FLEETING AGENCIES

This book offers a bold new perspective on the concept of agency and history of long-silenced coolie women—their role in the colonial economy and transnational movements.

The history of transnational labor has refused to acknowledge the importance and agency of women workers. In this landmark study, the author revises and decolonizes the history of transnational female plantation labor. This is the first book to examine the history of Indian coolie women who migrated to British Malaya and contributed to the Rubber Empire’s making.

The author disrupts the male-dominated narratives by focusing on gendered patterns of migration and showing how South Asian women labor migrants engaged with migration, interacted with other migrants, and negotiated colonial laws. In exploring the politicization of labor migration trends and gender relations in the colonial plantation society of British Malaya, it shows how the immigrant Indian coolie women manipulated colonial legal and administrative perceptions of Indian women, the gender-perspective roles within Indian societies, relations within patriarchal marriage institutions, and even the emerging Indian national independence movement in India and Malaya, all to ensure their survival, escape from unfavourable relations and situations, and improve their lives. Through this study, the author introduces the concept of *situational or fleeting agency* to provide a nuanced understanding of the term “agency” within the contexts of subaltern and colonial histories.

Meticulously researched, *Fleeting Agencies* is a major contribution to labor migration history, inter-Asia history, and British Empire history.

*Arunima Datta* is Assistant Professor of History at Idaho State University, USA, where her research focuses on transnational labor migration, gender, and women’s history and Asian history.
GLOBAL SOUTH ASIANS

Throughout the modern era, South Asia and South Asians have been entangled with global flows of goods, people and ideas. In the context of these globalised conditions, migrants from the subcontinent of India created some of the world's most extensive and influential transnational networks. While operating within the constraints of imperial systems, they nevertheless made distinctive and important contributions to international trade, global cultures and transnational circuits of knowledge. This series seeks to explore these phenomena, placing labourers, traders, thinkers and activists at the centre of the analysis. Beginning with volumes that seek to radically reappraise indenture, the series will continue with books on the mobility of elite actors, including intellectuals, and their contributions to the global circulation of ideas and the evolution of political practice. It will highlight the creativity and agency of diasporic South Asians and illuminate the crucial role they played in the making of global histories. As such it sets out to challenge popular misconceptions and established scholarly narratives that too often cast South Asians as passive observers.

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FLEETING AGENCIES

A Social History of Indian Coolie Women in British Malaya

ARUNIMA DATTA
For

Mimi, Papa, and Adi
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ABBREVIATIONS

AGIM       Agent of the Government of India in Malaya
AN         Arkib Negara, Kuala Lumpur
BL         British Library
CO         Colonial Office Records
CUKL       Cornell University Kroch Library
FMS        Federated Malay States
IIC        Indian Immigration Committee
INA        Indian National Army
IOR        India Office Records
MIC        Malaysian Indian Congress
NAI        National Archives of India, New Delhi
NAUK       National Archives of United Kingdom, London
NAS        National Archives of Singapore
NLI        National Library of India, Kolkata
NLS        National Library of Singapore
OHI        Oral History Interviews
PAM        Planters Association of Malaya
RJR        Rani of Jhansi Regiment
SS         Straits Settlement
TNSA       Tamil Nadu State Archives
UMS        Unfederated Malaya States
UPAM       United Planters Association of Malaya
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book began with my curiosity about the silence in scholarly literature concerning “coolie” women, though they were regularly recruited in British India for being transported to various British plantation colonies for both labor production and labor reproduction. That curiosity has been encouraged, nurtured, and supported by many scholars, archivists, colleagues, friends, and family.

My biggest debt of gratitude is owed to my mentors and colleagues, who over the years have patiently listened to my ideas, read drafts, provided valuable feedback, answered innumerable questions, and, most importantly, stood by me as pillars of wisdom and strength. In particular, I would like to thank Vineeta Sinha (Ammu), Sunil Amrith, Barbara Andaya, Leonard Andaya, Siddharthan Maunaguru, Kelvin E. Y. Low, Noorman Abdullah, Paul Kratoska, Indrani Chatterjee, Erika Rappaport, Catherine Hoyser, Louise Williams, Laura Seddelmeyer, Eadaoin Agnew, Kate Imy, Daniel Grey, Jonathan Saha, and Sumita Mukherjee—thank you for always supporting me, motivating me, and helping me develop my ideas. Words cannot define how thankful I am for your unwavering support and encouragement. Ammu, Barbara, Daniel, Indrani, Sid, and Sunil—I cannot express in words how grateful I am to you for always being there for me whenever the path became difficult. I also want to extend heartfelt thanks and gratitude to Elaine Farrell for being an amazing friend and mentor who helped me deal with trying situations in research and writing—in a task that seemed insurmountable. Kate Imy and Laura Seddelmeyer—thank you for always being there, always having time for me and being an amazing source of strength during trying times. Elaine, Kate, and Laura—I am lucky to have your friendship: it is hard to find friends like you in today’s world and I would have never believed it is possible to build such friendships in academia until I met.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

you. I also want to extend special thanks to Gordon Ramsey—without your help and constant readings and comments, this manuscript would not have reached its final stages. Finally, I would like to thank my wonderful colleagues at Idaho State University, especially in the Department of History, who have constantly been a great support through the process of finishing this book.

A few chapters are revised versions of the following articles: parts of Chapter 4 appeared in "Immorality, Nationalism and the Colonial State in British Malaya: Indian ‘Coolie’ Women’s Intimate Lives as Ideological Battleground,” Journal of Women’s History Review 25, no. 4 (2016): 584–601; Chapter 5 is a revised version of “Social Memory and Indian Women from Malaya and Singapore in the Rani of Jhansi Regiment,” Journal of Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society 88, Part 2, no. 309 (2015): 77–103. I owe grateful acknowledgment to the journals and publishers for allowing me to build on this earlier work.

Many institutions, libraries, and archives have made this project possible: multiple research grants from the National University of Singapore; research fellowship at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London; and the Asia Research Institute research grants helped in the research for this book. Accessing the stories of the heroes of my book—the “coolie” women—would not have been possible without the hard work and support of many archivists around the world. In the UK, I am grateful to the staff at the British Library, the National Archives, and the Women’s Library. I am especially grateful to the British Library staff—Annabelle Gallop, Arlene C. B., Charles Bonnah, Dorota Walker, Gary Carter, Haque Sarker, Jeff Kattenhorn, John Chignoli (Chop Chop), Lorena Garcia, Richard Bingle, Richard Morel, and Robert Boyling—most of whom have become as close as family to me over the years. In Singapore, I am grateful for all the support I received from the staff at Arkib ACCES...
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Negara, Kuala Lumpur. In India I am grateful for all the support and help I got from the archivists and staff at the National Archives of India, Delhi; Tamil Nadu Archives, Chennai; West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata. I would also like to thank the two anonymous readers and the series editor at CUP, Crispin Bates, who offered perceptive comments that generated crucial revisions to the manuscript. I am also grateful for the constant support and guidance I received from the CUP team—Ms Qudsiya Ahmed, Ms Sohini Ghosh, Mr Aniruddha De, and their team.

I also thank the various conference organizers and panelists between 2010 and 2015 who have given me the incredible opportunity to share my research and whose insightful comments have helped me develop my arguments. Your time, comments, and suggestions were extremely valuable.

I would also like to acknowledge with gratitude the love and support I have received from friends and family. First of all, Raghava Bhaiya, Mira, Riya, and Xiaoyang (Stella), thank you for being my family and home away from home. Thank you for patiently listening to all my challenges and giving me the courage to go on. Heather Ott, I cannot thank you enough for your kindness and amazing friendship.

Most importantly, I am ever grateful for the unconditional love and unquestioning support from the most important people in my life—my parents, Debasish Datta (Papa) and Rumjhum Datta (Mimi), and my amazingly supportive husband, Shiladitya Mukherjee (Adi). Papa, Mimi, and Adi, thank you for always being ready to read my work and providing valuable feedback on it—even though you were reading it for the fifteenth time. Adi, thank you for constantly encouraging me by reminding me that the blessings of the unsung heroes of my book, the “cooie” women, will always be with me. Papa, Mimi, and Adi—without your constant support, patience, willingness to postpone plans, willingness to travel, and constant encouragement, I would not have been able to complete this book. Come challenges, illness, or doubts, you three were always there and always believed that I would do fine. I dedicate this book to my parents and my husband!