Re-presenting and Narrating Labour: Coolie Migration in the Caribbean[1]

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> "Yet if we have become overly visible, contemporary hypervisibility traces its roots to the singularly modern belief in appropriating and desire to appropriate the world by means of the gaze. The modernization of cultures and societies was linked to an increasing secularization of the invisible. […] Their use of a visual rhetoric that defines scenarios, excludes or includes protagonists, and, most crucially, evokes pedagogies of the gaze allows us to glean signs of becoming, modes of *making visible* imagined modernities and communities."
> JAGUARIBE/LISSOVSKY 2009: 175-176

1 I wish to thank Michael Zeuske, Gesine Müller, Ulrike Lindner and Sabine Damir-Geilsdorf at the Global South Studies Center in Cologne for organizing this conference and for their enriching discussion, which helped me to sharpen my ideas and outline my argument. Without that impulse I might possibly have missed the importance of discussing imperial formations in the Caribbean in the light of labour and labour history, and particularly coolie labour migration, when examining the photographic and visual archives. I also thank the other participants for having challenged my questions from a necessarily entangled and global perspective.

VISIBILIZING THE UNSEEN

Beatriz Jaguaribe underscores what is widely acknowledged: the modern belief in appropriating the world through the gaze, the selective nature of which both renders seen, and invisibilizes. Mostly framed as an imperialistic gaze and conceptualized as a hegemonic perspective, it is broadly recognized that photography is a part of a dominant discourse being employed as a modern, efficient means in the service of the State, industry, and the sciences, in the way it appropriates time and space, freezing them into a linear narrative. However, focusing on this *grand récit* of photography would miss the pictures' *petites contre-histoires,* or their potential alternative narrative: that of a reclamation.

I am interested in the following three aspects, in order to unfold a picture-series' embodied reclamation from the vantage point of post-colonial and emancipatory discussions (cf. Gómez 2011). The first two are: making visible; and voicing/narrating; these two articulations are inextricably intertwined. The third aspect relates to the enclave as a modern spatial figure corresponding to the capitalist production of the plantation economy, and I will examine it against the idea of imperial debris. Drawing upon a larger conceptual framework I will argue that the two articulations and the spatial figure relate to the question of the archive and its relation to the public and the private. In his well-known essay on the *mal d'archive,* Jacques Derrida once astutely observed:

> "Nothing is less reliable, nothing is less clear today than the word 'archive.' […] Nothing is more troubled and more troubling. The trouble with what is troubling here is undoubtedly what troubles and muddles our vision […], what inhibits sight and knowledge, but also the trouble of troubled and troubling affairs […], the trouble of secrets, of plots, of clandestineness, of half-private, half-public conjurations, always at the unstable limit between public and private, between the family, the society, and the State, between the family and an intimacy even more private than the family, between oneself and oneself." (Derrida 1995: 57)

This certainly becomes true when examining the United Fruit Company photographic archive, with its thousands of images depicting the wide range of the United Fruit Company's agricultural operations and, moreover, an expanding experimental capitalism. These archival images contour the imaginary of modernization, while they are situated at the "unstable limit between public and private, between the family, the society, and the State" (ibid.). Interestingly enough, as we are reminded by Derrida, "[…] the technical structure of the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in

its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event." (ibid.: 17-18). As *consignation*, the archive seems to outline a figuration of what can be told and seen, of what can be voiced and visibilized, of what is to come.[2] Moreover, the archive seems to be a sort of *figurality* corresponding, I argue in the case of the United Fruit Company, to the plantation economy experienced in the Caribbean for a long time.

Let me expand this idea by turning to a photograph series that "produces as much as it records the event" (see figure 1). In the company's albums on Jamaica we find a picture series that shows a small group of children in front of and behind the labourers' barracks at Golden Grove. At first glance the pictures show the private space of what had become the company's spatial organization of labour. At a second glance they visually bear witness to the event of coolie migration and its aftermath in the Caribbean. Several rows of children are grouped in front of the barracks where the migrant labourers used to be detained. Seemingly, the pictures aim to make visible the infrastructure, and to 'document' the housing that the company upgraded in the course of their presence in the Caribbean. However, as a *figuration* of recording the past and the present, the archive makes visible the as-yet unseen or overlooked. For although the United Fruit Company employed coolie labourers or incorporated those from a previous coolie migration to the Caribbean, it did not mention the coolies (see figure 2).[3]

2 Derrida relates the idea of the archive to that of consignation as follows: "The archontic power, which also gathers the functions of unification, of identification, of classification, must be paired with what we will call the power of consignation. By consignation, we do not only mean, in the ordinary sense of the word, the act of assigning residence or of entrusting so as to put into reserve (to consign, to deposit), in a place and on a substrate, but here the act of consigning through gathering together signs. It is not only the traditional consignatio, that is, the written proof, but what all consignatio begins by presupposing. Consignation aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration. In an archive, there should not be any absolute dissociation, any heterogeneity or secret which could separate (secernere), or partition, in an absolute manner. The archontic principle of the archive is also a principle of consignation, that is, of gathering together" (Derrida 1995: 10).

3 With regard to coolie labourers in the plantations of the United Fruit Company, we find the following description in a historical document: "On the plantations of the United Fruit Company in Guatemala, I counted up the following racial groups: American, English, German, Swiss, Italian, Hebrew, French, Canadian, Scotch. This

Figure 1: Type design of labourers' houses. Front view of barracks.

Source: United Fruit Company Photograph Collection, Baker Library, Harvard Business School; photographer unknown.

The pictures do not tell us about coolie migration explicitly because, seemingly, they aim to show something else: among the series of photographs, to which

group comprised the petty company officials of administration and supervision. Among the labouring class were found natives of all the Central American States, Mexico, Columbia and Venezuela. Due to the [in]adequate local labour supply, the fruit companies have imported black labour from the islands of the West Indies and British Honduras. There are also come American negroes who went to the Tropics as railway construction men. The Jamaican negro predominates as he is the original 'banana man'. Coolies from Jamaica and French negroes from Martinique and Guadelupe add to the babble of tongues. In the small towns that spring up in the vicinity of the plantations, Chinese merchants are numerous and further complicate matters." (Williams 1925: 117-118)

these two pictures belong (see Fig. 1-2), we primarily witness a sort of technical language of 'documentation,' showing the different types of barracks and labourers' housing. The archival pictures, though, become a part of today's imperial debris. As leftovers, the pictorial remnants in this imperial debris constitute a part of the increasing "secularization of the invisible" (Jaguaribe/Lissovsky 2009: 175). As part of the United Fruit Company's archive, the photographs did not circulate at the time because they were carefully kept in photographic albums and inscribed into a private corporate image economy. Nor are they disseminated today. Yet, as pictures, which were taken in the contact zone of the Company's plantations, they produced and recorded the event of labour migration, while they simultaneously open the way for a potential alternative narrative about coolie labour, in the way they visibilize the unseen and unspoken.

Figure 2: Labourers' houses at Golden Grove

Source: United Fruit Company Photograph Collection, Baker Library, Harvard Business School; photographer unknown.

With regard to the business practices of the United Fruit Company, a company that quite efficiently established a world market for tropical fruits, and the expansion of experimental capitalism into the Caribbean, coolie migration was never really brought up as a subject in its own right. Only recently has it started to be voiced or made seen, configuring a visibilization of the violent modernization of the societies and cultures of the Caribbean. The writer Khal Torabully offers us *coolitude*, a cultural concept, which raises awareness of a cultural experience that has been overlooked, related to indentured and forced labour, which continues to the present day, bound to the economic and legal situations of the coolies (cf. Müller/Abel, this volume). The concept focuses on the transfer of knowledge between colonial empires and work regimes worldwide. Furthermore, it raises awareness of a pluricultural configuration of the Caribbean, which the pictures conceal in order to produce a homogeneous space suitable for economic exploitation.

On the one hand, as images of utopia the pictures belong to the imaginary of economic expansion envisaged as a chronotope of the eternal transition towards modernity, a promise of modernization itself. On the other, as dystopian narratives they reflect the processes of modernization and what has been called a world/colonial system that is accompanied by the constant production of cycles of marginality. This seems important as it sheds new light on bonded labour intersecting here with post-colonial studies and labour history. This is also underscored by Ann Laura Stoler, who critically stimulates a new framing of the study of the Empire, and encourages us not only to look at the colonial legacy, but also at the imperial debris, its ruins, and the processes of ruination, which continue to exert their influence today as a post-colonial presence. She underlines that it is important thus to disrupt the

> "[…] facile distinction between political history and poetic form, urging us to think differently about both the language we use to capture the tenacious hold of imperial effects and their tangible if elusive forms. […] to track the uneven temporal sedimentation in which imperial formations leave their marks. […] to ask how empire's ruins contour and carve through the psychic and material space in which people live and what compounded layers of imperial debris do to them." (Stoler 2013: 2)

Adopting voicing/narrating and making visible as epistemic practices, I wish to explore the "uneven temporal sedimentation" and, further, "the psychic and material space", in order to discuss the idea of imperial debris in the light of a series of archival photographs. Moreover, I argue that the concept of coolitude and the idea of imperial debris may serve to define a new conceptual framework

for discussing the migrant labour we witness as the emergence of a modern political space that has reproduced and expanded the Empire right up to the present day. Scrutinizing two photograph series that depict the coolie migration in the Caribbean by examining the visual field gives rise to a series of questions: What do the images visibilize? How is labour represented and narrated? Do the photographs register the coolie experience? How should the imperial visual leftovers be conceptualized in terms of environmental degradation and ecological ruins? How do these images depict the imperial contours and "psychic and material space in which people live" both at the time and in the present day?

RE-PRESENTING LABOUR

As the archive seems to determine "the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future", in accordance with Derrida (1995: 17-18), the photographs depicting the Caribbean and the modern plantation economy at a threshold of experimentation involving diverse, modern capitalist labour forms contour a particular kind of spatial production by representing labour. Following this, in another, earlier image series in a photographic album from circa 1890, we find, among others, a few pictures that visually bear witness to the coolie presence in the Caribbean.[4] It is noteworthy here that they determine the major theme or *leitmotif,* so to speak, of the way plantation economy is represented as a discourse of landscape. This discourse is also mirrored in the United Fruit Company photographs in the way the violent environmental transformations resulting from the plantation economy are not depicted, or only visualized as a peaceful transformation of the land into an improved agricultural landscape. Moreover, the photographs configure a projection and a desire for this transformation. It is this overall visual theme of framing the plantation economy as landscape that determines the exceptional value of many of these kinds of photographs, which form an important visual archive of the Caribbean.

For example, Figure 3 shows a river (most likely the Demerara river) with splendid giant water lilies of the species *Victoria regia*, discovered by the German explorer Sir Robert Schomburgk in the northern South American region,

4 Mrs. Lilian Horsford Farlow was the wife of William G. Farlow, an American botanist, and gave this photograph album to the Widener Library at Harvard University in 1927. She was a member of the the Massachusetts Society of the Colonial Dames of America (1909-1910).

in the former British colony that is, today, Guyana, which at that time mainly produced a particular cane sugar, also known as Demerara sugar. At a second glance, we notice a small group of people, labourers, at the left-hand margin of the photograph, who merge into the impression of plentiful and magical nature. They seem, from their traditional clothing, to be of Indian origin, and may be coolie labourers. Three young coolie women or girls sit on a small base with two water jugs and a basket in front of them. However, what the picture shows is primarily a vision of nature that frames the plantation economy as landscape, showing the typical contours of sugar plantation monoculture, viewed here to the left and right of the river. It carefully conceals the previously necessary clearing of a vast area of virgin tropical rainforest, making it a 'reversed image' of what is later perceived as environmental degradation and imperial debris. When embracing the visual, Stoler points out, it becomes urgent to become aware of the invisibilities in the visual field of this debris, which we far too easily assume within a given image (2013: 3).

Figure 3: Demerara. Victoria Regia

Source: Photographer unknown, photographs and clippings of the West Indies, ca. 1890, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Another picture from that same photographic album from the West Indies shows, as inscribed in the caption, "Coolies on Shipboard. Recently arrived" (see Figure 4). It is certainly one of those rare pictures representing the shipment and circulation of Indian coolies, here male labourers including two or three young boys, many of them in their traditional clothing, exhausted after a long middle passage on the journey to the Caribbean. The labourers gaze at the photographer, and the archival picture renders seen coolie labourers arriving at Demerara. Is this a scene of deportation? Does this picture belong to a visual economy that conceals or remembers the coolie experience, as it configures a new working regime and is a sign of a global becoming? Does this image belong to the visual archive that may give glimpses into the psychic and material space? Does its visual rhetoric include the coolie, in the way it reflects modes of making visible the imagined modernities and communities?

Figure 4: Demerara. Coolies on Shipboard. Recently arrived.

Source: Photographer unknown, photographs and clippings of the West Indies, ca. 1890, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

In the next picture (Figure 5) another process is rendered seen: at first glance we perceive a visual rhetoric that frames and represents landscape here as the main protagonist, peacefully orchestrated in the picture. But the caption, "immigration depot", clearly refers to another embedded discourse here: that of the modern

spatial organization of the circulation of labourers. Moreover, the caption characterizes a newly introduced vocabulary that mirrors the modern belief in organizing space through labour. Likewise, architecture as media correlates with the novel procedure for organizing large-scale immigration, which the American continent has experienced ever since as an incomparably global labour diaspora that forms part of the imperial genealogies of the present.

The immigration depot as architecture and as material practice belongs to what Stoler has called "residual or reactivated imperial practices" (2013: 4), which we can witness today in its material and visual leftovers, in images, texts, words, bodies and artifacts, such as spaces, landscapes, and other residual repositories of meaning.

Figure 5: Demerara. Immigration Depot.

Source: Photographer unknown, photographs and clippings of the West Indies, ca. 1890, Houghton Library, Harvard University

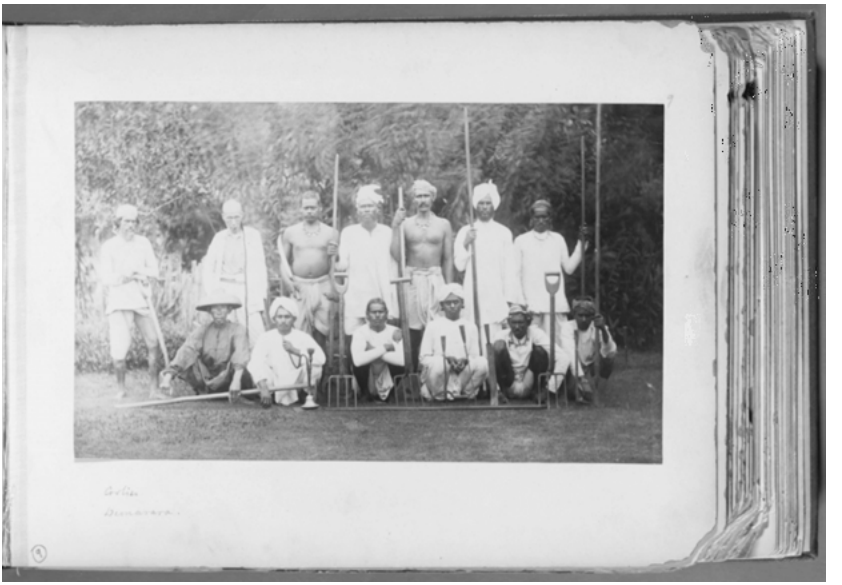
Yet, as Stoler has put it, we are still "wrestling with the task of seeing, with acts of violation for which there are no photographs able to document bodily exposures and intrusions of space" (2013: 3). So it is that migration and labour are the primordial experience and focus in both Khal Torabully's poems and

Marina Carter's historical study, forming what is referred to with the concept of coolitude, when they observe:

"As more and more Indians migrated, their identification and control became a time-consuming task. Immigration Departments, headed by Protectors of Immigrants, increasingly became the depositories of registers, and the headquarters of a bureaucracy that policed the indentured and time-expired labourers, rather than a nerve-centre where grievances could be investigated and redressed. The identification of Indians according to an immigration number, which was reproduced on all official documents, assumed a huge importance in their lives." (Carter/Torabully 2002: 125)

The novel vocabulary is noteworthy, as it mirrors the modern imaginary of flow and capitalistic spatial production, into which these photographic series are embodied in the way they re-present or make present again coolie migration in the Caribbean. Following this, both the captions and the photographs belong to and form a constitutive part of the bureaucratic culture of the colonial, and thus imperial, production of space.

Figure 6: Demerara. Coolies.



Source: Photographer unknown, photographs and clippings of the West Indies, ca. 1890, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

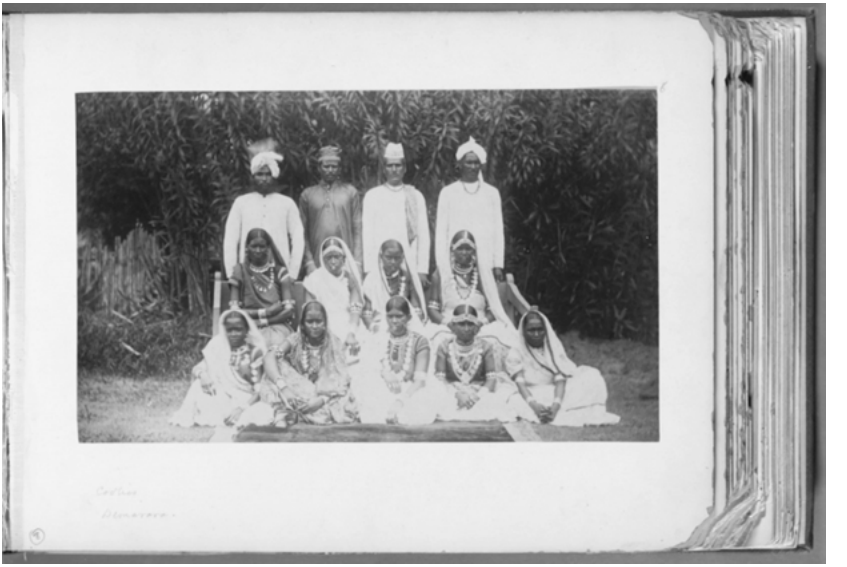
This becomes even more apparent in the following two portrait pictures of coolies in Demerara, as the caption indicates (see Figure 6). Following a rather conventional visual rhetoric, the images show labourers in an orchestrated and well-arranged scenario, representing them distinctly as coolies, marked as culturally 'other.' One picture shows a group of male labourers wearing traditional clothing, some with necklaces and distinctive headgear, bearing typical agricultural tools and other specific accessories, such as a traditional hookah, to sustain the ethnic distinction and otherness of the labourers. In this sense the image corresponds to an exotic fantasy allowing for a pedagogy of the imperial gaze.

Among the Indian coolie labourers, we can distinguish two apparently Chinese coolies, one of them wearing a traditional rural hat, the other exposing his long, thin hair plait. The image visually bears witness to the long experience of indentured labour in the Caribbean since the mid-19th century, mainly as labour immigration from China and India. How is labour represented here? Coming from a visual economy that we perceive today in its visual leftovers as imperial debris, the picture imagines the cultural 'other' as a constitutive part of the reproduction, thus sustaining the modern economic regime of the plantation economy. At the level of pictorial language, the image mirrors a familiar and more conventional genre of labour representation that seems to dissolve any individual trait in favor of a stereotypical representation of the body, which becomes the embodiment of otherness.

The discourse of labour thus visually economizes the very idea of human resources and the human body, explicitly inscribed into the images' economy. As a picture from a photographic album on the plantation economy of the West Indies, a rather generic but characteristic form of storage and representation of that time, the image within this economy of display, situated at the "unstable limit between the private and the public" (Derrida 1995: 57), turns out to be the very imperial residue of our present time. I argue that the photographic album, so commonly used and materially fabricated, predominantly configures a hegemonic gaze, in that it corresponds to an imperial formation and the plantation economy, in the way it evolves the discourse of plantation, whose modern imaginary is consonant with landscape and labour. So the culturally violent act of indentured labour is never explicitly represented. Yet, it is always present in the archival visual and textual documents, and even seems to be the very condition of their existence. As violence is not re-presented and possibly even not archivable, today we may only relate to these imperial formations in the form of a visual leftover or residue. That is, to conceive of the archive as an epistemic figure, in the way it structures the "archivable content" and "in its

relationship to the future" (Derrida 1995: 17-18). As Stoler remarks, these imperial formations have left "their bold-faces or subtle traces […] which contemporary inequities work their way through", and which we perceive with regard to the archive (2013: 3).

Figure 7: Demerara. Coolies.



Source: Photographer unknown, photographs and clippings of the West Indies, ca. 1890, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

The following picture (Figure 7) shows another group of coolie labourers in an image the genre of which we are familiar with: that of a portrait depicting the ethnic and cultural 'other' with its distinct cultural and religious marks of difference, visually represented in the image. It depicts a group of female Indian coolie labourers, carefully arranged in rows, squatting, sitting, and standing. The photograph shows them in their traditional clothing with their jewelry and ornaments as distinctive markers of their pluricultural and diverse ethnic backgrounds. As a group portrait, it also shows male Indian coolie labourers with archetypal traditional headgear (such as a tarboosh) that seem to represent four different ethnic, religious, and cultural groups that were brought to the West Indies, among them seemingly Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims, representing the great linguistic and cultural diversity of India. This image certainly discloses an imaginary of modern labour circulation marked by ethnic, religious, and cultural

traits, highly hierarchized: the making of a global labour diaspora yet to come. Circumscribing the cultural depth of the concept of coolitude, Marina Carter pays a special attention to the fact that:

"If their mother-tongues functioned as a means of more perfect expression for overseas Indians, their native languages could also be a source of comfort and cultural sustenance. It was not uncommon for migrants to carry with them manuscript copies of their sacred texts; the literate among them would read aloud stories from the Ramayana [and the Qur'an] and other religious epics to their fellow labourers. […] 'of all the religious books, the Ramayana has come closest to becoming the central text of overseas Hinduism. It was immensely popular among the contract and especially the indentured labourers in places as far apart as Fiji, Trinidad, South Africa, Suriname, Guyana and Malaysia… its central theme of exile, suffering, struggle and eventual return resonated with the experiences of the Hindu migrants, especially but not exclusively those of the indentured labourers." (Carter 2002: 128-129)

Interestingly, she further underlines that the "Ramayana gave them conceptual tools to make sense of their predicaments, articulated their fears, and showed them how to cope with these" (ibid.: 129). Female coolie labourers were brought along with the male since the very first British experiments with coolie indentured labour. Even children, including infants, were shipped to the Caribbean, though the mortality rate on the way was especially high among them. Notwithstanding this, their reproductive force became a part of an economy of labour in the transition from a slavery-bonded labour regime to a salary-based one, in which indentured labour was a new form of paid labour, although its slavery-like characteristics could never be totally abolished. This also seems to have been important for the imperial formation of a modern and global plantation economy and what would soon replace it. For example, labour in the plantation economy was already represented in 19th century paintings and lithographs, having defined a new genre, visually partaking in the transformation of landscape into peaceful and productive agricultural land (cf. Casid 2005).

Even though manifested and imagined as an aspect of peaceful environmental transformation, labour as a violent regime, as part of the plantation economy, was never represented as such. Instead, its cruelty and violence were invisibilized. This certainly becomes true regarding these photographic series where labour is *not* directly represented. Rather, labour seems to be naturalized and subordinated to a plantation economy, in the way the photographs conceal the violence of the environmental changes of the man-made monocultural landscape. So it is that the photographic series of this album makes of the

plantation economy and labour a major but hidden *leitmotif* whose representational form corresponds to that of landscape, strikingly beautiful and with a visually appealing aesthetic language. Yet, the pictures cunningly invisibilize the omnipresent violence of plantation labour, which makes them imperial debris.

Besides this visual concealment of the hegemonic gaze, the pictures are visual 'documents' of coolie migration in the Caribbean. In the way they are situated as archival images at the "unstable limit between public and private" (Derrida 1995: 57), and because of their quintessential relationship to the future, they also open the way for an alternative historiography that contours the coolie as protagonist. Accordingly, a future reclamation and reception of the photographs as signs of becoming might emerge. In the way the photographs belong to a larger visual archive of the Caribbean, we may recognize today the long imperial genealogy of environmental degradation and forceful asymmetrical global migration, which has still not been reversed. I have argued that the series of photographs evolve 'landscape' in the light of the process of transforming land into a viable aesthetic, economic, and political space, through the circulation of commodities and bodies. Moreover, these photographs may help to disclose the embodied imperial genealogies of labour as an ecological media history, mirrored in the landscapes and flow of people, still present today.

NARRATING COOLIE MIGRATION

The second perspective centers on the epistemic practices of voicing/narrating, which I relate to uneven temporal sedimentation as an articulation of psychic and material space. Revealingly, the anthropologist E. Valentine Daniel focuses on the embodied violence of colonial capitalism when he conceives of indentured or forced labour as the core of the plantation economy:

"What nineteenth-century colonialism did to more than thirty million human beings by turning them into coolies, the massive contribution of labour to colonial capitalism that was made possible by this transmogrification, and the positive role colonialism and the plantation economy played in the making of a modern nation-state amounts to but half of the story. The other half lies in the violence wreaked on the land and the people by the political economy of colonialism in general and, in particular, by the plantation economy – one of colonial capitalism's most productive enterprises of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth." (Daniel 2013: 70-71)

I wish to further discuss the question of the re-presentation of labour, and more specifically that of the indentured labour of coolie migrants in the Caribbean following the coolie perspective: how they voice and narrate their own experiences and survival within the imperial debris. Furthermore, I wish to speculate about the divergent but intersecting perspectives: firstly, that of visual representations of the coolie in the form of the photographs, and secondly, that of coolie voices retelling and remembering the coolie experience across many generations, articulating it as an intimate collective as well as subjective knowledge, by adopting aesthetic forms, such as epic songs, that shape today's post-colonial presence. In forming an archive, both perspectives seem to be entangled in the way they disclose "the unexpected capacity of objects to fade out of focus as they 'remain peripheral to our vision' and yet potent in marking partitioned lives" (Stoler 2013: 5).

Figure 8: Trinidad. Coolie.

Source: Photographer unknown, photographs and clippings of the West Indies, ca. 1890, Houghton Library, Harvard University

The photographic album of the plantation economy in the West Indies, or the few United Fruit Company photographs depicting coolie migration in the Caribbean, are objects that have faded out of sight, as they do not circulate, and

have rarely been seen by latter-day 'coolie' generations. As *objets trouvés*, though, the pictures are visual leftovers that are important repositories of meaning. Moreover, as visual leftovers they are bound to the political as they confer on the archive the potential figuration of future meaning and reclamation.

For example, the final picture (Figure 8) shows a studio portrait of a girl in front of a setting of typical accessories of that time, a remnant of a Roman column at the left side of the picture and a studio curtain whose motif is not very clearly discernible. Much has been written about the economy of this type of popular, 19th century studio portrait. It reflects a typical motif portraying the house and plantation workers that became a part of a household or plantation 'inventory.' In the form of the popular *carte-de-visite,* this used to circulate widely outside the private image economy, defined by a personal or private photographic album. In this sense the imagery certainly belongs to a hegemonic discourse or the discourse of plantation, as Jill Casid (2005) coined the term.

However, I hesitate to conceive of this as the only one. Rather, I wish to argue for conceiving of this type of picture as an object that has, indeed, faded out of sight, but may be able to renew its meaning in the way it embodies the potential to circulate back and be re-appropriated by subsequent coolie generations. Despite the fact that the picture belongs to an image economy that emerges from a primarily hierarchical representational order, as an historical 'document' it seems to outline the Coolie as a protagonist and historical agent, allowing us to glean "signs of becoming" and the modes of making visible imagined modernities and communities. Following this, the picture narrates coolie migration, while it alludes to an imperial genealogy that the cultural concept of coolitude tries to critically uncover. Embodying an externalized view, it nevertheless recovers an internalized experience. As an *objet trouvé* it asks for the future reception of the image by later coolie generations. In this sense, the picture becomes a visual leftover of a situation allowing for different future uses, as images *per se* are poly-semiotic; it articulates the tangibility of a colonial past and a post-colonial presence. Moreover, pictures as material objects embody the complex semantic situations of the imperial experience.

I wish to relate these observations to the second perspective, that of the articulation of coolie voices in the epics and lyrics, with which Khal Torabully restores the figure of the coolie in order to imagine an end to discrimination and racism, when he notes that "l'apocalypse […] révelera le martyre nègre, le martyre créole, et la prophétie annoncera la fin de la discrimination sociale et l'émergence de l'identité créole, grace a la dignité reconquise" (Carter/Torabully 2002: 5). He suggests that in narrative practices the coolie experience is recovered and dignity regained in the way they make available the complex

semantic situations of humiliations and violations culturally, environmentally, and humanly committed.

So it is that the anthropologist E. Valentine Daniel, personally sharing the experience of plantation labour through his family history, opts for the form of an *epic* to retell and reflect upon the present history, recounting the Coolie experience in South Asia, namely that of the Tamil minorities of South Indian origin in today's Sri Lanka, former Ceylon. He gives shape to his experience in the form of a hybrid poem, bearing the title *The Coolie. An Unfinished Epic*, by adopting an experimental ethnography and an oral history as major truthful non-linear narratives. But he also integrates written historical records about coffee, rubber, and tea plantations within the lyrical form. With the first stanzas he retells and remembers the experience of the generation and the idea of time, so deeply embodied in the plantation, tangible to us in our very post-colonial presence. Moreover, he opens to an archive that is, in the words of Derrida, truly situated "at the unstable limit between public and private, between the family, the society, and the State, between the family and an intimacy even more private than the family, between oneself and oneself" (Derrida 1995: 57):

Generations and Time

"When I leave this island," said Rukku, "a single
witness will still remain to tell of the observed
and the absorbed of the shedders of blood mingled

"with blood shed. Mother earth here has been quite reserved,
abashed to confess that she, soaked in venal crude,
puddles her own clay to create out of this sludge,

"coolies as us, over and over again. Lewd
our senses, our ways rude, so deemed by all who judge
and miss our dialect's pulchritude. Eternal

"returnees, requisite detritus. Judge not lest
you too be judged for having seen but not witnessed
harm infernal, unlike Ramu, who has lived our every test."
[…]
All prattle ceased. Her whispers, transformed into song
Pierced the rising mist as light would a veil of tears.
Place held time still. "Time," said Adhi "is neither long

"nor short. Length, could not its unchanging measure be.
Some times are gaugeable, as a repast's vaunted
Flavors are, in x lumens of intensity."

[…]
Chronicles keep now and then apart and airtight;

they declare time long or short. In heritage,
now becomes then and then becomes now. Five, eight or ten
hereafters reporting to this blend, may somehow

incinder the sum, causing the now into then
to collapse and effervesce, celebrate or mourn
and thereby time's space-analog vitiate. But

never always, nor forever. Its gift to burn
makes time a tree. For in the rings of its clean-cut
wound reposes the past's presence in synchrony.
[…]
(Daniel 2013: 75-78)

What both Daniel and Torabully make explicit is that narrating the coolie experience corresponds to the aesthetic forms of remembrance and transmogrification of global migration and indentured labour. Moreover, narrating as epistemic practice is entangled with perceiving and articulating time and space, so meaningful to the experience of migration, revealed in particular in the "unfinished" epic by Daniel. Further, the epic as well as the pictures, I argue, reflect the shifting time-space experience: they are imperial debris of repetition and cultural transformation materialized in language, belief, and rhyme. As a contestation to modernity, narrating-as-voicing becomes here the primordial form of resistance. Likewise, this contestation is embodied in the photographic series that subverts the discourse of plantation being the *raison d'être* of its production, haunting "our 'true' reality as a specter of what might have happened, conferring on our reality the status of extreme fragility and contingency, [that] implicitly clashes with the predominant 'linear' narrative forms of [historiography]" (Zizek 2005: 39).[5]

5 As observed elsewhere by the philosopher Slavoj Zizek: "This perception of our reality as one of the possible – often even not the most probable – outcomes of an

In her study, Marina Carter observes that

"[m]inorities in Creole societies, overseas Indians took refuge in the language and culture of a homeland, which became more and more mythical as the notion of returns faded. Paradoxically, as fast as Indians became part of a Caribbean or Pacific or African landscape, they sought to distinguish themselves." (Carter 2002: 130)

As "images of a continuing exile," she conceives, mobility in time and space becomes a major theme that predominantly resonates in the unfinished epic by Daniel. Once overseas,

"the indentured labourer plunged ever further into diaspora, wandering further and further afield. From Reunion, Tamil workers re-migrated to Mauritius; from Mauritius, labourers were engaged for Natal, and there was cross-migration between the Indian Ocean, Caribbean and even the later Pacific Ocean Indian diasporas." (Carter/Torabully 2002: 131)

This remarkably continuous mobility and movement, as submerged and yet invisible landscapes, re-surfaces as images in these pictures that allow for a reading of an alternative narrative beyond the discourse of plantation economy. Moreover, it is this mobility in time and space that allows migrating labourers to adopt new identities and to de-essentialize them. It is this very mobility in time and space, materialized in the cultural changes of language, word, and rhyme, that resonates with this poem and transcends a linear historiography, while expressing something that we as humankind all share: "Chronicles keep now and then apart and airtight;/ they declare time long or short. In heritage,/ now becomes then and then becomes now […]" (Daniel 2013: 77).

In the psychic and material space the epic narrative makes tangible a very modern time-space experience, which we share as migrant labourers of a globalized future world: "never always, nor forever. Its gift to burn/ makes time a tree. For in the rings of its clean-cut/ wound reposes the past's presence in synchrony" (ibid.: 78). These narratives thus become performative acts, in which time and space, as of resistance and memory, are contested in the way they make

'open' situation, this notion that other possible outcomes are not simply canceled out but continue to haunt our 'true' reality as a specter of what might have happened, conferring on our reality the status of extreme fragility and contingency, implicitly clashes with the predominant 'linear' narrative forms of our literature and film." (2005: 39).

situations semantically available as alternative. This is because they emerge from an open situation by configuring an archive that is situated at the "unstable limit between public and private, between the family, the society, and the State" (Derrida 1995: 57) continually shifting this fragile equilibrium of time-space relations: Narrative practices challenge the boundaries of the public and the private, and their inter-relationship. They may further reclaim the once private and make it public. Accordingly, what is reclaimed is the very idea of the *common* articulated with coolitude and with regard to the indentured modern form of labour whose experience is shared with humankind. I wish to argue at this point that the archive thus becomes a potential and powerful lieu of reclamation of the common, in the way it configures a potential voicing and renders seen the excluded at the unstable limit between the public and the private.

IMPERIAL DEBRIS: THE ENCLAVE

There is another articulation with regard to the imperial debris, which I wish to discuss as the modern spatial figure of the enclave. Imperial ruins are leftover material infrastructures that we witness today – in this case – as fragments of the structures of a plantation economy in the Caribbean. Interestingly, Stoler remarks that

> "such infrastructures of large and small scale bear what captivated Walter Benjamin, the 'marks and wounds of the history of human violence'. It is these spatially assigned 'traces of violence', more than the 'deadening of affects' to which we turn." (Stoler 2013: 22)

By focusing on the materiality of debris, she suggests, the "logic of the concrete" may be unlocked, as "ruins can be marginalized structures that continue to inform social modes of organization but that cease to function in ways they once did" (ibid.: 22). Adopting this perspective, I argue that the spatial figure of the enclave reflects the materiality of the imperial debris, in the way it materially corresponds to the organization of a modern plantation economy, being shaped by the transition from slavery into a post-slavery labour regime at the heart of colonial and corporate capitalism. Stoler astutely asks: "What happens when island enclaves […] become repositories of vulnerabilities that are likely to last longer than the political structures that produced them?" (ibid.: 22).

In the context of modern spatial production the enclave can certainly be conceived of as a special figuration of the organizing of space and time on the

plantation. Moreover, I argue for conceiving of it as an epistemic figure when it comes to describing the formation of a modern political space. As has been acknowledged, environmental changes in the Caribbean correspond to the rise of corporate colonialism at the turn of the 19th century, which reproduces and reorganizes the previous relations of labour and 'race'. Accordingly, the functional-technological enclave emerges as a type of new spatial phenomenon of a territorial organization, that is, a space that is characterized by transnational economic expansion. Likewise, the enclave as a figure describes the socio-economic space of the plantation developed in the Caribbean through slavery. In the alliance between labour control and racial hierarchy, we identify the foundations of the formation of this modern political space, to which the enclave corresponds as both a spatial and an epistemic figure.

I wish to expand this argument. One of the key categories that describe the modern economic expansion is that of 'race', as noted by scholars including Ann Laura Stoler, Étienne Balibar, and Immanuel Wallerstein. This is also relevant for the hierarchical and hegemonic organization and production of space constitutive of the emergent corporate colonialism: As visual technology, 'race' participates in the spatial order of the enclaves, plantation and company towns. Corporate colonialism's production of space is based on, as pointed out by Balibar and Wallerstein, "a variable combination of a continuous external exclusion and an internal marginalization" (Balibar/Wallerstein 1990: 55). With regard to the photographic archive, many pictures flamboyantly evidence the material organization of the agro-urban enclaves and the plantation, and 'document' the environmental transformation of space that makes effective a new corporate social and labour hierarchy.

Thus the photographic album corresponds to a discourse of labour constitutive of racial lines. 'Race', as Deborah Poole (1997) has remarked, is a visual technology here, in that this technology reiterates a racial hierarchy, both as an external exclusion and an internal marginalization, that enhances the idea of modern productivity and discipline through labour. The enclave as a modern spatial and epistemic figure correlates with this hierarchy. Today, as imperial debris, it remains a leftover structure, though it becomes a part of the

> "new de-formations and new forms of debris [that] work on matter and mind to eat through people's resources and resiliences as they embolden new political actors with indignant refusal, forging unanticipated, entangled, and empowered alliances." (Stoler 2013: 29)

So it is that at the level of psychic space the photographs materialize a visual imaginary that correlates with the enclave as raw material and epistemic figures of this space, carving out the contours of the modern political space.

In terms of territorial organization the emergence of this modern space is accompanied by a politics of the enclave that seems to characterize even the first half of the twentieth century. More generally, the enclave is defined as a principle of sovereignty, and is a closed area. This is certainly true for the island enclaves as a constitutive part of modern corporate colonialism. Moreover, with the implementation of the labour camp, spatial segregation is reproduced, reified and perfected. In this process, I argue, the enclave became the privileged form of an imperial formation, which corresponded to designations such as "plantation", "camp", "labour camp", etc. I wish to remind you, at this point, that the functional-modern enclave reflects the changing economic value of the workforce, experienced after the abolition of slavery. Moreover, it reflects the practices of hierarchy and difference, the inclusion and exclusion of labourers, and thus becomes an important spatial figure of a new ordering of the territory in the discourse of plantation. Accordingly, the enclave as labour camp seems, I argue, to be the paradigm of the modern political space. This reading of the paradigm leads us conceive of the enclave, which had generally been studied from the economic perspective as a place of direct foreign investment, as a phenomenon of modernization. With regard to an imperial and modern spatial formation, photography played an important role in modern social regulation, where spatial order converges with the discourse of race, and materializes as violent discrimination. Race as a visual technology, as the photographs reflect, seems to participate effectively in the spatial ordering of the enclave. Likewise, this as-such-configured visual archive provokes reflection on the enclave and the discourse of race as corresponding parts of the expansion of a corporate colonialism. In other words, as interlocked components they form a regime that works on social regulation through a hierarchical spatial order.

Interestingly, as Ann Stoler (1995) has demonstrated in another study, the exclusive policies of colonialism are demarcated not only by external limits, but also by internal frontiers that specify internal conformity and order within colonial societies; the categories of colonizers and colonized are underwritten by a racial difference that is also constructed in terms of gender. Above all, the company towns and plantations were centers of dominant masculine cultures, to which female labourers only visibly entered much later, as domestic servants, plantation labourers, or for the maintenance and serving of the plantation infrastructure. In this sense, the album photographs undeniably reproduce the plantation-as-discourse. As media of technology they articulate and reify the

intimate racial fantasies and fears of racial intermixing. In this way, coolie labourers as well as other labourers on the plantations and in the company towns, as depicted in the photographic series of the United Fruit Company, are represented as being a constitutive part of the enclave or labour camp. Yet, the pictures are cultural documents, which reverberate with the imperial debris, which, as material leftovers, remain a powerful historical source embodied in the landscapes today.

In this sense, both the United Fruit Company photographic series, which bears witness to the coolie presence, and the photographic albums of the plantation economy of the French and Dutch Caribbean colonies of 1890 imagine and visibilize the coolie labourer as a part of the economy of the enclave, while they reiterate the discourse of labour. At the same time they open up to a future and potential reclamation to be articulated by generations to come, because they *render seen,* and in so doing, continue to *make visible*. Interestingly, Carter points out in her study that

> "as overseas Indians became permanent settlers, they recreated the sacred topography of their homelands, constructing sites of worship and places where gatherings of their co-religionists could be held. Moving out of the estates and into towns and villages, status was defined less by a superior position in the plantation hierarchy than by one's attendance at spiritual and cultural functions of one's peers." (Carter 2002: 129)

This observation seems important, as it may help to conceive of the enclave rather as a porous spatial entity than as a hermetic and strictly closed space. And yet, the enclave as an epistemic figure responds to a hierarchical ordering of space through labour.

However, the pictures clearly conceal the violence of the spatial segregation and any traces of eventual violent incidents or arbitrary physical aggression by white employees against coolie labourers. This becomes evident most notably in the spatial hierarchy the great majority of the pictures depict, representing the development of different types of housing in accordance with the varying segments of labour. Further, this hierarchy is embodied in the photographic archive's own order, at least with regard to the United Fruit Company's photographs, in the way the pictures are arranged to mirror the fantasy of technological progress. The pictures in this sense camouflage violence and eventually obscure labour, on which this spatial hierarchy is founded, and make them disappear altogether by visually underpinning a discourse of technicality and modern production – that is, the discourse of plantation.

POSTSCRIPT

In a related context the literary critic Edward Said once observed:

"[…] how the production of a particular kind of nature and space under historical capitalism is essential to the unequal development of a landscape that integrates poverty with wealth, industrial urbanization with agricultural diminishment. The culmination of this process is imperialism which achieves the domination, classification, and universal commodification of space, under the aegis of the metropolitan center. Its cultural analogue is commercial geography, whose perspectives […] justified imperialism as the result of 'natural' fertility or infertility, of available sea lanes, of permanently differentiated zones, territories, climates, and peoples. […] Thus is accomplished 'the universality of capitalism', which is 'the differentiation of national space according to the territorial division of labour'." (Said 1988: 12)

This perspective, focusing on labour and indentured labour from within the imperial genealogies of the present, allows for a working "through the less perceptible affects of imperial interventions and their settling into the social and material ecologies in which people live and survive" (Stoler 2013: 4). As Stoler further underscores, this means "to look at 'imperial formations' rather than at empire per se […] to register the ongoing quality of processes of decimation, displacement, and reclamation" (ibid.: 8). This observation seems important to me because it opens up to the potential for readdressing the question of empowerment and agency. In this sense, visual leftovers, such as these two photographic series, ask for reclamation by generations to come in order to overcome discrimination and racism.

This kind of potential and powerful renewed reception of visual leftovers seems to avoid the reproduction of fixed structures that come along with an exclusive focusing on Empire, Capitalism, or Plantation. It allows an avoidance of the reiteration of the same metanarratives by causing fissures and fractures that open the way for *petites contre-histoires* or alternative semantics, such as those provoked by *The Coolie. An Unfinished Epic*, and oppose well-known discourses, which inhibit "sight and knowledge, but also the trouble of troubled and troubling affairs", as framed by Derrida with the *mal d'archive* (1995: 57). In this sense, vis-à-vis these visual leftovers, reading the archive means to read it 'against the grain' in order to allow the materialized and concrete fragments of the imperial debris to speak. So it is that the cultural concept of coolitude, that of articulating the experience of modern labour, becomes meaningful as it allows a

raising of awareness of the modern political space and its global forms of "a continuous external exclusion and an internal marginalization" (Balibar/ Wallerstein 1990: 55). Furthermore, the concept of *coolitude* allows for and reclaims the *common* beyond ethnic or racial lines, because it speaks out against global and modern bonded labour as a *conditio sine qua non* of the degradation of environments and personhoods.

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