labour in the British Empire, 1834–1920*, ed. by Kay Saunders (London: Croom Helm, 1984), pp. 42–56 (p. 45).

⁷⁰ Juliette Sméralda-Amon, ‘Structuration socio-ethnique de la société martiniquaise’, in *Les Indes antillaises: Présence et situation des communautés indiennes en milieu caribéen*, pp. 103–124 (pp. 119–120). [‘It is also true that, as an immigrant, the Indian had used all the rules designed to protect against abuse by the Békés’].

⁷¹ Schoelcher, *Polémique coloniale, 1871–1881, Tome I*, p. 269.

⁷² John Berger, and Jean Mohr, *A Seventh Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975; London: Verso, repr. 2010), p. 143.

hausse)⁷³ From this debilitating colonial policy of competitive ‘divide and rule’, profiting were the planters only: ‘les modalités attributaires des immigrés sont telles que les grands propriétaires en sont les principaux bénéficiaires’.⁷⁴ In the limited possibilities of paid work on the island, wages decreased as competition increased between the black and brown workforce.

Strikes, and attempts to strike, were constantly undermined by the *Békés* who exploited both camps, and turned to cheaper Brown Atlantic labour. The once viewed bargaining power of the black workforce was weakened by the ever-present threat of cheaper labour as ‘les propriétaires ont en main une arme dangereuse : l’immigration’.⁷⁵ Survival for all meant eating. Rendered childlike and dependent on the planters, ‘the freedmen were prevented from developing alternative sources of livelihood’.⁷⁶ When the ‘sugar revolution’ occurred in the mid-seventeenth century, ‘large-scale plantation operations became the rule’.⁷⁷ Modernisation and more efficient technology would ensure that sugar production replaced all other crops, which would later facilitate greater profitability in the competitive sugar market, but which in turn would then be replaced by cheaper sugar beet. By the commencement of Brown Atlantic labour in the mid-nineteenth century, there were twenty-one sugar-producing factories in Martinique. The black workforce sought not only higher wages, it also sought to escape from the slave past of labouring under the equatorial heat in the fields. In the increasing centralisation of labour in the factories, there ensued two camps of labour: ‘les usines s’attiraient les travailleurs des plantations en les alléchant par une meilleur rétribution du travail’.⁷⁸ The comparatively more arduous task in the fields was assigned to Brown Atlantic labourers. A first-hand account states that ‘le sucre, c’était les Nègres qui le faisaient, à l’usine. Pour les Indiens, il n’y avait que la canne. Le travail de la canne était dur. Personne n’en voulait’.⁷⁹ In itself, the phenomenon of the Brown Atlantic was an economic failure. Due to the increasing demise of sugar profit and production; the constant requirement to import more labourers, and the costs to do so, Atlantic Indenture did not pay: ‘on ne peut nier que les immigrants

⁷³ Jacques Adélaïde-Merlande, *Histoire générale des Antilles et des Guyanes : des précolombiens à nos jours* (Paris: Éditions L’Harmattan, 1994), pp. 78–79.

[‘in fact, one of the aims of immigration was to create competition between Indian and Creole workers and thus bring down wages (or at least limit its increase)’].

⁷⁴ Alain-Philippe Blérald, *Histoire économique de la Guadeloupe et de la Martinique du XVII^e siècle à nos jours* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 1986), p. 109.

[‘the terms granted the immigrants were such that the major proprietors were the main beneficiaries’].

⁷⁵ Jacques Adélaïde-Merlande, *Les Origines du mouvement ouvrier en Martinique 1870–1900* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2000), p. 113.

⁷⁶ Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 70.

⁷⁷ Robert Louis Stein, *The French Sugar Business in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), p. 40.

⁷⁸ Juliette Sméralda-Amon, *La question de l’immigration indienne dans son environnement socio-économique martiniquais, 1848–1900* (Paris: Éditions L’Harmattan, 2000), p. 274.

[‘factories drew the plantation workers by enticing them with a better compensation for work’].

⁷⁹ Antoine Tangamen, cited in ‘Zwazo: Récit de vie d’un prêtre hindou, commandeur d’habitation à la Martinique’, in *Présences de l’Inde dans le monde* (Paris: Éditions L’Harmattan, 1994), pp. 167–179 (p. 169). [‘sugar was produced by the negroes in the factory. There remained only sugar cane {field work}. The work was hard. Nobody wanted to do it’].

ont apporté un complément de bras pour l'agriculture, ce n'est qu'en période de crise qu'on constate une remise en cause de leur travail'.⁸⁰ Due to the increasing decline of European demand for sugar, time would show history repeating itself. As with their ancestors in India, the Indo-Martinican born descendents of the twentieth century would find themselves obliged to migrate from the rural to urban to seek paid work, or cross the Brown Atlantic again, but to Europe.

One of the aims of the concept of the Brown Atlantic is to recognise and acknowledge both parallels and contrasts between the four colonial empires, and between the fourteen colonies. The foregoing already broadens how we re-think post-Slavery by reflecting history, and incorporating the Brown Atlantic. Exploration and depiction of post-Slavery Martinique, however, whilst pertinent to the island, is not particular to it. Many of the aforementioned elements converge with those of the Brown Atlantic under Britain, Denmark, and Holland. How then, within the remainder of this study, may we widen the aperture of the analytical lens, to focus, capture and develop the black and white creole landscape in which we re-think post-Slavery?

In labour relations 'à la différence des colonies britanniques et du Surinam [...], les « habitations » des Antilles françaises étaient gérées par des Créoles, qu'ils soient Blancs ou hommes de couleur, nés dans la colonie'.⁸¹ Under France, the so-called 'coloured people' (*les gens de couleur*), descendents of illegitimate sexual relations between the *Béké* and slave, were often granted the right to own slaves also. Furthermore, after Abolition, France had granted citizenship and the right to vote in 1848 to its black population in the pre-Revolution '*vieilles colonies*' (old colonies) in the mid-Atlantic, and to the Indian Ocean island of Reunion. Again, such statuses were unlike the other colonial empires that used Brown Atlantic labour. How do these contrasts develop the post-Abolition landscape? In the French Atlantic, the 'brown' component, already relegated to the bottom of the white and black pile, could further find him/herself used also as labour for the mixed race stratum of Martinican planter society. This creole network of white, coloured, and black exacerbated the potential for exploitation of labour. Victor Schoelcher, the French anti-slavery activist, who was elected to the legislative assembly in 1848 and 1849 to represent Martinique, noted that for those of the Brown Atlantic, 'leur état civil n'est pas déterminé ; [...] ; ne sachant pas le français, ils n'ont pas même le moyen d'exprimer leurs besoins, leurs plaintes ; [...]'.⁸² 'Imprisoned' in the micro-world of the plantation, lacking any national

⁸⁰ Geneviève Léti, Lily Thévenard, and Henri Caristan, *L'Immigration indienne à la Martinique, 1853–1900* (Fort-de-France: Archives Départementales de la Martinique, 2003), p. 71.

[‘there is no denying that the immigrants provided extra assistance in agriculture; it is only in times of crisis that we see a questioning of their work’].

⁸¹ Singaravélou, *Les Indiens de la Caraïbe, 3 vols*, I, pp. 169–170.

[‘unlike the British colonies or Surinam {...}, the "plantations" in the French Antilles were run by Creoles, whether white or coloured, born in the colony’].

⁸² Victor Schœlcher, *Polémique coloniale, 1871–1881, Tome I* (Paris: Éditions Émile Désormeaux, 1882; repr. 1979), p. 268.

[‘their civil status was indeterminate ; {...} ; unable to speak French, they had no means to express their needs, their complaints’].

status as French, and with only 'coolie' as identification, the Brown Atlantic labouring population became more insular, introspected, and isolated. By 1870, under the Third Republic of France, it had been decreed by the 'mother country' that its colonies should have access to French-language school education. In the *vieilles colonies*, the aim was that 'ce n'est aussi qu'en passant par l'école que les enfants deviennent des citoyens, connaissant bien leurs droits et leurs devoirs [...]'.⁸³ Rural plantations would hinder access to urban schools. Added to the question of location was also child labour, the income of which was vital to the survival of the family, which was paid per quota of cane cut.

In the literature on Indenture, there exists explicit and implicit tales of brown woe; enrichment; greed; impoverishment; and pioneers. There are accounts of black oppression; anger; hostility; blame; frustration; and animosity. For those of the white Atlantic, discourses of victimisation; arrogance; guilt; benignity; civilisation; and barbarity may be found. In an investigative approach that has sought to be thorough and methodical, how might we further 're-think post-Slavery' beyond tensions, strikes, education, and so forth? How might we, for example, move 'to an examination of the possibilities of concerted action across the racial and rural/urban barrier, and to a fuller understanding of the seamless web of the working condition'?⁸⁴

One starting point to explore another path may be the crude, if not simplistic, conclusion that it was a culture of survival of the fittest. In the third epigraph selected to introduce this study, Althusser concluded that wages ensure the reproduction of labour power. Between the (black) proletariat and the (brown) peasantry, between the factory worker, and the field labourer, the 'seamless web' was prevented by basic human need. Both subalterns, in the Gramscian, and Spivakian sense, were hindered in their psychology of class solidarity against the *Békés* and *gens de couleur* through lack of economic power. Walter Rodney, although privileging Guyana in his study of the Brown Atlantic, offered an explanation that is also applicable to our case study of Martinique. He noted that 'the impact of racist perceptions was obviously magnified, and its principal consequence was to hold back the maturing of working class unity by offering an explanation of exploitation and oppression that seemed reasonably consistent with aspects of people's life experience'.⁸⁵ Part of this was not only the already examined external factors of segregation, isolation, and so forth. Marx observed that 'the estrangement of man, and in fact every relationship in which man stands to himself, is first realized and expressed in the relationship in which a man stands to other men'.⁸⁶ Under the gaze of the ruling class was reflected an image of nothingness, of dehumanised 'negro' and 'coolie'. The '[...] social relations of production

⁸³ Victor Schœlcher, *Esclavage et colonisation*, ed. by Émile Tersin (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948 ; repr. 2008), p. 205.

[it is only through school that children become citizens, learning their rights and their duties {...}].

⁸⁴ Kusha Haraksingh, 'Labour Movements in Caribbean History', in *General History of the Caribbean: Methodology and Historiography of the Caribbean*, vol. VI, ed. by B.W. Higman (London: UNESCO Publishing/Macmillan Education Ltd., 1999), pp. 283–307 (p. 290).

⁸⁵ Walter Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p. 181.

⁸⁶ Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, ed. by Dirk J. Struik, trans. by Martin Milligan (New York: International Publishers, 1964), pp. 114–115.

(the relations between human beings) cannot be viewed in isolation from one another and treated as though they refer to two different empirical entities'.⁸⁷ In the notion of *laboro, ergo sum*, each became estranged, and self-estranged under the fetishized commodification of sugar. The 'seamless web' of the working condition was fragmented both individually and collectively, externalised and internalised rather as consciousness.

⁸⁷ Dale W. Tomich, *Slavery in The Circuit of Sugar: Martinique and The World Economy, 1830–1848*, p. 125.

Conclusion

The nascent concept of the Brown Atlantic has been conceived to bring the phenomenon of South Asian Atlantic Indenture to the fore. In his poem, Derek Walcott writes that the *Sea is History*. However, unlike Emancipation, the Brown Atlantic is not recorded. Rather, like *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, its history remains hidden under the Ocean, which bears no scars of her 'Past'. Instead, she enveloped the bodies thrown overboard; she tenderly caressed those who chose suicide; she gently washed away the blood of children, women, and men; her roars drowned out the screams of rape. It would appear that the past has passed.

Selecting to 're-think post-Slavery' society was not a purely academic endeavour. Colonial events and processes are not insular and synchronic, occurring only at a particular point in time. They do not remain static, or ossified, but bear legacies and burdens into the contemporary. In our focus on Martinique, the inter-ethnic tensions between the actors of the Black and Brown Atlantic remained like an open scar until the 1970s. With the passing of time, and the ignorance of youth, younger generations in Martinique have become 'colour-blind' and unburdened by history. Questions of aforementioned French citizenship, combined with France's policies of assimilation and the civilizing mission, have set the French Atlantic apart from the other Brown Atlantic colonies. Notions of 'being' French have rendered a comparative superiority complex, which at the same time is complicated/facilitated by their departmentalization. In the socio-economic sphere, rendered *un pays assisté*, Martinique remains dependent on its metropole. The *Béké* continue to dominate, racially and economically, underpaying and exploiting the non-white population. History repeats itself. Inhumanity and injustice continue. The Past is Present.

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