

WOMEN, GENDER AND THE LEGACY OF
SLAVERY AND INDENTURE

LEGACY OF SLAVERY AND INDENTURED LABOUR

edited by

MAURITS S. HASSANKHAN and FARZANA GOUNDER

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Women, Gender and the Legacy of Slavery and Indenture

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MANOHAR

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Foreword

Although the migration of Indian peoples have occurred at different moments of history, indentured labour migration, on the scale that it occurred, was the most important labour movement to take place in the nineteenth century in the Indian Ocean. This migration was replicated on a smaller scale in other British, French and Dutch colonies in the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans, after the 'success' of the first attempt at indentured immigration to Mauritius in 1834. However, despite Mauritius being the largest 'receiver' of indentured labour, with a proliferation of writing on the history and heritage of indenture, to date there are few scholarly studies of women under the indenture system.

It is, therefore, an honour to be asked to write the foreword of a volume on women in the indenture system. Moreover, being a descendant of indentured great grandparents from Bihar and of an indentured woman Sumoreea 218031, makes my participation in this volume feel almost like a duty, as a way to remember and honour her and of course, all those women, who were brave enough to leave their home, make the journey to the distant countries where we reside today and that today we call 'home'.

The scholarly literature on women in indenture has gone through many phases: from the early representation of women as either 'chaste wives' or 'immoral doe rabbits' (Lal 1985, 71) to later reconsiderations by historians of the diaspora objecting to the focus on the sexual lives of female indentured labourers, which reflected the Western feminist debates prevalent at the time, to the more sophisticated analysis of works such as those of Spivak and the subaltern group. More recently, there seems to be another shift in focus to individual and family histories, which leads us to

another dimension of women's lives under indenture: more personal, more intimate insights into their daily lives, more direct and personal representations which is written with empathy. Perhaps, this reflects the historian's increasing use of ethnography, literary and other cultural expressions, oral tradition and oral history to analyse historical experiences from another dimension.

Many of these earlier studies were either local studies or, at the most, sub-regional level studies. Many attempted survey type histories which were compiled previously, published information in one volume. As far as I am aware, this is the first publication that has spanned several continents to provide a concerted, in-depth analysis of women under indenture. This is to be especially welcomed as too often the Atlantic dominance of the historiography of slavery has also impinged on indentured studies.

Women have been quite invisible even in more detailed and recent studies of indenture: most have focused on history relating to women's biological attributes and their sexual lives, while their economic, educational, political and social role and achievements have been neglected. There has been a tendency to focus on early immigrants but not on their children: those who grew up in the societies their families had moved to. Their history has yet to be told. It is time to undertake more detailed studies requiring more field and ethnographic work.

Women in indenture continue to be treated as one homogeneous mass but just as men did not constitute one homogeneous mass, so women too cannot be placed or studied as one universal category. Caste, tribe, class, ethnicity, relationships with other groups living at the time also played a role in influencing their life decisions and their experiences. Moreover, regional differences within countries and with other countries have not yet been taken into consideration. Few truly comparative studies exist. This volume, however, brings together a large number of relevant papers which could form the basis for future comparative work.

My own grandmother, though illiterate, a labourer all her life and widowed early, managed to purchase several plots of land. She contributed in a very significant way to the later fortunes of

the family. Yet, where in any book on economic history, do we read of landownership by Indian women in Mauritius or of their economic contribution? In South Africa, women worked in various sectors: in coastal plantations, in Natal Government Railways, with small farmers and smallholders as well as tea estates. Where are they in economic history books? We owe to these women to dig even further in the archival records, national and private, and write their history 'as it was' and not through our academic lenses and choices of topics that fit current scholarship trends.

Despite an impressive amount of scholarly literature, there are thus many missing links still remaining in our history of indenture that need to be understood. What were relations between women and their European mistresses under the indenture system? What hierarchies were at play among the women themselves? What was the demographics of indenture in each country? How did the variations impact on the role and future of women? What became of women when they moved from plantation estate to the villages? Were they all 'victims' of renewal of Indian patriarchal forms as so often stated in literature? Many villages were composed not only of Indians. What was the extent of *metisage*? In Mauritius, for example, it was extensive, as research into family history reveals, and almost every Mauritian family has an Indian ancestor somewhere.

This volume is thus a very welcome addition in the historiography of indenture as it restores the women in indenture as the 'central' players that they were. Kalpana Hiralal, Charu Gupta, Farzana Gounder use oral history, Choenni revisits the traditional portrayal of women and focuses instead on their agency within the confines of the plantation. The last three papers by Carter and Wickramasinghe, Siqueri and Terborg all point to the need as stated earlier, to link the different histories of indenture to other forms of unfree labour across time and space.

We must ensure that future studies link up with past and later histories of unfree labour to understand not only the continuities but the system itself better for indeed the economic systems did not change drastically: only the geographic origins of labour changed. Therefore, it is incumbent to understand both earlier and later

systems to understand the later system of indenture. There are too many 'parallel' histories being written and it is indeed refreshing to see that this volume has broken these regional, thematic and chronological barriers.

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4 September 2019

VIJAYALAKSHMI TEELOCK

Introduction

*Farzana Gounder, Kalpana Hiralal,
Amba Pande and Maurits S. Hassankhan*

This book is the second of ten books in the series *Legacy of Slavery and Indentured Labour*. The ten volumes are based on the presentations at a conference on the same theme organized by the Anton de Kom University of Suriname from 18 to 22 June 2018 in Paramaribo.

Migration has always been part of human history, but the age of imperialism ushered in a new phenomenon of large-scale organized migration of labourers through the systems of slavery and indenture, which were devised to feed the colonial political-economy. Another feature of such migrations was that it led to the permanent settlement of the uprooted African and Asian labourers in the new lands. These developments, in the long run, intertwined the histories of the 'ruler' and the 'ruled', the so-called 'civilized and the 'uncivilized' along with the people from various continents, thus, giving rise to plural societies. The narratives, however, remained dominated by the colonial legacies and frames of reference. In the present day, these historical colonial narratives are being challenged and clarified through multidisciplinary academic engagement in which gender has emerged as a prominent analytical category that had remained subsumed under the colonial as well as the native patriarchal notions. A case in point is the portrayal of the indentured labourers, or *girmitiyas*, within the colonial discourse, as individuals who were from the margins of Indian society, especially the women, because they were supposed

to be 'socially degraded and morally compromised' (Lal 2015, 179). They were the destitute widows, prostitutes and those who were from the lowest rungs of society. Indenture was, thus, framed as a means of escape from the labourers' drudgery and poverty-stricken lives in India.

Brij Lal's thesis (1983) provided the first comprehensive analysis of the girmitiyas' demographic origins. He demonstrated conclusively that the girmitiyas were not the 'flotsam and jetsam' of India, as framed within the colonial narrative of indenture. Instead, the girmitiyas were a cross-section of India's caste and class. The girmitiyas' resultant migration was due to 'push' and 'pull' economic and climatic circumstances. Factors such as drought, famine, poverty, the stranglehold of the caste system and the changing landscape of rural India under British revenue policies were all contributing factors behind the migration of over a million Indians to the colonies.

A further challenge to the colonial discourse was the re-evaluation of the indenture experience across the colonies. Rather than being an economic opportunity, girmit was shown to be a vicious cycle with detrimental consequences for the labourers' health and well-being. Low wages led to inadequate diet which caused sickness, which caused absenteeism which led to further loss of wages, fines and extension of indenture (Hassankhan 2014; Lal 1996).

The nine articles in this volume have been organized into three parts:

- Part 1: Perspectives from the Diaspora on Indentured Migration.
- Part 2: Perspectives from the 'Home' Country on Indentured Migration.
- Part 3: Gender, Sexuality and Agency.

Part 1: Perspectives from the Diaspora on Indentured Migration

The three articles in this part are united through three thematic emphases.

First, the articles provide further evidence to challenge the hegemonic colonial narrative on both the indenture system and

the positioning of the labourers within this system. Second, the articles analyse indenture from the labourers' perspective. Third, the three articles engage with recent theoretical approaches to indenture scholarship. Lal's study is about the engagement with the labourers' experiences of indenture through a new genre, which Lal terms 'factions', created through the fusion of academic and popular discourse. Gounder's study engages with the Girmitiyas' oral narratives and is thus in line with the recent turn in indenture studies on revisiting indenture through the first-hand experiences of the labourers themselves. Finally, Choenni's study furthers the feminist discourse, which engages with the liminality of women's positioning in relation to their indenture experience.

Thus, while forming a thematic whole, each of the articles provides a different lens on indenture scholarship.

The study begins with Lal's chapter on the state of the art in the field of indenture studies. Lal analyses the evolution of the indenture narrative and discusses a recent turn in indenture scholarship, which challenges the boundaries of where and how indenture has been discussed and presented. To mark the new genre, Lal has coined the term 'factions', which he defines as follows, 'The material is given to the writer, and preserving its essential truth (as opposed to its factual accuracy) is his primary concern. His 'characters' are not the inventions of the writer's imagination; they represent real people whom he has seen and observed or whose stories he has been told' (Lal 2013, 5-6).

The genre of factions allows for a retelling of historiography through popular discourse. In this regard, through its accessible voice, the experience of indenture has a new and far-reaching audience, beyond the academic arena. The genre has already been receiving favourable attention within the diasporas. Some noteworthy examples of the growing genre are Anurag Subramani's serialized stories published in *The Fiji Times* (2019), and Gaiutra Bahadur's *Coolie Woman*.

The works can be likened to that of Munshi Rahman Khan's (1943)¹ autobiography and Totaram Sanadhya's (1919) *Fiji Dwip*

¹ The autobiography written in Devanagari script and named *Jeewan*

men Ikis Varash, which was instrumental in the abolishment of indenture. Both authors represented indentured labourers and the experiences of indenture sympathetically for a wider, non-indenture-initiated audience.

Lal's article heralds new beginnings in indenture scholarship, and the volume thus begins on a positive note about the continued growth in the field of indenture studies.

Gounder's article is unique in indenture scholarship for its engagement with the labourers' oral narratives, as opposed to using primarily archival materials. The narratives were recorded in 1979 for a public broadcast on what was then Fiji's only Hindi radio station, as part of the Girmit centennial commemoration. These narratives form a cornerstone to the commemoration of Indian indenture. Gounder's analysis reveals the distinctly gendered strategies that men and women narrators use in positioning themselves in relation to indenture events within their personal narratives. The findings on the agentic positioning of the *girmitiyas* within their life stories provide further evidence that the *girmitiyas* did not perceive themselves to be simply hapless victims of an unjust system; rather, they responded to their circumstances using strategies that they felt were opportune.

As growing evidence indicates, the labourers responded individually and collectively to their circumstances in a variety of ways: some situations were tolerated, as the labourers adjusted to their plantation life and bore out their five years of indenture (Lal & Munro 2014).

Other circumstances became untenable, resulting in resistance, which took the outlet of institutionalized practices of complaints (through the inspectors, or the courts) for offences such as assault and battery of labourers and non-payment of wages (Lal 1986).

Prakash, was finalized in 1943. It was published for the first time in 2003 in Dutch, followed by its English translation in 2005. The publication of a Hindi/Devanagari version by Ashutosh Kumar is in the process of preparation, while Maurits Hassankhan is working on the publication of the original text in Roman script with a translation in Dutch.

However, several factors worked against them: the labourers' lack of proficiency in the colonial language and the difficulty in obtaining unbiased interpreters, combined with a lack of knowledge about the workings of the colonial justice system and how to present their cases in this culturally unfamiliar terrain, were some of the problems faced (Hassankhan 2014).

The result was that the labourers' complaints against the plantation authorities were more likely to be dismissed, or the plantation authorities were able to escape conviction. On the other hand, when the plantation authorities took the labourers to court for non-performance of tasks, unlawful absence, desertion, damaging property, 'want of ordinary diligence', the labourers, in most cases, were convicted, with harsh penalties for petty offences, through fines, imprisonment and even imprisonment with hard labour. A further consequence of imprisonment was that this was perceived as time away from the plantation and resulted in the extension of the labourers' indenture (Hassankhan 2014; Lal 1986; Naidu 1980).

The labourers became increasingly frustrated in their attempts to obtain redress through legal processes. The girimiyas believed that the indenture authorities (such as the Agent-General and District Commissioner) colluded with the plantation authorities and that it was futile to take the plantation authorities to court. The girimiyas turned to other forms of covert and overt acts of resistance at the plantation level, such as individualized spontaneous acts of violence, destruction of property, petty theft and other more organized and collective forms of protest, such as revolts and strikes (Gounder forthcoming, Hassankhan 2014, Hoeft 1987, Vahed 2014).

Gounder's article adds further evidence to resistance studies as she analyses the labourers' gendered remembrance of their responses to their indenture experiences. The study provides further evidence of the strategies men and women used to negotiate their agency and identity on a day-to-day basis during their indenture (Gounder forthcoming, Hiralal 2014, Mishra 2012, Vahed 2014). What emerges from Gounder's study is the nuances of agency that the men and women displayed during their indenture,

which are emphasized within their life stories. The analysis thus provides a tapestry of gendered survival, accommodation and resistance strategies, which the Girmityas felt were important to be remembered by the wider community.

Choenni's article, which marks the end of the part, focuses on women's experiences of indenture. The article provides a close examination of the workings of the indenture system and repositions the Girmityas in relation to their social and environmental structures. Within the colonial discourse, as evidenced within the colonial records, the labourers, and not the plantation structures, were blamed for any failings in the workings of the indenture system and women, in particular, were marginalized further.

The colonial discourse portrayed women as scheming and apathetic wives and mothers, who were responsible for the violence and suicide rates amongst the male labourers. With a ratio of 10 women to 40 men, women were a minority on the plantations and were blamed for the interpersonal violence amongst males that permeated the plantation strata, as well as male suicide rates. Within the colonial records, the attributed cause to these acts of self-inflicted and interpersonal violence was sexual jealousy and the mercenary behaviour of women. However, the reality was not so clear-cut.

A re-evaluation of plantation-based incidents demonstrates that women were particularly discriminated against on the plantations, as workers, as females and as mothers. In the heavily male-dominated society, women were not given paid positions of authority, as the position of Sirdar (Emmer 1987). Furthermore, although the indenture contract guaranteed a minimum wage of 1 shilling for men and 9 pence for women, the employers imposed a task system on the labourers, in which they were paid according to the type of work that they performed. Thus, indentured women, whose work involved weeding, hoeing and planting of cane earned less than men, whose tasks included the long hours of harvesting of sugar cane and women who were without a male partner were even more hard-pressed to survive (Hassankhan 2014). Moreover, in addition to their plantation work, women were housewives and mothers, who had to perform household tasks at dawn, before

leaving for their plantation work and in the evenings, after their return from the plantation (Beall 1990, Hoeft 1987).

As females, the women were subject to oppression, murder, violence and sexual assault at the hands of plantation authorities and male labourers (Thiara 1995). The pivotal examples within the Indian nationalist newspapers of two women labourers, Naraini and Kunti, as 'women defending their honour (*izzat*)' in an inhospitable environment away from home drew attention and sympathy for all Indian indentured women, and helped counter the colonial representation of indentured women as sexual mercenaries (Ali 2000, Gupta this volume, Lal 1985).

In addition to the sexual commodification of women, there was the plantation authorities' perception of women as labourers-before-mothers (Gounder forthcoming). Women were expected to return to the field soon after giving birth, despite colonial report recommendations (cf. McNeil 1914). Women were also forced to return to work due to the low wages of their partners (cf. Harvey 2000, Reddock 1985).

While on the one hand indenture has been established as a difficult experience for women, fraught with hardship and violence, in other circumstances, it also meant independence and greater bargaining power (Emmer 1985, Northrup 1995, Shameem 1990). Recent feminist discourse engages with the liminality of the two positions, and it is in this vein that Choenni's study is located. As Choenni demonstrates, due to the paucity of women, indenture provided an opportunity for a re-negotiation of women's cultural and social roles. Cultural values that could no longer be upheld within the constraints of the structures of the plantation environment had to be altered or abandoned. This included the abandonment of cultural markers, such as the caste system, which were impossible to maintain, as the paucity of women led to marriage across religious and ethnic lines. Choenni's study thus provides evidence of the pivotal role that women played on the plantations as workers, as women, as mothers and as cultural gatekeepers all the while negotiating the confines of the male-dominated plantations in which they lived and worked.

Part 2: Perspectives from the 'Home' Country on Indentured Migration

Contemporary scholarship also endeavours to explore the multi-layered dimensions of women's role and agency during the migration and settlement in the new lands. In this vein, the articles in this part reflect on the migration experiences of women from India and South Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The authors have sought to challenge traditional scholarship by highlighting aspects of migration which, to some extent, have been neglected in the histories of the Indian diaspora. They have provided feminist and gendered frameworks at regional, global and transnational levels and, in doing so, have probed myths and distorted images of Indian women in the context of the colonial archives, transoceanic migrations, and family economies. Importantly, the authors have provided narratives for the re-thinking of the connections between race, gender, class, ethnicity and nationalism and how they shape and define the migratory experiences of women.

One of the key themes that emerges in this part is the re-thinking of narratives beyond the boundaries of traditional scholarship. Gupta's study broadens the debate on the indentured subaltern women in India. She problematizes gendered migration in the context of nationalism, agency and identity by examining the role of the Hindi print media in India. In the extensive Hindi writings on the indentured women, the latter is portrayed as 'helpless', 'broken', and remains a victim perpetually. Gupta, utilizing non-traditional sources, through poems, songs and literary narratives, subverts this image. She argues that emigration was far more 'complicated, contradictory, and ambiguous than is commonly seen'. Similarly, Hiralal in her study on 'Wives Across the Seas' provides new perspectives on gendered migration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by focusing on the neglected experiences of 'passenger' Indian women. Her study highlights the need to shift the narratives not only beyond the place of destination but also the place of departure. The 'women who wait' or are 'left behind', and their links to male migrants has largely been an understudied

and misunderstood area of research in the Indian diaspora studies. Traditional scholarship has also detailed the lives of male migrants without women extensively and to redress the balance, Hiralal's article calls for greater attention to the transnational lives of women migrants. Hiralal calls for a re-thinking of the 'women left behind' and the need to problematize male-centred migration in the Indian Ocean region. Relying extensively on archival sources, she illustrates that male out-migration must be seen in the context of family structure, household economies, women's resistance and agency. The imbalance between male and female migration was far more complex. Migration was not a linear process, nor was it genderless; rather migration must be considered within the socio-economic and political context both at the place of departure and destination.

Another significant theme emerging from these three articles is the recognition of difference. Migration experiences of women cannot be essentialized or homogenized. Gupta deconstructs these notions by alluding to the lives of women of the Chamar and Parsi caste and how their experiences were at odds with nationalist and colonialist narratives of the duped, deceived, coerced and abducted migrant. It is equally significant that Gupta alludes to the constructions of Indian masculinity in the context of nation and state and how it sought to restrict and curtail women's migration. Hiralal's articles focus on indentured and passenger Indian women and show clearly how Indian women migrants were divided by a range of factors that included class, ethnicity, religion, geography, age and language and how these factors shaped and defined their migratory experiences. 'Passenger' and indentured women were subject to different immigration laws and socio-economic hardships. An examination of these aspects not only dethrones monolithic understandings of gendered migration but accentuates differences between women migrants in the Indian diaspora.

In all three articles, the authors have sought to debunk the myth of the passive and docile Indian migrant women. They have examined the twin aspects of victimization or oppression on the one hand and women's agency or activism on the other. Women, to some extent, did have social and personal autonomy that shaped

migration decisions. Gupta highlights how Dalit women were independent decision makers in the migration process. Many migrated voluntarily and with informed consent to escape caste affinities, poverty and patriarchal oppression. Migration was perceived as improving their personal and social status. Gupta provides interesting examples of Dalit women from the Chamar and Parsi castes, posing as single women, falsifying their residences and names, and migrating on their own accord. Similarly, Hiralal has shown that whilst both indentured and 'passenger' Indian women were subject to colonial and familial oppression, they were far from pliable. Many indentured women migrated to Natal voluntarily, signifying their independence and autonomy over their decisions to migrate. On the plantations, they challenged colonial officials and employers both through violent and non-violent means of defiance, such as desertion, depositions, arson and even murder. Amongst the 'passenger' Indian women, the 'deserted' and 'helpless' wife rebelled and at times sought the assistance of colonial officials to seek out her errant husband. Some women acquired new roles within their homes, while others had greater control over their actions and mobility. Women's political agency in the Satyagraha campaigns in South Africa between 1907 and 1914 was equally significant. The spontaneous reaction of both indentured and 'passenger' Indian women not only highlights their collective political strength but also their efforts to challenge traditional gender roles.

Clearly, the scholars here have provided interdisciplinary and methodological inspiration in challenging traditional narratives in the Indian diaspora. The articles raise new questions and understandings in the way we conceptualize, document and write gendered migrations in the diaspora.

Part 3: Gender, Sexuality and Agency

As stated at the beginning of this introduction, one of the stereotypical notions that this scholarship has managed to challenge is the positioning of women either as sexualized objectified beings or as victims with no sense of agency or control over their situation.

In reality, women are active agents and play a critical role in every form and stage of migration, i.e. the decision to migrate, the process of migration, and settlement. The three articles included in this part reflect the same theme. Each of the three articles examines different forms of migration, i.e. female slave trade across the Indian Ocean (Wickramasinghe and Carter), transnational marriage migration of Brazilian women (Siqueri), and the issues of marriage and concubinage in a post-migration society (Terborg). These articles are also unique as they bring out less discussed but stimulating subjects of Indian female slaves, stigmatization of transnational marriages in highly plural post-migration societies and a very sensitive subject of the presence of HIV and extramarital relations in post-migration societies.

However, there are also three common threads across the three articles. First, they highlight the post-migration stage and societies formed thereof. Second, the disruption caused as a result of migration and the emergence of new identities and societies is taken up. Third, the articles discuss the societal victimization and sexualized positioning of women while at the same time, detailing the women's agency and decision-making to transform their lives.

The first article by Nira Wickramasinghe and Marina Carter deals with Asian female slaves transported by the Europeans during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The authors use recorded court cases to highlight the inherent violence and tragedies in the lives of the Asian women migrants. These 'coloured' women were doubly marginalized, i.e. in the context of race as well as gender. At the French and Dutch settlements at the Cape and Mauritius during the eighteenth century, a number of European bachelors had relationships with female slaves, who were also freely hired by their owners to serve as concubines – thinly disguised as 'housekeepers'. They remained voiceless and invisible in the colonial records and appeared only through the prism of the voice of male slaves or slave-owners. But many among these women slaves managed to turn their status from slavery to concubinage to property ownership, marriage, and settled families. This study, therefore, holds immense importance and is a major

contribution in giving voice to the silenced female slave and shows her agency and capacity to overcome hardships.

The second article by Sueli Siqueri et al. deals with Brazilian women's multi-territoriality in transnational marriage conditions. The authors make use of the Burkean dramatism as an analytical tool to analyse how these women negotiated their gender, class and ethnic positions in the complex transnational, racialized familial and social structures of the country of their partners. These Brazilian women were recast in racialized and *exoticized* images. They constantly sought to *negotiate* with these images in order to gain acceptance from their partner's family and friends; however, the negotiation did not always have a happy ending. In many cases, unable to cope with the stigma and prejudices, the women returned to Brazil to face yet another kind of stigma associated with Brazilian women who departed from their partner. Siqueri uses the case of Flora, who returned to Brazil only to maintain the marriage in a transnational context. She faced the stigma and prejudice in the migratory process and was labelled as a 'whore'. Siqueri demonstrates, through the analysis of Flora's narrative, that Brazilian women did turn such situations around by marrying the natives and becoming mothers. But they did not completely erase the prejudice that continued to occupy the realm of sexualized and exotic social places in the relationship with the community as a woman, wife and mother. The authors state that 'migration may unveil situations of weakness, distress and stress but at the same time shows up the dreams, happiness, challenges, and achievements'. In this case, Brazilian women exercised their full choice for wandering and living in the multiple territories and overriding the temporal and spatial horizon.

The third article by Julia Terborg deals with the marriage, concubinage and extramarital relations in Suriname and the Caribbean. One of the legacies of colonialism was the formation of complex socio-cultural structures and intermixing of populations in the slavery ridden/indentured societies. The Caribbean is a good example of that. Focusing on the HIV-related concerns within the Afro-Surinamese population, the author takes the discussion to the larger issues of sexuality, gender, sexual behaviour

and extramarital relations across the Caribbean that had its roots in colonialism and was characterized by a hierarchical race, gender and class structure. According to the author, 'a more realistic approach would be to equally acknowledge the diversity of family forms and sexual relationships, and to ensure everybody's right to a safe life' and also 'develop policies that take into account local realities, multiple dimensions of sexuality and address the needs and requirements of the growing numbers of female-headed households'.

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PART 1

PERSPECTIVES FROM THE DIASPORA
ON INDENTURED MIGRATION

CHAPTER 1

‘A Most Callous Indifference’ Sukhdei’s Story

Brij V. Lal

Death lies on her face like untimely frost.

SHAKESPEARE, *Romeo and Juliet* 4.5.28

How do we write about a past where records don’t exist, or exist only partially, and memory is not properly archived? Yet, unwritten pasts must be remembered for they, too, are a part of our lives. This conundrum confronts all of us who write about the experience of indenture in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Written records are partial and fragmentary, but often that is all we have to go by. This is where imaginative reconstruction comes in, as in the case of the story that follows. We begin with the documented facts but then put flesh on their bare bones, read against the grain, draw upon similar cases to provide a fuller picture of what happened and why. Factual accuracy is important, but a higher purpose is to capture the truth of the experience through ‘true imagination.’ Sometimes, the truth of an experience or a fact is best understood in its imaginative version. This is Sukhdei’s story, but I have drawn on my lifetime’s knowledge of the indenture experience to create a composite picture which, I hope, does justice to the tragic experience of one woman. This is Sukhdei’s story, but not hers alone.

There is a spot on the banks of the Sigatoka River a few chains*

* Chain is a unit measuring distance equivalent to 22 yards or 66 feet.

from Ram Sami's village shop which men avoid and try not to walk past at night. Many say they have seen the figure of a frail woman with dishevelled white hair and dressed in white clothes wandering aimlessly at various times of the night, lost. Some swear that they have heard soft sounds of wailing at odd hours and others recall the fragrance of scents sprinkled on dead bodies during funeral ceremonies to keep the stench of death at bay. A mango tree stands forlornly in overgrown para grass. Some old timers remember this as the place where a deranged woman drowned herself. That is all they remember about her and the remote past of their forebears. The woman's name was Sukhdei. At the time of her death in the early years of the twentieth century, the tragic events which led to it were widely talked about in the Indian indentured community right across Viti Levu. The story of complicity and attempted cover up, the violence and treachery which surrounded Sukhdei's case finally ended in Fiji's Supreme Court, a very rare event almost unprecedented. Who, then, was Sukhdei and what was the true story of her ordeal? This imaginative reconstruction based on fragments of written and oral evidence seeks to answer this question.

Sukhdei, five foot something and a loner, was a *girmitiya* from the district of Mathura, in western Uttar Pradesh. She was seven months pregnant when she came to Fiji in July 1910. She was eighteen or thereabouts when she was assigned to the CSR's Tuva sector. A month after arriving in Fiji, she gave birth to a child (on 16 August) who died four days later. A pregnant unmarried woman would, have been a source of great shame to her family and the broader community, the situation made even worse in this case by the fact that Sukhdei was a Brahmin, or the priestly class, from a holy region that was the playground of Lord Krishna. She would most certainly have been thrown out from the village to fend for herself, or killed to avoid giving her family a bad name. At the Emigration Depot at Metiabruz, Calcutta, she was introduced to Ballu, a Fiji-bound immigrant from the district of Benares and they came together as husband and wife. There must have been many Sukhdeis among the indentured women who easily fell into the recruiters' net and emigrated to the colonies, victims of

violence and sexual molestation by their own men, broken and discarded.

Sukhdei was one of 13,596 Indian women who came to Fiji, all adults, as indentured labourers. She was one of 262 from the district of Mathura, and one of 510 who were Brahmins. The majority came as single migrants though there were about four thousand who came as members of families. But whether they came alone or in families, they were all assumed to have 'fallen into the depths of degradation and vice', as the Emigration Agent of Trinidad put it, unsteady, rudderless vessels, as an otherwise sympathetic observer C.F. Andrews put it, or immoral 'doe rabbits', as an overseer in Fiji described them. And accordingly they bore the brunt of the blame for the social ills of indenture. Their faces were hidden behind a 'veil of dishonour.'

Sukhdei's misfortune was not uncommon on the plantations as infants fell to high mortality rates especially in the wet cane areas of south-eastern Viti Levu. Nearly a quarter of infants in the 1890s died within a year of birth from a variety of ailments including anaemia, respiratory illnesses, diarrhoea and dysentery and the general unsanitary conditions of the lines. Things improved over time, but the danger of death was ever present and tore at the heart of many a family. The *girmitiyas* bore their tragedies stoically but not so the overseers and government officials who routinely held the mothers responsible who they thought lacked the 'motherly instinct'. Weren't they, after all, the flotsam and jetsam of Indian society, the lowest of the lowest? This deeply entrenched view among the planters, despite much evidence to the contrary, blunted sensitivity to the indentured labourers. Some parents pooled money together to hire a *dai*, a maid, to look after their children in the lines while they went out to work, but many mothers also took their children with them to the fields to suckle them during breaks. Exposure to the elements held its own peril.

Two days after the death of her child, Sukhdei was ordered to work crushing stones with a hammer for the railway track being built to cart cane to the recently opened Lautoka sugar mill. Sending mothers to work so soon after childbirth was against the regulations, but on the plantations, especially on the remote ones,

where official inspections were infrequent and the opportunity to file complaints limited, it was not the courts but overseers who had the final say. And Sukhdei was desperately unlucky to have Herbert Brackman as her overseer, or *kulambar*.

Brackman was a particularly violent man, volatile, quick to anger at the slightest hint of disobedience, or what he perceived to be disobedience. The possibility of miscommunication or misunderstanding never crossed his mind. In his thirties, he had worked with Kanaka labour in the cane growing district of Mackay, Queensland, before coming to Fiji to work for the Colonial Sugar Refining Company. It was rumoured that he had been 'advised' to leave Mackay before things got out of hand because of his rough treatment of the workers under him. At least two overseers had been hacked to death for systematically mistreating their labourers. Brackman had become a marked man. His first posting in Fiji was to the Naqiqi sector in northern Vanua Levu where, with a free hand, he unleashed what officials called 'a reign of terror' on the sugar estate. He had once poured a pot of hot water on his servant because he was unhappy with the way his breakfast had been prepared. The Stipendiary Magistrate at Labasa exonerated him of all blame because he had found 'no criminal intent' in his behaviour. Fearing reprisal against him for his violence and brutality, the CSR quietly transferred him to Viti Levu, to the newly opened and remote Tuva sector where, it was hoped, he would escape official notice. But Brackman was Brackman, a creature of habit who continued with his old ways.

Totaram, Brackman's *sirdar*, foreman, was not much better. *Sirdars* were the lynchpin of the system, the overseers' ears and eyes on the ground, chosen for the role for their ability as enforcers and taskmasters. On some plantations, they made a little extra by operating a store on the side, with the concurrence of the plantation manager as a reward for loyalty even though this was strictly against the spirit of the labour ordinance. They could also be relied upon to procure women for the overseers who were invariably young and unmarried. Some were not averse to 'sampling' women under their charge themselves though the constant fear of a sharpened cane knife in the hands of an enraged man kept

matters in check. Totaram, an Ahir (cow herder) from Gorakhpur, had arrived in Fiji in 1905. He was a big man with a fierce handlebar moustache and a no nonsense demeanour. A man with a very short fuse, he was feared in the lines. He often talked with his fist, people said. And he had big ambitions for himself too. He knew which side of his bread was buttered, as the expression goes. If he played his cards right, he might be transferred to a bigger sector with greater opportunities for himself. The combination of Brackman and Totaram proved deadly for Sukhdei.

At around 11 o'clock, Totaram came on his routine round of inspection. Seeing Sukhdei resting under a mango tree, he barked, 'What is this? Why aren't you crushing stones? *E tumhar baap ke kam hai?* [You are not working for your father]'. Sukhdei, weak and bleeding, replied, '*Hamar haal theek nahi hai. Hum nahi kar sakta e kaam.* [I am not well. I can't do this work]. *Kutch aur kaam deo.* [Give me some other work]'. Totaram interpreted this as insolence, this woman talking back to him like that? Who the hell did she think she was? He advanced towards her, slapped her a few times and ordered her back to work. '*Agar hum phir tummhe sustaate dekha to hum tumhar khaal utaar dega.* [If I find you shirking work again, I will strip the skin off your back]'. Someone uttered a muffled obscenity, but no one did anything, continuing with their work as if nothing had happened. The alleged abuse would be offered as mitigating evidence in Totaram's favour. On his way back, Totaram reported Sukhdei to Brackman when he inquired about work on the new railway track.

When Brackman came on his daily round of inspection around midday and saw Sukhdei resting, he remembered what Totaram had told him and flew into a rage even after Sukhdei had told him about the loss of her child and her weak state. She pointed to her bloodied dress. Could the *saheb* please give her some other work, she pleaded, sobbing. Brackman refused, 'No, I cannot give you other work.' 'Come on, get up. *Jaldi, jaldi.* Quick, fast.' When Sukhdei remained seated on the ground, he walked towards her, grabbed her hair and slapped her face hard. 'You talking back to me like that? I will teach you a lesson you will never forget.' Suddenly, Brackman lost his senses. He was like a man possessed. He lifted

Sukhdei and threw her down hard on the stones she was crushing and kicked her several times, as Sukhdei recalled in her testimony to the Stipendiary Magistrate at Sigatoka. Then the whip came raining down on Sukhdei's sweating bareback. Blood began to ooze from her mouth and back. The beating, fast and furious, went on for several minutes. Once his rage was exhausted, Brackman called out to Kali Das a chain or two away to take Sukhdei to the creek nearby to clean her up of blood and dust. Again, complete silence from fellow workers who had all witnessed the attack on Sukhdei.

Brackman's junior sector overseer, A.G. Allen, was aghast at what he had just seen but he was too timid to do anything. Reporting the assault to the estate manager would have spelled trouble for himself, possibly end his career. 'Snitching' was a punishable crime among the overseers. Allen knew Brackman well, too well, and so did everyone else on the estate, but a 'good' man was hard to find and as far as the estate management was concerned, Brackman was a good man who maintained discipline among his workers and 'got the job done'. Still, something moved Allen when he saw Sukhdei's terrible blood-stained clothes and heard her sustained sobbing. He pleaded with Brackman to send her to the estate hospital accompanied by Kali Das. Brackman reluctantly agreed but demanded that Sukhdei walk to the hospital some 5 miles away in Nailaga rather than be carried by Kali Das. As soon as he was out of sight of the overseers, Kali Das carried Sukhdei, bleeding and barely conscious, on his back to the hospital. Brackman sent a note with Kali Das to the Hospital Superintendent T.G. Witton: 'Please examine and classify this woman Sukhdei ex-*Santhia II*. She is apparently incapable or else damn lazy. Please let me know if she is physically capable of work and if so how much.'

Witton was new to the Tuva plantation, having arrived there in May 1910 just a few months before the attack on Sukhdei occurred. As a newcomer, he was unacquainted with the way things were done in a remote area like Tuva, unaware of the rituals and protocols of the culture of silence and conspiracy that governed the life of the *sahebs* on the plantations. 'Protecting the good name of the community', closing ranks against any outside intrusion,

was understood by everyone if not explicitly stated. But Witton made the 'cardinal mistake' of saying openly that he believed Kali Das's version of events. Brackman had claimed that he had merely 'tapped' her with a fly whisk to get her attention. Witton rejected this outright. 'The wounds I saw could not have been inflicted as far back as Friday,' as Brackman had claimed. 'I am positive the wounds on buttocks could be caused by her being lifted up and thrown down on stones.' Sukhdei, he told the District Medical Officer Dr Mullen when he came around on his weekly tour of inspection, was 'black and blue with weals on her back and buttocks.' Dr Mullen agreed: 'She was flayed,' he said simply.

The eight wounds he found on Sukhdei's body were the result of 'contusion caused by some weapon, probably a stick'. Like Witton, he, too, was horrified. 'The facts pointed to a degree of brutality that can hardly be conceived by any man in his right senses,' he wrote. The fact that the victim had 'not been shown to him in the ordinary way but with manifest reluctance' suggested that 'the Hospital Administrator had been influenced to cloak the matter'. It later emerged that either Totaram himself or one of his men had bribed the hospital orderly to hide Sukhdei from visiting inspectors.

Witton knew that labourers were regularly abused for not completing their task, for 'malingering', or for damaging field equipment, but this attack was outrageous, beyond anything he had ever seen. And he had seen a lot. He wrote a note to Brackman immediately and asked Kali Das to take it to him. The note read: 'Since when did you receive instructions to put women to work five days after confinement. Also, what do you think of yourself for ill-treating a woman in such a condition. Personally, I may say that it will be lucky for you if the woman doesn't die. However, I accept no responsibility whatever and if anything happens to her it is your fault.'

His humane concern was genuine, but it would be used against him in court, his willingness to believe the words of a mere 'coolie' against that of a fellow white man.

The note unsettled Brackman enough for him to write to Witton as soon as he had received his note.

I don't understand what you mean by your chit [about] the woman's child being dead. I believe she is legally liable for work. She asked for work herself and I asked her if she was sick or ill, and she said no. At midday, today I found her lying down and sent her to hospital against her will. I did not ill-treat her. You know I do not work the women. I believe the Sirdar handled her roughly when she refused to work but I was not there and so cannot say. I am sure her husband flogged her in the lines on Friday morning as I saw the marks. The *die* [midwife] who was with her told me her child was born quite normally and that the woman was all right. What is her sickness? I am feeling anxious about the woman's health since getting your note, but I of course do not hold myself responsible for it in view of the facts. Don't be so ready to believe a white man a scoundrel unless you are quite sure of your ground.

Finally, Brackman added, 'If I was not right in sending the woman to work please say what I should have done according to the Ordinance.'

Brackman stuck to his improbable version that Sukhdei had asked for work. This is what he said later, 'I complained to Sukhdei that her person and clothes smelt.' She said, 'What can I do? I have no money and no other clothes.' I said, 'Haven't you any soap?' She said, 'No.' I said to get some soap from her husband. She said, 'He is in hospital at present and if he were here he would not do so.' 'She asked me to give her work. I asked if she was capable of it.' She said, 'Yes.' Brackman thought he was doing the woman a favour. The Stipendiary Magistrate summed it up well. Brackman's 'assertion that he gave work to the woman at her request is hardly credible, and was denied by her, but if she had asked for it, her request should have been complied with [as] she was receiving rations.'

All new migrants were entitled to rations for the first six months. As for the provisions of the law governing the employment of pregnant women, the Stipendiary Magistrate simply noted that what Brackman had done was 'not in conformance with the intention of the Ordinance'. Pregnant women were not to be given onerous tasks and after child birth, women were not to be sent to work for up to two months and then upon medical clearance. That was the letter and spirit of the law, but on remote plantations, other realities prevailed.

Brackman could not get Witton's note out of his mind. He had to cover his tracks and quickly. Later that day, he asked Totaram to bring to his bungalow other workers who might have witnessed what took place at midday or had heard about it from others. Hansi, Balchand, Pudar, Hasmat and Ramphal went with Totaram and squatted on the veranda waiting for the big *saheb* to arrive. They were all also influential men in the sector and their word would carry weight backed by brute force. It was a very brave or foolish man indeed who went against their wishes or directives. Brackman opened the screen door and came out. Allen was with him. After a round of rough rum, Brackman looked at Totaram and said, 'If I get caught, that will be the end of my life. But if you take the blame, I'll pay the fine.' He handed 2 pounds sterling to Totaram to be shared among the witnesses. No one demurred. They all knew only too well the price of disobedience and defiance. They would become marked men and vulnerable to beatings, hard labour, an extension of indenture contracts. Better to get along and get out. Resistance came at a heavy price. If bribery did not buy compliance, the threat of violence did. Brackman told Kali Das the next day, 'If you say anything, you will be shot.' Kali Das did not say anything. The threat was repeated several times over the week. Brackman thought this is where the matter would rest. He was wrong.

Witton was sufficiently outraged to report the assault to the local police. For his part, Dr Mullen reported it to the Agent-General of Immigration, in Suva, the colony's top official responsible for Indian immigrants. He sought the advice of Colonial Secretary Eyre Hutson, the colony's chief administrator a few rungs below the governor, who advised getting more independently verified information from the Resident Inspector of Immigration based at Lautoka. Unable to contact the Resident Inspector who was on leave and in any case, was leaving government service, the Agent-General of Immigration asked the Inspector-General of Constabulary (IGC) for assistance. The IGC went to Tuva immediately to acquaint himself with the case. He visited Sukhdei in the hospital and talked with the Stipendiary Magistrate. He told Hutson that things on this occasion had gone too far, that

Brackman was an uncommonly violent man unfit to work with the labourers under his charge, and that the assault was too serious a matter to be ignored. It should be treated as an aggravated assault and Brackman indicted.

If word of the assault reached India, the consequences for the company and the government could be dire. India, he said, was beginning to take a greater interest in the affairs of the indentured labourers. Word had reached Fiji that an official delegation was on its way to Fiji to investigate the conditions on the plantations. These were all compelling reasons to take immediate action.

Hutson agreed and so did the governor. The case eventually came before the Supreme Court in April 1911. The CSR was bent on clearing its name at any cost. And the Supreme Court was the place to do it. Much was at stake including the future allotment of indentured labourers to its plantations. If Brackman was indicted, who would be next? Wouldn't this incite the labourers to file more complaints against the company? Order and discipline had to be maintained. But Brackman was charged with wounding with intent to grievous bodily harm and 'unlawful' wounding. What, one wonders, was lawful wounding? Attorney-General Albert Eckhardt K.C. prosecuted while H.M. Scott, the colony's leading criminal lawyer, appeared for the defence, with Leslie Davidson of Ba, a large sugar cane growing district who was well versed in cross-examining Indian immigrants. He knew their language and understood their culture. Sukhdei was the first witness, brought into the courtroom in a wheelchair.

Sukhdei was clearly mentally unwell, deranged, her evidence barely coherent, her recollections vague, contradictory. Indentured labourers were invariably at a disadvantage in a court of law, being unfamiliar with the processes and protocols of the law of evidence and cross-examined by *sahebs* in an alien language. But this was worse. No, Brackman did not beat her, she told the court. Neither had Totaram. Her husband Ballu was the culprit, a point used to significant effect by defence lawyer Scott. Sukhdei also told the court improbably that it was Ballu who had killed the child because he was not the child's biological father. Some of the witnesses who had gone to Brackman's bungalow on the day of the

attack had changed their minds and testified that they had indeed seen Brackman assault Sukhdei but compromised their evidence by admitting accepting the bribe. The court rejected their testimony out of hand. Kali Das, who had witnessed the whole episode, told the court that Totaram did not beat Sukhdei, and that he had not seen Brackman assault her either. Witton was upbraided by Leslie Davidson for writing the note to Brackman accusing him of the assault based on what Kali Das had told him. Wasn't a man to be presumed innocent until proven guilty?

The Chief Justice, Sir Charles Major, dismissed the case. He was Fiji's Chief Justice between 1904 and 1914. Born in the tiny West Indian island of St Kitts, he was a quintessential establishment man, the son of the chief manager of the Colonial Bank of the West Indies, Chancellor of the Diocese of Antigua. He followed the letter rather than the spirit of the law religiously. He had to decide on evidence adduced in court and tested through cross-examination and not on hearsay, he said summing up the case. But many questions remained. Was the Chief Justice aware, as evidently everyone else was, of Sukhdei's state of mind and body? After all, she had been brought into the court room in a wheelchair several months after she had been attacked. Why was Ballu, Sukhdei's husband, not questioned about allegedly beating his wife savagely and killing the infant? Shouldn't he have been sentenced to imprisonment for inflicting such bodily harm on her? How could the discrepancy between what Sukhdei had told the Stipendiary Magistrate at Sigatoka and what she told the Supreme Court be explained? The Stipendiary Magistrate himself was not cross-examined. Why had Kali Das changed his testimony? Why did Brackman bribe the workers if he was innocent? Did he not have a history of violence and brutality?

Some years after the Sukhdei incident, bits and pieces of information about it dribbled out. As soon as the severity of the assault had become clear, the ring of silence around Brackman had closed. Totaram was promised promotion to the Lovu sector in Lautoka. All his needs would be taken care of (women, alcohol, cigarettes, extra bonus). Brackman would personally see to that. Totaram told Ballu to forget about the assault and move on. *Jo hoi gaye so*

hoi gaye, bhai (What has happened has happened). 'Now look after yourself. Once Totaram is gone, you will be made the junior *sirdar* with a store to run on the side.' 'If you decide not to go along, don't ever say I did not warn you. Accidents can happen, as you know.' Ballu did as he was told. 'Rotten potatoes have no place among us.'

Totaram told Sukhdei not to say anything about Brackman. 'That will make matters worse for everyone. It is Brackman today, it could be someone worse tomorrow.' He would speak to the *sahab* to assign Sukhdei to domestic duties. And when matters settled down, he would try and get her *girmit* reduced. Some fellow women workers who had witnessed the attack consoled Sukhdei. They told her the story of an overseer on a neighbouring estate who had been set upon by women, pinned to the ground as they took turns urinating on him.

Humiliated, the fellow left the estate. 'His day will come, *bahini* (sister),' they said. '*Bhgwān ke ghar me der haye, andher nahin*' (justice will eventually prevail).

Justice of sorts did prevail. Things did not turn out the way Brackman and his accomplices had hoped. The Immigration Department was convinced that Brackman had indeed committed the grievous assault on Sukhdei. His own previous record of violence and callousness toward the labourers under his charge spoke eloquently about the man's character. As the Agent-General of Immigration said, 'The callous indifference to the suffering of this woman shewn in Brackman's notes is unmistakable.' Sadly, it was not evident to the Chief Justice. And officials were deeply troubled by his manner after the incident: no remorse, no sympathy. On the contrary, Brackman bragged to others how he controlled his workers – with a firm hand, and if force was required, he would happily teach the recalcitrant a lesson they would never forget. As evidence of his successful *modus operandi*, he often pointed to the absence of strikes on his estate and the paucity of complaints to the Immigration Department. Fellow overseers viewed Brackman with a mixture of horror and muted respect.

The Immigration Department advised Colonial Secretary Hutson, a future Governor of Fiji, to ask Governor Sir Henry May to direct the CSR not to employ Brackman any longer on

any of its estates anywhere in Fiji. Hutson gave his reasons: 'his extremely callous conduct in putting a woman to labour or allowing her to go to labour, even if it is admitted that she asked to be put to labour only six days after childbirth ...' his cruelty in not having the woman carried to hospital although she was in such a serious condition that the Hospital Administrator stated in evidence that 'she was very seriously wounded. I thought that there was danger to life upon admission'; his omission to inform the Hospital Administrator that the woman had been assaulted and in deference to her condition in writing to the HA that she was either 'incapable or damn lazy'; his omission to make a report to the Police on receipt of the note from the HA drawing attention to the ill-treatment that the woman had received'; and his 'neglect to report the occurrence to the manager of the estate.' Hutson was adamant that if the CSR disregarded the government's advice and continued to employ Brackman, it should be told that there would be no further allotment of Indian indentured labourers to any of its estates in any part of Fiji and would result in the cancellation of all indentured allotments to any plantation where he was employed. The Governor and the Chief Justice concurred and so, too, did the CSR.

Brackman's employment with the company was terminated, but that did not end his employment in Fiji. The Vancouver Fiji Sugar Company in Navua hired him as an office clerk and do other duties as the need or opportunity arose. Sooner rather than later he would have been restored to his old position. Agent-General of Immigration Coates was outraged. He wrote to the Colonial Secretary to tell the manager of the Vancouver Sugar Company that the 'Government have no intention of rescinding the decision already given as to any further employment of Mr Brackman.' Why should the Navua Company be allowed to employ Brackman when the CSR had cancelled his contract? The Governor was so advised but he disagreed. 'We only barred him from 'charge of indentured labour', he wrote to Hutson. 'If he is employed as a clerk I don't see how we can object. The CSR Company might have so employed him.' He told the Colonial Secretary to inform the Vancouver Sugar Company that all allotments of Indian indentured labourers

to it would cease if Brackman had any supervisory role over indentured workers.

At the Supreme Court trial, the jury had taken only twenty minutes to arrive at the verdict of not guilty, but they added that 'the conduct of the overseer in putting a woman to work in her condition at such a heavy task was callous in the extreme. It was a mild reprobation of an inhuman conduct'. But the Chief Justice disagreed. His Honour decided that he would 'exonerate the accused from the stigma of callousness in the circumstances.' What the circumstances were, he did not elaborate, and no one asked, although there was ample written evidence and testimony to the contrary. Brackman realized that his days in Fiji were effectively over. The assault on Sukhdei would haunt him wherever he went, hanging around his neck like an albatross. His notoriety had spread far and wide and he would be a prime target for a murderous revenge attack. The gruesome hacking attack on Overseer Steadman in the Moto district of Ba was fresh in everyone's mind. Bits and pieces of his body were strewn around the cane fields. It was time to move on. Brackman left Fiji on 5 July 1911 and was never heard of again. Sirdar Totaram was reluctantly demoted when the Resident Inspector of Immigrants at Lautoka protested his continued employment as *sirdar* by the CSR. He was sent to work looking after the estates' cows and horses, a stable hand. But not for long. A few years later, he was diagnosed with leprosy and sent to the remote Makogai Island in the Lomaiviti Group where he died and was buried. Both Kali Das and Ballu left Tuva some years after their *girmit* ended and nothing was heard from or about them.

And Sukhdei? What a lovely name: giver of happiness. But happiness was not her lot. Hers was a truncated life lived in suffering and on sufferance in a faraway land to which she had come in such hope and anticipation, all dashed so soon. She spent the rest of days as a physically disabled, mentally deranged vagrant around Sigatoka. One day, her body was found floating in the Sigatoka River. Her death was noticed and talked about for years by people who believed she continued to haunt the Tuva district long after she was gone. Her grave is unmarked. Was her death an accident,

which was not unknown for a people new to water? A suicide, a conscious act to end a damaged life drained of dignity and meaning? Or was she deliberately despatched to salve the conscience of fellow Indians who had witnessed the violent attack on her but chose to remain silent or, worse still, accept a bribe to cover the tracks of the perpetrators, a constant reminder of their callousness and cowardice? No one really knew. Sukhdei remained a mystery in death as she had been in life.

References

For background information on indenture in Fiji one should consult the following works:

K.L. Gillion. 1962. *Fiji's Indian Migrants: A History to the End of Indenture in 1920*. Melbourne, Oxford University Press.

Brij V. Lal. 1983. *Girmitiyas: The Origins of the Fiji Indians*. Canberra, Journal of Pacific History.

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For the experience of women on Fiji plantations, see Brij V. Lal (2000). 'Kunti's Cry: Indentured Women on Fiji plantations,' in Brij V. Lal, 2000. *Chalo Jahaji: On a Journey of Indenture in Fiji*. Suva, Fiji Museum: 167-94.

Marina Carter's work is important for Mauritius. See for instance:

Carter, Marina. 1996. *Voices from Indenture. Experiences of Indian Migrants in the British Empire. Century. Background and Impact*. London, Leicester Univ. Press.

———. 1999. *Lakshmi's Legacy' Testimonies of Indian Women in the 19th Century Mauritius*, Stanley, Rose Hill (Mauritius). Editions de l'océan Indien.

For South Africa, see: Jo Beall. 1990. 'Women under indenture in colonial Natal, 1860-1911', in Walker, Cherryl (ed.) *Women and Gender in Souther Africa to 1945*, 1990. Cape Town: David Philip: 146-67, downloaded from in South-African History online, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/women-under-indentured-labour-colonial-natal-1860-1911-jo-beal>

Gaiutra Bahadur's. *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture*. London. Hurst and Co. 2013, is important on Guyana and more generally.

CHAPTER 2

Gender and Resistance in Indian Indenture Life Stories

Oral History and the National Stage of Memorialization

Farzana Gounder

Introduction

This study is in line with a new ‘turn’ in Indian indenture studies: the emphasis on the importance of history for historical memory. Oral history is the reconstruction of past events in the form of life stories, recounted by those who have personal experience of the event (Yow 2014, 3-4). The emphasis on oral history within indenture studies can be seen in recent volumes produced throughout the diasporas on personal experiences of Indian indenture of the *girmitiyas*¹ (Ali 2004, Bahadur 2013, Bijlert 2006, Carter 1994, 1996, Sharma 2010), which re-centres indenture scholarship on the *girmitiyas* and their perspectives on Indian indenture. As these narratives define ‘who we are’, they are integral components in the formation of the collective memory and identity of a group. The oral history life story is, therefore,

a powerful tool for discovering, exploring and evaluating the nature of the process of historical memory – how people make sense of their past,

¹ The labourers referred to the indenture system as *girmit*, from *agreement*, the term used to refer to their indenture contracts. Indian labourers to Fiji coined the word *girmitiya* for ‘indentured labourer’.

how they connect individual experience and its social context and how the past becomes part of the present, and how people use it to interpret their lives and the world around them. (Frisch 1990, 188)

Collectively, these life stories reconstruct 'a body of remembrances' (Halbwachs 1980, 22), which maintain the continuity and connection of diasporic communities with the past, thus creating societal unity and cohesion through the (re)construction of the cultural memory of the group.

This research provides yet another strand to the dialogue on the oral history of indenture. The study analyses the *Girmitiyas*' chosen positionings critically, as witness, recipient or agent within their life stories using Narrativization Analysis Framework (Gounder 2011). The Narrativization Analysis Framework acknowledges that meaning is produced contextually. The events recollected by *girmitiyas* gain significance and rational understanding through the lens of the present social context, societal norms and values in which they are constructed (Halbwachs 1980, 23), such as the knowledge and beliefs of the community about Indian indenture, encapsulated in the songs, poems, fiction and non-fiction writings on indenture (cf. Lal 2015). The study addresses a significant weakness within indenture studies, where the emphasis has often been on macro-level factors influencing the occurrence of indenture, and micro-level studies of personal experiences of indentured labourers are lacking (Lal 2000).

The article begins with an overview of the Indian indenture system, with particular attention given to Indian indenture in Fiji. This is followed by an introduction to the *girmitiyas* in this study, the methodology, an analysis of the female and male *girmitiyas*' positioning choices of witness, recipients and agents within their indenture story world. The gendered positioning choices of the narrators are then compared with the positionings within indenture master narratives. Through the comparison, the study demonstrates how the positionings of *girmitiyas* resist the positionings found within the hegemonic discourse of indenture. A discussion on how the narrative positionings of *girmitiyas* contribute to the Fiji Indian community's collective memory of its imagined indenture beginnings concludes the study.

The System of Indian Indenture

Indian indenture was introduced in 1833 following the abolishment of the slave trade. The indenture system was seen as an improvement on slavery, as it involved ‘free’ contractual labour (Hassankhan, Roopnarine & Ramsodh 2016). Under the system, Indian labourers voyaged to ‘King Sugar’ colonies to meet labour demands on the colonial plantations around the world. Mauritius was the first country to import indentured Indians in 1834, followed by British Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Grenada, St Lucia, Natal (South Africa), St Kitts, St Vincent, Reunion, Suriname, Seychelles, and finally, Fiji in 1879.

Over a period of 80 years, more than a million Indians departed

TABLE 2.1: INDIAN INDENTURED LABOUR IN THE
‘KING SUGAR’ COLONIES

| <i>King Sugar colonies</i> | <i>Commencement of Indian inden- tured labourers’ arrival</i> | <i>Final year of Indian inden- tured labourers’ arrival</i> | <i>Number of Indians inden- tured to each colony</i> |
|----------------------------|---|---|--|
| Mauritius | 1834 | 1900 | 453,063 |
| British Guyana | 1838 | 1916 | 238,909 |
| Trinidad & Tobago | 1845 | 1916 | 143,939 |
| Jamaica | 1845 | 1915 | 36,412 |
| Grenada | 1857 | 1885 | 3,200 |
| St Lucia | 1859 | 1895 | 4,350 |
| Natal, South Africa | 1860 | 1911 | 152,184 |
| St Kitts | 1861 | 1861 | 337 |
| St Vincent | 1861 | 1880 | 2,472 |
| Reunion | 1861 | 1883 | 26,507 |
| Suriname | 1873 | 1916 | 34,304 |
| Fiji | 1879 | 1916 | 60,965 |
| Seychelles | NA* | 1916 | 6,315 |
| Total | | | 1,162,957 |

Source: Adapted from Lal 2004, 40.

Note: No verified information available.

from India to work under the indenture system mainly on sugar plantations around the world. The majority (64 per cent) of the emigrants were from north India, particularly, the United Provinces, Bihar, North-Western Provinces and Oudh (Brennan, McDonald & Shlomowitz 1998, 41).

The Machinery of Indian Indenture

The complex machinery of Indian indenture operated at different levels, with many individuals employed to ensure the arrival of the labourers on the colonial plantations. The process has been extensively detailed elsewhere (Ali 2004, Gillion 1962, Lal 2004, 2015, Naidu 2004, Tinker 1974). Based on these studies, this section summarizes the perspective of *girmitiyas* on the indenture process.

The indenture system trajectory, from the perspective of *girmitiyas*, can be divided into five phases, which are detailed below: (i) recruitment, registration and arrival at the sub-depot, (ii) arrival at the emigration depot, (iii) voyage to the colonies, (iv) confinement at the quarantine station and finally (v) arrival on the colonial plantation.

The Emigration Agent was the liaison person between the colonies and the Indian recruitment sub-agents and played an essential role in detailing how many recruits were required for each colony. However, he was most often unknown to the *girmitiyas*. For the *girmitiyas*, their initial contact with the system was through the recruiters. These were either licensed recruiters or unlicensed *arkhati* agents in the recruiters' employment, or even through returnee labourers turned recruiters (Bates 2017). The recruiters were in turn employed by the sub-agents, who were also thought to be former recruiters (Carter 1992). The sub-agents were responsible for collecting the recruits, ensuring their registration was complete and providing accommodation and transportation to the port of embarkation. The recruits were then taken to the sub-depot, where they could stay up to a fortnight until an adequate number of people had been recruited. The majority of the recruits to Fiji were young, unmarried men as there was 'discouragement

by the colonial government of family migration after 1890', due to the planters' complaints of the extra upkeep required in feeding and clothing families (Lal 2004, 60).

The recruits were allowed to emigrate only if they appeared to be emigrating of their own volition, and seemed fit for manual labour. For these reasons, the sub-agents aimed to keep the recruits happy and well fed in the sub-depot. To ensure that the recruits were fit for manual labour, at the sub-depot a medical inspector would examine them, and those who passed their medical examination would be taken to the sub-divisional magistrate for registration. The magistrate's priority was to ensure that the recruits were emigrating of their own volition. The recruiters or their assistants then took those who were registered to the embarkation port in Calcutta, Madras and later Bombay.

At the depot, the Protector of Emigrants was responsible for the recruits' welfare. The recruits were once again medically examined, this time by the Emigration Agent's officially appointed medical inspector to determine the recruit's physical fitness for manual labour on the colonial plantations and if the recruit passed the examination s/he received a certificate for embarkation from the Emigration Agent (see Figure 2.1 for an example of a male labourer's Girmit pass for Fiji). Those recruits who were pronounced medically fit to embark were then required to stay in the depot for seven days, although this could often extend to several weeks before the recruitment quota was achieved. By the time Indian indenture was introduced to Fiji in 1879, there was a strict ratio of 40 (or more) women to 100 men that had to be adhered to in India.

On an average 'a little more than three-quarters of the recruits who were admitted to the depot finally embarked for the colonies' although for some years, the rejection rate was as high as 41 per cent, mainly due to rejection on the basis of unfit for physical labour, followed by desertion from the sub-depot or depot, and finally, indications of unwillingness to emigrate (Lal 2004, 60-1). To keep the recruits occupied while they waited in the depot, they would undertake cleaning and gardening, eating meals together, playing games and singing songs, thus, fostering camaraderie that transcended the traditional barriers of caste and religion.

40194 191
COLONIAL EMIGRATION FORM No. 44.

MAN'S

EMIGRATION PASS.

HEALTH CLASS.

DEPOT No. 588

For Ship

S.S. "SANGOLA"

PROCEEDING TO FIJI.

No. 499.

Fiji Government Emigration Agency.

21, GARDEN REACH,

CALCUTTA. the

JAN 27 1911

PARTICU-
LARS OF
REGIS-
TRATION,

Place,.....Gaua
Date,.....11. 1. 11.
No. in Register, 58

NAME,.....Gauri

Father's Name,.....Mankas

Age,.....25

Caste,.....Shob

Name of Next-of-kin,.....Mankas, Father

If married, name of Wife,.....

District,.....Gaua

Thana,.....Tulshipur

Village, or Town & Mahalla,.....Tindapur

Bodily Marks,.....Scar on right knee

Occupation in India,.....Cultivator

Height,.....5 Feet 3 1/2 Inches.

CERTIFIED that we have examined and passed the above-named Man as fit to emigrate; that he is free from all bodily and mental disease; and that he has been vaccinated since engaging to emigrate.

DATED

The

1911

M.D., F.R.C.P.,
LIEUT.-COLONEL, I.M.S.
Depot Surgeon.

Surgeon Superintendent.

CERTIFIED that the Man above described has appeared before me and has been engaged by me on behalf of the Government of FIJI as willing to proceed to that country to work for hire; and that I have explained to him all matters concerning his engagement and duties. This has also been done at the time of registration by the Registering Officer appointed by the Indian Government.

DATED

The 20. 1. 1911.

Government Emigration Agent for FIJI.

PERMITTED to proceed as in a fit state of health to undertake the voyage to FIJI.

Source: Fiji National Archives.

FIGURE 2.1: MALE LABOURER'S GIRMIT PASS FOR FIJI

On board the ship, the recruits' medical care was the responsibility of the Surgeon Superintendent, who was a medical doctor and a female nurse. In addition, there were cooks, hairdressers, tailors and cleaners (Naidu 2004, 10-11). There was strict separation of the unmarried men and women on some ships and even 'the married men were berthed on one side, and the wives and children were berthed separately' (Naidu 2004, 11). The *girmitiyas* were encouraged to continue socializing to prevent boredom, despondency and homesickness. Hence, when they arrived in the colonies, many had formed strong bonds of *jahaji bhai* and *jahaji bhain* (ship-brothers and ship-sisters). These relationships were akin to family ties that existed long after indenture was over (Lal 2000, 372).

After a voyage of approximately three months on the sailing ships or one month on the steamships, the recruits arrived in the colonies. They were taken to the quarantine station, where the Agent General of Immigration and his medical personnel examined the recruits medically. Those who were deemed mentally and/or physically unfit for plantation life were to be repatriated to India. Those who were assessed as being able to make a suitable recovery were given half-tasks until their full recovery. The majority were then allocated to sugar or copra (coconut) plantations, where they served as field workers, as seen within the cohort of this study, although some also served as house servants and others were engaged to build railway lines and roads.

Terms of Indentureship in Fiji

The terms of the contract for Indian indenture in Fiji (Ali 2004, Lal 2004, Naidu 2004) stipulated the following:

The period of service was five years from the date of arrival. Upon their arrival on the colonial plantation, labourers were to receive rations from the employers for the first six months at government prescribed rates of 4 pence, deducted from the labourers' wages. Provisions were also made for families: For the first year, children between the ages of 5 and 12 were to receive half the daily ration, while those under 5 years of age were to receive 9 *chattacks* of milk daily.

Employers were required to provide the labourers with suitable, rent-free dwellings in good repair. Labourers were required to work 9 hours per weekday and 5 hours on Saturdays. Sundays and authorized holidays were designated as rest days. Wages were to be paid monthly, weekly or on the basis of task. For task-based work, all adult males were to receive 1 shilling or more for completion of the ascribed task in six hours of steady work, women received 9 pence or more for four and a half hours of work, and children were paid according to the work performed. If labourers were required to perform extra work, they were to be paid accordingly. Medical provisions were also given for those who were ill. They were to be provided with hospital accommodation, medicines and food free of charge. On completion of 5 years of indenture, emigrants could return to India at their own expense. The labourers also had the choice of re-indenturing themselves for another 5 years after which they could choose to return to India, with a free passage or they could remain in the colony, and lease land from the colonial government.

Despite the initial endorsement of Indian indenture as an improvement on slavery, there were endemic failings within the system (Mishra 2009), that were brought to the public attention largely due to the efforts of people such as C.F. Andrews (1918), J.W. Burton (1910), Hannah Dudley, W.W. Pearson (Andrews & Pearson, 1916) and Totaram Sanadhya (1973/1914). The Indian indenture system was abolished in 1917. In Fiji, the final shipload of 888 indentured labourers arrived on the steamship *Sutlej*, on 11 November 1916. All outstanding indenture contracts were completed or cancelled on 1 January 1920.

The Connection of Oral History to the National Stage of Memorialization

This study provides a unique linguistic opportunity as it focuses on the first cohort of speakers of Fiji Hindi. The language developed when the *girmitiyas*, who spoke different Indian dialects and languages, were brought into contact with each other under the system of Indian indenture (cf. Siegel 1987). In total, 60,965

indentured men and women voyaged from Colonial India to Fiji between 1879 and 1916 (with a final count of 60,553 individuals disembarking in Fiji) to work mainly on sugar cane plantations until the system was abolished finally in 1917 (Lal 2004).

As presented in the overview of this study, during indenture, sex-based differentiation was put into practice. This began from the recruitment process, where for every 100 males 40 females were recruited (Gillion 1962, 56). The differentiation continued on the ships where unmarried males and females were segregated and, finally, on the indenture plantations. In the lines or barracks where the *girmitiyas* lived, up to four unmarried labourers were expected to share accommodation and the allocation of these rooms was on the basis of gender difference.² Furthermore, although both sexes were required to work on the plantation, the types of tasks performed and the weekly pay was, again, differentiated on the basis of gender with an adult male entitled to one shilling and an adult female nine pence (Lal 2000, 48). Moreover, the plantation authorities were male. Hence, the power differential on the plantation was quite marked by gender-based differentiation.

Upon completion of their indenture, the *girmitiyas* had the choice to either travel back to India or to settle in Fiji. Forty per cent of the *girmitiyas* chose to start a new life in Fiji, marking the beginnings of the Indian community in Fiji. For the *girmitiyas*, indenture meant cultural and linguistic accommodation to the new environment. This saw the relinquishing of cultural mores such as the caste system. Hence, today's Fiji Indian community is egalitarian in nature (Brenneis 1987) with the major divisions in the community being gender, ethnicity (in particular, north and south Indian) and overriding both, religion (the overarching divisions being Hindu, Muslim, Christian) (Ali 1978, 2004, Brennan, McDonald & Shlomowitz 1992, Haniff 1990, Jayawardena 1980, Kelly 1991).

It was this Fiji Indian community for whom the indentured life narratives in this study were produced. In such a community, with

² Those who were married, and/or had children, were entitled to their own room.

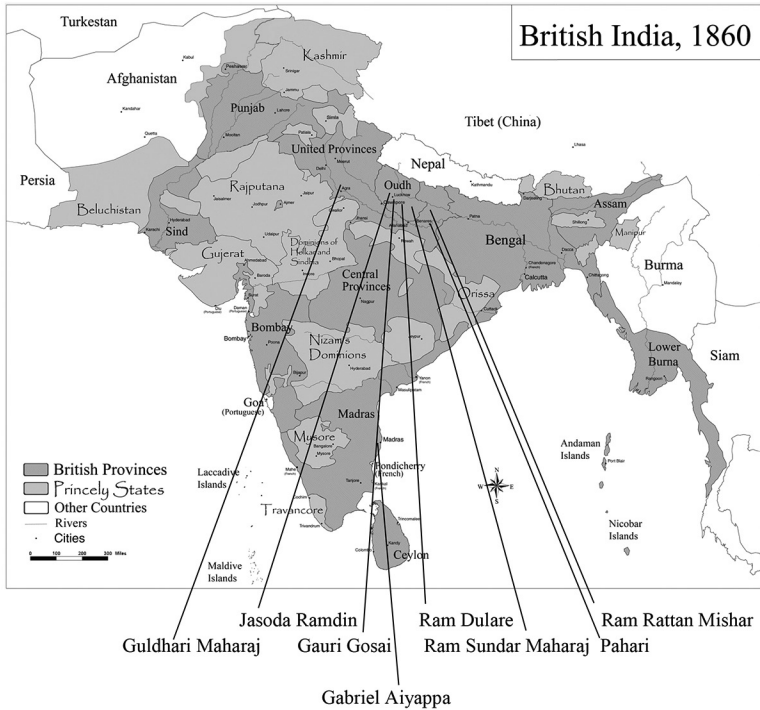
societal expectations of gendered socializing patterns and division of labour, it is possible to talk about women's and men's 'cultures' or patterns of behaviour (Coates 1986, 117). Moreover, in a community in which gendered roles are highly marked, one would expect to see gendered patterning in the narrativization techniques used.

The Narrators

The study provides a fine-grained analysis of the experience of five female and five male narrators during the indenture system in Fiji. The labourers' narratives were featured in a documentary series *Girmit Gāthā* in the early 1980s on what was then the only Hindi radio station in Fiji. The broadcast was to commemorate the indenture centenary, a significant event in the Fiji Indian community (Gounder 2011, 2017). By the time the life narratives were being recorded in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the number of living indentured labourers had dwindled. In his introduction to the *Girmit Gāthā* series, the radio announcer Tej Ram Prem states 'there were less than a handful of labourers left' within the community (Gounder 2017). These remaining *girmitiyas* were interviewed at home by Indian radio announcers. The narratives trace the *girmitiyas*' lives before, during and after indenture.

The majority of the *girmitiyas* were recruited in north India, and in particular, Oudh (Map 2.1). Most of the *girmitiyas* in this study served their indenture on Viti Levu, and in particular, around the Navua area (Map 2.2).

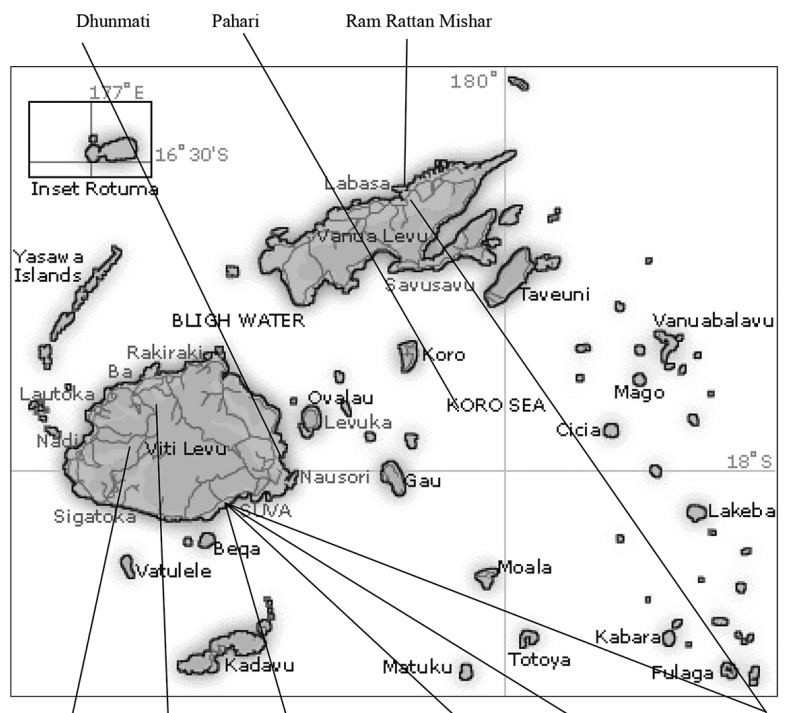
The male narrators were unmarried when they arrived in Fiji. Gauri Gosai from Kanpur emigrated on 18 March 1908 on *Sangola* (see emigration pass below). The ship carried 1,132 individuals, the second largest number of recruits to arrive in Fiji. He served his *girmit* on Lapat Kothi sugar cane plantation in Ba. Gabriel Aiyappa purposefully sought out recruiters as he was in search of work and enlisted himself as a recruit. He embarked from Madras depot and arrived in Fiji on 7 March 1910 on the ship *Sangola V*. Gabriel was based on the Vancouver Fiji Sugar Company's Tamanua plantation in Navua. Pahari, from Danapur in Bihar also arrived in Fiji on *Sangola V*. He recalls that at the age of 10 or 11



Source: Adapted from Gounder 2011.

MAP 2.1: RECRUITMENT OF NARRATORS FROM BRITISH INDIA

he went to Mithapur in search of work and was recruited there. He was enlisted to a copra (coconut) plantation on Mokangai, where he was a cook. Ram Delare was recruited in Kanpur, when he went to visit his sister, although, in his case, he was not in search of work but was befriended by some men, who turned out to be recruiters and who took him to the depot. He embarked from Calcutta depot on 1 September 1916 on *Chenab III*. Like the majority of the Girmityas in this study, his *girmitya* was in Navua on a sugar cane plantation. The final male *girmitya* in this study Ram Rattan Mishar, mentions his life before his indenture in Fiji only briefly and we learn that he embarked from Lucknow depot. Neither his place of origin nor the date of his embarkation is mentioned. He served his *girmitya* in Labasa on a sugarcane plantation.



Sarju Delegate Gauri Gosai Ram Sundar Maharaj Ram Dulhari Gabriel Aiyappa Jasoda Ramdin

Source: Adapted from Gounder 2011.

MAP 2.2: GIRMIT IN FIJI

The female narrators were either infants, who witnessed their parents' *girmit* or arrived in Fiji with their husbands to serve *girmit*. Guldhari Maharaj, from Ghorikdar, arrived as a child *girmitiya* with her parents on 23 May 1893, on *Jumna II*. She chronicles her mother's *girmit* on an unnamed sugar cane plantation. Sarju Delegate also arrived with her father Bhulur and mother Bachi, who served their indenture in Nadi. Jasoda Ramdin from Sitapur arrived with her husband on 30 July 1904 on *Ems II*, when she was sixteen years old. She served her indenture on sugar cane plantations in Lautoka and then Labasa. Following her *girmit* on the plantations, she and her husband were tasked with building roads and railway lines in Labasa.

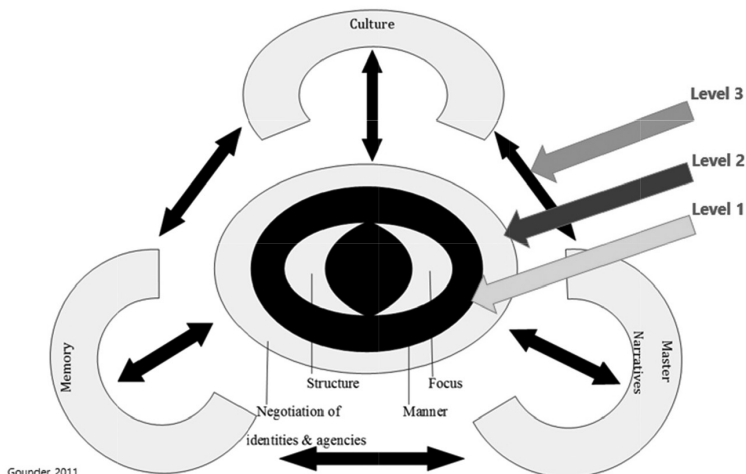
Ram Sundhar Maharaj from Benares arrived in Fiji on 29 May

1913 on *Ganges V*. She served her *girmit* in Navua on a sugar cane plantation. The final female narrator was Dhunmati also from Mirzapur, Benares. She was unable to remember the date or the ship on which she arrived. Her indenture was on a sugar cane plantation in Baulevu.

Methodology

The *girmitiyas'* life stories were firstly demarcated into individual narratives, each of which centred on a unique complicating action (Labov 1972, 354-96). The narratives revolved around (i) being recruited, (ii) the voyage over the *kala pani*, (iii) the movement of *girmitiyas* to the plantation and (iv) the social structure on the plantation. On an average, there were 6 narratives analysed per narrator.

Within each of these narratives, the positioning of the narrator-as-character was analysed using Narrativization Analysis Framework (Gounder 2011), a methodology designed particularly for analysis of indenture life narratives. The framework is built upon Labov's (1972, 354-96) narrative components and Bamberg's



Source: Gounder 2011.

FIGURE 2.2: NARRATIVIZATION ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

(1997) positioning analysis. Narrativization Analysis Framework, as seen below, consolidates the three levels at which narratives can be analysed and the constituent elements of each level. Level 1 focuses on how the narrator-as-character positions him/herself in relation to time, location, events and characters to produce a narrative with a particular structure and focus. Level 2 analyses the situated interaction between the narrator and the interviewer in the immediate context of narrative production. Level 3 focuses on the cultural norms, memories, and beliefs about indenture that prevailed within the community at the time the narratives were produced and initially heard.

This study is situated at level 1 and level 3 of the Narrativization Analysis Framework. At level 1, I investigate how the narrative is relayed through the narrators' positionings within the story world. The findings are then considered at level 3 to analyze gendered patterns of narrative performance vis-à-vis the societal hegemonic positionings of indentured labourers.

The narrator can utilize three possible positionings within the story world: witness, recipient, agent. In witness position, the narrator-as-character is an observer of events, with no agency to encourage or prevent the occurrence of the incident being observed. An example is Guldhari Maharaj, who went to Fiji as a child and witnessed her mother's indenture:

Guldhari Maharaj

Ahu mai jae huwe fil me
kām kare.... Huwā jae.
Kabhi jaldī āwe, kabhī
rāt hoe jāwe. Ganā jaiyā
kātin to hia nou baje rāt
ke ai.³ (Gounder 2011,
120-4)

*And my mother used to go there to
the field to work.... They went there.
Sometimes they came early, sometimes
it would be nightfall. When they used
to cut sugar cane, it would be nine
o'clock at night when they returned.*

³ While efforts have begun to code Fiji Hindi using a Roman script, there is no official version. For the purposes of this study, which analyses

A further consideration is the agency associated with the narrator-as-character position. When the narrator-as-character is in a witness position, s/he does not participate in the incident being described as seen in Guldhari Maharaj's excerpt above. On the other hand, when s/he is a protagonist, the narrator-as-character may either be speaking from a recipient or agent position. As a recipient, the narrator-as-character is at the receiving end of other characters' agency. Below, Pulyandi Gounder describes how, when the labourers arrived in the country, they were allocated to plantations around Fiji by the indenture authorities. In Pulyandi's narrative, the *girmitiyas* did not have a choice in the matter:

Pulyandi Gounder

Ādmi bāṭe lage. Yā Bā ke
bīs ādmi. Latoka tīs, chāllis
ādmi. Eise eise bāṭe. Hamlog
ke Ragrag ke koi pachīs ādmi
raha.

*The men began to be allocated.
For Ba here, twenty men. For
Lautoka, thirty or forty men.
They were allocated that way.
There were some twenty five of
us men for Rakiraki.*

When the narrator-as-character is in an agentive position s/he is in command issuing directives as seen in Gauri Gosai's excerpt below. In contrast to Pulyandi Gounder's resignation to the allocation of the *girmitiyas*, Gauri is determined to have an input. Amongst the *girmitiyas* being distributed by the indenture authorities, Gauri also distributes men whom he knows to be educated and trustworthy to different parts of Fiji. By doing so, Gauri intends to receive information about the treatment of the *girmitiyas*. He will in turn report back this information to India:

oral narratives, efforts have been made to keep the Romanized transcriptions as close as possible to the labourers' pronunciations (cf. Gounder 2011).

Gauri Gosai

Jab chalān bāṭe lage,
 koi kā lambāsā, koi kā,
 to hamlog usme ek ek
 vidyān bheja, parhā wālā.
 Tārā Chand ko Lambāsā
 bhejā, our jhā jhā rā.
 Nausorī me Totārām ko
 bhejā. Eise eise ādmī,
 apnī jahāj ka ādmī, chhāt
 chhāt ke huwā bhejā sāt
 me. (Gounder 2011, 261)

*When the allocation was announced,
 some for Labasa, and some elsewhere,
 we also sent intelligent men, who
 were educated. I sent Tara Chand to
 Labasa, and wherever else the other
 labourers were being sent I sent men.
 To Nausori, I sent Totaram. In this
 way, I searched out men from our
 own ship and sent them with the other
 labourers so that information would
 come to me.*

In these positions of agency, the narrator-as-character may either be individualized as seen in Guldhari Maharaj and Gauri Gosai's excerpts or be part of a collective body of individuals all of whom share the same positions of agency as seen in Pulyandi Gounder's excerpt.

These positions of witness, recipient, and agent are not held consistently throughout a life narrative; instead, the narrator-as-character is likely to fluctuate from one position to the next depending on the incidents being described and the characters involved in the incident. This study analyses how often women and men narrators utilize the three positions. The findings are then analysed contextually at level 3 in relation to the hegemonic positioning of the *girmitiyas* in the indenture discourses produced at the time of the indenture commemorations.

While this study analyses how the macro-level context contributes to the structure and focus of the life narratives, a limitation of this study is that we do not analyse the life narratives at level 2 of the framework. Future studies could continue the dialogue through contrastive analysis of the positionings within these life stories, which were produced for public broadcast, with life stories collected by historians, to analyse what role the situated context of the interviewer plays in the *girmitiyas*' positioning and emphasis on events in their life story.

Results

Figure 2.1 presents the frequencies of women and men narrators-as-characters speaking from a witness perspective. As illustrated in Figure 2.1, for both genders, the individual positioning is favoured over the collective. However, women used the individual witness position more than men, with 46 per cent of women and 13 per cent of men in the individual witness position.

Figure 2.2 presents the results for the narrator-as-character speaking from a recipient perspective. Overall, men used this position more than women (55 per cent to 36 per cent). There is a large difference between the women and men in the individual recipient position, with women taking the position only 6 per cent of the time and men 27 per cent of the time. For the collective recipient position, there is much less difference between the women and men, at 31 per cent and 26 per cent respectively.

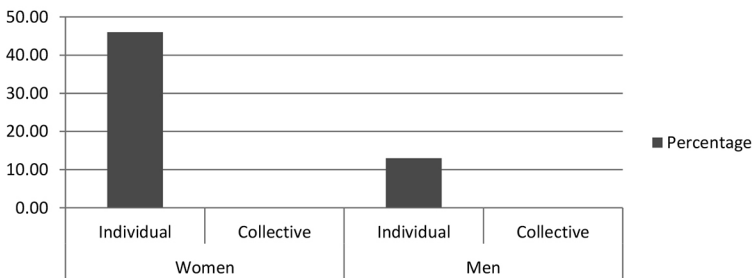


FIGURE 2.1: WOMEN VS MEN FOR WITNESS PERSPECTIVE

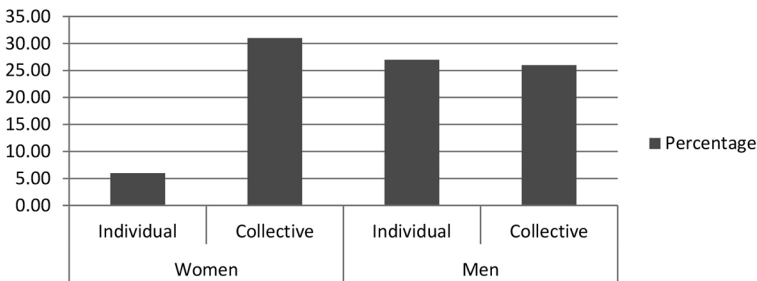


FIGURE 2.2: WOMEN VS MEN FOR RECIPIENT PERSPECTIVE

For the agentive positioning of the narrator-as-character (Figure 2.3), there is a substantial difference between the frequency of women and men in individual agent positions, with women holding the position only 7 per cent of the time compared to 33 per cent for men. On the other hand, women held the collective agentive position slightly more than men, at 11 per cent and 5 per cent respectively.

When analysing the men in the narrator-as-character positions, for all three categories, men held the individual positions more than the collective (Figure 2.4). Moreover, the men held the individual agent position the most out of the three categories. For two of the categories (witness and agent) the differences there is a substantial difference in the use of individual and collective positionings within the two categories. For the narrator-as-character speaking from a witness perspective, the men held only the individual position. When the narrator-as-character spoke from an agent perspective, he was more likely to hold an individual agent

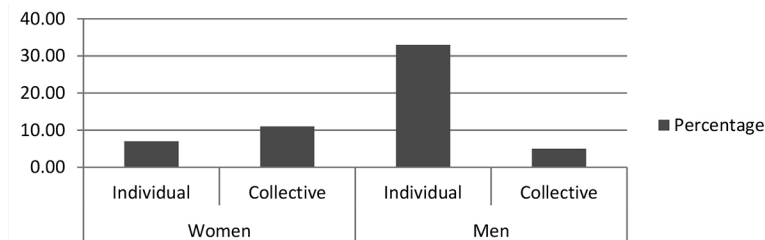


FIGURE 2.3: WOMEN VS MEN FOR AGENT PERSPECTIVE

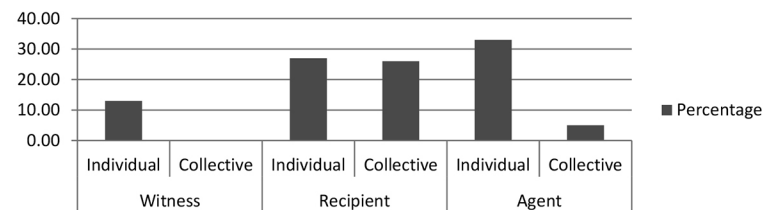


FIGURE 2.4: COMPARATIVE FREQUENCY FOR MEN IN WITNESS, RECIPIENT, AGENT POSITIONS

position (33 per cent) than to be part of a collective body of agents (5 per cent). For the male narrator-as-character in recipient position, the difference is negligible between individual recipient positions (27 per cent), and the collective positions (26 per cent).

Women more frequently utilized the collective positioning than the individual positioning in two of the three categories (Figure 2.5). The exception was the witness position, where women used the individual position. Moreover, at 46 per cent, the witness position was the most frequently used of the three positions. The position with the second highest frequency was that of recipient, with women more likely to be in collective recipient positions (31 per cent) than in individual recipient positions (6 per cent). Finally, in the agent position, the women were also more likely to display collective agency (11 per cent) in their role as narrator-as-character than individual agency (7 per cent). However, the difference between the individual and collective positions is not as marked as in the other two categories.

Level 3

As these are life narratives, the narrators are relaying information about reconstructed events that we as interlocutors understand to be re-presentations of events from the real world at a point in time in the past (Thomson-Jones 2007). To provide a contextualized analysis of the narrators' positionings, we consider the

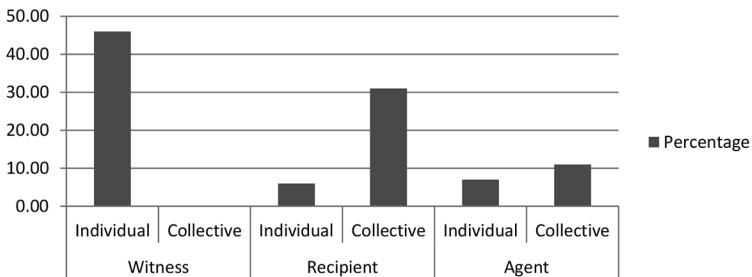


FIGURE 2.5: COMPARATIVE FREQUENCY FOR WOMEN IN WITNESS, RECIPIENT, AGENT POSITIONS

girmitiyas' positionings within the story world at level 3 in relation to writings that were produced to commemorate indenture and which served as the hegemonic discourse on indenture and indentured labourers.

Girmit poems, such as Raymond Pillai's (1979) 'Labourer's Lament' represents the *girmitiyas*' positionings that were prevalent in the Fiji Indian psyche. Such poems portray the *girmitiyas* witnessing or experiencing hardship without resistance throughout their indenture:

We, who tilled from dawn till dark,
Who worked in wind and rain,
We who strove to make our mark,
Now find we toiled in vain.

As presented in the poem above, the hallmark of *girmit* in the Fiji Indian psyche is its continuous cycle of hardship. However, when the *girmit* narrators use individualized recipient position within the life narratives, the events are unique, significant and highly reportable (Labov 1972, 354-96) events for the narrators, as seen in the excerpts below from Jasoda Ramdin and Ram Delare.

Moreover, while in Pillai's poem above, the *girmitiyas* are presented as a homogeneous group, undifferentiated by gender, in the telling of the life narratives, there is a marked difference in the types of events in which women and men narrators-as-characters are in the individual recipient position. In the few cases of women in individual recipient positions, these are situations in which the women's familial bonds are challenged. In such a situation, the women-as-characters take an agentive position, and the indenture authorities attempt to reposition them as recipients and negate their agency. These situations are most often concerned with the welfare of the women's children. For instance, Jasoda Ramdin describes below how the overseer slapped her because she had confronted the nanny. Jasoda had done so because another woman labourer had told Jasoda that the nanny had beaten Jasoda's son.

Jasoda Ramdin

Jasoda: To u sār jarur hamre eise mār dhis...

Interviewer: Kisne mārā thā āp ko?

Jasoda: U gorwā, ha. Bole, 'Kāe jhagrā karo dais, kāi jhagrā karo?' (Gounder 2011: 170)

Jasoda: He EXPLETIVE really hit me like this...

Interviewer: Who hit you?

Jasoda: That White man, yes.

He said, 'Why do you argue with the nanny, why do you argue?'

The men are also placed in individual recipient positions by the indenture authorities; however, the events revolve around work and financial circumstances in which they were singled out and treated unfairly. For instance, Ram Delare recollects he was blamed for letting a horse run into the sugarcane, but, as he saw it, this was due to the plantation authorities' fault for not inquiring about Ram Delare's prior experience:

Ram Delare

Tab bas kā bha....Bole, 'Jao, ghoṛā joto jaik'. Our ghoṛak kām ham kiṃyā na rahā. Sārā, ghoṛā gana me chalā. To ganā ukhār gei, tīn dāri chār. To ais, bhai, sardarwā, goṛ pite. Bole, 'Tum to ganā tur dio'. Goṛ oṛ pakṛis kulumbarwa eise. Ek chabuk mārīs. Hamse bole, 'Tum ganā tur diyo'. Ham bola, 'Hamlog ke muluk me ganā heiye nei'. To bole, 'Achhā, jao tum girās kato'. (Gounder 2011, 196-8)

And then what happened.... He said, 'Go and plough with the horse'. And I had never worked with horses before. EXPLETIVE the horse ran into the cane field. Three or four rows of sugar cane broke. The Indian foreman came, brother, and hit my leg. He said, 'You have broken the sugar cane'. The overseer held my leg, like this. He whipped me once. He said to me, 'You've broken the sugar cane'. I said, 'In our country there isn't any sugarcane'. He said, 'Ok, you go and cut grass'.

Finally, Pillai's poem hints at the *girmitiyas* as victims of an unjust system. Hence, the male *girmitiyas*' predominant use of the agent position within their life narratives counters the societal belief that the *girmitiyas* displayed little agency against what they felt to be injustice towards them or other *girmitiyas*. The *girmitiyas*' display of agency was often a reaction to the indenture authorities' attempts to position the narrator-as-character as a recipient. For instance, Ram Rattan Mishar, a male *girmitiya*, was leased a piece of land by the new Manager of his plantation to plant rice, with the understanding that the lease would be paid after he had harvested and sold the rice. However, on the day that Ram Rattan Mishar prepared to harvest the rice, the Manager refused to acknowledge their agreement and demanded payment before the harvest. This led to a chain of agentic behaviour on the part of Ram Rattan Mishar. He attempted to reason with the manager, and when that failed, he threatened to hit him. Finally, Ram Rattan Mishar went to see a labourer who was also the moneylender on the plantation to borrow enough to pay the manager. Armed with the money, he did something that could, under his indenture contract, have him imprisoned: he left the plantation without the manager's permission. However, he did so to speak to the Inspector of Immigrants, whose duty it was to listen to grievances by both the labourers and the plantation authorities. With the Inspector's help, Ram Rattan Mishar won his case against the manager.

The women's collective agency position within their life narratives challenged the limited societal discourse on the importance of women's roles during indenture, with the typical labourer referred to and thought of as 'a man', as seen in Satendra Nandan's (1997, 10) poem below:

Plantation by plantation, they build a new world
 Sugar sweet the slave crop grew
 Elsewhere it had depopulated half the universe
 Here my father's fathers,
 Sleeping on our mother's breasts
 Gave breath and bread to an island

The women narrators used the positioning of collective agency

a lot more than men (cf. Johnstone 1993, Tannen 1990 for similar findings) and their agency was tied to taking ownership for the work that they performed during indenture. For instance, in the excerpt below, Jasoda used the reflexive pronoun ‘hamai log’ (*we ourselves*). In a pro-drop language, this is an emphatic use of the pronoun, which draws attention to the agents carrying out the action.

Jasoda Ramdin

Dāku āwā. Kuta pusi nei *I came to Daku. At that time there*
 chalet rahe. *weren't even dogs or cats here. Then*
 Tab hamai log narku kata. *we ourselves cut down the reeds.*
 (Gounder 2011: 180-1)

As exemplified through Jasoda's excerpt, the women placed great emphasis on the difficulty of the task involved, as well as the importance of the accomplishment of the task for future generations in Fiji. Therefore, the stress is not on being agentive for one's benefit, but the benefit of others. However, unlike the men's collective agency, the benefit stressed by the women's use of collective agency is not only for the immediate characters in the story world but extended to the listening interlocutors in the social world.

Discussion

The study focuses on female and male labourers' experiences of indenture to identify how life narratives were performed as gendered and resistance discourse through the narrator-as-character's positioning within the story world. As seen through this study, men and women's oral narratives serve as first-hand testimonies of the indenture system, through their positionings as either witnesses, recipients or agents. The broadcast of the narratives over the radio provided the narrators with access to power, whereby they could be heard at a time when indenture was a salient topic within the community of practice.

As life narratives are representations of the community of

practice in which the events occurred and are also indices of the societal mores within which they are told (Schiff & Noy 2006), the construction of the story world impacted the speech community in which the narrative was told and heard (Young 1987, 19-68). Despite some similarities in the gendered storytelling habits across cultures, the narrativization styles employed by women and men were culture-specific. These patterns are shown to be localized negotiations, which are part of larger, global identity negotiations, as the narrators' positionings within the story world of indenture challenged the hegemonic positionings of the Giritiyas' in the master narratives of indenture. Hence, the gendered positionings within the life narratives told within the community of practice also built up to the larger picture of the *imagined community's* (Anderson 1991) beginnings.

The findings, therefore, hold implications for the presentation and representation of language ideologies: in the localized setting, what acts of identity (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985) did the narrators perform as 'man' and 'woman' in Fiji Hindi narrative telling, and how did these performativities correlate with the wider community's perceptions of indentured men and women's roles within the community. Hence, the study is not only about analysing localized performativity of gender, but also about how this localized performativity interacted with and constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed the wider existing language ideologies about social identities, including how to 'do' gender in Fiji Hindi.

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CHAPTER 3

Indentured Hindustani Women in Suriname

Chan Choenni

Introduction

In this article, the special recruitment of women in India for indentured labour that resulted in specific characteristics of the indentured Hindustani women in Suriname is analysed. This study explores the impact of the gender imbalance on gender relations and the (bargaining) position of Hindustani women.¹ It is important to keep in mind that these women earned their own income and after (their) indentureship (ended), they continued to earn their own income. These women had agency and despite the oppression by the Dutch planters and their staff and sometimes also from their husbands, they carved their own destiny.

Furthermore, the majority was very assertive and independent. These women were pivotal in retaining the Hindustani culture. Many became matriarchs and were essential in the formation of the Hindustani community. Although many were despised as 'indecent' women in India and also in Suriname by some community leaders, they gained respect in their extended family.

¹ This article is primarily based on extensive research on the history of Hindustanis in Suriname, in particular reported in Dutch in Choenni, 2016. I thank Tanja Sitaram for her help and my wife Bina Makhan for the extensive discussions about the revival of *izzat* (honourability) and the role of Hindustani matriarchs. Tanja also wrote her Master thesis in 2017 under my guidance on Indentured Hindustani women in Suriname.

The Indentured period of Hindustanis in Suriname lasted from 1873 to 1920. More than 34,000 Indentured Indian labourers arrived in Suriname as temporary labourers; almost 12,000 of them returned to India. The Indians in Suriname referred to themselves during this period mostly as *kantrakis* (working under Contract) or *kalkatiyas* (departing from Calcutta) and later as *Hindustanis*. They were British subjects till 1927, but Dutch penal law applied to them. Hence, a breach of the (Indenture) labour contract they had signed, unwillingness to work or desertion was considered a criminal Act and punished severely. They had to work hard in a harsh climate and were exploited. Besides the negative factors, there were some differences in their conditions compared to the Indians in the British Caribbean colonies. Some of these relatively favourable conditions have had a positive impact on their integration in Suriname.

Emigration to Suriname started in 1873. Thus, the Hindustani indentured labourers profited from the improvements in the indentured labour system and the ship's transport technology. In Suriname, they could return to India after 5 years of service or settle in Suriname. The difference in 5- and 10-year terms was significant. For example, a group of indentured Indian labourers had been recruited for Trinidad, but when they were told that they could serve a shorter period in Suriname than in Trinidad, they chose to serve in Suriname (Sanderson Report, 1910, part 1, p. 309).

On the other hand, indentured Indian women in Trinidad and Guyana had to serve only 3 years while the indentured period for women was longer in Suriname: 5 years; this was more favourable for the women because they had a guaranteed income for 2 additional years. During these years these women had a regular income because they had a contract with the Dutch government responsible for them.

Furthermore, all Hindustani adults or households settling in Suriname obtained since 1895 a plot of fertile Crown land free and without yearly rent for six years. At the same time, they received 100 *guilders* (comparable with 40 *Guyanese* Dollars then) in lieu of their (free) return passage after finishing their 5-year contract.

Moreover, the British consul appointed in the capital Paramaribo

protected the Hindustani indentured labourers and pressurized the Dutch planters to treat her British Majesty's subjects well. He reported yearly on this matter to the Imperial British government. Since 18 per cent of the indentured labourers died between 1873-4, the emigration to Suriname was postponed. It was resumed in 1877 after the Dutch government promised to create better arrangements and allowed the British consul to monitor these improvements. Housing and cooking facilities and also free medical services were improved (Colonial Report 1880).

Furthermore, the Dutch Colonial government policy in Suriname was focused on Hindustanis retaining their culture, because this was considered conducive for the agrarian orientation. Since 1876, schooling of children up to 12 years was compulsory in Suriname. Most Hindustani couples had boys as well as girls who immigrated to Suriname. They received some years of schooling, although many parents were not inclined to send their children, particularly their daughters to school. Moreover, there were special 'cooly' schools, teaching in Hindi between 1890 and 1906.

Periodization

As the indentureship period in Suriname lasted almost half a century (1873-1920) changes occurred in the demography and position of indentured labourers i.e. women. Three phases can be distinguished during the indentureship period.

1. *The pioneering phase 1873-89*: In the first phase, the indentured labourers were the vast majority of the Hindustani population. In the initial years, many were lonely and without a family. The bondage *dipu bhai* and *bahin* (depot comrades) and of *jahaji bhai* and *bahin* (ships comrades) was very important.² It was a very fluid situation with Hindustani emigrants arriving in Suriname, while

² In the sub depots and the depot in Calcutta many stayed weeks and sometimes even months before they could embark on a ship. The bondages and also relationships between men and women continued during the passage to Suriname on the ship. The bondages of *jahaji bhai* (ship

others returned to India; the first batches started to return after 1878. The Hindustanis were perceived as 'strangers' by the settled African population.

2. *The identity formation phase 1890-1902*: In the second phase the composition of the Hindustani group started to change. Besides the indentured labourers, the group of free Hindustanis (and time-expired persons waiting to return to India) became larger, and the number of Hindustanis born in Suriname increased. They settled in government settlement centres and became small farmers. The formation of the ethnic identity and an ethnic group became important and 'Cooly' schools were founded. The solidarity between *ganv ke nata* (villagers) and also solidarity among the Hindustani group thrived; they became an exotic minority in Suriname.

3. *The settlement phase 1903-20*: In the third phase, the group of free Hindustanis became the majority surpassing the group that worked as Indentured Labourers. Also, the gender balance improved because many children were born in Suriname. Many of the Hindustani (small) farmers settled on government settlement centres gradually moved beyond these settlement centres, buying their own plot of land. Hindustani settlers became the majority group among the Hindustani population instead of the Indentured Labourers. Furthermore, the group started to strive for total acceptance as 'Dutch subjects' of Suriname. Although the Hindustani women were still a minority among the Hindustani population, their proportion began to rise, and gender balance became better. By 1915 the proportion of women among the Hindustani population was already around 40 per cent.

Recruitment of Women in India

The indentured women who immigrated to Suriname had specific characteristics that were linked to their recruitment in India.

brothers) and *jahaji bahin* (ship sisters) were like a family relationship and remained a tradition long after their indentureship period.

TABLE 3.1: GENDER BALANCE IN AMONG HINDUSTANIS AND
TOTAL POPULATION IN SURINAME

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Hind. Male</i> | <i>Per cent</i> | <i>Hind. Female</i> | <i>Per cent</i> | <i>Total Hinds.</i> | <i>Total Suriname</i> |
|-------------|-------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 1915 | 12,294 | 59.8 | 8,204 | 40.2 | 20,498 | 100,245 |
| 1916 | 13,109 | 60.4 | 8,577 | 39.6 | 21,686 | 102,338 |
| 1917 | 15,146 | 60.8 | 9,756 | 39.2 | 24,902 | 105,391 |
| 1918 | 15,489 | 61.1 | 9,842 | 38.9 | 25,331 | 107,827 |

Source: Colonial Reports 1915-1918; Choenni 2016b: 549.

According to The Indian Emigration Act of 1871, it was compulsory that at least forty women to every hundred men should be recruited; hence the rate was 28.6 per cent. It was harder to recruit women for emigration than men in India. Therefore, the premium for every recruited woman for Suriname was higher, namely Rs. 35 for women, while for men it was Rs. 25.³ Furthermore, there were negative images of women in the colonies. It was asserted that they were forced into prostitution. A head recruiter for Suriname in Fyzabad (Uttar Pradesh) reported in July 1893:

The females are not seen in many districts to be recruited for. I have 35 men and 3 women ready this time at Fyzabad ... females scarce this time. I have sent my recruiters every side in my surrounding districts and other places to look for females, but I regret to write that I will not be able to complete the order of coolies of the 1st August. I hope you will be kind enough to give me time up to the end of August to complete the order of women short being in my challan, otherwise I can send the whole number of my agreement without the proportion of females by the first week of August. (Archive Agent-General in Suriname, no. 638)

The recruitment of women for Suriname resulted in the selection of two types of women. Beside married women single women were also recruited, in particular, widows who often consciously chose to emigrate. Reddock (1985, 81) states that high caste widows and Dalit (outcast) females comprised a significant proportion of the majority of females migrating as singles. And the majority

³ One rupee was then around 80 cents or 0.8 *guilder* (Dutch *guilder*), see: Wiersma 1903.

of indentured women migrating to the Caribbean were singles; therefore the majority of women were widows and Dalit women. Their determination to emigrate was itself a sign of the independent nature of these women; the decision to migrate alone was a sign of their strength and courage. The main areas of recruitment were the markets, railway stations, festivals, bazaars and temples (Sanderson Report, 1901, part 1, pp. 21 and 23). The Hindu holy city of Mathura was a prime area for the recruitment of females (Grierson 1883, 190, 205, 222, 273; Pitcher 1882, 78). Poor women and those who had lost their husbands and sometimes children during the disasters like storms, flooding, severe droughts often resulting in starvation, also chose to emigrate.

Because the rate of 28.6 per cent women on each transport batch of emigrants to Suriname had to be met, sometimes women were tricked and misled, but these were exceptions (Sanderson Report 1910, 9-10; De Klerk 1953, 66-7).

A documented case in Suriname in 1884 is of Miss Golab. When she was aboard the ship *Peshwa* bound for Suriname, she tried to convince the captain and the surgeon-superintendent to let her return to India. Miss Golab stated that she was misled by a recruiter. She also stated she had never signed a labour contract and never had seen a Protector of Emigrants, an Emigration-Agent or a surgeon for the medical tests. The Governor of Suriname agreed to send her back to India assuming she was misled. After extensive research in India it became clear that Miss Golab had signed the contract and never had objected to her emigration. (Colonial Report 1885, Annex F: 3)

The majority of the Hindustani emigrants, i.e. women had respectable reasons to emigrate consciously, and the myth of inveiglement (*Bharmai deis*) to the holy land of Rama (*Sri Ram Desh*) where one would eat from golden plates was used as rationalization by many (Choenni 2016b, 134-5). Some recruiters used the trick of portraying Suriname as *Sri Ram Desh*. However, despite negative propaganda against emigration many choose to emigrate in search of a better live outside India. Others fled with or without their husband escaping the oppression by their in-laws. An example:

A woman was married to a Hindu man, but she secretly practised the

Muslim faith. She did her *namaaz* (prayers), and when her mother-in-law became aware of this practice, she had beaten her and oppressed her. She decided to flee with her husband and her three sons. She was recruited for Suriname. But in the hurry, they could not collect the money they had saved. The Hindu husband went back to collect the money but did not return. He never reached Calcutta. This woman arrived in Suriname and became a pious Muslim and a matriarch. This woman became a business-woman in Suriname and had a better life than in India. She gave her sons Muslim names, and these names became surnames. These sons were progenitors of three large Muslim families in Suriname. (See: Choenni 2016b, 86, 133).

Few Agriculturists

The information about the wages and all the arrangements like free passage, free housing and the food was emphasized, while the information about the kind of labour was vague. Furthermore, it was not easy to recruit women who had worked on the land. Some illegal recruiters (*arkatis*) falsely stated that the women would work as housemaids or not work as labourers. They even advised registering under false names and as labourers or agriculturalists (McNeill & Lal 1914, 312). Many women who were recruited for Suriname were not labourers but had other professions (Emmer 1984, 250). The Emigration Agent for Suriname in Calcutta E. Van Cutsem stated in 1877 for example that he had rejected: '... a batch of dancing-girls and women of a similar description, with their male attendants. These people laughed at the idea of labouring as agriculturalists' (IOR, V/24/1209, Annual Report 1877-8, 10), and he stated in 1879:

... the class of women willing to emigrate consists principally of young widows and married or single women who have already gone astray, and are therefore not only most anxious to avoid their homes and to conceal their antecedents, but are also at the same time the least likely to be received back into their families. (IOR, V/24/1209, Annual Report 1879-80, 3)

He further stated that it was challenging to find out whether female recruits were married. Hence, since 1879, magistrates working in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh were instructed

to ascertain whether the 'husbands' of single female recruits were still alive and to find out whether they objected to the women's emigration (IOR, V/24/1209, Annual Report 1879-80, 2). Only a quarter of the women (2,064 of the 8,527) had worked in the field of agriculture in India. The single women who immigrated to Suriname had a wide range of professions ranging from housemaids, street vendors to prostitutes. The word *prostitutes* must be interpreted broadly in those days in the Indian context. A woman who had sexual relations with a man before marriage, or had been adulterous or did not live with their husbands because they were dissatisfied with their arranged marriages were considered prostitutes. According to De Klerk (1953, 147-8), a very small proportion was 'ordinary prostitutes' and 'shamelessly immoral'. McNeill and Lal (1914, 313) concluded about Suriname that:

Approximately one third consists of married women that migrated with their husbands; others are often widows and women who left their men . . . a small percentage are ordinary prostitutes . . . the large majority, however, are not as often is stated shameless immoral. They are women who had faced trouble and emigrated to prevent that they would live their life in India as a prostitute.

Some unmarried women registered themselves as married women or married soon after their recruitment, in the depots. Around only one-third of the women who immigrated to Suriname were married. One-third married in the depots in Calcutta or after arrival in Paramaribo at the Cooly depot. It meant that they chose a man with whom they would have a stable relationship. A provisional wedding/engagement (*sagaai*) was concluded, and the single women were in this way assured of a partner and especially of male protection during the sea journey and beyond. Also, in the Cooly depot in Paramaribo, such marriages were arranged. The Agent-General also encouraged a 'marriage' with a (male) partners of single females before they were allocated to the plantations. Single women on the plantations often meant troubles with single men.

Moreover, in Suriname it was allowed to 'buy indentured women free'. Hindustani men went to the Cooly depot in Paramaribo to buy free women as their spouse. Hindustani men paid the planter

when they succeeded in finding a spouse among the newly arrived indentured Indian woman. However, one-third of the indentured Hindustani women went as singles onto the plantations. These women had sometimes more than one male partner; hence polyandry existed in Suriname.

Two Types of Women

The proportion of the arrivals in Suriname was 70 per cent men (23,405) and 30 per cent women (10,232) of the total of 33,637 indentured Hindustani labourers. This rate was slightly higher than the minimal required rate of 100 men and 40 women (28.6 per cent). Among the children (4,360, totalling 13 per cent) the gender balance was better (2,458 boys and 1,902 girls). Two types of women immigrated to Suriname. One type was the married women, who were considered respectable. These women were depicted as: 'right kind of woman', 'honourable women', 'right women', 'moral types', and 'useful women' (Hoeft 1987, 57; Reddock 1994, 30). However, even among the married women, not everyone belonged to the so-called docile types. In some cases, these married women were the instigators for emigration. An example:

My maternal great grandmother (*parnani*) Sitabia returned from Mauritius to India. But she decided to leave India again and gave birth to a son on the ship *Erne I* in 1890 (De Klerk 1953, 72, 80). Sitabia became a businesswomen and a modijain (moneylender). She was a dominant personality and from a high caste and mother of four sons and three daughters in Suriname. She became ancestress of numerous descendants i.e. women who had her dominant personality.

Hence, the first type of Indentured women was what we call the *izzatdar* (respectable) Hindustani women who were married and often obedient towards their husband, a kind of ideal type Indian women. On the other side, two third of the indentured women were the single women and those who married in the depots. The majority of women were among 20-30 year old when they arrived in Suriname.⁴ Reddock (1985, 81) also concludes: 'the majority of

⁴ Considering the age group, 70 per cent were between 16-35 years.

Indian women came to the Caribbean not as wives or daughters but as individual women.' They were considered less respectable, even depicted as 'immoral' and 'destitute women'. These women became very self-assured due to circumstances and surviving the long journey to Suriname; they developed assertive personalities.

So, most women who immigrated to Suriname were not passive and docile. We call them 'assertive Hindustani women'. They had been single before their recruitment and most of them became matriarchs in Suriname gaining respect in due time in their extended family. We must also keep in mind that only one-fifth of the returnees were women (21 per cent), while women constituted 30 per cent of the arrivals. For widows and 'fallen women' – prostitutes or those who had committed adultery – it was better not to return. Often, they would be despised and mobbed in their village, or they would have to spend significant amounts of money to be reinstated in their caste. Others had suspended relations in India. We assume that the more assertive types of Hindustani women settled in Suriname.

Gender Relations

The shortage of Hindustani women and the aversion among Hindustani men to marry or have sexual relationships outside the Hindustani group resulted in strengthening the position of Hindustani women vis-à-vis the Hindustani men. Intermixing with other groups was minimal because of the notion of purity and pollution that was deeply rooted in the Indian way of life.⁵ Hence the single women and widows could find a male partner easily and even quit a relationship and choose another partner. In

Almost two thirds were between 20-30 years; a quarter were under 20 years. Only 2 per cent of the total were older than 40 years. Concerning their skin colour: 90 per cent had a brown or dark brown skin colour, the rest were light brown or (almost) black (Hira 2000: 27).

⁵ Some exceptions are reported. A Hindustani female researcher mentioned that her *adi* (paternal grandmother) was an indentured woman and when she 'gave birth to a black baby with "curly" hair' she had to leave the plantation with her child (Rampertap 2011, 54).

Suriname, they acquired more freedom than in India and earned their own income. Widows could remarry in Suriname and gain respect.

The mother of the Head Interpreter and Hindustani leader Sitalpersad Dube who emigrated from India as a young man was a Brahmin widow. She remarried in Suriname and had children with her second husband. She became a respected woman and became the matriarch of a rich and influential family in Suriname. Curiously, her husband had a young co-wife who regularly visited his house to collect money for her 'services'. (Interview with 100-year-old niece in 2013, see: Choenni 2016b, 638)

The mother of the authoritative Pundit Bhawanibhiek Shriemissier who went to India in 1935 and met with Mahatma Gandhi was also a Brahmin widow, who decided to leave India with two boys and was respected in Suriname, although she did not remarry.

Many single women chose mostly strong men who could protect them and also demanded some form of compensation for the relationship, like jewellery in return. Moreover, polyandry was accepted, meaning that some Hindustani women had multiple partners (Lamur et al. 1993, 126-7). There are some cases recorded. Sometimes the women had two husbands, and they were living together in one house; in some cases, two brothers 'shared' one woman (Choenni & Choenni 2012, 559). 'In one case on plantation Kroonenburg, an Indentured Hindustani woman lived with three men. In another case, an Indentured Hindustani woman lived alternatively in the houses of both her husbands' (Sitaram 2017).

Also, some Hindustani women changed male partners when they were not satisfied with the relationship (Debipersad 2001, 134-5; Lalmohamed 1992, 71). Hence, they could choose a male partner independently or exchange partners. As Hassankhan (2014, 226) states: 'Because of the paucity of female emigrants, they could negotiate a better position in the new environment . . . on the archive of the Immigration Department we can find enough evidence about women who left their husbands and decided to take another partner.'

Other consequences of the shortage of Hindustani women were that intercaste marriages were performed; the skin colour became less critical as well as religion in choosing a partner. Low caste and outcast women married middle and high caste men and sometimes otherwise. Thus, the caste system lost most of its base in Suriname.⁶ Also, mostly darker skinned women married lighter skinned men and vice-versa.⁷ Furthermore, Muslim men married Hindu women, and often these women became Muslims. Conservative Muslim women wearing the *hijab* or women who had *purdah* could not emigrate, because they were not recruited (Grierson 1883). Despite all hardship, many Hindustani women, especially of the lower castes and widows had a better life than in India. Many widows could have a family of their own and become matriarchs. Also, the girls had a strong bargaining position. Although they often 'married' at a very young age – sometimes even on 8-10 years of age – and went to live with their in-laws (*gauna*) their parents had a good bargaining position. Remarkably the practice of giving *dahej* or dowry (money, jewellery, clothes, and cattle) to the family of the bridegroom was reversed. The (family of) bridegroom had to pay often a price for the bride. A common practice was that older men married younger women.⁸

⁶ This did not mean that the caste system became almost extinct in Suriname. Brahmins were often addressed as *maharaj* and *maharajin*, but almost nobody took that as a surname, as they did for example in Trinidad (Roopnarine 2007, 67). My paternal grandfather (*aja*) Soekdew, born in 1893, and a Hindu scholar, could not become a pundit because he was from the Aggarwal Bania caste, although he later married a Brahmin woman. When he became an Arya Samaji – the revivalist Hindu group – in the 1920s his son Ramkisoore (my father) could become a pundit.

⁷ In the photographs of single indentured Hindustani women, we often see short and dark skinned women. This intermingling of skin colour led to families with children of different skin colours. Sometimes women were falsely accused of adultery because the skin colour of the baby did not match with her skin colour, while she had ancestors (invisible for those who did not know it) with another skin colour.

⁸ A remnant of this practice was the saying in Sarnami-Hindustani language, while visiting somebody and asking if the man of the house is at home. *Burhawa he ghare* (is the old man at home)?

Moreover, newly arrived immigrants could marry a second-generation girl.⁹ Sometimes fathers 'sold' their daughter(s).

In some cases these girls ran away from home to avoid such a marriage. In the archive of the Agent-General in Suriname, some cases are recorded. Also, McNeill and Lal (1914, 14) reported about these practices and advised emigration of more girls with families. However, the lobby from the Hindustani leadership for sending more women to Suriname and in particular 'decent' women did not have success.

Agency

Although many Hindustani women had a strong position vis-à-vis Hindustani men many were threefold overloaded. They worked to earn money, took care of their husband or spouse and children and were also responsible for the housework. The Hindustani women had to wake up very early in the morning preparing the food before going to work. After their work, they returned to their home to prepare the food and doing all tasks of the household and often take care of the children. They have worked very hard, and as survivors, they overcame the challenges. The average pay was 40 cents a day for women because her work was considered 'physically' less heavy, while men earned 60 cents a day. Even with this low wage, they succeeded in saving money because they were very frugal and even greedy (Fokken 2011, 41). Many also earned money by producing and selling agricultural and dairy products. They invested their savings in jewellery. Some sent money to their family in India.

Suriname was and still is a very sparsely populated country. Some Hindustani women bought land with their savings. One indentured woman became quite wealthy and donated a large plot of land for erecting a social centre that still exists as the Mata Gauri Centre in Paramaribo. Only with a written statement about 'good behaviour' one was allowed to buy Crown land. 'An example is

⁹ For example, the sister of my paternal grandfather, Sookheaa, born in 1891 in Suriname, married the immigrant Hansi.

my maternal great grandmother (*par-aji*) Dumatia (1864-1946) who arrived as a widow with two sons in 1889 with the ship *Elbe*. She bought a piece of Crown land in 1905 for 150 guilders. She could buy this land only after the consent from the Governor of Suriname about “good behaviour”.¹⁰

Those who arrived as young girls from India became adults, married and became mothers often of many children. They could raise these children because almost all adult indentured labourers acquired a piece of land of 1.5-2.0 hectare.

All in all, the indentured women achieved a better position compared to India. This was the case not only in Suriname but also in other Indentured Indian diaspora countries. Lal (1985, 142) states that:

emigration and indenture dramatically re-structured the women's position and hence their relationship with men . . . indenture promoted a new egalitarian ethos and a freer society that respected individual initiative . . . women were employed as individual labourers and were cash wage earners in their own right . . . control over their own hard-earned income gave the women a measure of power and economic and social independence to fashion their own individual destiny. . . not surprisingly, when circumstances demanded, they were not afraid to leave their husbands.

However, a group of Hindustani men did not succeed in finding a Hindustani female partner or spouse. They remained single/unmarried (*muglisia*) and lonely. They could often play the role of uncle for children on the plantations and the settlement centres. Many men experienced sexual stress and some used violence against women.¹¹ According to the Colonial Report 1888 (Annex J:

¹⁰ The female indentured labourers could have their own space, exercising their own discretion. The widowed Dumatia (1864-1946) who took her two sons Madho and Sadho with her from India in 1889, legally married my great grandfather Halkorisaw (1865-1937) in 1906 in Suriname. She gave birth to a daughter and a son in Suriname (my paternal grandfather) and named her two granddaughters after her Indian sons, Mahadee and Sahadee.

¹¹ Hassankhan (2014, 226, 227) states that the aspect of sexual relations in a situation of sexual imbalance during indenture and impact is

13) cases of physical abuse of Indentured Hindustani women also happened in Suriname. Some cases of violence by Hindustani men were mentioned. One was about the rape of a young Hindustani woman by two Hindustani men. The woman had come out of her house when the men, armed with bats, attacked her, stole all her jewels, forced her to the ground, raped and beat her. The men were sentenced to five years of forced labour. Some court documents refer to cases of abandoned husbands; often these women took the money and jewels with them (Sitaram 2017, 49).

In some cases Hindustani women even threatened the planter with a cutlass to chop him while using vulgar language like ‘your mother’s ass’ (*joe ma mapima je moerskont*) (Case 13 October 1881 of Luchmoneea, plantation *de Resolutie*). Sitaram (2017, 67) calculated that during 1875-1915 in Suriname 50 cases of murder were reported. Many were against women, but it was not as high as in Guyana. In Guyana, during 1885-90 about 33 murder cases were reported. Although the Indian population of Guyana was much larger, these numbers indicate that in Suriname murder of women or suicides among Hindustanis related to the shortage of women was comparatively not as bad as in Guyana (Bahadur 2013, Roopnarine 2015).

Janey Tetary

Hindustani women were also active in resistances. In 1884 Hindustani labourers for plantation Zorg en Hoop complained massively against the severe tasks and the low payments. They resisted the arrest in the *coolie lines* (the housing barracks) of four leaders and awaited the military police armed with cutlasses and sticks.

one of the taboos of migration history. But in my extensive research it was conceded that single Hindustani men went to prostitutes. And there were some well-known prostitutes; my informants mentioned names they had heard from their mothers. One was the dancer and Muslim prostitute named Alarakhi, who intended to become a Hindu according to the aforementioned author Rahman Khan. Some men even prostituted their own wives (Choenni 2016, 638).

When the military drummers reached the *coolie lines* they tried to intimidate the Hindustanis with drumming. The Hindustanis responded with: *Awa, Himat hai to awa!* (Come if you have courage). The ringleader Ramjaneer had mobilized the labourers and also a Hindustani woman, named Tetary.¹² Tetary, the *obstinate one* was well known for her toughness against injustices. She was asked to mobilize the women to attack the military. The women had collected dry mud pieces, stones and bottles. Despite repeated warnings to hand over the leaders and solve this problem without violence (the Hindustani interpreters communicated these messages) they refused to comply. Then the military approached the *coolie lines*, but they were bombarded with stones, bottles and dry mud pieces. The military was startled by the fierceness of the insurgents. A real battle took place. In particular, Tetary was very brave. She was shot dead from behind, and six other Hindustani labourers were gunned down while some military men were wounded. According to the *post mortem* report, she was shot twice; on her upper arm and the back of her head. The last shot had wounded her brains, and she died instantly (Archive Agent-General, inv. no. 1047; Colonial Report 1885, 7; see also Bhagwanbali 2011, 77-99). In September 2017 a statue of Janey Tetary in a heroic posture was erected in Paramaribo near the President's Palace.¹³ The brutal violence used by the military against the Hindustani immigrants was a remnant from the mentality during slavery when excessive violence was used to discipline the slaves.

¹² Tetary Janey emigrated in 1880 and arrived on the ship *Ailsa II*. She had number 491/I, aged 24 with a height of 1.465 m. She had a brown skin colour and hailed from the village Moniar, near Patna (Bihar). While she was a Muslim, she had adopted a Hindu child. Bhagwanbali, who has extensively published about Tetary, translates her name as 'the stubborn (person)'.

¹³ The bust of the second Agent General Barnet Lyon in Suriname, that was erected in 1908 by indentured labourers, was removed and Tetary's statue was placed on the same spot. This Act was motivated with the argument of 'correcting the colonial history'.

Accommodation and Cultural Retention

Although there were cases of exploitation and oppression retaliated by resistance, the majority of the indentured Hindustani women aspired to a better life for themselves and for their offspring in Suriname. This resulted in accommodating behaviour and the majority survived in coping with the harsh climate conditions and low wages. Although the wages for women were low (8 *annas* – nickels – a day against the 1 or 2 *annas* in India), it was still a far better income than in India. The Hindustani indentured labourers had the right to food rations the first three months, free housing, free medical help and free drinking water. Often they obtained a small piece of land of 1,000 sq. m. (20 × 50 m) to cultivate during the indentured period. They grew vegetables and some raised poultry and cows, not only for their consumption but also to earn some extra money. Owing to their frugal lifestyle many could save money, and some even sent to their family in India (Choenni 2016b).

The Hindustanis lived mostly isolated on the plantations from the Creoles and later often also from the Javanese. Furthermore, the roads were terrible and travelling to the capital Paramaribo took days by rowing boats. The relative isolation of Hindustanis and their small numbers during the indentured period reinforced the mutual dependence and solidarity. Because many were single or did not have an extended family in Suriname, solidarity and intensive relationships between the Hindustani plantation population developed, these *ganv ke nata* relationships were very important. Besides a *panchayat* (village council of five men) moral codes were also developed to retain order. For example, when somebody of the *ganv* (village) did something morally wrong – like a man harassing a girl – he was expelled from the village and became *kujat*, that meant expelled from the local community. After some time he could return and pay for his mistakes (Choenni and Choenni 2012). The Hindus had 32 and Muslims 16 recognized religious holidays besides the national (Christian) holidays. On these days and Sundays they were free. Numerous religious festivals (Phagwa/Holi, Diwali, Bhagwat and Muharram/Hosea) were celebrated and

Hindus and Muslims celebrated them together. Because it was a small group the religious difference was less critical and even marriages between Hindus and Muslim were contracted. Others were accepted as a family (*palwar banawe*), i.e. as brother or sister for performing the (wedding) rituals. Childless partners adopted children and orphans. Through intermarriage within the Hindustani group, new family relationships developed. In the initial phases, the identity formation of the Hindustanis could be understood in the context of their nature of work and new social set up which was entirely different from their experiences in India. One such occasion was the public display of Muharram festival when a large number of Hindustanis, Hindus and Muslims participated in the processions like also in Trinidad and Guyana. Through collective performances, the Hindustani group showed its solidarity and sense of belonging. Although the culture was based on the cultural heritage of India, more Hindustani style culture developed like *Baithak Gana*, a mix of Bhojpuri folk music. Because the overwhelming majority of Hindustani indentured labourers in Suriname hailed from western Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh, they could retain their common culture easily.

From Hindi, Bhojpuri and Awadhi (the Indian languages, which the labourers brought with them from India) the Sarnami, Hind(ustan)i language later evolved. It was challenging to learn the Dutch language for Hind(ustan)i-speaking persons (for example in Hindi and English one article exists for 'the' while in Dutch masculine, feminine and neuter articles are used) many did not learn Dutch. Hence, they could rarely communicate – officially – in Dutch and often (Hindustani) interpreters were consulted. However, many Hindustanis learned the (easier) lingua franca *Sranan tongo*. Hence, it was easier to retain the Hindustani language (*Sarnami Hindustani*), while in Guyana and Trinidad the Indians could easily switch to English and the Hindustani language faded away little by little. Women did have a pivotal role in cultural retention. Some celebrations were for only women, like *matikor*. The indentured women had intense friendship and solidarity and visited each other regularly. *Matikor* women also had their own cultural space (Kanhai 1994, XI-XIII).

In 1901 the gender rate in the Hindustani group was roughly two males to one female. However, among the Hindustani group, a high population growth rate was discernible and in due time Hindustani women born in Suriname increased in numbers. The demographic growth in the Hindustani population was not only striking compared to the other Surinamese groups but also compared to Indians in Trinidad and (British) Guyana. The death rate among the Indian indentured labourers in 1917 in Trinidad was 9.8 /1000 (pro mille), in Guyana 16/1000 and Suriname 0.6/1000. Among the not-indentured Indians, it was higher for Guyana 38/1000 and Suriname 17.8/1000.

Revival of *Izzat*

When the shortage of Hindustani women was reduced, their position was weakened and the oppressive Indian practices, like *izzat bachaw* (keeping up your honour) against the women were restored; remarkably with the cooperation of many indentured women. They strived that their (grand)daughters must become *izzatdar* (showing honoured behaviour) with all the limitations in public life. This *izzatdar* movement started massively in the 1920s when a more balanced proportion in gender emerged, and the national religious organizations were founded (Choenni & Choenni 2012). This *izzatdar* revival was a general trend. Many indentured Hindustani women became the matriarchs of large families. These very self-assured and assertive Hindustani women earned their income, walked freely on the streets and many smoked and even drank alcohol. However, most of them demanded that their daughters and granddaughters became and behaved *izzatdar* (showing honoured behaviour) with all the limitations in public life. Thus, they had a big stake in the revival of *izzat* resulting in oppressive practices against women and restoration of patriarchal relationships starting in the 1920s.

The ambivalent attitude of many Hindustani matriarchs can be explained. Through circumstances in India and sometimes also in Suriname they became 'fallen' women and were perceived as less respectful. However, this gave them enough freedom to work

and earn their income. They could not become *izzatdar*, therefore, they decided to raise their (grand)daughters to behave *izzatdar*. It must be emphasized that the daughters born before the 1920s were allowed to behave like these matriarchs.

Interestingly, the assertive and independent behaviour of these matriarchs co-existed at the same time with the *izzatdar* behaviour of their (grand)daughters. Although, this was a culturally contradicting behaviour these matriarchs were seldom criticized, but feared and respected for what they had achieved. These matriarchs had extended families and did their best to keep the family together and often oppressed their daughters-in-law. However, in due time and particularly after the Second World War and the urbanization the erosion of the extended Hindustani family started (see: Choenni & Choenni 2012, 560-7).¹⁴

Conclusion

The descendants of the more than 24,000 Hindustanis and 3,000 Indians from the Caribbean colonies, who settled in Suriname, numbered more than 300,000 in 2013; namely 148,000 in Suriname and 175,000 in The Netherlands (Choenni 2014). In more than 100 years, the Hindustani population increased more than tenfold (from 27,000 to more than 300,000). Besides this tremendous population growth, the Hindustanis are a successful and culturally distinctive group in both countries. Although many indentured Hindustani women in Suriname have been exploited and oppressed, the majority had *agency*. They were not just

¹⁴ On the one hand, there has always been a tiny group of liberal Hindustanis. Their wives and daughters were independent and 'Westernized' – often Christians – and many became part of the emerging middle class. On the other hand, there was always a small group of 'independent' women who were could not become *izzatdar* or did not feel obliged to follow the prevailing cultural norms. For example, women working as street vendors, fisherwomen or hawkers. Because some Hindustani families specialized in this niche, they were not part of the *izzatdar* revival.

survivors, but also self-assured and very assertive and not behaving like victims of the indentured system. Despite the oppression, in due time accommodation took place. Many indentured Hindustani women could compare their lives in Suriname with their dismal experiences in India. They survived the plantation life in the sparsely populated Dutch colony but with abundant fertile land. They capitalized on the opportunities offered by the Dutch Colonial government. In fact, many despised Hindustani women from India gained respect in Suriname through their hard work and perseverance and prospered in due time. The high population growth among the Hindustanis compared to the Indians in British Caribbean colonies and economic progress in Suriname proves that the majority of the Indentured Hindustani women and their daughters were resilient survivors. Their (work) ethos, strong ethnic identity and cultural heritage and the opportunities in Suriname resulted in due time in a relatively successful story. At the end of the indentured period, India became a distant land, but the cultural heritage remained the basis for a vibrant Hindustani culture. Hindustani women were in the vanguard in retaining the Hindustani culture. The revival of *izzat* was related to the homogenization and building of a Hindustani community and regaining respect for Hindustani women in Suriname

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PART 2

PERSPECTIVES FROM THE 'HOME' COUNTRY ON INDENTURED MIGRATION

CHAPTER 4

Indentured Women and Hindi Print-Public Sphere in Early Twentieth Century India

Charu Gupta

Saving 'Injured' and 'Wronged' Bodies: Indentured Women and Hindi Writings

From nineteenth century a new feature of colonial political economy was the import of Indian indentured labourers to plantations of Fiji, West Indies, Trinidad, Natal and Mauritius (Kelly 1991, 1, Lal 2001), an overwhelming majority of whom were drawn from UP and Bihar (UPSA 1873, 1914). Gender compositions of immigrant labour were skewed. Far more men than women migrated (Grierson 1883, NAI 1883). Nevertheless, between 28 and 40 per cent of migrants were women (Royal Commission on Labour, 141), of them 70 per cent single (Jain & Reddock 1998, Kale 1998, 141, Shepherd 1998). Most were women banished to the margins of society-prostitutes, widows and Dalits.

From the early twentieth century, indenture came to be overwhelmingly represented as a national calamity by middle class intelligentsia and nationalists. Condemnation of indenture by Gokhale, Andrews, Gandhi and Malaviya has been extensively covered (Gokhale 1920, 509-42, Kale 1998, 167-71, Kumar 2011, 66-101, UPSA 1914). The figure of the indentured woman gave the campaign an ethical edge, whereby stereotypes of morality, sexuality, national honour, sisterhood and exploitation could be promulgated in print and press (Leader 1923, UPSA 1914, 1923,

NAI 1922). The moving letter of Kunti, a Chamar woman from Gorakhpur, who had migrated to Fiji, gave the Hindi press its first crucial claim to the righteousness of its campaign, where she alleged an attempted rape on her by a white overseer in 1913 (Kelly 1991, 45-65, Lal 1985, Prasad 2004, 48-9, Sanadhya 1915, 21-2). The letter sparked fierce reactions against outrages on the 'indentured daughters of India'. It was soon followed by Totaram Sanadhya's (1876-1948) Hindi book *Fiji Dwip Mein Mere Ikkis Varsh* in November 1914 (Sanadhya 1915), which went into third edition by 1916 and was also translated into Gujarati, Bengali, Marathi, and Urdu, with poignant passages on the sexual abuse of women. This became a key text in the nationalist discourse on the abolition of indenture. Hindi translations of Andrews' works soon appeared, and these had an even wider circulation and impact (Andrews 1918, 1-35).

Stri Darpan, the leading Hindi women's periodical of the time (Nijhawan 2012, 36-48), brought out four issues around indentured women between 1917 and 1920 (Andrews 1917, Editorial 1917, Editorial 1920, Nehru Nandrani 1917, Nehru, R. 1917a, 1917b, Nehru Uma 1917). The celebrated 'national poet' (*rashtrakavi*) Maithili Saran Gupt composed his poem 'Fiji', with a critical focus on women (Gupt 2008). Premchand, the most prominent Hindi writer, wrote a story on the subject called 'Shudraa' (Premchand 1984). Banarsidas Chaturvedi, a leading Hindi journalist deeply concerned with the cause, was invited as guest editor of the most prestigious journal *Chand* to take out a voluminous collection of more than 300 pages on the subject in January 1926. The issue had five long poems and four articles exclusively on indentured women.

Certain features stand out in these extensive writings in Hindi on the indentured woman. There was, of course, deep pity for the 'helpless', 'broken' woman, perpetually a victim, in all these contributions. Selectively drawing from anti-slavery literature, the sentimental poem became particularly important as a form and device, its melodramatic pathos provoking tears. Maithili Saran Gupt mourned poetically:

Behold the suffering woman in the distant fields,
The helpless damsel fallen into the clutches of the wicked.

*Dekho, dur khet mein hai veh kaun dukhini nari,
Padi papiyon ke pale hai veh abla bechari* (Gupt 2008, 94-5)

It was not enough, however, to speak on behalf of the indentured woman. She had to represent herself, in her own voice, even if filtered through and mediated by men. Many men wrote poems in the form of 'testimonies' by women grieving over their pitiable condition. With liberal use of the personal pronoun (*main*: I), these were written as accounts in the first person. Though ostensibly meant to describe the first-hand experiences of indentured women, they were intended more to titillate than inform. One, called 'Pravasini Baala' (The Overseas Damsel), cried:

I, the overseas damsel, sit
Distressed, lamenting, crying out for pity,
Enduring unbearable hardships.

*Baithi main pravasini baala!
Karun vilaap 'kalap' karti hoon,
Sehti kasht kasaala!!* ('Nirmal' 1926)

Another poem, aptly titled 'Pravasini Bharatvasini' (Overseas Indian Woman), mourned thus:

Our heart breaks, our heads hurt, and we feel ashamed of speaking!
But, oh Men of India, to whom else do we dare open our soul? . . .
Oh! What I have gone through, hear with a strong heart . . .
A dire battle was fought for the welfare of mother Sita,
and the fruit of Mahabharat was the price to pay for one Draupadi's
honour. . .
In the pure blood of the Aryans, is there no fire left today,
For the brother stands and watches his sisters being shamed.

*Chaati phadti, sir dukhta hai, kehne mein aati hai laaj!
Kintu kahan man ki hum kisse, he Bharat ke purush samaj? . . .
Ha! kya-kya maine bhoga hai, suno, karo pathar chaati . . .
Mata sita ka hit kitna, racha gaya bhaari sangram,
Ek draupdi ki lajja ka, samar Mahabharat tha daam . . .*

*Aryon ke pavitra shonit mein, nahin ushnta hai kya aaj,
Bhai khada dekh sakta hai, jaati jo behnon ki laaj!* (Srivastava 1926)]

The poem evoked multiple metaphors and images. The indentured overseas woman was represented as a citizen of the Indian nation and yet outside it, completely disempowered as a result of her indentured status, and crying out for help from the men of her country. Her narrative was constantly interspersed with horror stories. Using the idiom of dharm, images of Sita and Draupadi were deployed to highlight the epic battles fought in their name, which were contrasted with the utter neglect of indentured women by the nation and its men. The application of tropes like the kidnapping of Sita and the ‘disrobing’ of Draupadi allowed for multiple readings and could be metaphorically analogous with the condition of the indentured woman. An allegory of the brother-sister relationship was employed to make the plea stronger, mocking the brother’s masculinity, for he stood mute witness to his ‘sister’s’ rape.

Using similar idioms, another poem expressed its derision thus:

Dear God, you lengthened the cloth draped over a single Draupadi,
And for a single sati Sita you waged a massive war.
Today lakhs of damsels are in the clutches of these villains—
Where are you today, O Krishna! The one with the naughty flute!!

*Ek draupadi ka prabhu var tha tumne cheer badhaya,
Ek sati sita ke karan tha sangram machaya.
Hai! Aaj lakhon ablaen pari khalon ke pale-
Kahan aaj ho he manmohan! natkhat veena vale!* (‘Visharad’ 1926)

In such poems, these powerless, passive, abused victims without resources were enlisted by nationalist rhetoric to ridicule Indian/Hindu masculinity and issue a clarion call to Indian men, the nation, and the Hindu gods to come to their rescue and protect them. As has been shown in different contexts, the discourse of rescue and reform, while marking indentured women as victims, also contained them within a language of nationalist patriarchies.

In order to lend flesh and blood to the misery of overseas women, some writers gave them faces and names, combining

reality with fiction. Zahur Baksh (1897-1964), the prolific writer for *Chand* and famous for a series of sensational 'first-person confessions' under the heading 'Samaj ke Agni Kund' (Wells of Fire in Society), in which he assumed the voice of the suffering woman, wrote a piece in the January 1926 issue titled 'Main Patit Kaise Hui' (My Degradation) (Baksh 1926). Once again, he described the pain of a woman taken overseas by an *arkati* (recruiting agent). He even gave the name of the ship in which she was taken, and added such statements as 'I had to satisfy the lust of 15-30 men every day.' The supposedly personalized nature of the account heightened the impact of an already melodramatic narrative.

In several of these narratives, explicit links were made between emigrant women, water, and virtue. Beginning with Kunti, her account emphasized how, with much difficulty, she managed to free herself from the overseer and, to protect her chastity dived into a river, at which point a boy on a boat close by rescued her (Kelly 1991, 46, Lal 1985, 55). In the emotional songs inspired by Kunti, the power of flowing water was perpetually present and audible:

When evil forces resolved to shake the religion of the pure women,
Kunti jumped into the seamless water.

Satyon ka dharm digane ko jab, anyayon ne kamar kasi;
Jal agam mein Kunti kud pari (Chaturvedi 1985)

Embedding Kunti in his poem, Maithili Saran Gupt repeated this connection:

See who in that distant place, jumped suddenly into the water,
Relieving herself from the evil world, she drowned herself in endless
waves.

Dekho, kaun daurkar sehsa kud pari veh jal mein,
Paap jagat se pind chudakar dubi aap atal mein (Gupt 2008, 94-5)

Choosing as his protagonist a low-caste *kaharin* woman, Gaura, Premchand's story 'Shudraa' told the reader how she was tricked and duped into going overseas, and once more the story ends with her suicide by drowning in a river. From Kunti to Gaura, from

'real' to 'mythical', there appeared a symbiotic relationship between indentured women, water, and virtue. Jumping into or drowning in flowing water was a metaphor for the preservation of the woman's chastity as well as the punishment of the 'unchaste' woman. It was like a 'trial by water' which signified both an escape for 'innocent' victims, as in the case of Kunti, and drowning as 'shame' for their apparent transgression, promiscuity, and sexual impurity. The 'good' victims were assisted and protected by water while the 'bad' women were punished by drowning. Water absorbed them, either to save their virtue or to 'drown' their 'disgraced,' debauched, and tragic bodies.

The sea was also borderless and unidentifiable, and in it, certainties of place, nationality, and identity were dissolved. The turbulence of water, particularly the ordeals at sea, disturbed ideas of borders and national belonging and embodied the cruelties of indenture, loss of humanity, tears, struggle and death. The sea passage equated through mythology with black waters (*kala pani*) figured largely in the arguments of the anti-migration lobby (Lal 2001). Its symbolic association with barriers, transitions, and journeys separated women from their family and drove them away from their land and nation. Water was also fluid and no space was proof against its invasive power. While to the upper castes travelling overseas across the waters was a caste taboo, Dalits and women seemed to have had a much more ambiguous view about crossing the ocean: it was also identified as the passage to opportunity, jobs, emancipation and positive hopes of a better life in an unseen world (Menon 2006, Narayan 2001). Some of them had long-established traditions of migration in search of employment (Kolff 1990). Many folk songs of Dalit emigrants from north India represent their journey by sea as an 'escape' from the oppressions of caste, Brahmanic Hindu religion, economy and nation (Lal 2001, 114-16).

At the same time, the 'injured body' of the indentured woman served as a powerful metaphor for advancing the interests of nationalists, for it allowed a scathing moral attack on colonial 'misrule,' and condemnation of the 'beastly' white-skinned man. 'Pravasini Bharatvaasini' said:

There are innumerable male demons here and whites the destroyers of womanliness.

Nar-pischach hain yahan bahut se, gore hain stritva ghaati (Srivastava 1926)

Maithili Saran Gupt recapitulated this:

Constantly striking as vultures over corpses, overseers
Constantly molest our living frail women.

Geedh mari lothen khate hain overseer nirantar
Haath chalate yahan humari jeeti ablaon par (Gupt 2008, 94-5)

Describing the life of these women as a hell created by the white man, another poem declared:

If you want to see the hell of live misery on the surface of this earth—
If you want to see the justice of these white demonic villains,
Hold your heart witnesses and come to ‘coolie’ lane.
See the misery of these sisters and shed many tears!! . .
What all will these unfortunate powerless women have to go through?
Till when will they have to live in this painful hell?

Bhutil par yadi jivit dukh ka, nark dekhna chahin
gorang pischach, khalon ka nyay dekhna chaho.
Hridya thaam lo zara vachakon, kuli lain mein aao.
Dekh durdasha in behnon ki do-do ashru bahao!! . . .
Durbhagini in ablaon ko, kya-kya sehna hoga?
Dukh purn is nark lok mein, kab tak rehna hoga? (‘Visharad’ 1926)

The ‘injured body’ of the emigrant woman became a rhetorical trope that provided a legitimating structure within which to reinforce protest against the ‘illegitimacy’ of British policies concerning indentured labour.

Stri Darpan, in particular, took up the cause of their overseas ‘sorry’ subaltern sisters, speaking on their behalf and attempting to establish bonds of diasporic sisterhood across region, caste, and class (Nijhawan 2014, 111-33). Women writers in the magazine took upon themselves the mantle of rescuing and saving the suffering emigrant woman. It also enabled the journal to make its voice heard in a wider arena, with a vision not just for women but for the

entire nation. In many ways, it was speaking in harmony with other nationalists of the times and simultaneously representing moral feminists and nationalists. Moreover, it gave the periodical a political orientation. A deputation of prominent Indian women went to meet the viceroy about this issue, including Sarojini Naidu, who was actively associated with this campaign (Bahadur 2013, 159, Gillion 1962, 182, Kelly 1991, 48, *Speeches and Writings of Sarojini Naidu* 1924). An Indian representative summed up the essence of telegrams sent to Lady Chelmsford, wife of the viceroy, 'There was an intensely strong feeling of concern . . . [which included] ladies who lived in purdah [veil], but read the news' (quoted in Tinker 1974, 353). In a sense, the campaign can be regarded as a precursor to the national movement, with women playing a critical role (Nijhawan 2014). It has been remarked that the move to stop the degradation of Indian women on colonial plantations attracted more support among the Indian masses than any other movement in modern Indian history, even more than the movement for independence (Gillion 1962, 182, Lal 1985, 55). These women and men revealed a 'wounded attachment' to the subaltern emigrant woman and saw in a 'damaged other' a justification for their own interventionist impulses (argument influenced by Dozema 2001). Savitri Devi from Badaun said in a meeting of the Prayag Mahila Samiti, 'Our simple women are duped into going to plantation colonies. . . . In these times of crisis should we sit quietly? No, definitely not. We should unite and sympathetically teach our innocent sisters not to enter into the clutches of these evil people' (Nehru 1917, 115-16).

Indentured women's bodies grew central to considerable debate. Reformers and nationalists denigrated the labouring identity of these women by focusing explicitly on their sexual identity. They conflated indenture with prostitution, constantly reiterating the loss of women's honour (*izzat*) in the degradation of *girmit*. Rather than viewing them as exploited workers, they were seen as unwilling objects of exchange between unscrupulous men. Sympathy for indentured women was transformed into a concern over 'moral filth' and forms of cohabitation consequent upon indenture. Issues of *Stri Darpan* repeatedly stressed the highly immoral

lives emigrant women were forced to lead in the colonies and this often took priority over their dismal living conditions. The horror of a multiplicity of sexual partners or husbands was invoked and assumed to be true by all. Maithili Saran Gupt wrote,

Three women behind every ten men, tired and afraid,
See, are walking back as if carved in stone.

*Das narpeeche teen nariyan thaki aur shankit-si,
Dekho, laut rahi hain kaisi pathar mein ankit-si* (Gupt 2008, 94-5).

The poem 'Kuli Line Mein Pravasi Behnen' (Emigrant Sisters in Coolie Lines) repeated the sexualized nature of exploitation, adding to the urgency and drama of the movement against indenture:

Behind every four men, there is one helpless woman-
And honour vanishes to save one's life.

*Chaar mard peeche hoti hai ek abhagini nari-
Apne praan bacha kar mano lajja kahin sidhari* ('Visharad' 1926)

In tandem, *Stri Darpan* stated with disgust that these women were abandoning one man after another, or living simultaneously with many men, forsaking all shame, honour, chastity, and virtue. *Stri Darpan* saw any expression of non-conjugal female sexuality as the highest form of moral degeneration to which indentured women could succumb. Potential women migrants were seen as prostitutes-in-waiting who had to be prevented from travelling at all costs. Endorsing Andrews and emphasizing Hindu shastras and religion, Nandrani Nehru wrote in a critical editorial of the magazine, 'Our shastras do not allow more than one husband, and even widow remarriage is considered bad. How then can we tolerate such laws in which women constantly change husbands or have several? We will not allow any woman worker to be sent to these colonies' (Nehru 1917, 156-9). It was also argued that the emigration of women often covered traffic of an undesirable character. The limited wealth and money that these women acquired were seen as sinful. Nandrani Nehru (1917, 156-9) continued, 'We do not need such money, which is earned after so much of disgrace. . . . They just need such women in colonies who are either

prostitutes or those who can be made into prostitutes. We strongly oppose any more women being sent to these colonies.'

The emphasis on the 'immoral character' of such women gave the campaign a distinctly traditional, patriarchal tone. The alleged immoralities, lewd behaviour, and lack of shame among emigrant women posed a serious threat to the moralities of middle class, upper caste reformers and spread anxiety and panic among them, not least among the women. This also implicitly strengthened an 'us-them' divide. From the late nineteenth century, the social composition of prostitutes had also seen changes, with most such women now coming from the pauperized low castes (Banerjee 1989). The politics of branding immigrant women as prostitutes was intertwined with the alleged promiscuity of low caste women, amplified in indenture. This was compounded by the loss of caste due to practices such as inter-caste sexual alliances and inter-dining, which were perceived as part and parcel of the experience of indenture (Bahadur 2013, 43-6, Sanadhya 1915, 7-8, Sanyasi 1947, 15-16). The subaltern diasporic indentured woman was the 'outsider', a dim-witted woman who was not allowed to, and indeed could not, think or speak for herself; her 'superior sisters' had to speak on her behalf and wean her away from the dangers lurking in unknown lands. The bonds of imagined sisterhood and citizenship, thus forged, were also deeply hierarchical. For immigrant women, such concerns represented a double-edged sword. They were targets of the moralizing impulses of nationalists, whose mission was to cleanse and sanitize the immorality of the colonies; but this could well encompass condemnation of the indentured woman herself, who had the audacity to indulge in such practices, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, since it indicated that she had forfeited all her moral moorings. In principle, however, the fact that there were many more men than women on the plantation may have empowered some women, who may have valued the right to 'change husbands'.

The migrant woman was always conceived of and depicted as duped, deceived, cheated, forced, coerced, abducted or kidnapped (Chand 1932, 72). It has been argued that while the deception argument may have been valid for an initial period, the notion

that indentured migrants remained indefinitely ignorant of their destinations is untenable (Carter 1994). Similarly, while Brij Lal concedes that the recruitment process was sometimes based on fraud, he maintains that the extent of the deception has been exaggerated. He attributes emigration chiefly to the weak economic and social position of certain classes and castes in India, rural poverty and dislocation, especially in times of famine, and explains that a new place outside India offered the possibility of moving out of the caste system (Lal 2001, 229).

Yet numerous writings of the period pointed to the coercive nature of emigration, stressing that women, in particular, were always misinformed and misled by the recruiters, and often held captive against their will. It was repeatedly alleged that emigration agents were abducting women in UP and Bihar. Pilgrimages by women to shrines and temples, fairs, festivals and railway stations were identified as the main sites of such kidnappings (Sanadhya 1915, 50-1, UPSPA 1923). One educated native remarked, 'The system of recruiting females is open to grave objection. Great atrocities are committed under its cover. Frequently the recruiters and their men entice away wives and daughters from poor and even respectable families, never mentioning to them the real object for which they are wanted' (Grierson 1883, 30). Grierson, in his report, also pointed to the prevalence of this view in north India. The Hindi public sphere endorsed these opinions. Premchand's low-caste Gaura was thus tricked into going overseas. A poem said:

Repeatedly stressing our miserable conditions, these scoundrels deceived us.

Cheating us at many levels and then using force, they were able to send us here.

Isi durdasha ko keh-keh kar, ha dushton ne behkaya.

Bahu chal karke, phir bal karke, humko yahan bhej paya (Srivastava 1926)

The emphasis on the coercive aspects of women's migration was in some measure driven by sexually and morally conservative agendas, allied to the demands of the nation. It was meant to restrict and curtail women's migration while increasing moral surveillance over their lives and reiterating their embodiment in

nationalist ideologies. Any recognition of 'voluntariness' on the part of a woman was a threat to the nation's integrity. The resistance to emigration also relied heavily on the alleged cheating of such women and the suffering they endured. Although indentured women often found they had become the victims of forced labour and sexually exploitative conditions, it does not follow that they were recruited only through coercion or that they were all reduced to slavery. The possibility that the migration of women could at times occur voluntarily and with informed consent, to escape caste, class, and patriarchal oppression, or as a way of bettering their situation, was not even perceived. In the process, indentured women were shown as incapable of all independent decision-making and denied the possibility of self-representation.

While stressing patriarchal authority, familial ties, and caste affinities, many Hindi writings evinced a particular horror at single women migrating on their own, unchaperoned by a male. An editorial of *Stri Darpan* argued,

We have to ensure that not even a single woman goes to these colonies on her own. Else she is bound to become corrupt. Men should come back from these colonies on holiday, marry in their own jati, and take their wives with them. Till the protection of married men, women have no future or salvation in these colonies. (Editorial 1920, 175)

Single women came to be perceived as more liable to immoral sexual conduct; they were habitually characterized as sexually deviant. There was also scepticism about the recruitment of single women due to its destabilizing consequences on family life, as control over their labour and sexuality went away from the arena of the household (Sen 2004). 'Free' and detached from parental, spousal, and male authority, single women were demonized, and their emigration made virtually impossible. The prospect of such women working for wages and the reproduction of their own labour, whether as labourers or prostitutes, was alarming, and indeed threatening to notions of order, virtue, and civility among both nationalists and colonialists. This significant restriction of single women's recruitment demonstrates that nationalist and colonial opinion, often quite unintentionally, worked in concert.

However, there are many examples, particularly of Dalit women from the Chamar and Pasi castes, posing as single women, falsifying their residences and names, and coming of their own accord to emigrate. Of all women emigrants to Fiji, for example, 16 per cent belonged to the Chamar caste, a higher proportion than any other caste (Lal 2001, 108). The high registration of women outside their districts proves that many women were quite mobile, contradicting the view that they were tradition/caste-bound and stayed at home; this was particularly true of Dalit women. There were also instances of women eloping with their lovers, running away from their villages, and then meeting recruiters in order to be enlisted and escape the clutches of their families (Grierson 1883, 30). Many women used emigration to run away from violence in marital homes and escape abject poverty. Even while lamenting migration, we hear women's voices, indirectly and unintentionally, in some of the poems composed by nationalists:

We were dying of hunger in India, what is our fault in this.
Leaving that we came here, do not hold this against us.

Bharat mein bhukhi marti theen, ismen hai apna kya dosh.
Chod use jo hum aayi hain, isse kahin na karna rosh! (Srivastava 1926)

I will end this article by quoting from a revealing report of UP, which, while exposing the patriarchal bias of the colonial administration, also confirms that some single women, particularly Dalits, came of their own accord, minus their men, to migrate:

Women came forward in abundance [for emigration]. . . . A person called Bhanjun recruited Musammat Radhia, a Chamarin from Zillah Azimghur, Village Fatehpur. On an enquiry made through the Azimghur police, it appeared that she had falsified her residence. . . . Musammat Bachia, a Chamarin from Ghazipore, village Isripur was refused registration. . . . I tried my best to trace out her home and to ascertain as to whether her husband was alive and willing to let her go and owing to her having given false information I could not trace her husband. . . .

Similarly, Lakhia a Pasin of Ghazipore, village Paharpur was not registered because orders were sent to the police to enquire if the husband of the woman was alive and, if he was alive, to ascertain from him whether he was willing to his wife becoming an emigrant. No reply was received. . . .

Rukia a Chamarin of Ghazipore, village Karampore was refused registration because it was claimed that she had falsified her name (OIOC).

Dominant narratives of both nationalists and colonialists are at odds with such records of subaltern women's experiences, whose needs were rendered invisible by the British and nationalists alike. These women perhaps occupied and negotiated ambiguous spaces represented by home and away, the national and the transnational, the inside and the outside. Emigration and indenture restructured their position dramatically, as well as their relationship to men. In constricting situations, and in a life filled with pressures and miseries, they sometimes left their husbands and family to carve out some little space for themselves. It cannot be denied that those women who managed to migrate did so in a highly gendered atmosphere. They faced sexual and economic exploitation, but with all its problems this might also have been for them an opportunity to better their social and material status.

Conclusion

Discussions by nationalists on the issue of migration, supported by virulent opposition to indentured labour, were rooted in an intensely privileged understanding of the Indian nation. They were also profoundly gendered, as the figure of the woman was called upon to play a particular role in the writings against indenture. She was represented in such a way as to burden her in public discussion with particular features, calculated to produce specific morally loaded meanings in any debate over indenture. She was also required as a symbolic figure in the nationalist armoury against the colonial government. The Hindi print-public sphere, in particular, became a fertile ground for mobilizing gendered concepts of belonging and for inflecting the campaign against indenture with middle-class reformist and nationalist idioms. These reformers, nationalists, and middle class women undertook the task of thinking, speaking, and acting on behalf of the emigrant woman and deciding what was good for her.

While it had its roots in India, the campaign also proved an

enabling discourse for middle-class women, who could represent their afflicted subaltern overseas sisters as in need of their urgent assistance, while failing to argue for any change in their subordinate position. Reforms around indentured women were altruistic acts, and in the discourse of 'rescue' these women could only be marked as 'victims'. The gender of the women campaigners made them – it was believed – feel for supposedly miserable indentured women, but since they were anchored to their superior caste/class position by their impeccable morals, this sympathy was prevented from becoming identification. The result was that their attitude was invariably patronizing or censorious. However, the vast majority of indentured women did not, indeed could not, be integrated into the moral economy of the middle class. In many ways, they remained the 'other,' leaving the safety of their home and nation, its boundary, and its sanctity.

The troubled, victimized, sexually exploited, and vulnerable figure of the emigrant woman became both metaphor and common rhetorical device for the crisis that beset indenture. Narrow and casual connections were drawn between prostitution and indenture. At the same time, regardless of the conditions of labour, distinctions between consensual, exploitative, and forced migration were elided. The condescending upper-caste commentary on migrant women not only denied women any agency but also saw migration purely as exploitation rather than as a possible opportunity, even if deriving from circumstances of oppression and deprivation. Even when the subaltern indentured woman was seen sympathetically, the progressive edge of the anti-indenture movement was considerably blunted by its compassionate conservatism. While exposing the exploitation and inhumanity inherent in the system of indenture, deep-seated anxieties around 'sexual slavery' also arose, since it presented a moral crisis of unprecedented proportions. This led to slippery statistics and hazy definitions which suggested that the dangerous, disruptive sexuality of the indentured woman required scrutiny and control. She was both a citizen of the nation and a hindrance to citizenship because of her 'inappropriate' conduct, an insider and an outsider, a part of 'us'

and the 'other', an innocent victim and a guilty migrant. Stranded between belonging and unbelonging, and inferiorized as both, she was seen as in need of both protection and punishment.

Representations of the indentured woman in the Hindi print world, while differing from colonial perspectives and official documents, often presumed and produced reciprocal gendered limits to migration. There were certain assumptions in the arguments of both nationalists and colonialists, particularly about the migration of single women, which also determined not only the questions that were asked but also the responses to them. This also revealed intersections between different geographical areas, local, and transregional social hierarchies, and the more extensive power structures within which gendered subjects operated. Narratives and experiences of women, however, particularly those that were single and Dalit, made emigration appear more complicated, contradictory, and ambiguous than is commonly seen. These 'unhomely' mobile women did not offer any simple moral tales but demonstrated complex and multidimensional realities: they constantly negotiated regions, nations, and borders, and defied easy either/or alternatives. Occupying a liminal, untidy, 'intimate public' space, their mobility disturbed received ideas of identity and confounded the gendered politics of belonging.

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CHAPTER 5

Wives Across the Seas – 'Left behind' and 'Forgotten'?

Gender and Migration in the Indian Ocean Region

Kalpana Hiralal

Introduction

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the migrations (both indentured and free) of peoples from South Asia to Africa, Canada, Fiji, Mauritius, Caribbean and the Americas led to the establishment of Indian and Chinese diasporic communities abroad. While indentured labourers were contracted specifically to serve capitalist interests, free Indians arrived in search of better livelihoods and economic opportunities. In South Africa, Free Indians who arrived in the late nineteenth century were known as 'passenger' Indians, because they paid their own passage to Natal and were unencumbered by contractual obligations. Late nineteenth century India was plagued by famines, floods, plague outbreaks (cholera and influenza epidemics) and fires which caused widespread poverty and unemployment. These socio-economic conditions hastened male migration to South Africa. They came mainly from the region which is presently known as Gujarat. 'Passenger' Indian migration was primarily male-centred. Both single and married men arrived without their families and engaged in diverse occupations: hawkers, salesmen, managers, shoemakers, tailors, and those with enough capital opened retail and wholesale stores (Bhana & Brain 1990). Early migrants were 'sojourners' who left their wives and children behind.

Patriarchal and gendered nature of the household economy and traditional village economy in nineteenth-century India influenced those who migrated as well as those who remained behind. Men were tasked with being the breadwinners of the family, occupying a superior status whilst women in subservient roles were expected to be obedient and attend to domestic duties. Upon marriage, the young bride moved with her husband's family taking on the responsibility of her new home and his parents. Many young brides had to contend with an absentee groom soon after marriage, as they opted to migrate in search of better livelihoods. Some wives joined their spouses after a few years whilst others waited for years and even decades. Whilst their spouses were away women left behind in the villages were challenged by household duties, problematic in-laws, fractured familial relations and marital infidelity. The wives left behind in India had to endure long separations. Waiting anxiously for the absentee husband to return home became a way of life for most women. Theirs is a story of human tenacity, agency and displacement in the migration process. It is the lives of these women left behind that I explore in this article.

Gendered Migration

Scholarly work on historical migrations has given some attention to the families who were left behind. A significant area of analysis has been the social, economic and cultural consequences of migration. Linda Reeder (2003), in her study on Italian women, highlights how transoceanic migration re-defined and reshaped women's roles as mothers, wives, workers and Italians. She argues that women were 'far from being abandoned', but participated actively in the migration process through decision-making, organizing migrant groups and financing voyages (Reeder 2003, 102). Recent scholarship on the Indian diaspora has challenged scholars to widen their historiographical approach to unearth lesser known experiences of migrants (Hassankhan 2013). For example, Hassankhan (2013), Tiwari (2003), Kumar (2013) and Singh (2017) highlight the significance of poems, songs and folklore in documenting the memory and emotional aspects of migration.

In South African historiography, similar calls to new approaches and perspectives were made by Surendra Bhana. His review of Indian history in Natal alluded to more work to be done on 'popular' history to 'find the voices of the people' by focusing on issues such as 'family life, disputes, leisure time, diet, marriage, divorces, song, music, folk tale . . . areas in which more research can capture the lives of ordinary people' (Bhana 2003). Current histories on gendered migration have centred largely on indentured women in the context of labour, family, reproduction and migration patterns (Beall 1990, Badassy 2005, Govinden 2008, Hiralal 2014).

However, the histories of South Asian immigrants who arrived as 'passenger' Indians or free Indians are yet to be explored from a feminist perspective. Traditional works are ingrained with male perspectives with little exploration of the complexity of gendered relations or the inclusion of women's voices. Given the male centred nature of 'passenger' Indian migration, scholarly works have tended to focus on the migration experiences of male immigrants in South Africa rather than understanding migration in terms of the wider family, community and transnational implications.

However, recently there has been some attempt to address these gender gaps. Dhupelia-Mesthrie (2014) has provided valuable insights through the use of oral histories and immigration records on male-centred migration of 'passenger' Indians, in particular, the experiences of women in Cape Town and those who remained behind in India at the turn of the century. She examines issues of female mobility, adaptation and assimilation. Her study uncovers how male migrants maintained split households and multiple families across the continents, forged inter-racial marriages with local women and deserted and abandoned wives left behind in India. Whilst Dhupelia-Mesthrie's study is significant, its focus is largely on the Cape Province. My own work has sought to provide a more gendered comparative perspective to both Chinese and 'passenger' Indian migration in the Indian Ocean region (Hiralal 2013, 2014, 2018, 2018a). These studies have focused largely on immigration hardships and punctuating the myth of the 'docile' and 'passive' women in the migration process. It, however, to some

extent, stops short of examining migration narratives of women on the other side of the Indian Ocean region (Hiralal 2018).

This article examines the impact of male centred migration to South Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries on the families left behind in India, in particular, their wives. Using a gender lens, I move the migration narratives to the other side of the Indian Ocean region seeking to examine the impact of male centred migration on familial and marital relations. In so doing, it probes notions of the 'left behind' and 'forgotten' women. Clearly, transoceanic migration affected men and women in different ways. For men, it led to transnational fatherhood, split households, remarriage and the creation of new families abroad. For some women, it led to abandonment, desertion, limited mobility and divorce. Others negotiated their 'left behind' status, asserted independence and accepted shifts in gender roles within the household. Hence, women coped differently in terms of being a 'left behind' wife. It is these narratives that are alluring and fascinating because, as this article will reveal, it shifts perceptions of the 'left behind' women from a compliant and pliable woman to one of being rebellious and defiant in the migration process.

One of the challenges of writing the histories of 'passenger' Indian women in South African history is the lack of their voices in archival sources. Indentured immigrants (both men and women) had their histories meticulously recorded given their labouring status. 'Passenger' Indians came on their own accord so detailed records of their arrival and settlement in terms of shipping list, birth and death records and official correspondence are largely absent. This limitation has steered me towards utilizing both traditional and non-traditional sources to construct the main arguments of this article. Traditional sources such as Law reports, newspapers, letters and immigration records, were valuable in providing insights into the social, cultural and economic landscape of India and South Africa in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For example, the immigration records and law reports were valuable in providing demographic data (names, marital status, place of birth, place of origin) on 'passenger' Indian women and tracing migration trajectories between India and South Africa. But I have

also sought to use non-traditional sources such as fictional literary sources extracted from a local newspaper, *Indian Opinion*, which provided ingrained perspectives on the challenges and constraints early male immigrants endured during migration. One of them is a short story titled ‘*Dakshin Afrika Darshan yane Be Mitre-no Samvaad*’ (Introducing South Africa or Dialogue of Two Friends) written anonymously by *Ek Hindi* (An Indian). This story appeared in a local Indian newspaper, *Indian Opinion*, between 29 July and 23 December 1911 and is based on two Gujarati-speaking childhood friends living in Durban, Udayshankar and Manharram. Their conversation centres on immigration challenges and men whose families have been left behind in India (Bhana & Bhoola 2004).

The article is part of a larger project on ‘passenger’ or South Asian women’s experiences in transoceanic migration in the Indian Ocean. I hope to gather more non-traditional sources such as poems, folklore, songs that would add to the richness of gendered experiences. Nevertheless, whilst, there may have been limited archival and non-traditional sources within the South African context, the absence of women’s voices should not be a limitation. There clearly needs to be a deeper probing of sources and sites of information, only then, can we move women’s history from the margins to the centre and change perceptions of women as being passive and docile in the migration process.

Long Separations

Long separations and absences from their villages and towns for months, years sometimes decades, was a characteristic feature of ‘passenger’ male migrants. If a male migrant could afford return travel expenses between India and South Africa, he would see his family every three or five years. He would stay with his family for several months to a year and then return to South Africa. These intermittent visits varied with migrants. For example, Hassan Dawjee, a trader in India left his village, wife and children, in 1877 for Mauritius. He established a business there for three years and in 1880 migrated to Natal, South Africa. On arriving in Natal,

he started a business partnership in Durban and Johannesburg. In 1889 he visited India for the first time since his departure in 1877, 12 years after he had left home! The purpose of the visit was to rekindle family ties and to prepare for his daughter's nuptials. However, tragedy struck, when in May 1889 he died, whilst visiting his family (NLR 1895, 96-7).

M.H. Jamadar, a native of Navsari arrived in Natal in 1895 and established a business at Adams Mission and another near Reunion Sugar Estate. In 1902 he returned to India and married Kulsum Bibi and had a son Ebrahim. Jamadar returned to South Africa thereafter but his wife Kulsum and Ebrahim joined him in August 1913. However, the Immigration Officer did not allow them to enter because Jamadar had also married another woman Rahiman in Natal in 1910. Kulsum and her son were forced to return to India. However, after Rahiman's death in 1938 Jamadar successfully applied for the re-entry of Kulsum Bibi which was granted in 1949. Thus, Kulsum was forced to live without her husband in India for 36 years before she was granted permission to join him! Barely three years after her arrival Jamadar died at the age of 97 in 1952 (MSCE, 1198/1952). Kulsum Bibi's example highlights the impact of male centred migration on women's sexuality, marital relations and companionship. In 1913 when she was refused entry to South Africa, she was a young woman of 36 years. When she joined her husband Jamadar in 1949, she was 70 and he was 94 years' old. Whilst in India, Kulsum did not request for a divorce or remarry but continued to live as the first wife of Jamadar.

Zuleika Mayet, in her book *A Treasure Trove of Memories: A Reflection on the Experiences of the Peoples of Potchefstroom* (1996) aptly captures the impact of these long separations on women:

Like so many in the villages, they had to be content with husbands commuting from South Africa every other year. They were left behind to take care of the family estates; to look after the aged ones who were reluctant to leave the security of home and environment and to see to the education of the young ones since the facilities in South Africa were rather limited. The entire lives of these women were centred on the comings and goings of their husbands and sons (Mayet 1996).

The 'comings and goings of their husbands' were to have a profound effect on the relationship with the migrants' immediate and extended family and the household structure. It fractured and dislocated familial bonds in the context of the father, son, daughter, wife and husband. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century India, traditional Indian society was governed by strong family ties. The family consisted not necessarily of the nuclear family but also the larger community. Auspicious cultural and religious festivals, birthdays and marriages were celebrated as a family and community function. However, migration created split families, households and at times weakened familial bonds. An extract from the fictional short story 'Dakshin Afrika Darshan yane Be Mitre-no Samvaad', between Udayshankar and his friend Manharram, clearly reveals changing family dynamics. Manharram, who just returned from India brought village tidings. He highlights how Udayshankar's absence impacts on his wife left behind in India,

Leelavati-bhabi (wife) is yearning to see you. The most important message is that I am to prevail upon you to return to India. It is already six years, and *lobh* (greed) is still keeping you here. Our scriptures say that one should not cross the ocean. However, time and circumstances necessitated this crossing. Still, one should not be separated from his wife for more than three years. Surely you know that. (Bhana & Bhoola 2004, 13)

On Udayshankar's father:

Your father, Pranshanker-*kaka*, is very anxious to meet you. He is old and frail and constantly calls out for you. . . . According to our religion, we should visit with our family regularly. Moreover, the time for the wedding of your only beloved daughter, Prabhavati, is coming closer. Your presence at that time will be necessary. You lost your mother while putting off returning – not today but tomorrow. May her *atma* rest in peace. (Bhana & Bhoola 2004, 13)

The above quote highlights two important consequences of male migration. First, the weakening of familial bonds and transnational family conflicts. The absence of Udayshankar at his mother's funeral and his impending daughter's marriage were important events that concerned his father gravely. Parents yearned for their

absent sons to write regularly, visit more and send remittances. These factors linked the migrant to the family he left behind. It also highlights the strong links migrants had with India.

Second, it also created transnational fatherhood which was to have serious repercussions. Long absences of migrants led to some fathers barely recognizing their children. For example, Ahmed Moosa Ebrahim of Kantharia, from the district of Broach, left India 1904 for South Africa. He managed a store in Donnybrook in Natal and visited India only in 1911, during which time he married and later returned to South Africa on 8 July 1912. His wife gave birth to a son during his absence on 2 December 1912. His next trip to India was in 1919 when he saw his son for the first time at the age of 7! (Fakir 1983; *The Leader* 15 August 1952). In other instances, the narratives are more tragic. Cassim Agjee migrated to Natal in 1889, from Tadkeshvar, from the district of Surat in Bombay. At the time of his departure, he was married to Mariam with whom he had two minor children. In 1894 Cassim keen on seeing his family returned to India only to discover that his two children had passed on (Bhana 1983, Khan 1983).

Marital Relations

As alluded to earlier, one of the challenges of writing gendered narratives in the Indian Ocean is the absence of women's voices in the archives. However, an examination of family migration records reveals that some women did write letters to their spouses in Africa. These letters, which are rare, provide valuable insights to women's emotional state, how they felt and reacted to long-term separations of their spouses. The narratives below are very telling, highlighting how some women navigated and negotiated their 'left behind' or 'forgotten' status.

Long absences of husbands caused marital conflicts, tensions and discord. Wives were not keen on their spouses leaving for Africa or being away for long periods of time. Natha Ooka migrated to Natal and after having accumulated sufficient capital returned to India and later married. However, his new bride was not keen on him departing to Africa, 'When I got married my wife

would not let me come back to South Africa' (IRD, KCM, 99/53/4). Ooka, he was caught between his livelihood in Natal and family commitments in India. Despite his wife's protests, he returned to South Africa. Thus, migration increased pressures on new marriages. Hundreds of young brides had to be content with their spouses leaving soon after they were married. It had serious implications for family planning and the fertility patterns of women. In some instances, new brides did not conceive immediately and they were forced to wait for their spouses' return to start a family. This delayed family planning prevented women from bearing children that would bind her to her husband's family. In several instances, women conceived only after the arrival of their spouses. In addition, a new bride also had to adjust to her new marital home. The patrilineal nature of Indian society reared girls to be dutiful daughters-in-law and faithful wives. Upon marriage, a young bride left her natal home and lived with her in-laws. She had to adjust to her new household and forge new kin relationships (mother-in-law, brother-in-law, father-in-law, sister-in-law). Conflicts arising between her and her in-laws would be mediated by her husband or she would seek assistance from her family. Many wives had to resolve conflicts with their in-laws in the absence of their spouses. At other times, men, away from home, sought to mediate conflicts by controlling the behaviour and actions of their wives via letters as the following extract from 'Dakshin Afrika Darshan yane be Mitre-no Samvaad', shows:

Durban 543 Grey Street

Date 8-6-1911

Dearest Kamla Gauri

Place: Rajkot

With your good wishes, I arrived safely at my destination after a long journey. I am well and beg you to look after your health. I am aware that many Hindu women separated from their husbands go on a fast needlessly and weaken their health. So, take extra care of your health since your condition is delicate. Also, do visit your in-laws. Always respect the elders. I realize that you will get angry at me for mentioning this and ask whether you had ever talked back to your elders, but this is just to remind you to guard against such practices. Live in harmony with your

sister-in-law and brother-in-law. In my absence, you might have to bear insults and therefore feel hurt. But when I come back, I will resolve all these issues. Do write news of home. An addressed envelope is enclosed with this letter. . . .

Your Manhar

(Bhana & Bhoola 2004, 33).

The above quote highlights the challenges of a transnational marriage. Some women were subject to hostile in-laws, were insulted and humiliated and forced to mediate their situation alone, at times with great difficulty. Some women became the long-suffering wives, anxiously waiting for their husbands to return. The absentee spouses sought to resolve family conflicts by monitoring and controlling their wives' actions, mobility and whereabouts. Thus, within the transnational space, letters became an important mechanism for many migrants to maintain influence and power as husbands over their wives, given that they were thousands of miles away from home.

The long separation of spouses, family discord, lack of communication and absent remittances led to many wives feeling abandoned, confused and 'helpless'. Some women took the initiative to seek the assistance of kin to ameliorate their situation. For example, Fatimabai Sakur Latib Bagha, Mundiawar, Kut yana wrote to the Governor-General on 22 June 1916 to help her track her husband in South Africa. She asked her maternal uncle Aba Umar Mamad Mundia to 'sign' on her behalf 'as I do not know how to write' (SAB GG902, 15/836). In her letter, she outlined her desperate predicament and how her husband had deserted her. She started off her letter by identifying herself by place of origin and family. She also alluded to the fact that she was a young bride of 'one month' when her husband decided to migrate to South Africa. Her narrative of a young bride is a familiar story of hundreds of women who were in a similar situation:

I am a daughter of a respectable family and belong to the Memon community. About eleven years ago I was married to a Memon, named A.G. Dada (Abdulgani Dada) Abdulgani Dada at the age of eleven or twelve years. A.G. Dada, my husband, is a native of Kut yana, a town of Junagadh

State in India. He stayed after marriage for one month and a half with me and went for earning to Johannesburg situated in Transvaal Colony (which is) governed by your Excellency, with the passport of 'Permit' under the rule of Indian Asiatic Immigration. He is living perhaps in the 17th Street Stand 502 or 23rd Street in Johannesburg. (SAB GG902, 15/836)

Before his departure, Fatimabai's husband made promises of keeping in regular contact with her and of supporting her via remittances:

My husband at the time of departure gave me the promise of returning within two years from the journey and entrusted me with gold and silver ornaments worth ten or eleven pounds (£10 or £11). From Johannesburg, he sent £10 (10 pounds) for living expenses for me and his parents a long long time ago. Since then no news or expense is received from him. (SAB GG902, 15/836)

Fatimabai also discovered that her absentee husband was living with another woman and how as the long-suffering wife she had lost her sexuality and youth. Equally significantly, it also reveals that some male migrants forged marriage alliances without the knowledge or permission of their first wives in India:

Moreover, I am given to understand he has married a Malay woman in your Colony and passes his time with her. Here I live as a chaste woman and a true and faithful wife to my husband. If I am required to prove the truth of it, I will be ready to do so on being informed. But now without him and the expense from him I cannot live. (SAB GG902, 15/836)

But Fatimabai was bold and decisive in her demands. Either her husband had to divorce her with 'living expenses' or seek reconciliation. She wanted to be compensated one way or the other:

Therefore I, a woman, request most humbly your Excellency to be pleased enough to give me proper justice and redress my grievances. Either Your Excellency may be pleased enough to send the divorce certificate signed by my husband, together with the sum of living expenses of so long a time, which I can claim as his wife, or Your Excellency will be pleased enough to send him (if he is not willing to divorce me) directly to me within two or three months from the date of which my application may reach Your Excellency. Your Excellency will be pleased enough to take

care that he comes directly to Kut yana. It may not be so that under the pretence of coming to Kut yana he may run away somewhere else. If he is not willing to defray living expenses and at the same time is not willing to come but wishes to divorce me still, I will not grudge. Anyhow either must be done. Of one thing I must remind your Excellency that the divorce can be given only by the husband and not by the wife, according to our Mahomedan law. Against the will of the husband, the wife cannot be released from the marriage bond. (SAB GG902, 15/836)

In a second letter dated 15 December 1916, Fatimabai made another plea to the Governor-General and urged him to assist. She informed him that her attempts to extract remittances from her in-laws were met with resistance, '£20 and £5 are received by my husband's father on different occasions. On demanding a portion of the money from his father, I received a negative answer' (SAB GG902, 15/836).

Her desperation can be discerned clearly from the tone and phrases in the letter, 'If my husband, therefore, is made to leave that place for Kut yana, it would be an immense obligation to a helpless woman such as I am' (SAB GG902, 15/836). Fatimabai's case was investigated by the Acting Secretary for the Interior H. Venn who informed the Prime Minister on 27 March 1917 that the police informed the 'defaulting husband', Abdulgani Dada about his wife's letter. At the time Dada was living at No. 54 Krause Street, Vrededorp, in Johannesburg. Dada 'intimated that he would see his Solicitor regarding the matter' (SAB GG902, 15/836). The government was contemplating how to assist 'deserted wives' and ultimately decided that '... it might be better to leave the matter alone in the hope that the husband will take action. . .'. (SAB GG902, 15/836).

Whilst Fatimabai boldly confronted and challenged her 'helpless' status, other wives had their families step in to protect their 'honour' and dignity. For example, Dawood Amod sought financial compensation for the sum of £84, to 'defend the honour' of his sister, Rassool Amod, and 'charge his brother-in-law for abandonment'. Suliman Mahomed Vorajee married Rassool in 1872 when she was four years old. When she reached the age of puberty, she cohabited with Vorajee for about a year and four months during the years

1883 and 1884. Suliman then left India and arrived in Natal in 1886, leaving Rassool back in India 'entirely unprovided for'. Rassool was supported and maintained by her brother, Dawood, for the sum of £84 and 'upwards' (NLR, 1893:10 July 1893, 1 September 1893: 238-44). Dawood who arrived in Natal in 1888 confronted Amod who had 'promised from time to time to repay . . . [the] sum of £84'. When Amod failed Dawood sought legal action for financial compensation because 'his sister's honour was violated'. But Amod challenged Dawood's accusation of desertion stating that prior to his departure from India, he made arrangements with his mother in India to look after and 'maintain' Rassool in his absence, Rassool refused to 'take up her residence' with her mother-in-law' or join him in Natal. He even agreed to pay for his wife's passage to Natal, but she 'refused to come'. Vorajee also denied that he requested Dawood to 'pay moneys or incur expense on behalf of Rassool' or that 'he promised to pay any money' to Dawood. He added that according to Muslim law he was 'exempted from any obligation to maintain' Rassool during the 'period of her desertion' (NLR 1893, 10 July 1893, 1 September 1893, 238-44). Vorajee added that he sent money to his mother from Mauritius for Rassool's support. When he met Dawood in Mauritius, he said to him 'I left your sister with your mother . . . don't be afraid, I'll pay expenses of her feed and keep. I promised to send your mother from 150 to 200 rupees per annum' (NLR 1893, 10 July 1893, 1 September 1893, 238-44). Vorajee stated that he did not request Dawood to remit money on his behalf nor would he repay Dawood for this money he sent to his mother. Dawood claimed he sent his mother two amounts, one of £80 and the other £17. During the court proceedings, it was discovered that the £80 sent was 'averred' and there was 'no evidence of its receipt or appropriation'. The receipt of £17 was acknowledged, but none of the funds 'was expended in purchasing food or clothes for Rassool'. Amod submitted a letter dated 14 August 1890, to the Court, written on behalf of his mother, showing Vorajee 'promised to forward arrears to his mother-in-law' for Rassool's maintenance:

Defendant has gone to Natal and has not sent any expenses. When he went away, he said, we should not be afraid of expenses, and that he

would send from about 150 to 200 rupees every year, but he has not sent even a 'pie' in those six years; mention this in presence of two persons that he may be put to shame, and then he may send expenses or money. (NLR 1893, 10 July 1893, 1 September 1893, 238-44)

Justice Turnbull gave judgement in favour of Dawood Amod with costs, but Justice Gallwey stated that since the promise was given to Dawood's mother, she had to institute the claim. Hence Dawood could not sue in his own name. Justice J. Wragg described Vorajee's conduct towards his wife, Rassool as 'very reprehensible' (NLR 1893, 10 July 1893, 1 September 1893: 238-44).

The above cases cited reveals that some women left behind were subject to desertion and abandonment. Their spouses' cohabitation or second marriage with local women threatened their personal and family interests. Some women were cash strapped, emotionally distressed and forced to fend for themselves. It was not unusual for a migrant husband to leave, cease communication and remittances. At other times the absentee husband would make arrangements for his wife to stay with his in-laws. Arrangements were made for her supervision, upkeep via regular remittances. When promises were unfulfilled some women were forced to divorce their spouses. This had serious implications for women because divorced and abandoned women were stigmatized in Indian society and women had very few options of leading a normal life.

Many wives left behind also had to be content with their spouses' infidelity and marrying local women. This was common amongst Italian, Irish, and Chinese male migrants to America in the early nineteenth and twentieth century. It was a mechanism, a means by which single and married men coped with loneliness and living away from their families. Markovits (2000) and Shah (2011) in their study on Indian male migrants to Russia, China, Philippines and Egypt and the American North West have noted how married men forged sexual relationships with local and indigenous women (Markovits 2000, Shah 2011). Harris (1998) in her study on Chinese male immigrants indentured on the Transvaal mines in the early twentieth century shows that there were reports of Chinese labourers visiting brothels and there were a few cases

of sexual relationships with African women, which 'often led to violent friction between the Chinese and African men but did not result in any judicial action (Harris 1998). On the other hand, Chinese migrants who had 'carnal connection' with white women prostitutes, were arrested, prosecuted and sentenced to jail with hard labour' (Harris 1998, 139).

In South African historiography the sexual behavioural patterns or 'the sexual economy' of 'passenger' Indian male migrants is largely an unexplored and undocumented topic (Dhupelia-Mesthrie 2014, 639). Dhupelia-Mesthrie (2014) alludes to some aspects of miscegenation of 'passenger' Indian migrants living in the Cape during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Dhupelia-Mesthrie 2014, 639). During my archival research, I came across several case studies highlighting some interesting aspects of the 'sexual economy' of 'passenger' Indian males and how it affected their wives left behind in India. First, polygamy was practised amongst Hindus and Muslims, but it was especially common amongst Gujarati-speaking Muslim men. There were numerous cases of married Muslim migrants who had wives in India and then took second wives and established a second family in South Africa. For example, Hassim Mahomed married Sukina according to Muslim rites in Surat, India in December 1895. She remained behind in India, whilst her husband returned to Natal in 1897. In 1905 he married another woman in the Transvaal, called Issa, also by Muslim rites (IIAB, KCM 99/53/5). Ebrahim Mahomed Jussat was a registered Transvaal resident since 1902 and had two wives, Rasool in Standerton and Fatima in India, both of whom he married according to Muslim rites (IIAB, KCM 99/53/2).

However, the creation of new families by male migrants was to have a profound impact on the mobility, succession and inheritance rights of the women left behind. When Ebrahim Mahomed Jussat (case cited above) sought permission from the Immigration Officer to bring his wife Fatima from India to South Africa (after Rasool deserted him in 1910), the Barberton Magistrate disallowed Fatima's entry into the Transvaal on the grounds that Rasool had already acquired domicile as Jussat's wife, hence, his first wife could not claim entry (IIAB, KCM 99/53/2). There were hundreds

of similar cases where the rights of the first wife in India were jeopardized by their husbands taking a second wife in South Africa.

Issues of inheritance and succession rights became even more complicated for wives in polygamous marriages across trans-oceanic spaces. Succession claims to inheritance in terms of property, jewellery, money and land were to become contested legal issues between transnational families in India and South Africa. Dawjee Mahomed Seedat was a Muslim trader and married his first wife Assa Bibi in India in 1883 by whom he had four children. He arrived in Natal and in 1904 contracted a second marriage with Rasool Bibi, with whom he had six children. Upon his death, his will stipulated that his property in both Natal and India was to be distributed 'whenever they may consider necessary in their discretion between my said wives and Rasool Bibi and Asa Bibi and my children born of my said wives according to the Mahommedan Laws of [and] Succession'. Seedat's left a will which made it easier for the Courts to distribute his wealth between his two families (IIAB, KCM 99/53/1).

Conclusion

This preliminary study has shown that the phrase 'women left behind', or 'left behind' and 'forgotten', needs to be questioned and explored. Ordinarily, the phrase, conjures various images, myths and stereotypes about this group of women, being long-suffering, abandoned wives who might or might not see her husband again and who had no voice in decision-making in the migration process. The narratives in this study reveal that the 'women left behind' were far from passive and docile. While some aspects of their being the abandoned and suffering wives are true, there is equally sufficient evidence, that these women displayed agency in the migration process. Women were left behind for multiple reasons. Some women made a conscious decision not to migrate to Africa despite given the opportunity to do so. In addition, the economy of the Indian household meant that women had a far more important role to play within the home and hence was one of the key reasons for her being 'left behind'.

Clearly, male-centred migration had serious repercussions for the 'women left behind'. In particular, it had far more impact on a women's domestic life. Separated conjugal life, shifts in gender roles, desertion, abandonment, spousal remarriage, long-distance communication and split households became a way of life for many wives left behind. Women had to accept or negotiate their personal and domestic situation. For some wives, periodic visits by their spouses, regular remittances and letters were important channels of communication that created some form of familial stability within transoceanic spaces. Other women were subject to limited contact and sought the assistance of village networks, kin and government officials to track their errant spouses. Their actions were indicative of their agency and resourcefulness, and the insurmountable barriers they faced in the migration process. This study is largely explorative and adds to the scanty information that exists currently in South African historiography on gendered migrations in the Indian Ocean crossings. We need to know more about the isolated lives of women, the impact of male migration on fertility patterns, how remittances bound male migrants to their families, how women coped with separation, loneliness, adultery, dual marriages and divorce. These aspects are important as they will provide valuable insight as to how male centred migration affected and altered the everyday lives of the 'women left behind'.

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CHAPTER 6

Gender, Labour and Resistance¹

Mapping the Lives of Indentured Women in Natal, South Africa 1860-1914

Kalpana Hiralal

Introduction

Indentured labour, which characterized the capitalist economy in the British Empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, led to the migration and settlement of thousands of Indians to Fiji, Mauritius, the Caribbean and South Africa. Women constituted an essential segment of the labour migration to the British colonies. Traditional analysis of indentured labour migration in the diaspora has been largely male centred seeking to project women as victims in the migration process (Tinker 1974). Gender, as a category of analysis, was mostly absent from historical analysis, thus obliterating women's voices and experiences. Over the past two decades, feminist scholarship has overhauled the traditional narrative on indentured women immigrants and broadened the theoretical frameworks and methodological tools by incorporating gender as a key category of analysis. This has led to several studies examining gender in the context of labour recruitment, the production and reproduction processes of the plantation economy, gender relations and the constructions of masculinity

¹ Aspects of this article were extracted from and discussed in E. Reddy and K. Hiralal, *Pioneers of Satyagraha Indian South Africans Defy Racist Laws 1907-1914* (Navajivan 2017).

and femininity. Collectively, these studies have been successful in shifting women's narratives from the periphery to the centre in historical migrations (Bahadur 2014, Carter 1994, Lal 1985, 55-71, Reddock 1985, 79-87).

In South African historiography, the gendered aspects of indenture have been examined in the context of agency, identity, caste, ethnicity and religion (Badassy 2005, Beall 1990, 146-67, Govinden 2008, Hiralal 2014, 241-69, 2016, 41-52). This article adds to the current historiography by documenting Indian women's resistance and agency in Natal between 1860 and 1914 and, thereby revealing how Indian women immigrants responded to the varying socio-economic and political situations. It highlights how women were far from docile in the context of being labourers and immigrants and that migration, at times, challenged women to adopt new roles in the diaspora. This article adds to the current historical debates on gender, migration and agency in the diaspora from an African perspective.

History of Indian Immigration into South Africa

Indentured Indian labour to South Africa was the result of an organized emigration, mutually agreed between the Government of India and the Government of Natal. In the mid-nineteenth century, there was a demand for labour for the emerging sugar plantations in Natal. Given that Natal was a British colony, efforts were therefore made by the Government of Natal to secure labour from India with the approval of the British government in London. At first, neither parties showed enthusiasm for the scheme. The bills of the Natal Legislative Council regarding the importation of labour were vetoed by the Colonial Office. It was only after many years of agitation by planters in Natal that a law was enacted and sanctioned by the British government. The Natal government also secured the approval of the Indian government after 'some difficulty' ('Memorandum on the Position of Indians in the Union of South Africa submitted to the United Nations', 1946).

The importation of labour was subject to certain terms and conditions: labourers were to serve under a contract of three years,

which was subsequently raised to five years. After the expiry of their five-year contracts, they could work as free labourers. At the end of ten years, they were entitled to claim a return passage to India. Once Indians were free from their indentured contracts, they were entitled to the protection and benefit of the ordinary laws of the colony ('Memorandum on the Position of Indians in the Union of South Africa submitted to the United Nations', 1946).

The first batch of Indian labourers arrived in Natal in 1860. Their arrival was 'hailed in the Colony as guaranteeing its prosperity'. According to the *Natal Mercury*, 'Coolie immigration is the vitalising principle' ('Memorandum on the Position of Indians in the Union of South Africa submitted to the United Nations', 1946).

Indentured Women

Between 1860 and 1911, 152,184 indentured Indian immigrants were shipped to Natal: 62 per cent men, 25 per cent women and 13 per cent children (Beall 1990, 16). The law stipulated a minimum proportion of women, 25 per cent, in every ship and this constituted a significant problem. To secure the quota of women, ships often waited for days at the port before embarkation. Recruiters at times often misled and misguided immigrants under 'false pretenses in despair' or 'scanned the city and picked up whatever they could' (Arkin 1981, 50-1, Indian Immigration Papers (II), Caldwell to Protector, 1/7, 1272/1880; Meer 1980, 4). Women immigrants originated mainly from northern and southern parts of India with the main port of embarkation being Madras and Calcutta. The majority of the immigrants were Hindus, followed by Muslims and Christians. Overall, indentured immigrants composed of 83 per cent Hindus, 12 per cent Muslims, and 5 per cent Christians (Beall 1990, 148).

Labour and Working Conditions

On arrival, women were assigned to various spheres of Natal's economy. Law 14 of 1859 contracted women recruits for five years; they were given half the wage of men (a wage of 5 shillings),

together with food, clothing, accommodation, medical care and medicines (Meer 1980, 4). They were assigned, 'lighter varieties of labour', and worked as field hands on plantations, domestic servants, did surface work on coal mines and railways (KCAL, Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants 1895).

Whilst women were subject to many hardships on the estates, there were variations in terms of the nature and frequency of their work. (i) On some estates, employers insisted that all indentured women work daily and subsequently received the rations to which they were entitled. (ii) On other estates, women were not compelled to work, and employers were not bound to supply ration if they did not work. (iii) Yet on other estates, where indentured women were not compelled to work, they received half of the rations to which they were entitled by contract. (iv) Finally, on some estates, women worked as they pleased at a daily rate of 6 pence.

However, these different systems of work and remuneration often created hostility between employers and indentured women (Meer 1980, 297). On some estates, the employers insisted that women had to work and occasionally 'complaints' were lodged to the Protector by employers. However, the Protector informed employers that women were not bound to work. In one instance, in 1875, upon the representation of the Protector of Immigrants, the Lieutenant-Governor, acting under Law 19 of 1874 cancelled a sentence of a Resident Magistrate whereby he imposed imprisonment on 13 Indian women, who had refused to work. In 1877, the Protector, Capt. Mcleod, in a letter dated 27 April and addressed to the Manager of Clare Estate, stated, 'I beg further to inform you that you are not permitted to make women work against their will.' The Manager, in his reply on 10 May, protested that the women to whom the Protector referred, had, in India, 'signed articles' to work and that 'our' Magistrates had informed them that they must work. These different systems of work is indicative of the colonial authorities' paternalistic view and masculine biases towards women recruits. These attitudes were further entrenched within the labour system. The work done by women was not considered 'so regular or valuable that employers are anxious to insist upon it' (Meer 1980, 297). In the case of married women, it was 'often

absolutely necessary that they should stay at home to attend to their little children and to household duties such as cutting firewood and drawing water. Such married women frequently earn more money than they possibly could in the field by rearing poultry and goats or by growing vegetables' (Meer 1980, 297). Moreover, women were often described as being of a 'lowly class', 'of the usual stamp', infected with 'the usual amount of venereal disease amongst them' (Report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants 1884-9, 1894-5). Beall argues that women were 'grudgingly' imported to Natal, were of 'little use in the sphere of sugar production' and were regarded with 'suspicion and resentment' and treated as chattels' (Beall 1990, 146-7).

Resistance on the Plantations

Women laboured under challenging conditions and resistance was common in the workplace. A careful analysis of the Return of Criminal Cases in the various magisterial districts in Natal between 1888 and 1895, such as Lower Tugela, Upper Tugela, Lions River, Inanda and Umlazi provide interesting insights to the defiance of labour laws by indentured women. Women were convicted of several offences such as absenteeism, being insolent, leaving work without permission, theft, assault, willful disobedience of orders and damages to property. The two most common forms of labour violations were insolence and desertion, which together comprised approximately 70 per cent of the convictions. This behaviour was often punishable by payment of fines or imprisonment. Women on the plantation were often described as a 'source of trouble'. For example, in May 1895, the Protector of Indian Immigrants reported that at Fish Hoek estate, 'The women here continue to be . . . trouble' (Minute Papers [MP] 1/78, 793/95; Hiralal 2014, 247-9).

Domestic servants who constituted an essential segment of the labouring force in Natal were a 'constant source of trouble' for many employers (Badassy 2005, 54-5). Depositions submitted by many employers to the Protector of Indian Immigrants often complained that their servants were negligent and disobedient, at

times 'useless' and of 'no further use to my wife'. Like many agricultural workers, they often deserted their employers (MP, 1/145, 2154/1906; Hiralal 2014, 247-9). Female domestic servants did not hesitate to challenge their employers by laying claims to their labour rights or rebelling against a system that procured their services under 'false pretences'. For example, a woman named Sonarie on Deepdale Farm in Impendhle, raised 'objections' with regards to her work as a domestic servant. She stated, 'I complain, I was indentured in India to work as a general labour, not as a domestic servant. I have objections to work in my employer's house. He cannot compel me to do domestic work against my will' (MP 1/162, 2154/1908; Hiralal 2014, 247-9). Thus, indentured Indian women were not afraid to violate the labour laws or challenge the system that restricted their mobility. The circumstances in which women found themselves, compelled them to make decisions to protect themselves both as labourers and as women.

Women's Resistance to the £3 Tax

As the number of Indians grew in Natal, they became a settled community in the province. However, they were not welcomed by certain sections of the European population and opposition to their settlement intensified. A commission, established to look into Indian grievances in Natal between 1885 and 1887, reported that 'the majority of white colonists were strongly opposed to the presence of the free Indians as rival and competitor, either in agricultural or commercial pursuit.' Some even demanded that Indian immigration cease altogether ('Memorandum on the Position of Indians in the Union of South Africa submitted to the United Nations', 1946). To satisfy European public opinion, the authorities decided to tax the Indians who remained in the Colony after indenture. Indentured workers were initially offered land and security after the end of their indenture, but only a few received plots of land. The provision of land was abolished in 1891. Ex-indentured workers were, however, able to lease land from Europeans and many became market gardeners. In 1895, Natal sent a delegation to India to propose a levy of £25 on Indians who did not return to

India or re-indenture. The Indian government agreed to a levy of £3 on the understanding that the non-payment of the levy would not be regarded as a criminal offence. The tax, called a licence, was enacted in 1896 but came into operation in 1901² (*Indian Opinion*, 11 November 1911 and 24 September 1913; Joshi 1942, 55-6). The tax was exploitive as the indentured workers earned only six pounds a year, but were required to pay £3, in addition to the £1 poll tax that all males had to pay.

Despite the protests of the Natal Indian Congress (a local political body that challenged discrimination against Indians), the tax was instituted. The tax was extended to wives of the labourers, as well as male children over 16 and female children over 13. Many ex-indentured labourers stayed on in Natal but were not paying the tax as they could not afford it.³ The Natal government was oppressive in the collection of the tax. In 1905 it passed a law prohibiting employers from employing Indians who did not produce the £3 tax receipt. Employers were also required to deduct the tax from the wages and by auctioning the material possessions of the labourers. However, they could not imprison them. The Natal Government soon devised a way around this. The magistrates would order the families to pay the tax, and if they did not pay, they would be charged with contempt of court and sent to prison (Reddy & Hiralal 2017, 49).

The tax weighed heavily on women. It forced some women into prostitution and subjected them to constant harassment by the police. An Indian wrote in September 1908,

² The tax was similar to the poll tax imposed on Africans to force them to work in the white-owned mines or farms, but the amount of tax levied on ex-indentured Indians was far higher. African women in the Cape Province were faced with similar forms of taxation and demanded the reduction of the hut tax (*Indian Opinion*, 3 October 1908).

³ According to the report of the Protector of Indian Immigrants, between October 1901 and the end of 1906, 21,943 men and women completed their first term of indenture and became liable to the tax if they remained in Natal, but 8,131 were unaccounted for. According to report in *Natal Mercury* reproduced in *Indian Opinion*, 16 November 1907. Some of these had probably moved to the Transvaal.

I know of a poor Indian woman, who was employed in Berea as a nurse; and as her earnings did not meet the demands made upon her, she had to give herself to a man. . . . The constables were constantly after her. This poor woman was arrested by the Sydenham Police very often in 1906, sometimes two or three times in a month... she had to go and sleep a night in the cell and return in the morning...' (*Indian Opinion*, 5 September 1908)

The Indian community was vociferous in its condemnation of the £3. Many young men, born in South Africa and known as 'colonial-born Indians', took up the issue. They sent petitions and held meetings denouncing the tax (*Indian Opinion*, 16 November 1907 and 29 August 1908).

Women, too, both indentured, ex-indentured and 'passenger' Indians, protested against the £3 tax. The protests took several forms via meetings, petitions and letters to the local newspapers and most notably the political resistance in the Satyagraha campaign of 1913. Collective organizations by women in the form of associations and clubs became an important vehicle for resistance against this discriminatory legislation. One of the foremost Indian women's organizations to agitate against the £3 tax was the Durban Indian Women's Association (DIWA), founded in 1907. The DIWA was primarily a welfare organization seeking to bring about social change and its work revolved largely around 'moral and intellectual education' (*Indian Opinion*, 6 November 1909). It was not politically inclined but did not hesitate to protest against oppressive measures. The Association was particularly sensitive to the issues of the £3 tax and how it affected ex-indentured women. In 1908, a petition signed by 60 members of the DIWA was sent to the Parliament of Natal in 1908, voicing their condemnation of the £3 tax, stating:

Your Petitioners regard with great shame and sorrow that women who are in default of payment are sentenced to imprisonment, and the very dread of being marched up to the Court and gaol is enough to numb their intellect and cause terror, to escape from which the aforesaid Act fosters in them a temptation to barter their female modesty and virtue. The aforesaid Act has been a source of breaking up many a home, alienating the affection of husband and wife, besides separating child from mother.

There is no precedent in the legislation of any other country under the British flag where women are taxed for the privilege of living with their husbands or under the protection of their natural guardians. (*Indian Opinion* 26 September 1908, 3 October 1908 (Reddy and Hiralal 2017, 143-4))

The Association also sent a petition to the Natal government but received no reply.

Indian Opinion, the local Indian newspaper wrote on 29 August 1908:

To put an annual tax of £3 on a boy of 16 or a girl of 13 is iniquitous, but when we know what the effects of this tax are, we are led to marvel that the Government of this Colony can still call itself Christian. In the existing economic circumstances of the Colony, it is a known fact that the imposition of the tax compels the younger generation of Indian immigrants to live a life of servitude from the very first days of arrival at an age of discretion. . . . In the case of the girls and women, the outlook is horrible, for the temptation to forego their womanhood must necessarily be tremendous. . . . The Protector of Indian Immigrants himself admits the utter impossibility of an indentured Indian being able to save sufficient to enable him to return to India and live there upon the savings of five years of unexpectedly hard toil. In his last Report, he shows how the average savings of the Indian returning time expired man scarcely exceeded £8. . . .

In 1912, the Natal Legislative Assembly considered a Bill to abolish the £3 tax on women.⁴ But instead, the Assembly adopted an amendment to give discretion to magistrates to relieve poor Indian women from the payment of the tax.⁵ Many Europeans in Natal recognized the futility and the injustice of the tax. The colonial newspaper, *Natal Mercury* said in an editorial on 17 November 1911 that the tax 'is a disgrace to any civilised country, and a foul blot on the name of British administration. It is a tax that every right-minded man and woman in South Africa must condemn as immoral and flagrantly unjust' (*Natal Mercury*, 17 November 1911).

⁴ Indian Immigration (Licences) Act Amendment Bill.

⁵ Immigration of Indians had stopped by 1911.

Women and the Satyagraha Campaign in the Transvaal 1907-1911

While women were active on the plantations and in the workplaces, the early nineteenth century provided women with an opportunity to engage in the public sphere. In early twentieth century, Indians in the Transvaal were subject to a series of discriminatory legislations, such as immigration laws which inhibited the free entry of domiciled Indians to the Transvaal. Frustrated by the Transvaal government's attempts to restrict their mobility, the Indian community embarked on the first passive resistance between 1907 and 1911. The struggle was confined primarily to the Transvaal, and the resisters came mainly from the trading class. This was also a male-dominated struggle, as patriarchal attitudes forbade women from participating actively. Traditional attitudes restricted women to the home as politics was the domain of men and not women.

The masculine nature of the struggle can be further discerned in the way Gandhi and the Indian community perceived the role of men and women in the struggle. Women's exclusion from the struggle was justified on notions of Indian masculinity and the fact that the immigration laws did not apply to women. In *Satyagraha in South Africa*, Gandhi not only acknowledged the women's willingness to participate in the Satyagraha campaign in the Transvaal but also how Indian male attitudes defined and shaped women's political activism:

Some brave women had already offered to participate, and when Satyagrahis went to jail for hawking without a licence, their wives had expressed a desire to follow suit. But we did not think it proper to send women to jail in a foreign land. There seemed to be no adequate reason for sending them into the firing line, and I for my part could not summon courage enough to take them to the front. Another argument was, that it would be derogatory to our manhood if we sacrificed our women in resisting a law, which was directed only against men. (Gandhi 1961, 275)

Indian women, however, were not deterred by these chauvinistic attitudes regarding their political or social activism. On the contrary, they became very involved in the struggle in various

ways. Their husbands, sons and brothers were all imprisoned and they had to find ways to negotiate and re-negotiate their lives as wives, mothers and sisters. The local community newspaper, *Indian Opinion*, primarily a mouthpiece of the Indian community in South Africa stated:

The imprisonment of a large proportion of the Tamil community had imposed great hardships on many families. In some cases, the sufferings outside the prison gates have equalled the sufferings within.... They have seen their husbands and sons imprisoned, they have taken up the duties of life which do not usually fall to a women's lot and have borne the heaviest burdens to make it possible for those they love to be true to conscience. They have felt the grip of hunger, and yet through all they have never wavered. All honour to them! They are worthy helpmeets of a band of stalwarts! Just now some twenty-three families are destitute. Their bread winners are among the hundred odd Tamils now in prison, and the stress of endurance falls with peculiar weight on these women and children. (*Indian Opinion*, 28 September 1909)

One of the ways in which women assisted the struggle was through collective organizations. Thus, the Satyagraha campaign in the Transvaal led to the formation of the Transvaal Indian Women's Association (TIWA) in 1909. The TIWA consisted primarily of wives and mothers of passive resisters. Frustrated by the constant arrests and imprisonment of their husbands and sons, they decided to mobilize both as a support and protest group. This organization became an important platform for denouncing the government's racial policies and for mobilizing support amongst women for the struggle. Sympathetic European women such as Mrs Vogl, Mrs Polak and Miss Schlesin aided the organizations by fund raising, hosting regular meetings and drafting petitions. Funds were collected by door to door canvassing, knitting, selling garments and holding cake sales. Funds were used to not only sustain the organization but also assist imprisoned families in need. Members of the Association also visited satyagrahis in prison (*Indian Opinion*, 12 March 1910).

The TIWA also engaged in social welfare programmes such as holding classes for girls in reading, writing and needlework and

first aid education. For example, Mrs Vogl gave a first aid demonstration in bandaging to the members (*Indian Opinion*, 5 March 1910).

At its inaugural meeting in 1909, the impact of the struggle on the women and their families can be discerned clearly from a letter written and later published in a local Transvaal paper. The tone and nature of the letter are indicative of how women were responding as wives, mothers and sisters and whilst they were not directly affected by the measure, they were indirectly affected by the consequences of Satyagraha resistance. The letter read as follows:

Sir, A meeting of Indian women recently held in Johannesburg has desired us, on their behalf, as well as on our own, to write to the Transvaal papers. This meeting consisted of women of all ages, classes and religions, many of whom are now without their husbands and sons, who are serving terms of imprisonment for the right to live and be free. Women everywhere and always have had to suffer in this way, that their children may live upright, honest and free lives; and we will suffer and endure for our children in like manner. There cannot be any possibility of happiness or comfort or security for us, unless this cause wins, and so we must help to fight in the only way we can, by uncomplainingly enduring and encouraging our sons and husbands to continue till the end. Nearly all of us wish most devoutly that we could be with our husbands in gaol – we have no joy outside. And for those of us who have not enough to eat for ourselves and children, can we not look to British women for a little sympathy? Women in England are suffering imprisonment for the right to vote; we are enduring much greater sorrow for the simplest of all rights, the right to live as we believe our religion teaches us to do.

We are, etc. (Sd.) Mrs. Imam, A.K. Bawazeer, Mrs. M.K. Gandhi, Mrs. D.N. Cama, Mrs. D. Ernest Johannesburg, Mrs T. Naidoo. (*Indian Opinion* on 20 March 1909)

The TIWA became a significant body in keeping the spirit of defiance and resistance alive in the satyagrahis. *Indian Opinion*, in an article on 8 February 1908, cited two cases of women pressing their recalcitrant husbands to fulfil the pledge taken on 11 September 1906:

One of the men arrested at Pietersburg was in Pretoria when the Pretoria

men were sentenced so barbarously. Terrified at the thought of heavy penalties, including hard labour, he hastily proceeded to Natal where his wife lay upon a bed of sickness whence she might never again arise. Upon his arrival in Durban, however, she demanded of him the cause of his departure from the Transvaal, and when she heard the cause peremptorily ordered him to return by the next train and submit to his punishment. He returned, surrendered to the police in Pietersburg, and was sentenced to three months' imprisonment with hard labour. Another man, in Pretoria, who had disobeyed the magisterial order to leave the Colony, was to appear before the Court to receive sentence. His courage began to leave him, but his wife informed him that if he were a coward, she would don his clothes and herself receive punishment on his behalf. He went to gaol. The Madrasi women of Pretoria informed their husbands, sons and brothers, who had undertaken picket duty, that they need not be alarmed for them. If the men were arrested and sent to gaol, they themselves would at once take their places in the pickets' ranks and warn the people of the perils awaiting them.... In the light, then, of these incidents, who shall say that the Transvaal Indian community was without its heroines? (*Indian Opinion*, 8 February 1908)

Letters, whether as protests or petitions, were not confined only to South Africa. On the contrary, petitions were also sent to the Head of State in the British Empire. In July 1909, the women signed a petition to the Queen which read:

That your Petitioners are the wives, mothers or daughters of British Indians' who have suffered or still are suffering imprisonment in the Transvaal in connection with the Asiatic struggle that has been unfortunately going on in the Transvaal. Your Petitioners believe the struggle on the part of the British Indians' to be righteous and for the honour of their race. Your Petitioners are further aware that those Indians' who have been continually courting imprisonment are bound by a solemn oath not to submit to the Asiatic Act of the Transvaal Parliament until the grievances which have dictated the oath are redressed. Your Petitioners have felt bound to encourage their sons, husbands or fathers, as the case may be, in observing their obligation. Owing to the above, your Petitioners have in many cases been obliged to suffer not only the pangs of separation but privation. Many Indian families have been reduced to poverty during the struggle. Your petitioners are aware that under the British Constitution Your Majesty cannot directly intervene on behalf of the sufferers. But your Petitioners respectfully lay their case before Your Gracious Majesty

in the hope that it may be possible for Your Majesty to use your influence unofficially as mother or wife feeling for mothers or wives and help to end a situation that has become most acute. The points required by the sufferers are the repeal of a law which is no longer required by the Government and the removal of a racial bar in the immigration law of the Colony, so that it may be possible for the most highly educated Indians' to enter the Colony on the same terms as any other immigrants. Your Petitioners respectfully hope that their humble prayer will be taken into consideration by your Gracious Majesty. And for this act of justice and mercy your petitioners shall for ever pray, etc. (*Indian Opinion*, 3 July 1909).

The support of the Indian women in the Transvaal Satyagraha campaign drew praises from men and women, both locally and internationally. Gandhi described the women as 'passive resisters', for supporting their husbands and sons, that they acted very 'bravely' and their work has attracted the 'motherland' (*Indian Opinion*, 11 December 1909). The 'motherland', India, became one of the staunchest supporters and admirers of the work undertaken by the women in the Transvaal. For example, in December 1909, the Hindu Ladies' Social Club held a meeting in Poona. This Club expressed

... their profound feeling of admiration for the spirit of patriotic co-operation shown by the Indian Ladies in the Transvaal with their husbands and brothers and sons during the glorious period of passive resistance, which has necessitated going to gaol on their part and which has taught them to endure their sufferings bravely and cheerfully. (*Indian Opinion* 11 December 1909).

Families of deportees also praised the efforts of the Indian women in the Transvaal. Kumudini Mitra, daughter of Babu Krishna Kumar Mitra, who was deported and later released, revealed how their 'acts of self-sacrifice and noble patience' of the Transvaal women served as role models to many deportees' families: 'you . . . have strengthened us in our times of trials. By your self sacrifice you have kept up that ancient standard of Indian womanhood which in our times of glory astonished the world . . . the heroic examples of patriotism set forth by the ladies of the

Transvaal and other martyrs comforted us' (*Indian Opinion*, 7 May 1910).

Support, interestingly, also came from Englishwomen in Britain. Letters of admiration and sympathy were sent to the editor of *Indian Opinion*, which were subsequently published, in this local Indian newspaper. In a letter titled *Message to the Wives of Passive Resisters from an Englishwomen*, dated December 1909, Florence Winterbottom, of Strand, London, wrote of her admiration for the Indian women in the Transvaal who

have willingly given up husbands, sons, brothers or other relatives, to suffer in the gaols, whilst they themselves and their helpless little ones are left desolate and un provided . . . my heart has long been torn because of your sufferings. . . . I want you to believe that, although I am an Englishwoman, yet I hate the legislation which has wrought all this trouble upon you, and grieve exceedingly that my countrymen have wandered so far from British traditions of justice . . . allow me to call myself your sister . . . (*Indian Opinion*, 25 December 1909)

A similar letter of support was also sent by Hilda Margaret Howsin, titled 'An Englishwoman's Letter to the Wives of Passive Resisters', Dated 12 November 1909, Howsin admired the Indian women in the Transvaal for their principled stance and reassured them that support was growing from fellow Englishwomen, 'Do not think I am alone, there are many here who feel with me. We feel you are fighting for the honour of your manhood and womanhood, for the honour of your glorious motherland' (*Indian Opinion*, 11 December 1909).

The TIWA also became involved in immigration cases affecting women and children. In 1909 Mrs Rambhabai Sodha, wife of passive resister Ratanshi Mulji sought entry to the Transvaal with her three children. The Immigration Officer refused Mrs. Sodha entry to the Transvaal because her husband was not a registered Indian immigrant and she was subsequently taken to the police station and asked to appear in court. She was released on £10 bail. Mrs Sodha did not seek permanent domicile in the Transvaal, but her stay was temporary (*Indian Opinion*, 12 November 1910). The TIWA condemned the actions of the Immigration Officer and at a meeting passed the following resolution:

This meeting of Transvaal Indian women hereby offers its indignant protest the prosecution of Mrs R.M. Sodha, to whom it tenders its sincere sympathy, and earnestly appeals to the Union Government to withdraw the proceedings instituted against her. The meeting adopted another resolution moved from the Chair: In the event of their appeal to the Union Government being rejected, those present pledge themselves to seek every opportunity of being imprisoned and thus sharing the sufferings of Mrs Sodha. (*Indian Opinion*, 26 November 1910)

These two resolutions were telegraphed to the Prime Minister.⁶ *Indian Opinion* commented:

Nothing less was to be expected of the Transvaal Indian women than that they should follow the example of their brave husbands or other relatives and offer to court imprisonment with their sister, Rambhabai Sodha, should she be, as there is very little doubt she will be, imprisoned owing to the prosecution that is pending against her. It is perhaps as well that, in the semi-religious struggle that is going on in the Transvaal, the women of the community should have the privilege of taking their full and direct share in it. We congratulate Mrs Rama Moodaly and her brave companions on the firm stand they have taken in this matter. (*Indian Opinion*, 26 November 1910)

Mrs Sodha was sentenced to one month in prison.⁷

Women's commitment to the Satyagraha struggle in 1910 can be discerned clearly by their spirited actions. *Indian Opinion* on 12 February 1910 stated:

... in Mr Gandhi's office, Mrs Amacanoo and Mrs Packirsamy removed all the ornaments from their persons and vowed not to wear them again till the fight was over. They took off everything, their ear-rings,

⁶ The meeting also passed a resolution, acknowledging the support given by the women's meeting in Bombay on 26 August 1910. The resolution read as follows: 'This meeting of Transvaal Indian women hereby tenders its warm and grateful thanks to the women of Bombay for their generous support and sisterly sympathy given to the families of the Transvaal Indian passive resisters in their time of trial'. (*Indian Opinion*, 26 November 1910)

⁷ After the provisional agreement of May 1911, she was allowed to stay in the Transvaal.

nose-rings, necklaces, bangles and rings. They took off even their wedding necklaces. This was no ordinary thing to have done. Mrs Packirsamy removed her ornaments, saying that it was impossible for her to wear them when Packirsamy's eldest son was about to go to gaol and Mr Packirsamy himself was likely to be arrested soon.

The TIWA appears to have spurred other women to organize themselves. Similar associations were established in Germiston and Pretoria (*Indian Opinion*, 7 August 1909).

In 1912, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, member of the Indian National Congress visited South Africa at the invitation of Gandhi. During his stay in South Africa, he was an invited guest at the TIWA reception held in his honour in 1912. Gokhale was presented with a casket of teak containing a silver writing set, a tablecloth which had the names of two Indians who died during the satyagraha struggle in the Transvaal and a picture entitled 'Thoughts of Home' by M. Appavu. One of the members of the TIWA, Miss Bhaikum Morgan read the following address at the meeting:

Dear Sir, we, on behalf of the Indian women of the Transvaal, desire to pay our respectful tribute to you. When hours were darkest with us and our homes were desolate, it was a comfort to think that you, so far away, were watching over us, befriending our husbands, sons and brothers, many of whom were strangers in a strange land. We know, too, of your work in connection with the abolition of the indentured labour system with its incidents which so nearly touches the honour of our woman-hood. And we know what you are doing in the cause of woman's education. For all this and many other noble acts too numerous to record we are deeply grateful to you; and we pray Heaven's blessing on your work. In response to their address, Gokhale said he knew what they had to go through during the dark days of the struggle. (*Indian Opinion*, 9 November 1912)

According to *Indian Opinion*:

As he [Gokhale] was speaking he could almost see before his eyes a great meeting that was held in the Town Hall of Bombay, at which their delegate, Mr. Henry Polak, described to the people of India the suffering and disgrace to which they had been reduced in the struggle. At that meeting hardly an eye was dry or a heart untouched by their sacrifice and suffering.... The Indian women of the Transvaal had come forward

courageously to take part in the struggle, to cheer their menfolk and send them forth, and it had been an object lesson to their sisters in India.... He felt in every fibre of his being that a great destiny awaited their land (India); in that destiny, the women of India would play a great part, and the women of the Transvaal had set an example for them. (*Indian Opinion*, 9 November 1912)

The Satyagraha Campaign 1913

In 1913, Indian women mobilized themselves against discriminatory legislation that was an affront to their womanhood. First, in 1913, a judgement of Justice Malcolm Searle of the Cape Supreme Court on 14 March 1913 denied legitimacy to marriages under religions which allowed polygamy – this seriously had an impact on Hindu and Muslim marriages of ‘passenger’⁸ Indian origin. This judgement had broad implications. It degraded the legal status of Indian women within Hindu, Muslim and Parsee marriages by branding the wives as ‘concubines’. Second, it sought to make the children of such marriages illegitimate and deprived the rights of a wife and her children regarding ownership and inheritance on the death of her spouse. Third, it practically prohibited the immigration of Indian wives to South Africa. The judgement was a particular affront to women as it affected women more than men (*Indian Opinion*, 10 May, 1 October and 8 October 1913). The TIWA protested against the judgement boldly. They sent a telegram, on behalf of the Association, to the Minister of Interior, General Smuts, calling for a legislative remedy to restore the situation before the Searle judgement, failing which, they would embark on passive resistance. Both indentured and ex-indentured supported the bold stance by the TIWA.

The marriage issue and the £3 tax were serious grievances affecting former indentured women and passenger Indian women. Hence they could no longer be prevented from participating in the Satyagraha struggle. Women from diverse backgrounds mobilized

⁸ Indians who arrived under normal immigration laws unencumbered by contractual labour.

themselves to show defiance and political solidarity. Women were active in Johannesburg defying municipal laws such as hawking and transgressing provincial immigration laws. For example, in Germiston, a town in the Transvaal, six women joined ten men in trying to court arrest. They first hawked fresh fruit and vegetables on the main street but were not arrested. They proceeded to the platform of the Central Railway Station and began hawking. They were then arrested. A *Transvaal Leader* correspondent described the scene at the railway station at Germiston,

Excitement reigned for a while at Germiston railway station this morning. From 50 to 60 Indians, male and female, took possession of the central section of the spacious new platform. About 20 of them carried hawkers' baskets, containing a few bunches of bananas, a pineapple or two, or a few handfuls of monkey nuts, which they offered for sale to the white people assembled. As hawking on railway premises is prohibited the police intervened. It then transpired that the affair was a passive resistance demonstration. (*Indian Opinion*, 29 October 1912)

The women, were later released (*Indian Opinion*, 25 February 1914). Kasturba Gandhi also joined the struggle and was among the four women in the pioneer party who crossed the border at Volksrust and was arrested. Her defiance encouraged other women to court arrest. Amongst them were Bai Fatima Sheik Mehtab, one of the first Muslim women to become a passive resister at a time when Muslim women practised *purdah*. She left Durban on 8 October for Volksrust, accompanied by her mother, Hanifa Bibi, and her seven-year-old son, as well as Akoon, a servant and family friend. The adults were arrested at Volksrust and sentenced to three months with hard labour (*Indian Opinion*, 26 November 1913). *Indian Opinion* published a letter by Mrs Mehtab to 'Indian Brothers and Sisters' giving three reasons for her going to prison: the marriage issue; the Government's breach of the promise to Gokhale to abolish the £3 tax; and the need for Indians' to defend their institutions. She said that because of the crisis, she was breaking the *purdah*, which she had long observed (*Indian Opinion*, 22 October 1913; Reddy and Hiralal 2017, 151). In the Natal Midlands, women mobilized support on the coal mines. They

addressed political platforms and urged the miners and their families to strike until the government assured them that the tax would be abolished (*Indian Opinion*, 8 October 1913. Thambi Naidoo described the determination of the women:

The poor ladies tried their utmost to get arrested but they could not succeed. They forced their way into the barracks and called upon all women and men to come out, thinking, if they did so, they also would be arrested, and they told the sergeant who came to arrest us that they were also advising these people. But the sergeant took no notice of them.... (Gandhi 1961 [3rd edn.], 288)

At the Ballengeich mines, Indian women jeered and taunted Indian miners to defy incarceration on mine premises. According to Puckrie Pillay, a time keeper at the mine, two Indian women 'started to abuse the men saying they were not men and why did they not march on to Newcastle' (AG 764/1913). According to the medical practitioner, J.A. Nolan of Newcastle, 'one woman was evidently urging the Indians on' (AG 764/1913).

Conclusion

Indentured men and women forged new lives and identities when they travelled on an unknown journey to Natal in 1860. Women, defying traditions of patriarchy and purdah, crossed the *kala pani* to seek new opportunities. Indenture, whilst exploitative in many instances, did, to some extent, reverse gendered notions of power, femininity and womanhood. In unknown terrain, indentured women had to redefine and reshape their roles as wives, mothers and women. The harshness of plantation life forced some women to disobey domineering partners, challenge abusive employers and defy colonial authority. In the process, women became more assertive both within the private and public spheres. This was clearly evident in the Satyagraha campaigns of 1907 and 1913. Women's commitment to struggles against labour exploitation and political oppression can be clearly discerned in the ways in which they chose to resist and take responsibility for their actions. Crossing the *kala pani* transformed indentured women from immigrants to settlers to active agents of change in the diaspora.

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PART 3

GENDER, SEXUALITY AND AGENCY

CHAPTER 7

Unsettling Diasporas – Negotiation of Identities and Subversion of Categories

Asian Women in and Beyond Slavery at Mauritius, the Cape and Sri Lanka

Nira Wickramasinghe and Marina Carter

Introduction

In *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* (Stoler 2002), the general and all too familiar questions of race, colonization and ‘miscegenation’ gave way to new issues concerning domesticity and the government of the intimate in the colonial past of Indonesia. Her focus was on a group she classified as ‘poor whites, subaltern soldiers, minor clerks, mixed-blood children and creole Europeans’ a selection, it may be argued, that tends to homogenize race and class. We would like to suggest that there are other areas of subjugated knowledge in the domain of the colonial intimate that need to be disinterred where power worked in a less binary fashion. These stories are not always of subalterns but maybe stories of survival, property ownership and foundational status. In her path-breaking monograph *Liberating the Family? Gender and British Slave Emancipation in the Rural Western Cape* (1997) Scully looks at the moment women became free and explores the freed women’s experiences and strategies to control their own labour and sexuality. These moments of transition are indeed crucial to understand the linkages between conditions of servility and the struggles that took place over centuries to overcome imposed identities. Van der

Spuy's work on stories of slave women in the Cape has focused mainly on experiences of violence through a reading of criminal records (1996). We need to tease out different stories from the gaps and silences of the narratives to reconstruct a more nuanced account of the genealogies of Asian women in these Indian Ocean locations.

Solitary Stories, Unsettling Tropes

The presence of Asian women slaves is itself an unsettling, often unacknowledged fact of colonialism. The key historical works on slavery at the Cape, Mauritius and other Indian Ocean territories controlled by Europeans in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries report the presence of Indian and Southeast Asian slave minorities whilst acknowledging that the sources for and about this trade are patchy and thin (Shell 2001, Allen 2014). The collective narratives of slaves traded and herded onto ships, the horrors of the Middle Passage, and of punishments on the plantation that have nourished the burgeoning literature of African slavery and spawned countless films, have few counterparts in Asian historiography. Women and children were often shipped and transacted as single units, 'imported one by one' or 'in small groups as part of larger mixed cargoes', their sale, resale and subsequent life stories lost in lonely, forgotten archives (Shell 2001, 76, Allen 2014, 76-7).

The paucity of the archival record has led to an over-reliance on the accounts of contemporaries to flesh out the little known presence of Asian females among the slave populations of Indian Ocean settlements in the Cape, Mauritius and Sri Lanka. These accounts frequently bear witness to an assessment of Asians as a favoured group who tended to be employed in domestic establishments, rather than as field labourers due to their skill-set. Writing about the Cape in the late eighteenth century, O.F. Mentzel asserted that 'Female slaves from Bengal or the Coast of Coromandel, from Surat and Macassar, are in great demand because they have a reputation as skilful needlewomen' [Mentzel 1785-7, vol. 2, 127-8]. In the French Mascarene islands, Asian women slaves were described as 'the most attractive and well-formed as a cleaner, more faithful

and sober. Jacques Milbert, a young French artist who arrived at the Isle of France in 1801, wrote particularly vivid and sensual descriptions of the Indians he saw on the island, including an encounter with a young slave woman sent by her owner and paramour with a drink for him. She breastfed the child she carried with her in front of him while he admired this 'young and beautiful Indian', who, he felt would be a match for the most beautiful women of Europe in attractiveness (Milbert 1812, 170-2).

Despite contemporary accounts of favoured mistresses and skilled, valued domestics, the stories of Asian women slaves, in reality, frequently begin and remain enmeshed in threads of violence and powerlessness. Mirham's plight was not an uncommon one. She reported having been 'stolen from the house of her parents, who reside at Kutfurdah Ameerah Bass by Moondhee Mahjee, afterwards sold to a man by the name of Sampson, residing in Calcutta, who left her in a woman's house at Serampore, and was sold by her to Pétit Jaun (of Chandernagore) who sold her to Monsieur Jourdan.' She was discovered on board a ship which had left Calcutta and was no doubt destined for a life of slavery in the French Mascarene islands (Carter, 2018). Following the stories of individuals, rather than viewing men and women as collective victims of colonial oppression, will nevertheless enable us, as we hope to show in this article, to tease complicated narratives from recalcitrant archives and fashion new understandings of old subjugations.

Individual Transactions; Multiple Destinations

A further complicating factor in unravelling the historical narratives of Asian female slaves is the fact that they tended to inhabit more than one colonial space. Frequently moving between destinations, they slip between archives and defy categorization. Birthplace is obscured, and misidentified; names are ascribed and changeable. Tracing such fractured genealogies is difficult and unprovable. Their geographical movements are an indicator of commodification rather than of social mobility whereas, once embedded in a specific destination they may indeed transcend

hierarchies of colour and servility and blur the lines between settlers/slaves, traders and the traded.

Ten year old China was sold into slavery by her own mother for the sum of 15 silver rupees on 24 January 1768 'by reason of poverty and lack of a means of livelihood' and became the property of Jan Christian Lijst, a trumpeter working for the Dutch East India Company at their settlement of Bimlipatnam, south India. The girl renamed Rosa, was resold in 1774 to another VOC worker, Hendrik Hillman, who sold her on, a few months later, for a small profit, to another colleague. Yet another transaction, for the same girl, but now denominated as Roosa, saw her sold to a Dutch sea captain Cornelis Bosch. A few months later she travelled with him aboard the VOC ship *Bovenkerker Polder* which arrived at the Cape on 24 March 1775. There she was sold again to a Cape pastor, Johannes Petrus Serrurier, remaining in his employ and his home until her death. Her story could only be resurrected because the deeds of transfer were retained in a single archival bundle enabling the child's serial renaming and displacements to be tracked (Shell 2001, 76).

The adult named Roosa must have been well aware of her slave status while serving in the household of Pastor Serrurier, but how the child called China understood and coped with her situation is hard to imagine. The blurring of identities in the stories of many Asian women in servility also serves to underscore the difficulties for historians who seek to reclaim and comprehend their lives. Manomia, for example, lived under a misapprehension of her true situation for many years. As a toddler (between 3 and 6 years of age) she travelled with her parents from Bengal aboard a Dutch ship sailing to the Netherlands, in 1742. Her mother was employed as a 'wet nurse' for the family of the Dutch governor of a trading settlement in Bengal. When the ship stopped en route to the Cape, the young girl was left behind with a family named the Blankenbergs. She was given to understand that her mother would return within two years to collect her, and later received two letters from her mother, which were read to her by Mrs Blankenberg learning from them that her father had died soon after the ship's arrival in the Netherlands and that her mother still intended to send for her.

Later she heard that her mother had also died. Manomia, now using her baptismal name Clasina, seems not to have been made aware that the Dutchman, who had shipped her family, had legally transferred her to Mr Blankenberg, who, in turn, had transferred his ownership of her to another Dutch woman, Johanna Truter (Shell 2001). Manomia was, to all intents and purposes, separated from her family as a child slave in 1742 but had been allowed to misinterpret her true status for years afterwards. The girl, who thought she was only temporarily separated from her parents, and then orphaned, gradually understood as an adult that she was, in fact, a slave; a legal status which condemned her children and grandchildren also to lives of servitude. It was not until many decades later, in fact just before her death, in 1811, that she sought – unsuccessfully – to challenge the legality of her enslavement.

The difficulty for such Asian children, who were effectively orphaned by sale as well as by parental deaths, finding themselves far from home and kin, to understand their predicament or the true nature of their relationships with the ‘masters’ and ‘mistresses’ of the houses in which they were raised, is underscored by the reaction of Marie. Marie was a kitchen slave, originally from Coromandel, south India, when her mistress Catherina Everts van der Zee was struck with an axe by Claas van Mallebar. She ran into the house, screaming ‘Boss, Boss! Mother is dead! Mother is dead!’ (Shell, 218-19). Does this appellation indicate that Marie viewed her owner as akin to a parent? Interpreting the ties that bound children and their owners must be nuanced, in the same way, that comprehending how relationships of mutual respect and affection might emerge from the cohabitation of female slaves with male owners should not obscure the inequalities in power and status.

Social Expectations and Sexual Taboos

In the eighteenth century, French and Dutch settlements at the Cape and Mauritius, and the preponderance of European bachelors led to many relationships between male owners and female slaves. Visitors were scandalized to see that ‘respectable settlers’ both men and women, freely hired out their female slaves to serve

as concubines – thinly disguised as ‘housekeepers’ – to visiting merchants and sailors (Shell 2001, 295). Many instances are on record of such relationships being long-lasting, producing children and leading to the manumission of the slave partner and her offspring. Priests who kept civil status records struggled to maintain both accuracy and discretion, describing the birth of such children without mentioning the name of the father but indicating their mixed-race status with the designation of ‘*mulâtres*’. Thus at Grand Port, the birth of ‘Joseph, mulâtre, natural son of Brigitte, Indian, slave of Bonamour’ was recorded (Carter 1998).

White fathers of slave children looked for ways to protect offspring born into a different and inferior social status, but enfranchisement was costly. When the son of a French surgeon by his Indian slave reached the age of 15, his father, Quintin, planned to manumit him, but not having sufficient means he placed the boy with a military unit under the authority of the local government. After Quintin’s death, however, his slave concubine and their children were put up for public auction along with his other goods (Carter 2018).

Men who flouted social conventions and cohabited with or impregnated female slaves could devise various means of disguising their activities. One method was to marry off the slave to a free, coloured man. Another alternative was to sell or otherwise dispose of the slave. After Jean Servant’s Bengali slave Jeanneton gave birth to his daughter, he persuaded her to embark on a ship bound for India on the pretext that he would follow in a later vessel. He never arrived, but Jeanneton managed to convince the authorities in Pondicherry, south India that she and her child should be considered free persons and returned to the Isle of France (Peerthum 2005).

The very personal nature of such relationships between white male settlers and Asian women slaves could, conversely, mean that when feelings soured, the reaction of the owner/partner might be especially vindictive. We do not know what led to the deportation of Rosa of Bengal from the Cape, but the stipulation of her owner to the ship’s captain who carried her away is telling: ‘she must never be allowed freedom and was no Christian’ (Shell 2001).

Illicit Passions and the Violence of Transgression

The forced cohabitation of Asian slave women with single, white or free coloured men led, in numerous cases, to freedom or marriage; in other instances, women paid with their lives for unknown or unwitting or involuntary transgressions. In 1798, a French sailor named Bocquet slit the throat of Rosalie, a Bengali slave who lived in a hut belonging to a man named Guillaume Massal and then committed suicide by shooting himself through the mouth. The details of this double tragedy are unknown but presumably, testify to an affair involving passion and despair. The feelings of another French sailor, Francois Bauge, who solicited the help of four ship-mates to kidnap a teenage, Bengali slave from the home of her master, are clearer. He testified that after having cohabited with the girl for some time, he had unsuccessfully offered the owner the substantial sum of £2,500 for her which had been refused, explaining 'I was too attached to her to be able to let her go' (Wanquet 2000, 207).

The story of Selestina, in early nineteenth century Sri Lanka, is akin to that of many other enslaved women's experience of violence that happens in the bedroom, the workplace or the field and has been forgotten even by gender historians. Though the colonial archive reports the life of subaltern women only at moments of aberration and Selestina was a failed witness who uttered only a few words, her story betrays a certain familiarity. Excess violence in the small hut where she lived was the normality. The ordinary is a continuous life of pain and humiliation. It is only the death of a child that makes it worthy of being recorded. It is in court cases and reports on court proceedings in such matters that the voices of enslaved women can be heard, albeit faintly. The layered nature of the colonial archive and the possibilities it offers in reading echoes and whispers and silences has been explored in a rich body of work that is an inspiration to force the archive and capture the precarity of Selestina's life (Stoler & Cooper 1997, Stoler 2009).

The gender ratio among the population of enslaved people as it appears from the slave registers of Colombo points to an imbalance between men and women. While there were 348 slave women

to 284 slave men, the distribution of men and women among Colombo inhabitants gave an excess of men. This was a patriarchal society where social and economic powers were concentrated in the hands of the slave owner. Added to this vulnerability, women were also exposed to the pressures of male slaves who came from similarly male-dominated societies. Imposed non-consensual sex was a natural condition in a household composed of masters and enslaved people. Scholars have often linked sexual violence and homosexual activities by slave men in the Cape to the ratio of men to women among enslaved people which was approximately 4 to 1. Feminist historians have disputed these conclusions and asserted that sexual violence is about domination rather than the fulfilment of a libidinal need (Scully 1996).

Selestina of Colombo, the slave of J.L. Cramer, secretary of the Sitting Magistrate in the Colombo district court, was, according to the words of the Sitting Magistrate of Colombo on 21 January 1822, 'charged with having murdered her child'.¹ Selestina was taken into custody. The child had been dropped nine feet into the latrine and fallen on the filth that 'was not very deep as it had been cleared six months before'. There were no marks of violence except a scratch on the nose. The afterbirth was found in the room of Selestina, so it seemed that Selestina had delivered herself. The child, a boy, died on the morning of 20 January, at 4 a.m. The doctor, however, stated that she would have delivered herself 'by forcible means' since the navel string was broken and the child must have died from loss of blood. Cramer expressed surprise at any suggestion that 'his slave girl' had the intention of getting rid of the child. Selestina's testimony, as it was reported, confirmed the narrative of the others, including her description of feeling something like a ball drop and then losing her senses until she went to the room adjoining Cramer's house. The magistrate brought to the notice of the court that Selestina had already had two children. Selestina added that she did not do this 'intentionally'. Selestina was committed for trial before the Supreme Court for having murdered her child.

¹ SLNA, RG 6/494 Sitting Magistrate Colombo, Sitting Magistrate's Office Colombo to Lusignan Esq Deputy Secretary, 21 January 1822.

However, the trial that was to have taken place before Chief Justice Sir Hardinger Giffard did not go ahead as Selestina appeared in a list of prisoners as a female slave, of 22 years, Roman Catholic. Next to her name is scribbled 'discharged without prosecution' dated February 1822.²

Selestina's life hereafter is unknown. Before the tragic events of 1822, her name appears in the slave register for Colombo, which diligent slave owners used to confirm ownership over human beings. In 1818, she was 18 years old, and no children were registered under her name. We do not know what she looked like, or the colour of her eyes. When were the other two children of Selestina born and what happened to them? Who was or were the father of these children? The unsaid is also revealing. At no moment in the proceedings does the magistrate question Selestina as to the identity of the father of the child, which would be a natural concern. Was it to avoid the embarrassment of hearing the name of J.L. Cramer? At no moment was there any sense of surprise or consternation that a 22-year-old slave woman would have already given birth to three children out of wedlock. The relationship between a male slave owner and an enslaved woman working in his home is not alluded to but in 1803, Robert Percival in *The Account of the Island of Ceylon* describes the Dutch women he encountered and their relationship with enslaved women. He touches upon the cruelty displayed by them on occasions and their jealousy vis-à-vis the slave women (Percival 1803, 141). J.L Cramer's name was listed among the Dutch Inhabitants and Burghers of Colombo who were subscribers to the address to the Prince Regent for Emancipating Children born of Slaves after 12 August 1816.³ Had Selestina's

² Lot 81, Supreme Court Sitting Circuit for Colombo, February 1822.

³ According to Regulation 9 of 1818, the Prince Regent accepted the voluntary emancipation of all children born of female slaves on and after 12 August 1816 whose proprietors had signed a declaration. This compromise which entailed freeing the children but releasing them from service only once they reached the age of 14 years was hatched by the Chief Justice, Sir Alexander Johnston who encouraged slave proprietors who had been given the right to sit on juries to display their high moral

child survived he would have been freed from enslavement upon reaching the age of 14 years.

The fact that Selestina already had two children makes it difficult to accept that she did not know she was carrying a child. We do not know if the child was dropped intentionally or not, but other similar slave narratives lead one to speculate that the child might have been the product of rape. Like many violated women, Selestina might have been unwilling to bring a child into a world where he would not be free and would surely suffer bodily harm. The juridical narrative is blank as to her motives but hints towards a strategy of survival. When Selestina claimed that she had lost her senses and made the point clearly that the child was not dropped intentionally into the latrine she was in effect putting forward her defence. For Selestina to kill her own child meant facing the opprobrium of her entourage, and this leads one to imagine she felt a sense of complete desperation and absence of hope in the future to commit such an act where she risked prosecution. Her defiance was not covert, oblique or symbolic as was often the case in more repressive slave societies. Selestina's act must be looked at as part of the ordinary life of an enslaved woman rather than an interruption of it or as an aberration.

In many ways historical fiction such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), or Yvette Christianse's *Unconfessed* (2006), which depicts the story of Sila van den Kaap. She was sentenced to death in April 1823 for killing her nine year old son Baro, fills in where the archive falters, enabling us to imagine the thoughts and feelings of history's silenced, subaltern women. Of course, the judicial archive tends to dwell on cases of high drama where women who disobey are confronted with societal shame. For other equally dramatic stories, where enslaved women cross boundaries and escape their bonds, we need to plunder a very different set of archives, measuring property and status, rather than documenting transgression.

values through a voluntary emancipation of the newly born children of their slaves.

Surmounting Shame, Subverting Subordination

Despite legal impediments to such relationships, marriages between white colonists and their former slaves did take place. In 1771, for example, in Mauritius, a Breton, Pierre Dufour, married his former slave, a 'Bengali negress' named Marie Christine, while at the Cape, historian Robert Shell contends 'early manumitted adult female slaves [1658 to 1713] were concubines [and often wives] of the numerous free bachelors at the Cape' (Carter 1998, 31; Shell 2001, 384-5). It can be argued that in cases where such relationships led to manumission, this can be viewed as a source of social and economic mobility for slave women. However, we do not know how Maria from Bengal felt about being 'sold into freedom to Jan Saharias from Amsterdam on condition that she becomes his legal wife' (Boeseken 1977, 124). In French Mauritius, the relaxing of legal and social taboos against formalizing relationships between white settlers and freed slaves led to a surge in the number of marriages during the revolutionary years (1790-1803). The civil status documents of this period testify to the long duration of many such relations. When Pierre Lamargue of Charente married Françoise, the daughter of Francisque Thiampa an Indian and Thérèse, a Creole, in year 2 of the Revolution, he legitimated their three children born in 1783, 1785 and 1788 respectively.

Slave concubines and faithful domestic servants often had to wait until the death of their owners before they could hope to yield any rewards. The last will and testament of Louis Vigoureux, a French East India Company ship captain, dated 22 December 1745, made reference to the devoted services of his two Chinese female slaves, Pauline and Gratia, and awarded them freedom, money and slaves of their own (Carter 2009, 28). Slaves like Gratia and Pauline, who were given property on their enfranchisement, thus became, in their turn, slave owners. Occasionally, their owners, on freeing them, recognized the economic contribution the women slaves had made. When French carpenter, Jacques Olichon freed his Indian slave Marie, he informed the authorities that her earnings constituted a significant part of his fortune. Whilst there are frequent indications that they made use of their improved

status to free family and friends in bondage, – Eugenie Guillaume freed her 53-year-old Indian mother by payment of 100 dollars.

There are also examples of ex-slaves participating in the perpetuation of slavery. In 1774, for example, Pauline, a freed Indian woman residing at Pamplemousses on the Isle of France, lent £1,000 to a French officer to finance a slaving voyage to Madagascar, ‘with the expectation of a 30 per cent return on her money’ (Allen 2014, 93, Peerthum 2005). Some Asian freed women also became substantial property owners – Marie Rozette, a slave of Indian origin, who was freed around 1770 and given a small plot of land, eventually owned significant savings, landed property and 12 slaves. She built on the capital given to her at manumission by moneylending and land speculation. By the early 1800s, she was one of the wealthiest women on Mauritius (Allen 2011).

Conclusion

Since the pathbreaking work of Jean Taylor (2009, 2nd edn.) that emphasized the role of Asian women in the creation of a Mestizo culture from European and Asian interactions during seventeenth-century Batavia, historians of South Africa, the Mascarenes and South Asia have explored the racial and sexual practices and laws under Dutch, British and French colonialism. Yet the multiple trajectories of enslaved Asian women in colonized territories and their capacity to overcome hardships has often been submerged in quantitative studies of forced migration. The archive is made of other matters, matters of state that involve the men who commit the violence, so the pain and oppression Selestina and others discussed in this article suffered have to be prised out of texts produced by the oppressing powers of state and patriarchy. Women of colour belonged to two marginalized groups. Gender and race concurred to make them invisible. In the colonial archive they appear through the prism of the voice of male slaves or slave owners; in the registers, they appear as names often distorted by the hand of a culturally insensitive colonial scribe, as a gender encompassed in the letter F and as an age. Trespassing the boundaries of the archive makes historians culpable of professional oversight.

For this reason we have few detailed life histories of subaltern women under colonial rule to draw upon, although accounts of the construction of native women's sexuality by colonizers and local elites have been scrutinized. In general, native women were circumscribed by colonizers and local elites in a domestic sphere where their main duties were towards childbearing and looking after the home. This was why infanticide was seen in the society in which they live and labour as the most heinous crime, as the ultimate perversion. Conversely, women who strived to meet the domestic ideal and faithfully offered whatever services were required of them, could reap significant rewards, albeit, in many cases, only after a lifetime of obedience. Gendered patterns of survival mechanisms match the gendered pattern of violence.

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CHAPTER 8

Migrant Women Multiterritoriality Processes in Transnational Marriage Condition

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Introduction

According to Morokvasic (1984), for a long time women in the migration process were stereotypically represented as those who followed men – as ‘passive dependents’ or as those who went on their own way, i.e. as prostitutes. The increase of female participation in this social phenomenon has been termed ‘feminization’ of population displacements. Nowadays this is a feature of the new processes of territorial mobility, connected to ‘new ways of producing’ (BILAC, 1995).

The increase of participation of women in international migration flow is an important feature of the contemporary human displacement. Of course, this raised some important question to migration theories. As a whole, these women are included in such activities like domestic. These jobs they avail themselves on informal social networks from ethnic immigrant enclaves (Morokvasic 1984, Anthias 2000, Forner 2000, Assis 2007). In the meanwhile, Anthias (2000), having in mind migration in the European south-west by the end of twentieth century, highlights focus on the discourse role on the processes, and the gender identity as well, in the migration to and settlement in the destination society.

Regarding the presence of immigrant women in the United States, although women have been the majority in legal flows since

the 1930s (Houston et al. 1984) they were been made *invisible* in migration studies. This situation begun to change only in the 1970s as one can sees in Pessar (1999) and Chant (1992) research studies which also reveal a theoretical turn. This changing of approach meant to bring the gender category at stage. The increase of female participation from 1970s happened in the context of the growing international migrations. Contemporary migrants, different from their predecessors, rely on cheap and efficient systems of communication and transport.

Zlotnik (1998) claims in her research that the number of migrant women increased 63 per cent between 1965 and 1990: from 35 to 57 million. This means an increase of 8 per cent more than male migrants. In the United States, 53.3 per cent of the new immigrants were women in the year of 1998. In the 2000s, some researches carried out by Siqueira (2009), focussing on Brazilians from the Governador Valadares Micro-region migrating to the United States, show a bigger pro-cent of women, i.e. 1.1 per cent more of her sample. Assis (2007, 2011) and Siqueira (2011) studies prove the weight of women in the migratory gender network configurations and negotiations in the set up of a project of emigration and return.

This article researches a specific women group experience that in their emigration trajectory got involved affectively with men of other nationalities. This group inserts itself in a realm of a transnational experience of affections. So, the questions here are: how these women negotiate, reinvent or dribble situations of prejudice and stereotypes towards an idea or label of Brazilian women? Sometimes all these have as underground an exacerbation of a view of sexuality and racial miscegenation interwoven with social class vision and androcentrism. So how did this impact on women as persons in a transnational affective relationship?

We try to answer this question after the discussion of some theoretical tools, having as ground a Flora's account collected in Brazil. Flora was single when she emigrated in 2006. Today 41 years old, she, is living in Brazil and her Swiss partner, going back and forth between Brazil and Switzerland. Flora's history is just one of so many others we found in our research and is a template example (Fig. 8.1).



FIG. 8.1: SYMBOLIC IMAGE SHOWING THE CULTURAL DIFFERENCE AND AN INTERCULTURAL MARRIAGE

This interview shows up narratives with clue elements that help us in a deep analysis of the *dramatic* issues undergrounding her history of transnational marriage under consideration in this article. This account, while retrieving some day-by-day experiences, also discloses the phenomenon of multidimensional nature. So, they require an approach that could deal with this multidimensional aspect. In this sense, Burkean dramatism is a very useful tool in two aspects, at least. Burke's proposal of dramatism considers the construction of meaning of all experience of the human being in his/her speech as a result of an action which articulates motives, thought and language (Burke 1966).

The reports of migrant women remind one the drama of human existence as one permeated by encounters, mismatches, dreams, love, rejection, pains, strong emotions and their psychological consequences. Flora's history is not just a picture, but a dynamic narrative and so should not be understood outside her temporal-spatial realm. This history is a scenario where several scenes unfold as if she were on a stage where actions, relationships, interactions and behaviours intersect. So, in this analysis we were in need of an instrument that would access and reveal the information of each

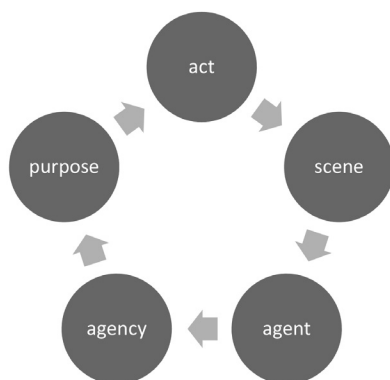
word, so to say, that was delivered to us as part of her life. This is why we choose drama or dramatism as tool.

Dramatism as An Analytical Methodology

Drama is actually a metaphor build up by Kenneth Burke (1966). Having drama as a kind of background, Burke sees human action in a narrative perspective. He selected five concepts that he considers structuring: this is the dramatist pentad.

Methodologically these five words work as keys to unveiling some dimensions of human existence. Put the narrative in a scenario to avoid the linear reading or audience. In a stage we have, in addition to speech, movements, scripts, the character make up and action, displacements and all this in front an audience real or fictive. Moreover, we can say that 'narration is a cultural activity that we learn together with our mother tongue as we grow in our particular life circle and never do it without a hypothetical audience, even if it is simply imaginary' (Kaivola-Bregenhøj 2005, 3).

It is in this context that we welcome this instrument of analysis: act (what happened?) is the element that interacts directly with the context; scene (where did the event take place?) refers to a social, political, history, place or time; agent (who performed the act?); agency (how was it done?) deals with instruments; purpose (why



Schema 1 – Burke's *pentad*

was it done?) have in mind the conscious or unconscious intentions (Burke 1966, 17).

Such a stage relationship builds a context where the individual acts and this action bring up a kind of amalgam that fuses it with symbolic actions. In this way, the *pentad* sees human action having in mind its main outcomes: the social interactions and the psychological behaviours in a dynamic process, just so as in a drama performance on a stage. Burke himself says: 'dramatism centers on observations of this sort: for there to be an act, there must be an agent. Similarly, there must be a scene in which the agent acts. To act in a scene, the agent must employ some means, or agency. And it can be called an act in the full sense of the term only if it involves a purpose' (Burke 1989, 135). As one can see, the *pentad* is constituted of elements in interplay that modify each other, in a kind of generative principle: '[...] any development (in organisms, works of art, stages of history) got by the interplay of various factors that mutually modify one another, and maybe thought of as voices in a dialogue or roles in a play, with each voice or role in its partiality contributing to the development of the whole' (Burke 1966, 403).

The motives are the outcome of the interaction between the conditions of the inner and external world of the individual. The motives or reasons in turn, hold up the acts resizing, therefore, all the other elements related to the motives of the *pentad*. So, the *pentad* is not a methodological tool applicable to a hermetic perspective. Rather, it evokes not only theatrical dynamism or the performance on stage but also considers, in the research, intentions identifying what the scene, agency, agent, and purpose of the act are. The anthropologist Turner also argues: 'These situations – arguments, combats, rites of passage – are inherently dramatic because participants not only do things, they try to show others what they are doing or have done; actions take on a "performed-for-an-audience" aspect' (Turner 1988, 74). All set up has at least: a script of the character; a backstage as source of the elaboration or clothing the character; and an audience to whom this personage will be presented or staged.

The backstage metaphorically is not just a place or a stock for depositing elements of readymade personage composition. There

happens a creation of personages for a (re)presentation. When the actor expresses the speech or movements of his personage we clearly have a new creation, that is, the message the actor wants to say or communicate. Of course, we never could say it all because it's impossible bring the actual life on stage and also sometimes we could hide something having in mind some special interest. This dynamic of script, backstage and audience is virtually universal in human communication.

Another meaningful element is what Burke technically name *dramatis personae*, i.e. the list of the people – or better, personages – that are invited to enter in scene or are excluded. In the same way as the personage or actor builds up an image from the backstage (*simulacrum*) with which he will introduce himself on the stage, he can also – mainly through speech – constitute a list of those who will be present (or will not) on his/her staging.

As act – action or speech with some intention – is developed by an agent and its action happens in a space and in a *stage timing*, another dimension which Burke calls *ratio actionis* takes its place: it's a pro-cent of space and time that each element or personage on stage receives in order to develop his/her script (Burke 1989, 146).

In short, we could say that an actor or agent could give time, space, voice, gesture and meaning to the characters of his/her scenario according to what he/she has in mind to inform or not to inform to the audience. Burke points out that we could have important characters on the stage but they cannot act and talk, so they are mere figuration.

Accordingly, we will be considering, in this exercise of the pentad, the scene that unfolds some aspects of the drama of a marriage. In this scene we assume the condition, the context and the circumstances involved in the act (the marriage). In principle, we will take the broader social, economic, cultural and political conditions of the place where the agent carried out her act. The place where action occurs, the scene, could also be extended to the mental conditions of the agent who performed the act.

We will approach the scene considering its temporal and spatial articulation in its dynamic complex process. This figures, restructures and transfigures territories embedded in a continuum

between the objective and the subjective dimensions of the life (Haesbaert 2004, 2008). In this approach, having in mind the contexts in which the relations between migrant men and women unroll, we seek to understand how gender pervades the trajectories of these migrants and how it is staged in different migratory realms.

Scene: Background of Migrant, His Emotions and Pathologies

Migration as a social phenomenon is a research target of several academic areas. Each one brings its offerings revealing meaningful elements of the migration phenomenon, mainly in international displacement. In this specific issue we are dealing in a scene involving migrants from the anthropological and geographic point of view (i.e. from the humanistic and cultural outlook). Of course, we are aware that in many transnational marriages the labour issue is at stake. In other words, in many accounts marriage happens as function of migration in order to get a better life and job conditions.

The book *Dislocating Labour: Anthropological Reconfigurations* is just an example of a collective published on the issue labour and health (Harvey, Krohn-Hansen 2018). The invited authors presenting their research are unanimous on the assessment that these displacement processes, in the realm of the globalization of the last decades, lead to a reconfiguration process on the way the human being understand and arrange their lives. This happens for several motives, not just due to the fact that people migrate to other nations and culture; even internal migration lead to the same troubles.

Schober (2018, 135-6) argues that very few studies had been conducted on this subject, i.e. affections and migration in the field of social sciences. This psychic dimension in the realm of the displaced working people had big changes in the last half century. One of the first shift we could name is post-Fordism which started right after Second World War and led to the job restructuring. Until that time, a job was a task for all life: stable and full-time. Another important aspect within this social mentality was the

belief that the more the subject did the same thing, the more he would do it better. In this sense, a corollary of Fordism was the creation of a certain sense of security and even predictability of the future. This could be translated into a career-step-by-step with all its stages even doing the same thing throughout his/her life. In the last half-century, this connection between work and life was increasingly put at stake and after many starts drop out the assembly line. This is the case of migration, when people leaving their country search for another place and even kind of activity (Hervey, Krohn-Hansen 2018, 13).

From this angle, Michel Maffesoli's phenomenological sociology sees contemporary man/woman as saturated with wanderings. One could say that there is a 'drive for wandering' as a response to a static world that no longer satisfies. Life's present perspective is detachment, departure, chance and transitory merge, making up the new nomadism; all this reach the status of a kind of an anthropological standard of contemporary society (Maffesoli, 2001).

Adding to this context we find the fact that the process of displacement between nations and even between cultures is sometimes easy. The experience of these displacements can be understood for labour purposes within a continuum from the definitive and the provisional. Juan Luis Linares classified in two points of reference as the grandmother and the adolescent attitudes. Grandma style here would be the one who moves to a new place for a while, to make money, but her head remains in her place of origin. On the other hand, the teenager style gets in, learns the language, the songs, the dances, begins to date and head in this new situation as if it was her new home (Linares 2014, 220).

However, there is no way to disregard, the changes in the features of migratory phenomena in this context of globalization. In other words, in the globalized world we see not only the displacement of people from one place to another. We also testify a shift in the move of capital and investments and this is also a kind of indirect migration, carrying with it various other social and cultural changes (Paumard 2018, 33). In this case, instead of people moving, are the factories, farms, and capital that produce goods and jobs that are moving.

This scenario is present in Brazil, Paraguay and around the world. We get many examples of small towns that start to produce something that has never been imagined in their economic history. What happened? In this case, it was not labour that moved but the companies. This further differentiates investments from those living in a typically rural community, turning a modest and inland locality into foreign land, a world neighbourhood. An issue hangs in the air: did the people of these cities not emigrate without leaving their house?

These, and other issues are questions of human geography, mainly in its cultural approach. Here the challenge in the last decades was to give a new dimension to the territorial concept. An academic movement against the discussion of a disseminate idea of the end of the territories, having in mind the fluid society, now proposes the notion of multi-territoriality. So, as one can see in the anthropological studies previously considered, there is no loss or disappearance of a territory. It's actually a complex process of (re)territorialization that leads to the constitution of multiple territories, making, in the words of Haesbaert (2004, 1), 'de-territorialisation a kind of myth'. So, what Bauman (2001) argues as the new nomadism could correlate to a deep hybridism that does not destroy territories, but ends up making them more complex and dynamic, in Haesbaert's words (2004, 2008). The interconnection between these two dimensions leads up to an entanglement correlating 'mobility and immobility, hybridity and territorial withdrawal, openness/multiplicity and relative closure of territories' (Haesbaert 2008, 414).

Migrants are human beings, that is, people who migrate with their workforce and take with them their emotions, experiences, dreams, pains, body and so on. The migration experience is then a dynamic re-figuration of their living spaces through new territoriality dimensions and accumulations of experience. In the context of globalization, where the phenomenon of migration is inserted nowadays, there is no way in research of leaving out these subjective aspects.

So, the temporality experienced by migrants at the place of origin, remains if it was crystallized and another time rhythm starts

to manage their lives focused now on the new world of work in another country. Another subject is genre issue: what looks like to be a man or a woman in present time? What does this mean in the new places or cultures? What about the new sexual orientations or tendencies, and so on? Migrants find new relationships that frame their social roles: employer/employee, husband/wife, and so on. Therefore, we have alongside with migration of people, migration of sensations, emotions, feelings and affections which received very little research attention until now.

Pains of leaving their own land, kinship, difficulties in adaptation are not always easy to bear. For the migrants, especially when dealing with the new work environment in permanent insecurity, is virtually a hard task (Schober 2018). Some anthropologists – and certainly other scientists studying the human experience – begin to consider this topic more closely. It's quite a surprise that all the literature research on this topic has been done in the last ten years. Emotions – which are different between cultures in terms of their mediators – are more transient and related to everyday experiences. 'Affect, in contrast (to emotions), highlights involuntariness and an anchoring in pre-linguistic, non-conscious, and pre-subjective experiences of the often-collective kind, and significantly impacts in the way we make sense of the world' (Schober 2018, 136).

Moreover, any social or personal project that is not force-imposed must be of affective order to be effective. Schober argues that both emotions and affections do not happen in the air but are embodied. In such a way that happiness brings health and sadness diseases (Schober 2018). All anthropologists should know that affections are ritualized and learned collectively and modern psychology is aware that if they can no longer be collectively ritualized and experienced, they lose their power to organize a meaningful experience of reality and are a source of pathologies. Generally, when experiences lose their meaning and the world does not seem a reasonable organization anymore, the subjects feel that they are adrift, helpless, isolated. This bad emotional state ends up as a feeling of distress, anxiety, and finally deep stress.

The kinds illness, in their great majority, come from stress

and stress has many sources. Franci (2005) argues that stress is not always a pathological issue. However, 'failure to mobilize or demobilize allostatic mechanisms causes disorders that can lead the organism to the pathological condition, as long as it do not establish and maintain homeostasis anymore' (Franci 2005).

Modern neuroendocrinology states that there is an inner relationship between hormones and neurons, that is, between the emotional feelings and human neurophysiology (body). So, it's not difficult deduce that a continuous psychological stress process leads, in many circumstances, to illness. However, thinking in practical terms, as in the case of countless migrants, if future uncertainty, the insecurity of the environment, the weariness of the personal relationships begins to demand a continuous tension (stress), he/she will enter as time goes by into a system of stress and, therefore, of illness (Souza et al. 2015).

All these elements are intertwined in a multi-territoriality process which requires a special effort of localization and spatial and symbolic identification on the part of the subject. The migrant suffers emotionally for a former territory that he is not able to be detached from and stresses himself in a new territory that must emerge as long as his existence is established in the new space.

It is from this complex background that we must consider the displacements: context as a scene where the act unfolds. This scene implies deep transformations experienced by women, for instance, this one interviewed in this research and introduced in this paper.

Agent and Narratives: Act, Backstage and Audience

Flora: A Marriage with so Much Love

SCENE 1

Flora was 23 years old and had the training of technical nursing when she emigrated in 2006. She was single and worked as caregiver (of elderly) in her home city. She wasn't happy with her wage and work conditions. A friend of hers said something about the caregiver job in England and how good the wages were there.

On stage the audience sees the development of the life of young

student, single and unhappy with her professional life as first step. We know almost nothing about her personal history and the lack of significant personal data denounces innumerable porosities in the narrative. This raises the question of Flora's difficulties in her quest for new horizons in her homeland and so her option for an emigration is quite the only way out. We could bring to mind the Maffesoli wandering (2001)?

SCENE 2

Using a friend's Internet network, she contacted Brazilians living in London and emigrated with a student visa, already having a job as caregiver for a disabled child. She worked in house of a Swiss married couple who was living in London for a while. She did not speak English when she emigrated. Then afterwards, she studied English and French and, after two years in London, she was able to move around alone and take her own decisions about her life (in her words).

When the couple went back to Switzerland she went along. There she met her partner who was a friend of her bosses in London, but the crush started when she moved to Switzerland.

Again, we face here what Haesbaert calls new nomadism (2008, 414). One can see this in the indiscriminate mobility. But here we find also an inseparable correlation between immobility and mobility and at same time, an open multiple territory in a context of globalization. This stands in contrast to those territorialities already under the dominium of local groups but are unable to offer new economic and social exits to younger generations. Having this data, we could understand that why at the end of the first scene Flora emigrates with a student visa having a warranted job in her hand.

SCENE 3

In the day-by-day life with her family (boss family, actually), friends and the relationship community of her partner she feels the prejudices more directly. These arise from the fact that she was

a Brazilian woman, labelled by the tripod of prejudice described by Azerêdo (2007). This tripod could be represented as follows: woman (mother, housewife, holy), the man a provider and the whore. In this way, we see how this is a meaningful factor for the relative success or failure of women as such in their conjugal relationships abroad.

What is really Flora's main question or quest? (Find a good job). Her job took her in the warmth realm of a family. Perhaps Flora felt protected by family life where she lived even as outsider. It's possibly she got affectively linked to the child she was hired to look after. In any case, Flora expressed an affective tie that maintained her not only in her work activity, but also with a family or her boss's family.

Soon after moving from London, another affective tie began. She set up this one with a friend of the couple. The fact is that Flora, a woman psychologically away from her people, at least apparently and detached from her place in the first scene, now was able to depart from her homeland, family and friends, and maintains her job ties with a 'strange' family and extended her emotional inner life to a friend of the couple who hired her.

In this personal report of her life process in Switzerland one could see some clues leading to a more deep understanding of her experience. In this new place it seems that she found the home of the bosses as a welcoming territory. There she could exercise her territoriality and constitute an identity as a student and as a professional following a career. Her new identity enabled her to study, to know and to enjoy a wider territory where she learned to move around.

Perhaps all was so new to her there that she had not enough suitable words or narrative style to describe what happened to her in England and after a while in Switzerland. It was an overwhelming process that resized her identity and territory and that would require much time and psychological tools to elaborate.

In this realm, Flora staged to an audience that witnessed the young student, without opportunities in her homeland, to plunge herself towards the unknown in order to work in England and later move again to Switzerland. Undoubtedly, she could get out of

the ordinary life when she saw the rest of her closest community left behind.

Flora set-off against the normal. She showed to everyone that she was able to win professionally. She even established more lasting affective ties through a love relationship that would soon turn into a marriage.

On other hand, to the audience attending her staging in England, Flora could be similar to one of the many students who came to the country to study and take on some provisional jobs. There was no highlighting of her uncomfortable conditions. Our interviewer describes in her narrative that the essential thing of her life was the labour activity. The relationship with the employers, also immigrants, left her in a comfortable position. In her emigration to Switzerland, Flora began to feel uncomfortable in some conditions, especially those experienced with her boyfriend at home, as we'll see later.

Now, the social ways are made by local cultural elements and any movement towards a new configuration of her multi-territoriality was now a hard walk. Daily questions of the new relationship began to bother her. For instance, in her closest relationship with her partner's family, friends and the community, she felt, more directly, the prejudices arising from the fact that she was a Brazilian woman. Anew she felt labelled by the tripod of prejudice against the woman, described by Azerêdo (2007). This day-by-day clash undermined their autonomy.

I had no problems with the language and moving around, but even so I could not decide on many things. [...] you [know] you are in other hands [...]. It's terrible! Here [in Brazil] I decide what I'm going to do! I know where I'm walking and how to do it. There [in Switzerland] I always felt that I was going to do something wrong; I was observed, criticized. This has been stressing to the point I became ill [...].'

Flora in full exercise of mobility felt motionless. She didn't know where she walked and she was not anymore able to take her own decisions. She was insecure about how mastering local social and cultural practices that she didn't know well. What had changed in Flora?

FINAL SCENE

Flora got sick and made up her mind to go back to Brazil. From that time on she spent two months of the year in Switzerland and her partner divided his time of the year between Switzerland and Brazil. In the meanwhile, she took a course in nursing and did not intend to return to and dwell in Switzerland anymore. She maintained a formal coexistence with the partner's family because she saw how important the presence of the paternal family was to her daughter's life.

Now, in this new condition, in Switzerland, her scene-stage had supporting actors in continuous dialogue with her and she needed to exercise her multi-territoriality expressed in a fusion of Brazilian woman, emigrant, hardworking and now, girlfriend.

Let's go back where all this begun. This life mixture contains elements from both her homeland and her recent migratory experience. To the Brazilian audience, Flora could make or take her own decisions; to the Swiss audience, she was worthy of criticism and everything she did, according to her, deserved some kind of adjustment. This was due to her lack of knowledge of the social and cultural codes. Of course, as she stated above, social and cultural tension is felt also physiologically. Flora's body remained continuously aroused, in a high level of stress that leads or could lead to illness.

Prejudice exists everywhere, said Flora, but it is in the closest relationship with and in family of her partner's group and community that she felt cultural, class and gender differences clashing more explicitly.

Here, at home, the constraints got more emphasis differently. She once experienced in social situations when these behaviours were more veiled or with people without close relationship. For instance:

[...] I went to a restaurant with Lenon. It was very chic. So, a waiter was looking at me in a weird way. Then I said: 'Lenon, I think he thinks I'm a call-girl, I want to leave'. Lenon told him that I did not like the way he looked at me. He gave a cynical laugh, apologized and I saw him talking

something with the other waiter and laughing. I was so upset that I started to cry and we left the restaurant without eating.

In Flora's day-to-day stage scenes, we find innumerable supporting actors who demand her not only an appropriate dialogue. With her whole body in a permanent state of arousing, she evaluated every look, every smile. Everything seemed to be a plot against her image as a woman who could make or take her own decisions. For Flora these conditions of stress were unpleasant, but she was able to overcome them, because there were situations where she met people outside of her family life circle.

The displacing discomfort became bearable due to the multi-territoriality build up in other social spheres. However, there is no way to neglect the fact that her body was all time confronted with situations that aroused a high level of stress.

Flora highlighted her first contact with her mother-in-law, from her various scenes of her daily life. From the very first contact, her mother-in-law made it clear that she did not accept her as daughter-in-law, and she did not say even a word to Flora during the first dinner. Her future mother-in-law knew that Flora knew how to speak French, but she kept the conversation on in German (language that Flora did not master very well) and her mother-in-law left the house before dinner was served.

The behaviour of the future mother-in-law bulldozed the wedding ceremony that had been prepared by Flora herself and her boss. Flora definitely could not make or take her own decisions and she did not know where she was or how she could or should walk. She could not reign as the main figure in the triumphant scene of her wedding party marriage announcement: on stage there was an antagonist, i.e. her mother-in-law. Perhaps, the most idealized or dreamed scene of her life, the wedding party, had to be resized in this moment. From the wedding party scene stage all could be sum up in one sentence: the marriage only could be in the County, a second level place.

Another highlight scene was the motherhood. After her daughter's birth, her mother-in-law and her sister-in-law approached the married couple, but not Flora.

There was a lot of psychological pressure coming from my mother-in-law and my sister-in-law. They criticized everything and so I became insecure. As I told you, I took care of Tynna [her bosses' disabled daughter] very well, [from where come the idea that] I wasn't able to take care of my daughter as well? But they made me feel awkward and I could not resist; I think this was because I was very alone, and Lenon did not help me in nothing. He kept quiet; he saw what they did and just let it happen. When he became aware it was too late. [...] All this made me sick; I lose weight, [after all] sprouted spots on my whole body. I did all the medical exams and the physician said that all came from emotional [disorders].

In this scene one can see the unfolding of Flora's identity. Now, afterwards, she also became wife and mother. She searched backstage for symbolic elements that should be her armour and find a comfortable condition. However, even in the exercise of her domestic multi-territoriality, in the everyday scenes, two supporting actors approached as two antagonists: her mother-in-law and her sister-in-law. They questioned Flora's new identity and submitted her to an asymmetrical relationship in her own territory, her home (even in her baby-cradle). Her husband who she thought would be her great ally (stage assistant), did not question the situation. All these elements expressed themselves in Flora's body. She gets sick.

In summary, Flora faced the unequal relations that expressed at once a racial and exotic point of view of the Brazilian woman. She faced the situation by building a relationship between two places: coming back to Brazil and remaining distant from the relationship with her husband's relatives.

She managed to make herself respected when she returned to her home territory, and now dealing with her husband's family from the standpoint of her social rules and cultural practices. Now the relationship in her original territory became asymmetrical towards the other side or her family, i.e. of her husband's Swiss family and relatives. When she spent the seasons in Switzerland, she went with Grandma's head style, not anymore with teenage style intentions. Although women could deal with situations of prejudice and discrimination, one can also see in these realms how these women lived experiences of agency. According to Piscitelli

(2008), based on the arguments of Mahler and Pessar (2001) gender in the experiences of migrant women operates on multiple spatial and social scales. Sometimes they focus on the social locations of the agents. These locations, within power hierarchy structures would enable actions of different types of 'agency' 'understood both in their cognitive aspects, involving imagination, planning, and setting up strategies and concrete actions' (Piscitelli, 2008).

Flora in her trajectory shows these moments of discrimination and prejudice, but she also displays how to dribble prejudice and create agency spaces in order to maintain their relationship, just as other Brazilians women married to foreigners negotiate their gender positions. They seem to negotiate their identities by engaging ethnic sympathy to gain their place in the labour market, but also to establish themselves as 'good mother and wife'. However, to accomplish the ideals of love concerning marriage, she comes back to Brazil.

Final Remarks

It's not up to Burkean pentade to close considerations, but above all come up with interpretations, open up understanding possibilities of the experience of transnational marriage one finds in Flora's account. We can even conclude that to some women, the transnational marriage is an opportunity to establish new connections in the destination society and thus overcome its constraints. Reconnecting to some dressed elements on Flora's backstage, the transnational marriage, in addition to some meanings, could also represent an expectation of both the search for a romantic love and living an ideal of the template of family that they bring with them from the original culture.

In the drama of this woman we find the presence of the ideal of romantic love and the pursuit of happiness to both. This is a trap in a net of performative identity. Her expectations are frustrated in the first contacts with the relatives and community closer to her partner. This is due to what she represents as a Brazilian woman's stereotype to this group. She seeks to negotiate with these images of Brazilian women to get a place in her partner's family and

friends. This does not always happen with a happy end in these relationships, since they face racialization and exoticness of the image of Brazilian women. In this case, she returns to Brazil and this is a way to maintain the marriage/transnational cooperation in a more suitable context.

This narrative shows how different conjugal transnational experiences could be; we could find of course in this experience a great deal of nuances however when compared with another one however in each one we find the stigma attached to Brazilian women. Azeredo's (2007) prejudice tripod is present not only in Flora's history but also in the histories of many other Brazilian women.

Single women migrants and those who depart from their partner in the migratory process are labelled as whores. From this condition comes distrust, prejudice. But when they get married to natives, they became mother, turn around as a saint. Even so, they do not get rid of this prejudice totally.

Conflicts in the conjugality come from the frustration of the expectations. Some of these conflicts are deeply intertwined with the representations associated with Brazilian women in the migration context. This realm imposes sexualized and exotic social places in the relationship with the community as a woman, wife and mother. Such representations about Brazilian women end up with gender hierarchies even between them and other women they set up some kind of relationship in their day by day life. This subaltern position takes away their autonomy, and in the same stream placing all marriages on suspicion as being arranged as expediency marriages, not fruit of genuine love. In this context, of course, these social roles represented by Brazilian women under feeling of prejudice cause strangeness and their autonomy and identity are eroded.

In the women's trajectory represented here via Flora's one, we can say that they were able to overcome the constraints, before the marriage. But in the conjugality realm, with a native partner, in the land of immigration and her reference group, for some, it became an impossible task. Even as workforce, these women are discriminated against but are tolerated; they are always outsiders. But in conjugality they become insiders. This is fundamental to their

permanence in the territory in which her identity as a Brazilian woman is reaffirmed and essential. Nevertheless, the conflicts remain even if these women stage other attributes of brazilianity, and show themselves as good mothers and wives, fulfilling the expectations of their gender in relation to marriage within the frame of romantic love.

At the workplace, their way of being, their way of dressing, their sensuality, all is negotiated, and all is at stake. This creates niches in the labour market and in this sense, they get empowered. But when they become a wife, mother, or they want to be accepted in this way they must assimilate the expected gender patterns of foreign women married to Europeans. In this new realm, women are required to be good mothers and wives in the contexts to which they emigrate: gender identity as a representation of subordination to the home and isolation of public life. This is not always required of the women in the society they enter as immigrants but is required of Brazilian women in their affective relationships. The women who are part of this study, whose narratives were not analysed, did not conform to this and reacted against this social configuration imposed on them. They found, therefore, an agent space where they negotiated these unequal gender positions; this is the different gender regimes imposed on immigrant women.

They establish a negotiation in conjugality: changes, of course, could lead to permanence of the affective relationship, or its rupture. The output of this negotiation, for instance, is the rupture within the immigration territory and the maintenance of conjugality in the original territory of women. As a result, we find in Flora's case, the return to her city or original place and maintaining a two-world life; keep her conjugality giving and configuring transnational marriage as well.

However, beyond the romantic love and the expectations generated by a transnational marriage there is an entire internal and external world that constantly presses Flora to bring about new dimensions to them. When on stage, in her own way, she unveils her 'lived' and 'still to live' existence. She elaborates scenes, creates specific spaces and allocate proper times to each experience; she chooses the personage she counters; highlights some circumstances and hides others.

She is the protagonist of her heroic narrative and chooses the villains, supporting actors and the scenario. She tells one, as she could, the experience of a life between two worlds, in front of two audiences, under hard stress, trying to find the exact weight/colour/intensity of each scene.

One must recognize in this case that not even the richness of the Burkean approach captures all the nuances tangled in this narrative entrusted to us. There are a lot of elements that, however present in her living world were not made explicit in this narrative. From what came up from her utterance we could infer the deployment of a dramatic act (marriage), in a complex scenario (the context of a migrant in a globalization realm) which puts our interviewed (agents) in front of an extreme situation so that, not surprisingly, she got sick.

Migration, when under humanistic terms and the focus of cultural and existential dimensions, unveils situations of weakness, distress and stress. At the same time, it shows up the dreams, happiness, challenges, and achievements that are in temporal and spatial horizon. This, of course, represents much more than only financial issues. In this vague temporal and special and sometimes hazy horizon, are imbedded the dreams and the weakness of those displaced but, nevertheless, this does not break her ties with her homeland (birthplace). In a global context, Flora and many others exercise their full choice of *wandering* and live the challenge of carrying on the existence in multiple territories, elaborating, in a superhuman effort, their multi-territorialities.

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CHAPTER 9

Marriage, Concubinage and Extramarital Relations in Suriname and the Caribbean

Continuity and Change

Julia Terborg

Introduction

In the past two decades, gender and sexuality have been central themes on the research agenda in the Caribbean. This attention is closely linked to the region's second highest worldwide ranking in HIV prevalence and the government's obligations towards the implementation of international agreements and related national policies on gender equality and the improvement of sexual and reproductive health. In the recent HIV related discussions on sexuality and gender, there is a slow shift of interest from the so-called 'Most at-risk populations' (MARPS) to populations that were previously out of scope as they were assumed to be 'not at risk', in particular people in conjugal relations, including marriage (Unwomen 2012, Kempadoo 2012). It appeared that marriage and other types of steady unions are more susceptible to risks than previously thought. Recent findings show a great discrepancy between norms and practice. While marriage and consensual unions are generally assumed to be based on mutual expectations of trust and monogamy, extramarital relations in the Caribbean are widespread and despite the existence of HIV, still continue across all classes and ethnic groups (Terborg 2002, Bombereau & Allen 2008, Ramdas 2008, Bakboord & Schmeitz 2011). A deeper

understanding of the sexual relation structure in the Caribbean and the related norms and values is critical for the development of strategies and policies that connect to the specific circumstances and diverse needs of local individuals and communities.

Against the need for national responses that take into account our specific realities and based partly on extensive dissertation research among the Afro Surinamese population, I argue that extramarital relations are embedded in a sexual relation structure that has its roots in colonialism, and are characterized by a hierarchical race, gender and class structure. An overview is presented of the varied perspectives on historical and contemporary factors influencing Caribbean sexual relations. The analysis in this article departs from a feminist perspective, which is critical of the Eurocentric bias and economic deterministic approaches. The role of human agency is acknowledged as well as the importance of examining notions on gender and sexuality through history in close connection with a specific socio-economic and cultural context. The article suggests the workings of a historically developed collective frame of reference on sexuality and gender, which builds on a common West African background, a West European colonial culture of dominance, and a specific (creolized) Surinamese context. These basic notions on gender and sexuality can be found across all social layers, ethnic groups, are similar to earlier findings in the Caribbean and show both continuation and change.

HIV Related Discussion on Sexuality

The Caribbean is still the region in the world with the second highest prevalence of HIV. In the past 30 years of HIV prevention and reduction, strategies are very much focused on the behavioural change of the individual, from the point of view that behaviour is guided by individuals who make rational choices. This view is reflected in what is called the ABC approach, with the core messages of 'Abstinence, Be faithful and use a Condom'. This approach largely ignores an existing hierarchical sexual structure, characterized by unequal power relations.

In a relatively recent literary review on socio-cultural factors

driving the HIV epidemic in the Caribbean, multiple concurrent partnerships by men and serial partnerships by women were identified as common and widespread practices (Bombereau and Allen 2008, Kempadoo 2006). Based on results of quantitative and qualitative studies Bombereau and Allen concluded that: 'Quite a number of people in the Caribbean who have more than one partner, especially adults, are in fact involved in steady multiple partnering arrangements.'

In her study on the mapping of Caribbean sexuality, Kempadoo also indicates that the patterns of 'informal polygamy' and 'multiple partnering' are a key characteristic of Caribbean sexuality and generally considered to be an accepted part of Caribbean social life, especially when men are concerned. Multiple partnering for women is also described as a common practice, although mainly accepted when driven by economic motives. Kempadoo criticizes the focus of HIV responses on so-called 'at risk' populations sharply, while neglecting the wide-scale practice of multiple partnering among heterosexuals:

Thus, it is homosexuals, prostitutes, migrant workers and 'promiscuous' adolescents who are defined as the problem for having sex with multiple partners and who are blamed for transmitting disease into the general population: for being 'the bridge'. The wider and just as common practice of multiple partnering for heterosexual 'normal' people is obscured by this focus, with the consequence that this population believes that it is safe. (Kempadoo, 2006)

The multi partnering or informal polygamy Kempadoo refers to, is often a combination of a conjugal relationship with one or more outside partners. Just promoting monogamous relations is in sharp contradictions with the relative autonomous working of a sexual structure that facilitates varied forms of conjugal relationships and tolerates multiple partnering. There is also little consideration of structural inequalities in gender and sexual relations, and the pervasive double sexual moral, with relatively much more 'sexual freedom' for males than for females. Most women, especially in non-cohabiting partner relations, are usually in a weak position to negotiate successfully on fidelity or condom use of the

male partner. In the case of domestic violence, economic dependence, or responsibility for children, the vulnerability of women increases.

Sexual Culture

In the public, common sense discourse in Suriname, sex is perceived as a natural instinct, that is primarily aimed to procreate but also associated with health and pleasure (Wekker 1994, Terborg 2002). At the same time, there is also a strong sense of the importance of sexual upbringing and the need for careful guidance and regulation of sexual behaviour, which is reflected mostly in kinship and family norms and values on marriage and fertility. Not only in academic thinking, but also in popular discourse, there is increasing acknowledgement that sex and sexuality never refer only to natural desire, but also to learned and transferred norms and values, thus closely associated with culture.

Understanding sexual culture is not simply about describing sexual behaviour of individuals, what they do or what they are not doing in terms of sexual acts, but much more on how this sexual behaviour is constructed, i.e. how sexual expressions attain meaning in social, economic and political contexts that can vary from time to time, and how these meanings shape behaviour and identities. As Jeffrey Weeks (2006), one of the leading authors in the discussion on sexuality and culture states,

Sexuality, far from being a force of nature external to society, is in fact always inevitably central to the social and cultural, and malleable by them. Sexuality is a highly social phenomenon, and as society changes so must sexuality. Does that mean that nature has nothing to do with it? Not quite. Sexuality builds on biological potentials and is subject to a/the psychosocial organization, so both biology and psychology can no doubt help us understand individual sexual development. But we must also recognize that sexuality, like everything else, attains meaning only in culture.

Studying sexual culture in the Caribbean is still a largely unexplored terrain and only recently being researched as a question

on its own. Kamala Kempadoo (2011), one of the first scholars to study sexual culture in the Anglophone Caribbean, conducted a mapping of 'Caribbean Sexuality' and concludes that 'Until recently sexuality was not a central topic in Caribbean studies, and it is only in the 21st century that it has become a discrete arena for study in different parts of the world, including this region.'

Although HIV related studies on sexuality have revealed much about sexual behaviour, Kempadoo found in her mapping that most of these studies focus primarily on describing behaviour and are less aimed at in-depth understanding of how culture impacts on sexual behaviour work. She therefore states that: '... it is vital to carefully examine and question how law, religion, the media, gender relations, ethnicity, and class and any other significant factors such as ability, create a particular culture or cultures with their own set of understandings, norms and values, and which produce particular sexual knowledge, actions and identities' (2013).

In the few in-depth studies that have been conducted on sexual relations in the region, Caribbean sexual culture is often characterized as ambiguous and paradoxical, with a great discrepancy between a permissive public sexual culture and a restrictive private sphere where sexuality is surrounded by double morals, taboos, shame and silence (Dagenais 1993, Wekker 1994, Reddock 1998, 2011, Terborg 1998, 2002, Kempadoo 2006, 2009, Sharpe and Pinto 2006). Thus, what you see in public is not what is actually happening in the private realms. Most researchers have been faced with the complicated nature and culture of sexuality and its conscious and unconscious sexual expressions, especially in the private spheres. A common understanding is that sexuality is strongly influenced by gender. This ideological system of cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity can be considered one of the main sources of inequality between the sexes, typically to the disadvantage of females. However, there is also consensus on the fact that social constructions of sexuality are embedded not only in gender ideology but also in other cultural ideological frames. Wekker (1994) for example, studied lower class Afro Surinamese women and relates gender and sexuality to African cultural heritage. She looks specifically at sexual relations between women, historically

common practice in the lower classes, and relates the tolerance of these same-sex relations to an egalitarian gender ideology that has its fundamentals in the traditional Afro Surinamese religion 'Winti'. Sexuality in the Caribbean has also been linked to the pervasive race ideology during slavery and colonialism (Reddock 1984, Mohamed 1994), with evidence to show how the racial images of black sexuality were implanted in social and sexual identities. Richard Parker (1991) who studied sexuality in Brazil reveals different frames of reference when understanding sexual culture. In his opinion, there are multiple ideological frames of reference that are simultaneously shaping sexual behaviour: the Catholic religion, scientific sexual discourses and an erotic ideology that is rooted in the principle of 'transgression'.

A similar assumption in many recent studies is that individuals are perceived as active agents. This means that, while culture imposes meanings from different sources on how to behave or not to behave, people don't simply live by the rules, as the working of power relations varies from context to context. Even under social pressure and in unequal power relations, individuals are resisting, pushing boundaries in multiple spaces, negotiating their social positions and challenging existing norms.

While many studies suggest the existence of a 'Caribbean sexuality', there is also an acknowledgement of the still limited understanding of the existing diversity within and between Caribbean societies, the generational changes in sexual behaviour, and the dynamic working of intersecting forces that are simultaneously constructing sexual behaviour and thoughts in specific contexts. Sexual culture has a history. In the Caribbean, this history is one of the plantation societies, immigration and colonialism.

The Building of the Plantation Society

Suriname was established as a plantation society in the sixteenth century. During slavery, about 300,000 slaves, mainly from West Africa were shipped to the Suriname plantations (Lamur 1995). Thousands of slaves succeeded in escaping the plantations and established their own communities in the forested interior. These

runaway slaves are now referred to as Maroons. Slavery was abolished in 1863, followed by a mandatory 10-year transition period of paid work on the plantations. After this period the former slaves left the estates forcing plantation owners to fill the labour shortage with the import of mainly contract labourers from the British and Dutch colonies in Asia. In a smaller number indentured labourers were also recruited from China. Between 1873 and 1945 about 34,000 immigrants (the Hindustani) from British India arrived to work as indentured labourers. The second flow of about 33,000 labourers (the Javanese) was recruited from Dutch East Indies, mainly from Java, between 1890 and 1939. To firmly establish the Dutch power, the colonial government policy was one of imposing cultural norms and assimilation, with the establishment of legislation aligned to Dutch law and compulsory education in 1876 where Dutch was the official language and education was aimed at adaptation into Dutch culture. To a certain extent, the government recognized Asian cultural traditions, resulting in the establishment of 'koeli' schools and the Asian Marriage Act of 1940. On the contrary, traditional African religion and marriage customs of the Creoles and Maroons were not only restricted (completely forbidden) but also penalized until 1971. The process of Christianization started with the manumitted people being obliged to be baptized since the beginning of colonization. Some denominations of Christian churches were allowed to baptize slaves, namely the Moravian church from 1776 on and the Catholic church from 1796 (Wolbers).

Sexual Relations During Slavery and in a Post-Slavery Society

The plantation society was characterized by a great variety of partner relationships, reflecting the existing social, racial and gender hierarchy. Social relations were grounded in a powerful race ideology, defining whites as superior and slaves as inferior. In line with this dominant racial image of blacks, the sexual behaviour of slaves was described in terms of 'insatiable, animal-like and hypersexual'. The idea that slaves were not familiar with marriage forms

and were primarily driven by sexual instincts was deeply rooted in the white colonial thought all over the Caribbean (Reddock 1984, Lenders 1994).

Sexual relations were based on a patriarchal ideology and primarily accommodated the sexual promiscuous sexual lifestyle of the white plantation owners. Marriage had the highest status and was accessible only to whites. Slaves were not allowed to marry during slavery. Second in rank was the so-called Surinamese marriage or common-law union, created primarily to accommodate relationships between white men and black women. Sexual relations between black men and white women were prohibited (Neus 2007).¹ Besides these two main conjugal forms, there was the so-called non-residential relation with an 'outside women' or 'de buitenvrouw'.

In the post-emancipation period, the rigid hierarchy in relation structures was further institutionalized. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the sexual lifestyle and the related varied family forms among the white males were also adopted on a large scale by the freed coloured men. Outside unions initiated by well-situated men from the white elites and coloured men from the middle class, with lower-class women of colour continued. It was quite common that in these outside unions, children were born and additional households were established.

Multiple sexual relations were practised by both black men and women, with women more involved in serial monogamy. In the isolated Maroon societies established in the forested interior by runaway slaves, the West African regulated system of polygamous marriage was continued.

In the later period of indentured contract labour, the reservoir of available outside women from the lower class expanded with the additional availability of female indentured labourers, first from British India and later from Java and Indonesia. Initially, a minority of women settled in Suriname. Just like black women, they were on the lower range of the social ladder and often headed female

¹ Neus, 2007, 'Ras of ratio? Verbod op het huwelijk tussen zwarte mannen en blanke vrouwen', in *OSO* 26(2): 306-22.

households or were part of extended families. It was a common practice that these Hindostani and Javanese women had varied relationships, including non-residential relationships and children with men who were already in other relations, either marriage or concubinage (Helman 1978, Hoeft 1987, Hardjomohamed 1998, De Bies 2004, Rampertap 2011).

Colonial Population Policies: Regulation of Sexuality and Reproduction

During the whole period of slavery in the Caribbean, not only marriage and sexual relations were regulated but also the biological reproduction (Reddock 1984, Hoogbergen & Den Theye 1986). Driven by a preference for natural reproduction of slaves or import of slaves, the biological reproduction of women was manipulated accordingly. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the abolishment of the slave trade in 1808 and the economical decrease of the plantation economy were the main reasons for the colonial power in Suriname to shift population policy from anti-natal to pro-natal (Teenstra 1842, Oomens 1986, Hoogbergen & de Theye 1986, Lamur 1985, 1995). This economic motivation was further strengthened by the application of medical science in the regulation of sexual reproduction, in particular through the introduction of the approach of 'public health' in Europe and the promotion of strategies of social hygiene, including reduction of venereal diseases. From a social and medical point of view, sexual behaviour was closely linked to economic production (Foucault 1980, Parker 1991). In Suriname, Kuhn was one of the leading physicians to advise the government on measurements to increase reproduction. According to Kuhn (1928), excessive sex would cause exhaustion and therefore physical deterioration of the labour force. Too much sex would not only weaken the body, but sex with multiple partners also increased the risk of contracting a sexually transmitted disease, which could endanger the fertility as well as the health of the offspring. The negative effects of unregulated sexual behaviour were already evident in the high neonatal mortality

and high infertility among the female working force.² Guided by the objective to increase economic production the colonial state, supported by the church and health authorities, shifted to a policy of promoting monogamous Christian marriages to ensure stable and reproductive families (Kuhn 1928; Sewpersad 1979). Resistance against this sexual regulation policy came from both the white planters as well as the slaves. The promiscuous lifestyle of white males was already institutionalized in a hierarchical relation structure of marriage, common law and outside women that were already widespread in the colony and practised not only by white males but by all males. The race ideology was persistent in the dominant idea that the 'hypersexual animal-like' sexual behaviour of slaves couldn't be regulated. Christian religion had very little influence on both planters and slaves, slaves resisted the Christian marriage and continued living together according to their own traditional religions (van Lier 1977, Lenders 1994). Also in other colonies in the Caribbean where the ban on slave marriages was lifted, the responses were more or less similar. Revised population policies in British, Spanish and French Caribbean colonies at the end of the eighteenth century to enhance slave church marriages were not successful, given the low number of slaves entering marriage (Barrow 1996).

Gender and Sexual Ideology in a Plantation Society

Female scholars have conducted tremendous work in the recovering of the historical experiences and perspectives of Caribbean women in past societies, using a considerable range of sources and methods to rewrite 'her story' (Mair 2006, Shepperd 1995, Brereton 2013). Also, in Suriname, historical studies were conducted with a focus on constructions of gender and femininity in colonial society (Hoeft 1987, Lenders 1994, Klinkers 1997, Neus 2003, 2007). Although in

² It's interesting that Sarah Arvey (2013) found similar sexual regulation policies guided by physicians in Cuba, however, in a much later period, in the 1930s till the 1950s.

the plantation society gender relations in European and non-European communities alike were dominated by patriarchal ideology, there were also significant differences between white women and black women. White women were subjected to a strict hierarchical regime, characterized by sexual and economic subordination and obedience. Black women, on the contrary, were an important part of the workforce in the plantation economy. This position of relative economic independence was also reflected in the power relations with black men. Black women had relatively more space than white women to resist male dominance and develop themselves economically, while sexual restrictions were less sharp. This is especially the case for manumitted black and coloured women (Neus, 2010).³ Since there were no strict and mandatory marriage standards and regulations, relationships were formed with relative flexibility. It was not uncommon for black women to have different or alternating sexual relationships, whilst they could also relatively easily, end a dissatisfying relationship (Everaert 1999, Lenders 1994). Sexuality had a double meaning for black women: sex was the area of exploitation and oppression but also one of the few strategies to attain social mobility. Sexuality was an important means of negotiation in relationships with both white and black men and in general an important survival strategy. Similar sexual patterns were found among the first groups of female indentured labourers from India and Indonesia, mainly single women, who entered the colony in the post-emancipation period. Female labourers were often described by colonial authorities as women with a 'loose' sexual lifestyle. As unmarried women, they had relative sexual freedom, characterized by patterns of multiple partnerships and also transactional sex, which was an available and socially tolerated survival strategy for poor women.

³ Neus, 2010, 'The Yellow Lady: Mulatto Women in Suriname Plantocracy', in *Color Struck: Essays on Race and Ethnicity in Global Perspective*, ed. J. Adekunle and H.V. Williams. Lanham: University Press of America.

Resistance Against Marriage

In 1989, after the abolishment of slavery, marriage law was included in the established civil legislation and presented on the ex-slaves the ideal way to marry. However, the number of Creoles who entered into matrimony in accordance with the rules and regulations of Western marriage was very low. They preferred the less imperative '*Verbond*' or so-called 'church marriage', acknowledged by the Moravian church, but not legalized by the colonial government.

In 1885, when most of the inhabitants in Paramaribo were Afro-Surinamese and Christians, the proportion of (illegitimate) births out of wedlock was about 78 per cent. Also in the next century, there was no considerable increase in the number of legitimate marriages. Between 1900 and 1940 the percentage of illegitimate births was never lower than 70 per cent.

The small number of marriages within the Creole lower class in the post-emancipation period has been attributed by several authors (Van Lier 1977, Smith 1986, Lenders 1994) to a number of formal economic obstacles, such as the high costs of the (legitimate) marriage ceremony and the high costs of divorce. Men of the lower social layers, in particular, were not inclined to marry, because they could not meet the material demands linked to marriage and fulfil the expectation of being a breadwinner. As an alternative, many men chose non-legitimized cohabitation relations or a visitor relationship.

Several Caribbean scholars rejected these explanations and argued that the objections against marriage did not ensue simply from material obstacles, but were closely connected with historically developed notions about gender and sexuality. Even during slavery, there were clear indications that slaves could or not easily comply with strict marriage regulations. As a symbol of patriarchal gender relations, more than in any other relationship, partners were expected to conform to a strict labour division: the man as breadwinner and head of the family and the woman as housewife and mother. Women especially had difficulty with these marriage rules of unconditional obedience and subservience to the man.

Even in Christian families where daughters were taught that marriage was morally superior and also more prestigious, there was no unconditional acceptance of marriage. The rebellious attitude towards marriage is testified in the following response of a coloured father in the nineteenth century when a white man asked to marry his daughter, 'Marry, immediate marriage? No! That is not possible. You can live together first, for at least a year. Then we can see how it goes. My daughter must have a free life and will not bind herself unconditionally for life!' (Teenstra 1842).

This expressed high value for personal and social freedom was not gender specific but deeply embedded in the construction of both masculinity and femininity. Legal marriage was in contradiction with this high value of freedom and economic independence in the female identity, which was gained during slavery. Under conditions of slavery, Creole women had allocated a certain economic autonomy and sexual space, which they did not want to sacrifice at the cost of the legitimate marriage.

And even where people actively followed the Christian philosophy of life, there was no complete adoption of the Western marriage norms. Premarital sex, premarital pregnancy, outside relationships, entering marriage with children from a previous relationship, gender-specific social activities, were common throughout history and across the class hierarchy.

In a nutshell, it could be stated that self-images of black women contradicted with the dominant colonial patriarchal image of women. Influenced by specific historical experiences both in West Africa and in Suriname, black female self-images have developed, in which freedom and economic autonomy are central elements.

Gender Ideology in Contemporary Afro-Surinamese Conjugal Relations

Since the beginning of the twentieth century till the late eighties, studies on sexuality in Suriname were focused mainly on heterosexual relations in Afro-Caribbean lower class households, dominated by a strong Eurocentric perspective and aimed especially at understanding why Afro-Caribbean families structures

were 'deviant' and 'unstable', despite their extensive contact with western culture (Buschkens 1973, van Lier 1977). The main pre-occupation was with understanding why there was no conformity with the Western sexual morals and marriage patterns, which were perceived as universal. In the description of Caribbean sexuality, authors emphasized the high prevalence of female-headed households, the absence of men not fulfilling their role as breadwinners and the social acceptance of a wide variety of family – and sexual relational patterns, characterized by males combining common-law unions or marriages with extra-marital or outside unions. Women, mostly in female-headed households, had serial monogamy or also multiple relations on a non-residential basis with men or with women.

In the discussion on the factors influencing the wide variation in Afro-Caribbean family forms, the economic deterministic perspective was most prevalent. Large-scale male unemployment, large-scale male labour migration, lack of access to land, were all factors hindering men to the male role of breadwinner and head of the family and realize their pursued ideas of legal marriage (Buschkens 1973, van Lier 1977). Wilson (1973) was one of the first authors to move from this economic thinking to a more cultural approach in which local meanings of masculinity and femininity (Brana-Shute 1979) were also considered. According to Wilson (1973), the sexual differences between males and females were guided by a gender and class-specific dichotomous value system that could be symbolized with the central cultural values of respectability vs reputation. In the middle class, both men and women were guided by the dominant culture of 'respectability'. Women in the lower class, who had historically much more frequent contact with white culture, had a much strong orientation towards Christian values and dominant Western cultural norms, which was expressed in their frequent church visits, their pro-marriage attitude, their monogamous lifestyle and their quest for social mobility. Men from the lower class, on the other hand, pursued the masculine culture of 'Reputation' to compensate for their weak economic position and the inability to provide for the family financially. As an alternative they derived social status from

an alternative source of reputation, associated with a masculine lifestyle of promiscuity, sexual prowess and virility, anti-marriage attitude and a perception of a lifestyle as a contra culture, symbolizing resistance against the imposed Western way of life.

With the development of gender and sexuality studies in the Caribbean, cultural approaches were increasingly at the forefront, with a focus on research of African cultural influences but also on the specific local Caribbean context. Departing from the concept of gender, as an instrument of analysis to understand the roles of women and men as well as their relations in close interaction with their specific social environment, research was aimed especially at revealing local voices of women and men and a great interest in the 'how' question: How did Caribbean women and men, as active change agents deal with the challenges that they faced historically but also in contemporary society? How did they perceive their daily lives and how did they justify and explain their situation, and how were these meanings linked to a wider socio-economic and cultural background? (Wekker 1994, Senior 1998, Mohammed 1998, Momsen 1998, Reddock 1998, Terborg 2002).

Using gender as an instrument of analysis, I studied male-female relations in the Afro-Surinamese populations as part of the debate on the Afro-Caribbean family (Terborg 2002). Following earlier Caribbean scholars, I focused on gender and sexual ideology and how local notions of masculinity and femininity could be understood against the background of European dominance, West African traditional culture and specific notions that emerged within a specific Surinamese context. Despite the wide variation in self-images, some clear patterns in constructions of masculinity and femininity could be identified, reflecting a mixture of influences of different frames of reference. In the definition of masculinity there are contradictory notions: On the one hand males identify with patriarchal norms of masculinity, in particular regarding their role as primary breadwinner, authoritarian leader and protector of the family, they believe in the polygamous nature and male sexuality and place high value on virility and fertility, and are inclined to control women's sexual behaviour to prevent sexual infidelity which many harm their reputation. On the other hand,

males are very aware of the fact that this patriarchal role is conditioned by their proven financial (dis)ability to provide for the family. Contrary to the stereotypical image of the 'absent and irresponsible father', males assign a high value to the relationships with their children. The ability to fulfil a paternal role, regardless of who the biological father of the children is, is an important source of social status. Males also acknowledge and value women's role through generations in the economic survival of families, but are also aware of a historically grown survival strategy of women in which sex is exchanged for money or material goods (Terborg 2002).

Female self-images are also characterized by conflicting notions. On the one hand, women conform to a certain extent to the norms of sexual morality, especially in private, i.e. not to take sexual initiatives, control their sexuality (*hor i srefi*), not to use sexual language, pretend sexual inexperience, while virginity is valued. On the other hand, postponing sex until marriage is not the norm. Just like men, women perceive themselves as active sexual beings with sexual desires. Children and motherhood are the most important sources of social status, regardless of the relational context in which children are born. Although women recognize the male as breadwinner and leader, this role assignment is not coupled with feelings of inferiority and unconditional obedience to the man. Because of the great value for freedom and independence in the female image, they – like men – have the need to move freely and, therefore, often clash with male dominance. The strong awareness of equality among women and their determination to be free and independent is expressed in particular in their need to be economically independent, that is to say, to be able to generate their own income and to be able to develop their own social activities outside the home. From a woman's perspective, sexual fidelity is also conditioned and depends on the extent to which she receives sufficient attention (love, sex, intimacy) and also material rewards. Although economic independence is highly valued, males are also perceived as important financial resources, which can be accessed in exchange for sex (Wekker 1994, Terborg 2002).

These constructions of femininity and masculinity are not only conscious and unconscious transferred from generation to

generation, but in the process of social mobility, also from class to class. The conflicting gender ideologies give rise to many conflicts in partner relationships.

Continuity and Change

In the past twenty years in many areas, substantial progress has been achieved in the area of gender equality and women's empowerment. The legal context has been strengthened with the ratification or adoption of relevant international and national legislation, for example, the age of legal marriage has increased, and legislation has been put in place for prevention and reduction of domestic violence. The total fertility rate has declined to 2.5 (Census 2012) and in the area of education, years of schooling, especially for girls, has increased. In tertiary education, the number of women far exceeds that of men. In the economic and political area, women are progressing slowly, with increasing numbers of women entering the key decision-making positions in the private and public sector. While women's advancement in public areas is significant, women still face many challenges in the private spheres of life, particularly in the area of sexuality. Despite the decline in the HIV and AIDS curve, a worldwide trend, the annual HIV prevalence among pregnant women remains stable at 1 per cent, which is the main indicator to place Suriname and many countries in the Caribbean, in the category of countries with a generalized HIV epidemic.

Variety of Partner Relations

The multi-religious composition of Suriname is reflected clearly in a wide range of marriage systems. Historically this range varied from the legal monogamous Christian marriage to the arranged early marriages based on the so-called 'Asian Marriage Legislation' (1940), with age of marriage relatively low, 13 years for girls and 15 years for boys, to the traditional illegal polygamous marriage in Maroon communities. To align with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), in 2003, the Asian Marriage Legislation was

abolished and the Civil Marriage Legislation was revised with an elevation of the marriage age for girls to 15 years and boys to 17 years. Over time most religions adapted to the specific circumstances in Suriname. In their study on marriage and religion in Suriname, Bakboord and Schmeitz (2011), drew attention to significant adaptations of Hinduism and Islam in Suriname. For example, Islam in Suriname, in following national legislation, does not allow polygamy while adultery is not sanctioned with punishment. Since the post-emancipation period, most Christian denominations acknowledge the consensual union, and children out of wedlock are also baptized.

Examination of present marriage patterns in Suriname shows the continuation of the heterogeneity in partner relations, with legal marriage, included, however, not dominant. The most recent data are derived from the last 2012 census. The picture is very contradictory. On one hand, the strong religious orientation of the Suriname population is obvious. About 84 per cent of the Suriname population is affiliated to one of the three largest religions in Suriname, i.e. Christian (48 per cent), followed by Hindu (22 per cent) and Muslim (14 per cent). While in all these three main religions marriage is prescribed as the dominant norm, practice shows that only 30 per cent of the population 15 years and older, is legally married (8th Census ABS, 2013).

If marital status data are disaggregated by ethnicity, large differences between ethnic groups are revealed. Within ethnic groups, marriage is the highest among Hindustani (49 per cent), followed by Javanese (45 per cent), while the lowest proportions of legally married people are found within Creoles/Afro Surinamese groups: 18 per cent and Maroons: 5 per cent (8th Census, ABS, 2013).

Data from other national data sources (MICS 2006) indicate that the historically developed diversity in partner relations and family forms is still vivid. The majority of Hindustani and Javanese women are in cohabiting relations, either married or in consensual unions, while among Afro-Surinamese, Maroons and 'mixed' the patterns are more varied. While the majority of Creoles and Maroons live in consensual or common-law unions, there is also a

significant share of non-cohabiting relations, in which children are often born. Although the basic characteristics of the historically established sexual relation structure continued, data from national and community studies, indicate some important generational changes. While there is more or less a continuation of family forms among Afro-Suriname during history, it is striking to observe that the other ethnic groups are slowly mirroring family forms of Afro-Surinamese, which were historically always stigmatized as deviant.

There are signs of a clear increase in the age of marriage, which can be ascribed to the increase in the legal age of marriage in 2003. In the age group younger than 25 years, a relatively small proportion of young people is married, mainly Hindustani and Javanese women. It is also notable that there are less arranged marriages. Partner relations are based mainly on mutual attraction, while there is also more space to delay marriage. In this regard, cohabitation and childbirth outside of marriage are becoming increasingly common, which explains a relatively high proportion of consensual unions. Among younger, educated women and men there seems to be a different attitude towards motherhood. Although fertility and bearing children are still important sources of social status, the desired number of children has decreased sharply among both sexes. Unlike the past, women also have relatively more control over their reproduction, in terms of being able to regulate births, while young men, especially when educated, attain higher value in the paternity role (Terborg et al. 2013).

Ironically, the same relational patterns, from a nineteenth-century Eurocentric point of view, perceived as unstable, unhealthy and a main barrier for social development in the Caribbean, are also occurring increasingly and accepted socially in Western European societies of today.

In fact, worldwide, legal marriage patterns are changing. A study of Mensch et al. (2005), shows that in most developing countries, substantial declines have occurred in the proportion of young men and women who are married. The decline in the proportion of young married people is ascribed to several factors, including

increases in educational attainment, especially the expansion of schooling for women, and urbanization, the decline in arranged marriages, changes in the legal age of marriage and a transformation in global norms on women's rights and gender equality.

Outside Relations

With respect to the outside union, in Suriname called 'buitenvrouw', Terborg (2002) confirms the continuation of the historic form, as established in colonialism, mainly between middle-class men and lower-class women, but also significant changes in the manners in which outside relations are organized nowadays. First, the traditional family form of outside unions is on a much smaller scale and procreation within these unions is less valued. Most men cannot afford the cost of a second household and tend to take paternity more seriously. As an alternative, middle-class males switch to outside relations with fewer obligations and financial responsibilities. A second significant change is that, increasingly, the female partners in these outside relations of middle-class men are middle-class women, educated, with their own income, with less desire to establish a cohabiting union or to procreate. They have their own household, value economic independence and also a free movement without restrictions imposed by a man. Their relation with the married man is mainly driven by sexual desire and companionship. Amongst the men from the lower class, those men who are financially weak, tend to avoid cohabiting partnerships given their inability to provide for a family. Instead, they have multiple casual relations.

The extramarital patterns found by Terborg among Afro-Surinamese were confirmed in later studies in other ethnic groups. M. De Bies (2004) studied contemporary sexual relations and notions in gender and sexuality among Javanese men and women and found similar patterns of sexual relations. While in Javanese society there is much more pressure to conform to the norm of marriage and relatively more people are married, there is still a widespread practice of extramarital relations in which both

women and men are involved, across classes. To study the influence of religion on marital relations in Suriname, several authors (Ramdas 2008, Bakboord & Smeitz 2011) look in particular to the extent of how within Hindu, Muslim and Christian religion, people conform to the dominant sexual norms. The findings show striking similarities. In all ethnic groups, it appeared that religion hardly influenced monogamous behaviour. In a group of 450 respondents from different religions, Bakboord and Smeitz found that about one-third were involved in extramarital relations, more men than women. All authors found that people believed that a religious lifestyle was not in conflict with the practice of extramarital relations.

Polygamous Marriages

The polygamous marriage practised for centuries by Maroons within a traditionally regulated marriage system with strict responsibilities and obligations for both women and men is now eroding. In the past twenty years, the position of Maroons has changed drastically. Urbanization, commencing already in the early sixties was accelerated by the internal war in the period 1986-92 when more than 10,000 Maroons fled to the capital or to French Guyana. In the city, they were confronted with new challenges such as lack of adequate housing, employment and access to other basic services. The difficult living conditions led to the erosion of traditional lifestyles including polygamous marriage. While the traditional polygamous marriage was bound strictly to rules, in the city the new pattern showed similarities with the colonial patterns of unregulated multiple partnering where men could walk away from their responsibilities easily, even if there were children involved (Terborg et al. 2010). The traditional high value of fertility contradicted with new opportunities for women to attend school and have an education and career. Adolescent fertility was the highest among Maroons, often unintended, and strongly related nationwide to low educational levels in women and low economic status of households (Terborg 2011).

Sexual Patterns among Young People

There are signs of considerable generational changes in sexual culture all over the Caribbean for the better and for the worst. While the fundamental sexual structure continues, and old problems persist, there are also new challenges, in particular, impacting adolescents and youth. More and more young people are confronted with diverse and often contradictory frames of reference with mixed messages about sexual norms and borders. While sexual patterns among young people are still influenced by traditional sexual norms there is also competition with global sexual and consumption patterns, strongly reflected in modern popular culture and its sexual images expressed through mass media, music and fashion.

Several authors studying temporary youth sexual culture in the Caribbean, pointed to the tension between the public health campaigns and religious norms with emphasis on restrictive and negative aspects of youth sexuality on the one hand, and on the other a pervasive, attractive global popular sexual culture, communicated through mass and social media, in which a wide range of sexual expressions are promoted, varying from safe to dangerous. It is especially through the internet and other communication technologies that new sexual opportunities are provided to remain hidden and private and attract young people to get involved in modern-day sexual possibilities that not only include sexual pleasure and excitement but also exposure to risk of sexual exploitation, coercion and violence (Reddock 2011, Barrow 2011). Although studies on sexual culture of youth are missing in Suriname, there are sufficient indications to assume that trends found in other Caribbean countries are also reflected in Suriname. Descriptive data show high proportions of teen pregnancies, often unintended, a high number of unsafe abortions, sexual trafficking, sex work in the goldmines, and sexual abuse of children, as well as a growing business sector of new forms of commercial sex (escort services, call girls, massage salons, etc.) where young women are involved increasingly, attracted mainly by relatively high earnings. Also, the sharing of sexually charged photos or videos on social media is practised in Suriname.

Conclusion

In the past two to three decades women have made considerable advancements. On both international and national level feminist struggles have put women's rights and empowerment high on the agenda, and resulted in significant changes in legislation, in the educational and labour area, changes that enable women more than ever to participate, to get engaged, and above all to choose. Consequently, women across classes and ethnic groups have more choices than before and are pushing restrictive borders, more than ever widening their space for sexual and social freedom. Women are more critical towards partners, less willing to bind themselves unconditionally for life, which explains the greater variety in conjugal forms and sexual partner relations, including same-sex relations. Although heteronormativity is still prevailing and homosexuality rejected in the dominant definition of masculinity, there is also a clear trend of more public profiling of same-sex relations, and increasing social acceptance.

The heterogeneity in family and partner formations is not typically Afro-Surinamese anymore. Marriage, consensual unions, non-cohabiting relations, including outside relations are all various forms that are found increasingly across all classes and all ethnic groups, an intrinsic part of social life, regionally and globally. Unfortunately, legislation and related policies tend to perceive civil marriage as the ideal still, safest, most prestigious union, which also has the most privileges and rights. A more realistic approach would be to acknowledge the diversity of family forms and sexual relationships equally and to ensure that everybody's right to a safe, healthy and happy life, regardless of the family or relation form, is recognized and protected.

National responses to improve sexual health and sexual rights in the broadest sense should consider long term strategies that address the socio-economic and political contexts, as well as the cultural and societal norms and values. Unequal power relations in all spheres of life and the related elements of patriarchy in the gender and sexual ideology along with heritages of our colonial past, are still impacting sexual behaviour. The family as a major socialization institution, regardless of its form, needs full material

and immaterial support. Policies should address the question of growing numbers of female-headed households specifically, and how to ensure that these families receive the required material and immaterial support to ensure that all women can enjoy a safe, healthy and productive life with active participation in society. Comprehensive sexuality education remains a must, meaning that measurements should enforce and encourage responsible sexual behaviour for both sexes, but in particular for males. The limited understanding of the complexity of sexual cultures in Suriname should motivate Suriname scholars to further explore the multiple dimensions of sexuality and continue with the development of approaches and thoughts that take into account local realities.

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