Sexuality, Nationalism, and “Race”: Humanitarian Debate about Indian Indenture in Fiji, 1910–18

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In a 1916 report C. F. Andrews and W. W. Pearson set out their first-hand impressions of Indian indenture to Fiji. The two Englishmen had trained as Anglican clergymen and were sympathisers of the Indian nationalist cause. They saw indenture as a negative moral influence both upon those indentured and upon Britain’s civilised status. Furthermore, they considered the end of indenture to be essential to raising India’s reputation in the eyes of the world. Their findings were in many ways concerned not with the actual conditions of indentured labour, but with the local and global effects of the indignities and exploitations experienced by those seemingly brought low by the experience, particularly women who were exploited by the system but who were, in Andrews’ and Pearson’s eyes, essential to changing indenture into Indian immigration. This paper considers the role that normative ideas about heterosexuality and gender relations played in the image of a spiritual, rural Indian migrant in the Pacific who Andrews and Pearson hoped would develop Fiji. Thereby veiling the longer history of unfree labour in the region since the previous century, their conclusions would be endorsed in Australia and London through networks of progressives and anti-slavery advocates seeking renewed international attention towards the Pacific, British imperial reform, and the greater role of Australia and New Zealand in the Pacific islands.

In 1915, one year before Indian indenture was suspended due to the outbreak of war, Charles Freer Andrews and William Winstanley Pearson travelled to the British colony of Fiji to investigate the conditions of indentured Indians on the island’s sugar plantations.¹ Their report contributed to the decision made by the government of India and British authorities that indenture from India to Fiji should not resume after the war. As the historian of Fiji, Brij Lal, has argued, the report published in India in 1916 was one instance in a larger set of critiques not least of which were those offered by “girmitiyas” themselves, and by Indian-

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1. See John S. Hoyland, *C. F. Andrews: Minister of Reconciliation* (London: Allenson and Co., 1940); Hugh Tinker, *The Ordeal of Love: C. F. Andrews and India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979).

Fijians, Indian unionists and others active in Fiji in this same era.² In 1910, the Sanderson Commission had declared indenture in the British colonies of Mauritius, Jamaica, Fiji, and Natal, and in Sri Lanka through internal forms of unfree labour, humane where systems were properly administered. As shown in the following, exactly what systems operated and how they were carried out at the local level would be the source of considerable debate in the years that followed. Indenture became part of the humanitarian and later human rights agendas that would shape internationalism in interwar Europe,³ as well as national politics in settler colonies like Australia, where, for example, Indonesian indenture into the northern pearling industry was exempted from the White Australia Policy.⁴ And, as noted at the end of this article, accusations that indenture was a modern form of slavery were applied to Aboriginal people within Australia, and would impact on the international and national reputation of Australia's status as a British Dominion. In each case, campaigns against indenture should be recognised also as an effect of anti-colonial and rights agendas emerging from within indentured and/or colonised populations themselves.⁵

Like others before them, Andrews and Pearson were deeply affected by the conditions of indentured Indians they met in Fiji. These former Anglican clergymen were part of a generation of Christians who embraced the ecumenicalism and religious relativism promoted, for example, by the International Missionary Council held in Edinburgh in 1910.⁶ They aimed to follow a life of service, and did so by working among the poor in London before travelling to India where they contributed to the humanitarian imperial project of education and missionary work among "natives." At the same time, they became politicised by Indian

2. Brij Lal, *Girmitiyas: The Origins of Fiji Indians* (Lautoka: Fiji Institute of Applied Studies, 2004).
3. Rachel Sturman, "Indian Indentured Labour and the History of International Rights Regimes," *American Historical Review* 119, no. 5 (2014): 1439–65; Daniel Roger Maul, "The International Labour Organization and the Struggle against Forced Labour from 1919 to the Present," *Labor History* 48, no. 4 (2007): 477–500.
4. Julia Martinez and Adrian Vickers, *The Pearl Frontier: Indonesian Labor and Indigenous Encounters in Australia's Northern Trading Network* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015).
5. See Kay Saunders, ed., *Indentured Labour in the British Empire 1834–1920* (London and Canberra: Croom Helm, 1984); Sophie Loy-Wilson and Mae Ngai, eds, "Labour Rights and the Coolie Question," special issue *International Labor and Working-Class History* 91 (2017); on unfree labour more broadly, see for example Marcel Van Der Linden and Magaly Rodriguez Garcia, eds, *On Coerced Labour: Work and Compulsion after Chattel Slavery* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016).
6. Peter Kallaway, "Education, Health and Social Welfare in the Late Colonial Context: The International Missionary Council and Educational Transition in the Interwar Years with Special Reference to Colonial Africa," *History of Education* 38, no. 2 (2009): 217–46.

Gandhi (centre) with Charles Andrews (left) and William W. Pearson (right), 1914

Source: World History Archive, Alamy Stock Photo

activists then seeking self-rule including in the name of the diaspora and particularly the indentured. Nor were British authorities unaware of these issues or the need to be seen to respond to them. The two men would undertake their enquiry into Fijian conditions with the support of Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy of India, and through the encouragement of G. K. Gokhale of the Indian Imperial Legislative Council and founder of progressive movement, The Servants of India. In 1912, Gokhale presented a resolution to the Indian Legislative Council declaring that indenture was a form of slavery.⁷ Andrews and Pearson were sent to South Africa by Gokhale, where Andrews in particular became a key figure in Mohandas Gandhi's circle and would remain so for the rest of his life. And in Fiji they would deploy methods learned in South

7. Quoted in Hoyland, C. F. Andrews, 43–44.

Africa by speaking with the indentured themselves.⁸ In recognition of his influence, Andrews and Pearson dedicated their report to Gokhale who died in 1915 before it was published.

Their investigation of Fijian indenture began in India among recruiters and newly contracted workers awaiting departure. From there they sailed across the ocean via Australia and New Zealand into the Pacific and finally to Suva, Fiji. While not sent to compare these places, travelling through the region brought a range of locations and attitudes towards India and Fiji into their study. Travel provided them with insights into settler colonial perspectives informed by "geographical imaginings" extending beyond territorial ambitions, including that of Australians and New Zealanders regarding the British colony of Fiji.⁹ Ideas about being modern in the British world were conveyed by progressives met during stopovers in Australian cities, their ideas clearly chiming with the investigators' own beliefs that interracial and intercultural integration and anti-racism were fundamental to Christianity. They were arguing for the realisation of what Duncan Bell has called "a disencharned conception of the 'civilizing mission'" in which Britain's superiority was relative.¹⁰

This revised mission for whiteness saw a syncretic future that transcended nationalist exclusions and sought harmony through the exchange and intermixing of cultures.¹¹ Such a hope for the Pacific, would find expression in interwar Pan-Pacific internationalist communities.¹² It sat in contrast, however, to an ideology of British leadership in the humane management of "race" that suggested, for many, not Indian independence but quite the reverse. For Britain's duty was to remain in India, or Fiji for that matter, in order to carry on the work of uplifting others. This article considers the findings of Andrews and Pearson in the wider context of humanitarian concern about colonial labour and its supposed place in regulating imperialism, in relation to the interconnected futures of India and of Fiji within the British empire. Finally, it argues the context of racial hierarchies were evident in the

assumption of Andrews and Pearson that Fiji was available to become an Indian colony in the region. Historians of Fiji have written about the interconnected experiences and agency of indentured Indians, the effects of colonial policy towards Native Fijians, and British imperial debate in this era. As argued in the following, the Andrews and Pearson report is part of this larger story, linking the end of indenture to India's future. Thus Fiji became one context in which the reconfiguration of imperial authority desired by men like Andrews and Pearson was articulated.

In a recent article about representations of indenture, historian Ashutosh Kumar has argued for degrees of agency among indentured Indians, reflecting their own reasons for wishing to emigrate.¹³ In their report titled *Report on Indentured Labour in Fiji: An Independent Enquiry* and published in pamphlet form in India in February 1916, Andrews and Pearson rehearsed well-established views of indenture as inherently exploitative and of the indentured as effectively enslaved.¹⁴ As Deryck Scarr points out, Andrews, was the more well-known of the two men. He was a "moralist" whose claim that indenture degraded the spirit as much as the body would find wide acceptance among progressives in Britain and India (and, as will be argued in this paper, in Australia as well).¹⁵ The two men described the conditions of recruitment from Indian village to life on the "coolie line" in Fiji as inherently inhumane and routinely unregulated. In their view, vulnerable men and women were wrenched from the relative stability and religious and moral frameworks of village life, sent misinformed and with almost no recourse to justice, through the chaos and disorientation of departure from Calcutta, into the brutalising effects of contracted employment on sugar plantations.

The sexual exploitation of women and its effects on the status and standing of Indian and other men was a central theme in this account of the pernicious effects of indenture. Women in India had been long represented by British authorities as needing protection from traditional forms of exploitation. In her study of masculinity and Indian nationalism, Mrinalini Sinha has shown that sexuality and the status of women in Indian culture represented a key site in the struggle between

8. Hoyland, C. F. Andrews, 36–37; Tinker, *The Ordeal of Love*, 121–26.

9. Frances Steel, "'Fiji is Really the Honolulu of the Dominion': Tourism, Empire, and New Zealand's Pacific, ca. 1900–35," in *New Zealand's Empire*, ed. Katie Pickles and Catharine Coleborne (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 147–62.

10. Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860–1900* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 176.

11. See for example, Warwick Anderson, "Liberal Intellectuals as Pacific Supercargo: White Australian Masculinity and Racial Thought on the Boarder-Lands," *Australian Historical Studies* 46, no. 3 (2015): 425–39.

12. See for example Fiona Paisley, *Glamour in the Pacific: Cultural Internationalism and Race Politics in the Women's Pan-Pacific* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009).

13. Ashutosh Kumar, "Naukari, Networks, and Knowledge: Views of Indenture in Nineteenth-Century North India," *South Asian Studies* 33, no. 1 (2017): 52–67.

14. C. F. Andrews and W. W. Pearson, *Report on Indentured Labour in Fiji: An Independent Enquiry* (Chintamani, India: Leader Press, 1916) (hereafter *Report on Indentured Labour*).

15. Deryck Scarr, *Fiji: A Short History* (Sydney and London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984), 124ff. See also Brij Lal, *Broken Waves: A Short History of the Fiji Islands* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1992), 43–45; for Fiji in the context of the Pacific more broadly, Tracey Banivanua Mar, *Violence and Colonial Dialogue: The Australian-Pacific Indentured Labor Trade* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007).

male exponents of either independence or continuing British rule.¹⁶ In a parallel context, Jane Samson has investigated how both nineteenth century missionaries and British officials condemned interracial relationships between white settlers and indigenous Fijian women. Their concerns were mobilised in the campaign to consolidate British control in Fiji, and contributed to the British Anti-Slavery Proclamation of 1852.¹⁷

The question of native Fijians is returned to below. In the 1916 report, the negative impact of indenture was claimed to be singularly destructive upon the morality of Indian rather than local women. Although reference is made to "an abominable trafficking in young girls,"¹⁸ for the most part little specific evidence is provided documenting sexual exploitation by overseers and Europeans, and the prostitution of women among Indian indentured men. The topic, however, was already a sensation in India, thanks to the circulation of the story of Kunti, an indentured woman who wrote of her close escape from rape by her supervisor in Fiji.¹⁹ Margaret Mishra has pointed to the power of these stories for a generation of post-indenture Indian women labourers in Fiji seeding, in their painful remembrance, the emergence of a Fijian women's movement.²⁰

In his analysis of campaigns against indenture in Fiji, John Kelly notes that sexual issues featured in European criticisms of indenture. He concludes that the gendered and sexualised Christian humanitarian discourse of protection and uplift mobilised by Andrews and Pearson in 1916 was agreeable to the Viceroy of India who, on receipt of their report, called for an end to indenture in the following year.²¹ In previous years, numerous publications and reports had proclaimed the dominance of inhumane conditions and unjust treatment among the indentured, or had been instigated in response to such claims from the indentured or their supporters. In 1910, Lord Crewe, then Secretary of State for India, established the Sanderson Commission to survey conditions of indentured Indians in the colonies, including Fiji. Lord Sanderson, formerly of the Foreign Office, established an interdepartmental

16. Mrinalini Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006); Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The "Manly Englishman" and the "Effeminate Bengali" in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).
17. Jane Samson, "Rescuing Fijian Women? The British Anti-Slavery Proclamation of 1852," *Journal of Pacific History* 30, no. 1 (1995): 22–38.
18. *Report on Indentured Labour*, 34.
19. Lal, *Broken Waves*, 45; see also Tinker, *The Ordeal of Love*, 107–108.
20. Margaret Mishra, "The Emergence of Feminism in Fiji," *Women's History Review* 17, no. 1 (2008): 39–55.
21. John D. Kelly, *The Politics of Virtue: Hinduism, Sexuality, and Countercolonial Discourse in Fiji* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 62.

Committee into Indian Emigration to the Crown Colonies between the Colonial Office and the India Office to investigate the problem of misrepresentation by recruiters. In the same year, Rev J. W. Burton a missionary living in Fiji published *The Fiji of Today* in which he included a damning critique of the immoral effects of indenture upon women and men.²² Burton and fellow Methodist missionary Florence Garnham continued their call for urgent reform and in 1916, following the investigation by Andrews and Pearson, would write a scathing letter to the press condemning indenture in Fiji.²³

Meanwhile in India, a sensational autobiographical account of indenture, written by "Sanadhya" upon his return from Fiji, was published in 1914 and the author toured the country raising public awareness.²⁴ While in Fiji in that year, the first representative of Indian Fijians was appointed to the Legislative Council. Manilal Doctor had trained as a lawyer in London before returning to India where he became a member of The Servants of India. With the encouragement of Gokhale, Doctor went to work among indentured Indians in Mauritius, for which he has been described as the Gandhi of that colony.²⁵ After Doctor arrived in Fiji in 1912, he started a Hindi-English newspaper, and founded the British Indian Association of Fiji in 1911, agitating for Indian schools and community representation on local councils.²⁶ Although Gokhale's motion to the Indian Legislative Assembly in 1912 had been defeated, he continued to agitate for reform. In 1914, the British administration of India was alerted by census figures revealing higher murder and suicide rates than among Indians in India (rates that would be reproduced by Andrews and Pearson in the pages of their report). The McNeil and Chimanlal commission of enquiry sent by the Viceroy to Fiji in 1914 concluded that these figures were the result of systemic problems including poorly regulated recruiting in India; and it recommended a range of reforms also in Fiji, such as the provision of family accommodation, fines instead of imprisonment for working days lost to the plantation owner, and the establishment of schools.²⁷ In their report, Andrews and

22. J. W. Burton, *The Fiji of Today* (London: CH Kelly, 1910).
23. Lal, *Broken Waves*, 44; Brij Lal, *Vision for Change: A. D. Patel and the Politics of Fiji* (Canberra: ANU EPress, 2011), 11.
24. Totaram Sanadhya, *Fiji Dwip Men Mere Ikkis Varsh* (My Twenty-One Years on the Fiji Islands), published in Kanpur in 1919, as discussed in Rajendra Prasad, *Tears in Paradise: Suffering and Struggles of Indians in Fiji* (Auckland: Glade Publishers, 2004), 121.
25. Prasad, *Tears in Paradise*, 46.
26. Lal, *Broken Waves*, 46–47; Lal, *Vision for Change*, 13.
27. Prasad, *Tears in Paradise*, 121. See also Brij Lal, "Veil of Dishonour: Sexual Jealousy and Suicide on Fiji Plantations," *Journal of Pacific History* 20, no. 3 (1985): 135–55; *Report on Indentured Labour*, 56.

Pearson reiterated these reforms, while noting that no action on them had yet been taken. They echoed calls for shorter contracts, fines over imprisonment, increased numbers of women in order to facilitate family settlement, better living conditions, accurate information to be supplied at the point of recruitment, and the right of workers to challenge cruel treatment or move to another plantation. Beyond economic conditions, however, and drawing on observations in India via South Africa and Australasia to Fiji, they looked also to the moral impacts of indenture and called for an immediate humanitarian response to help those suffering injustice. And they argued that, by improving the standards of migration through ending the forced labour among Indians living there, permanent migration would be encouraged in the islands.

In their efforts to link the improvement of labour conditions with future settlement, the two men were clearly influenced by their experience in India. Following his ordination as an Anglican clergyman in the late nineteenth century, Charles Andrews had completed a degree in classics at Pembroke College in Cambridge before taking up a position at the College's mission house in Walworth, London. There he worked among the poor. Andrews would later write of the connections he saw between "the inhuman treatment of our own depressed classes" and dealing honourably with India.²⁸ Upon learning that a missionary friend had recently died in India, Andrews travelled there in the early 1900s to take his friend's place as a teacher at St Stephen's College in Delhi. From there, at the behest of Gokhale, Andrews went to South Africa to see the activities of Gandhi who was campaigning for the rights of Indians indentured in Natal, before returning to India in 1915.²⁹ Among other European supporters for this cause was Henry Polak, a friend and colleague of Mohandas Gandhi. Polak had worked against Indian indenture in South Africa and had, in the interwar years, corresponded with the Indian Fijian union leader, S. B. Patel. Polak also exchanged views with the Anti-Slavery society in London, an organisation that sought to promote the findings of the 1916 report. Their correspondence is discussed at the end of this article.

As a former clergyman dedicating his life to social reform, Andrews was part of the historical shift in Christian missionary work towards political action in the name of cross-cultural solidarity and a Hindu-Christian vision.³⁰ William Pearson, his co-author, was also a

former clergyman and graduate of Cambridge who in 1907 followed his own missionary connections to India where he taught Botany for several years at the London Missionary College in Bhavanipur. After relinquishing mission work and returning to England, Pearson met the Indian poet and commentator, Rabindranath Tagore, while Andrews had been deeply impressed by Tagore at a reading by W. B. Yeats of Tagore's celebrated book of poems, *Gitanjali*, in London.³¹ Inspired by Tagore, Pearson returned to India where he taught English and Nature Study at Tagore's ashram, Santiniketan, in Bolpur, West Bengal. Andrews and Pearson noted in their 1916 report that they were both living at the ashram in 1915 before leaving for Fiji.

Indeed, in their report, Andrews and Pearson described Shantiniketan in a heightened language suggesting the idyllic image of Indian village life they hoped to see transplanted into Fiji:

The memory of the Ashram, and of those who dwelt there, was with us through all our long journey. The freedom of its life made us the more sensitive to the misery which we witnessed in the coolie "lines" ... Now, when we return to India, after the voyage is ended, and see its fields and its villages once more, the longing rises that the day may not be far distant when the Indian homesteads in the beautiful islands of the Pacific shall be a true image of the best village life of India itself.³²

As indicated by this lyrical vision, the two men looked forward to the replication of Hindu village life in the Pacific. A similar preference for Hindu over Muslim India had been embedded within the British colonial administration of India since the previous century. This alignment continued to influence Christian humanist and theosophical western progressive thought that ignited in the first years of the century. Such a self-consciously cosmopolitan worldview looking to India for the renewal of western modernity along spiritual and esoteric lines (including among Australians) led some Europeans to forge friendship and alliances with Indian nationalists.³³

Gandhi's Ideas (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1929); C. F. Andrews, *India in the Pacific* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1937). See also, Isabel Hofmeyr, *Gandhi's Printing Press: Experiments in Slow Reading* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013).

31. R. K. Dasgupta, "C. F. Andrews as Man of Letters," *Indian Literature* 16, no. 3/4 (1973): 150.

32. *Report on Indentured Labour*, 66.

33. Jane Haggis, Clare Midgley, Margaret Allen, Fiona Paisley, *Cosmopolitan Lives on the Cusp of Empire: Interfaith, Cross-Cultural and Transnational Networks, 1860–1950* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2017). See also John Marriott, *The Other Empire: Metropolis, India and Progress in the Colonial Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

28. Quoted in Lal, *Broken Waves*, 45.

29. For a contemporary account of the history of Indian labour in South Africa, see Raymond Buell, *The Native Problem in Africa*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Bureau of International Research of Harvard University and Radcliffe College, 1928), especially "Indian Labor," pp. 23ff.

30. Andrews is probably best known for his role in Gandhi's "Great Fast" in 1924 and for several books about his experiences including *C. F. Andrews: Making*

Life on the "Coolie Line"

Writing of the spatial constructions of "coolie" and "free" Indians, and native Fijians in Fiji, historian Reshad Durgahee calls for a more nuanced account of movement between these racialised geographies on the islands.³⁴ In the 1916 report, however, these demarcations are assumed to be distinct. Arriving in Suva in November 1915,³⁵ Andrews and Pearson wrote that they would never forget their first sight of the "lines" although they were vague about the exact location of those they visited, or whether they travelled to see a range of them on the islands. In this sense, the "lines" they evoked and image of their occupants they hoped to convey were symptomatic rather than particular. What they saw was degeneration. They wrote: "The looks on the face of the men and women alike told one unmistakable tale of vice." The deleterious effects of these harsh and unjust conditions came not from any inherent moral weakness but through being taken away from "the communal life of their own Indian homes" and of becoming "completely separated from all their old ties and associations."³⁶

In this sense, the actual conditions of work on plantations were less central to their enquiry than the moral implications of the system of indenture as a whole. Reprising contemporary anxiety about the impacts upon working-class morality by overcrowding in the slums of London, worry over their translations into colonial settings like India³⁷ was familiar to Andrews and Pearson. They wanted readers to know of the deleterious effects of cramped quarters on emigrant ships where "decency can hardly be preserved, and every temptation is rife ... [while] in Fiji itself, they are crowded again into the coolie 'lines,' which are more like stables than human dwellings."³⁸

Having collected over 100 interviews from those living on the "lines," mostly it seems men and women who came to speak with them in Suva, they nonetheless remained optimistic. Their interviewees were evidently aware of the injustice of their treatment. And, even though they were "members of another race, speaking their mother tongue

34. Reshaad Durgahee, "'Native' Villages, 'Coolies' Lines, and 'Free' Indian Settlements: The Geography of Indenture in Fiji," *South Asian Studies* 33, no. 1 (2017): 68–84.

35. Tinker, *The Ordeal of Love*, 122. No information is provided in the report concerning where they travelled within Fiji beyond Suva itself.

36. *Report on Indentured Labour*, 30.

37. In his study of late nineteenth century social reform through mapping city slums, Patrick Joyce compares studies of London's poor with governance under colonial rule in India. Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London: Verso, 2003), ch. 6.

38. *Report on Indentured Labour*, 30.

imperfectly" and despite reasonable fears that these white men were working for the "coolie agent," many had been determined to speak about their suffering. The two enquirers reported that they became known as the "Calcuttawale Sahibs" – white men sent from Calcutta to document their conditions.³⁹

The deleterious impact upon women was an essential aspect of their analysis combining the experience of indenture, the reputation of India, and the future of Fiji. The degeneration attributed to indenture was gendered and sexualised, as women's bodies and their morality were the material on which Indian masculine virtue relied when away from home without restraints embedded within religious structures. According to Andrews and Pearson, demoralisation was accelerated by the relative lack of women among the indentured, resulting in competition for them and a lowering of moral standards between the sexes. Secondly, they saw Indian women in Fiji as the victims of a lack of privacy on the "line," degrading to even the most respectable among them. All the activities of daily life and even intimate relations between husband and wife, the enquirers reported, could be heard or seen over low wooden partitions. Thirdly, men's natural sexual veracity must be guarded against, and so European recruiters or Indian *sardars* (overseer) should not be single men. These impacts proliferated through the experience of indenture, as, once dislocated from family and friends at home, women of "good caste" became too ashamed to tell their families of their fate, and many literally disappeared from their villages never to be heard of again. Andrews and Pearson were even more disturbed by evidence that some women were recruited directly from the "prostitute class" in order to serve the needs of men on the "coolie lines." Their lives of utter degradation were horrifying to contemplate, given the effect on children growing up among them and, in some cases, their exploitation in the sexual economy. And yet, even under these terrible conditions, "[e]very now and then, some beautiful action would come to light, which showed that the sweetness of human relations had not been lost, and the pure ideal of womanhood still held its ground."⁴⁰

Notably, it was Hindu sensibility that moved Andrews and Pearson in their account of im/morality. Reflecting their assumptions of differences between South Asian masculinities, the two men reported that among Hindus in particular the lack of privacy on the "coolie lines" was a "matter of indignant complaint. They would tell us, with indignation, that they were made to live 'like animals.'"⁴¹ But if "Indians"

39. *Ibid.*, 5.

40. *Ibid.*, 65.

41. "Note 12: Lack of Privacy in the Present Coolie Lines," *Report on Indentured Labour*, Notes 27.

in the report were mostly described as Hindus from rural villages, the sample of interviews offered by the authors reveals a greater diversity among their informants. Although redacting names to safeguard their identities, they hoped to contextualise their selection of first-hand accounts by providing the supposed place of origin, caste, and/or language group of the speaker. Among them are a "Mahomedan" and a "Christian," while in another example an explicitly racial commentary is offered to emphasise that a man of low caste was "of low features." One woman is described as having been on a pilgrimage to Benares when she was separated from her family and became prey to a recruiter who promised to help her find them but instead took her to a Depot. She was too frightened to resist.⁴²

Their identification with Hinduism reiterates a long-standing orientalist vision of "India." According to the two men, an appendix included in the report was written for the Acting Governor of Fiji, Sir Eyre-Hutson to circulate among "authorities" who would like to know more about Hindu culture. In this essay the unnamed author (perhaps Andrews himself) emphasises the centrality of marriage to Hindu life. The reader is told that the child-like faith of the Hindu will likely shock the average Englishman until he realises the "devotion and tenderness that overflow in it."⁴³ If religious faith anchors all social relations in Hindu society, then marriage figures as its core feature taking place only within the group where girls are betrothed at the age of puberty, and remarriage is not allowed. These characteristics are endorsed by the author, who adds that any reform of indenture should include more women of good character and provide for religious marriage ceremonies. At present women were able to leave their husbands by simply obtaining a written agreement drawn up by a lawyer.⁴⁴ Perhaps indentured women were utilising conditions in Fiji to transgress traditional prohibitions in order to shape their own lives in ways not available to them in India. But for the author of this account, such a freedom was antithetical to Hinduism. The status of women in Indian society and culture had long been mobilised in imperial narratives both for and against Indian civilization and masculinity. And within a few years, in Katherine Mayo's sensationalist best-seller *Mother India*, published in 1927, Indian culture and Indian men were denounced as irrevocably degenerate and backward and child marriage a particular horror. According to Sinha,

42. *Ibid.*, 12–16.

43. "A Paper Written for the Acting Governor of Fiji," an anonymous appendix to *Report on Indentured Labour*, 4.

44. *Ibid.*, 8.

Mayo's book promoted a "dual imperialist and anti-Asian stance."⁴⁵ In the 1916 appendix on Hindu culture, the author admitted that recent criticisms of Hindu marriage laws and "idolatry" had "filled the pages of popular books and magazines." But she or he dismissed them as criticisms of a "too fervent" desire among Hindu men to "maintain a high ideal."⁴⁶

India and the White Pacific

Turning from the conditions of indenture to the status of India itself, Andrews and Pearson argued that indenture reduced the reputation of free Indians also, a point they had learned, as they wrote, "from Mr Gandhi, who was the first to make clear to us the far-reaching effects of these evils upon the free Indians."⁴⁷ Because the indentured labourer who stayed on the islands would eventually take up small plots of land provided by the plantation owner, so the two men argued that the selection of indentured immigrants in India was to be crucial to the future of Fiji and, hence, to the world's attitude towards India itself.

The prospects for this dual goal were seemingly encouraging, given what they argued was the positive attitude towards Indians among white settlers on the islands. Fiji was nowhere near as bad as South Africa, they advised, thanks to the efforts of the Governor and Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR) company, and because Australians and New Zealanders were less racist than their counterparts in South Africa. First-hand evidence of this assertion came from their stopover in Australia and on board ship. It should be noted also that the treatment of Aboriginal people – then being criticised internationally by the Association for the Protection of Native Races in Australasia and Polynesia (APNR) and through the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society (ASAPS) in London⁴⁸ – was not commented upon by them. Rather, they described a warm reception to their claims for the morality of interracial exchange and the virtues of Indian civilization in Melbourne and Sydney and friendly discourse while at sea, leading them to conclude that they had misunderstood the White Australia Policy. It was an economic not a

45. Sinha, *Specters of Mother India*. Sinha states that C. F. Andrews travelled to the USA in 1929 specifically to counter Mayo's thesis, and thus contributed to a new kind of anti-racist alliance emerging transnationally between African Americans and Indians as well as Japanese and Chinese; *ibid.*, 104.

46. "A Paper Written for the Acting Governor of Fiji," *Report on Indentured Labour*, 5.

47. *Report on Indentured Labour*, 30.

48. For example, Jane Lydon, "Anti-Slavery in Australia: Picturing the 1838 Myall Creek Massacre," *History Compass* 15, no. 5 (May 2017): e12330, doi: 10.1111/hic3.12330.

race-based policy and even the exclusion of Indians despite their being British subjects, was a matter of embarrassment among those they met:

Indeed ... when we were travelling through the country listening to opinions openly expressed on all sides, we seemed to find in the air a new sentiment towards India in the very making. At public meetings in Melbourne and Sydney, when we openly and plainly condemned the "White Australia Policy," we were heartily cheered ... [E]ducated Australians, one and all, were opposed to the disrespect shown to educated Indians in their statutes, and that the country would soon be with them in demanding a revision of their ordinance.⁴⁹

This enlightened attitude was further reflected, they believed, on Fiji itself where a diversity of non-white races including Japanese, Chinese, and Samoan, combined with the "hail-fellow-well-met" attitude of Australians. As a result, "a 'cosmopolitan' rather than the 'racial' spirit" would ensue, meaning Fiji would never become a "white man's country."⁵⁰ Even so, Fiji was of key strategic importance to Australia's place as a white nation in the Pacific. In a note titled "The Place of Fiji in the Pacific," the authors reflected that while the significance of Fiji in the Pacific was hardly realised "by people in India," it functioned already as a vital naval base for Australia and New Zealand, and the chief port for ocean liners between Australia and the USA.⁵¹ An unfortunate effect of this increased traffic had been that Fiji was now among "the travellers in the Pacific ... a false advertisement" of India. "We do not wish to enter into the political question, namely, the danger of colonizing such an important outpost with a weak and degraded population, though much might be said upon that subject. But we cannot pass over," they wrote, "the relation of the Fiji Indian population to the place which India itself holds in the eyes of the civilized world. For that question is more than political, it affects the moral intercourse of the nations of the world."⁵²

49. *Report on Indentured Labour*, 63. On immigration restriction and British Indian subjects, see Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the Question of Racial Equality* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2008), 255–56; Kama Maclean, "Examinations, Access, and Inequity with the Empire: Britain, Australia and India, 1890–1910," *Postcolonial Studies* 18, no. 2 (2015): 115–32; Margaret Allen, "Identifying Sher Mohamad: 'a good citizen,'" in *Empire Calling: Administering Colonial Australasia and India*, ed. Ralph Crane, Anna Johnston, and C. Vijayasree (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 103–19. For a discussion of progressive views among white Australians on the White Australia Policy in the interwar years, see Fiona Paisley, "The Spoils of Opportunity: Janet Mitchell and Australian Internationalism in the Interwar Pacific," *History Australia* 13, no. 4 (2016): 575–91.

50. *Report on Indentured Labour*, 59.

51. Steel, "Fiji is Really the Honolulu of the Dominion."

52. "Note 17: The Place of Fiji in the Pacific," *Report on Indentured Labour*, 33.

In another note appended to their report, "Fiji as an Indian Colony," Andrews and Pearson added that they were persuaded that the question of indenture was "bound up" with the "far broader issue of colonization." They advised that it was "the deliberate intention of the Governor of Fiji to make the islands into an Indian colony."⁵³ Such an aim would be achievable within a generation because (they advised) it was widely asserted that the Indian population would soon overtake the native one. That the islands would be placed under the "direct administration" of Australia and New Zealand following the war was being openly discussed in Australia, they reported, as one of the possible "war changes."⁵⁴

In addition, they found a new attitude in Australia and New Zealand towards India as a civilisation. This change in outlook had been influenced by recent reports of the heroic war service of Indians alongside Australian and New Zealand servicemen (the ANZACs) at Gallipoli.⁵⁵ They described women in Melbourne and Sydney wearing brooches in the shape of Gurkha *kukris* or swords. They also declared that the new Trans-Australia railway had brought India closer to the eastern states. There was an upsurge of interest in Indian culture and civilisation, as was evident in their minds in the popularity of Tagore's book of poems that "everyone" was reading,⁵⁶ the same book of poetry that had led them to meet Tagore in London in 1912.⁵⁷ Thus, they concluded that India would need to take greater responsibility for selecting quality migrants for Fiji. Ultimately, "[i]t rests with India, the motherland of these her distant children, to give them such good conditions that they may worthily represent her in the Pacific."⁵⁸ In the meantime, the "pathetic appeal" of the indentured for "help in their distress ... should be lifted above the level of ... [economic] interests, and made to depend upon the higher sovereign claims of humanity itself."⁵⁹

In addition to linking India and Fiji as sites of renewal, Andrews and Pearson expected that the post-war Pacific would rely on Indian migration for development in the Pacific. Thus they reiterated the commonly-held notion that those they described in the report as native Fijians would be unable to provide such an impetus, remaining for their own sakes under the traditional control of their chiefs and the

53. *Ibid.*, 31.

54. *Ibid.*, 63.

55. Peter Stanley, *Die in Battle, Do Not Despair: The Indians on Gallipoli, 1915* (Solihull: Helion, 2015).

56. *Report on Indentured Labour*, 62.

57. For example, Tinker, *The Ordeal of Love*, 56–57.

58. *Report on Indentured Labour*, 64.

59. *Ibid.*, 67.

influence of Christian missions, while, on the other hand, white labour was inherently ill-adapted to tropical conditions.⁶⁰ In making these assumptions, the pair reiterated a racial geography marked by the backwardness of indigenous Fijians, the limits of white masculinity in the tropics, and the availability of amenable Indian labour.⁶¹

Indenture as a Form of Slavery

On their way to Fiji, apparently Andrews and Pearson were often told that Europeans also worked under contract in many parts of the world (such as Australia). But they felt the comparison of Indian and European contracted labour only strengthened their cause. While the latter was based on "freedom, responsibility and intelligence," the Indian experience was "nearly equivalent to the old word 'slavery' writ large."⁶² The current system of Indian indenture was essentially equivalent to slavery in this larger sense, as both were an "endeavour to get the service of a fellow human being on compulsory terms."⁶³ Similarly also, the corrupting effect of reducing humans to economic value could be seen in the fact that Colonial Emigration authorities paid recruiting agents (or "kangani") a sum per head and a bonus for every woman, practices that "recall[ed] the worst features of the old slave system" and encouraged "cunning and fraud."⁶⁴ Indeed, "unscrupulous exploitation dogs the footsteps of the illiterate coolie from first to last."⁶⁵

As this special issue attests, by the early twentieth century the reform of indenture had become a global issue that, like the so-called abolition of slavery in the mid-nineteenth century, sought to assert Britain's leadership in the treatment of non-white races. This was a particular moment in relation to Fiji, as indenture had been suspended during the war in order not to detract from Indian conscription into the army. Questions were emanating from India, among English-speaking progressives, and would be aired in British parliament about "ending" or mostly reforming, the system after the war. In addition, Andrews and Pearson pointed out that sugar profits were at a high point suggesting the availability of funds to enhance workers' conditions. Their findings contributed to the "end" of indenture in 1916 declared by one of their

supporters, Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy of India, several months after they had been published. But it would not be until 1918, when Andrews returned to the region, that his and Pearson's report gave rise to new impetus between the APNR in Australia and the ASAPS in London.

Through the Permanent Mandates Commission at the League of Nations, Australia would be appointed the mandated power in formerly German New Guinea following the war. As explained in a brief history of the origins of the association written in the 1930s, a committee of missionaries met in Sydney in 1910 to discuss reports emerging on the unjust conditions of labour in German New Guinea. The group representing missions and churches with an interest in the Pacific quickly realised that it needed to form an organisation in order to respond to labour issues in the New Hebrides, Papua, and Fiji, as well as among Aboriginal people in Australia. According to this document, the APNR formed in 1911 explicitly sought to model itself on the ASAPS in London formed through an amalgamation of the Aborigines Protection Society and the Anti-Slavery Society active since the mid-nineteenth century.⁶⁶

Over following years the ASAPS continued to develop an international reputation, including in Australia for its campaigning in the name of Australian Aboriginal people and "native" peoples around the world and in the British empire. It would wield significant influence in following years during the formation of the League of Nations. The association would be actively involved in the initiation, framing and applications of the Slavery and Forced Labour Conventions following World War I through which anti-slavery was mobilised as a leading humanitarian critique of unfreeness in the modern world.⁶⁷ The ASAPS supported the campaign for Indian Dominion status, participating, for example, at the Nationalities and Subject Races conference held in London in 1910 at which India was represented by nationalist leaders, one of whom had been recently deported by British authorities.⁶⁸

60. Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002).

61. On the construction of racial categories and their historical legacies, see John D. Kelly and Martha Kaplan, *Represented Communities: Fiji and World Decolonization* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

62. *Report on Indentured Labour*, 2.

63. *Ibid.*

64. *Ibid.*, 6.

65. *Ibid.*, 5.

66. "The Association for the Protection of Native Races in Australasia and Polynesia," first of six typed pages, S55-131-6-1, APNR Papers, Special Collections, University of Sydney Archives, Sydney. On the anti-slavery society in London, see Zoe Laidlaw, "Integrating Metropolitan, Colonial and Imperial History: The Aborigines Select Committee of 1835-1837" in *Writing Colonial Histories: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Julie Evans and Tracey Banivanua Mar (Melbourne: RMIT Publishing, 2012), 75-91; James Heartfield, *The Aborigines Protection Society: Humanitarian Imperialism in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Canada, South Africa, and the Congo, 1836-1909* (London: Hurst, 2011).

67. Kevin Grant, *A Civilized Savagery: Britain and the New Slavery in Africa, 1884-1926* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

68. *Nationalities and Subject Races: Report of Conference Held in Caxton Hall, Westminster, June 28-30, 1910* (London: P. S. Kind and Son, c1910).

Through the ASAPS, the APNR contributed to the "humanitarian imperialism" that would soon dominate the League of Nations.⁶⁹ Far from being antithetical to the ambitions of Dominion Australia, the progressive imperial worldview shared by the APNR and the ASAPS envisaged a future for the Pacific based on Christian white rule. One of the founding aims of the missionary-dominated APNR, as articulated at its first meetings in the Melanesian Mission Office in Pitt Street, Sydney, was to "strengthen" the "hands" of the Prime Minister at the Imperial Conference of that year. By providing him with information about poor conditions on the "islands," they hoped to increase "the sphere of Australian political influence."⁷⁰ APNR considered that Australian control of Fiji could parallel that practiced in Papua, although the use of unfree labour in Papua was also a topic of discussion at APNR meetings.

The two organisations had been in close correspondence in previous years. Since the formation of the APNR in 1911, the ASAPS had published information from APNR reports and correspondence in the pages of *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*.⁷¹ APNR annual reports concerned with Australasia and Polynesia (the Pacific) included the "Western Pacific" and "Fiji" as areas of concern along with the Northern Territory (under Federal control from 1911), Papua, German New Guinea, and the New Hebrides. Although mobilised as a site of humanitarian concern, the question of indenture's impact on "native" labour in Fiji assumed the kinds of racialised hierarchies of difference familiar also to White Australia. In this sense, concern about Indian indenture into the Pacific region articulated with anxieties about the proximity between "Asians," including "coolie labour," and Aboriginal people within Australia (see Griffiths' article in this issue). Thus in 1916 the APNR in its contribution to humanitarian debate about the future of indenture argued that the "presence of Asiatics generally" – meaning free as well as indentured Indians on Fiji – "has a most detrimental influence upon the native races, with whom they mingle."⁷²

Over following years, areas of concern raised in APNR annual reports would continue to be rehearsed by the ASAPS in the pages of *The Reporter*, its newsletter with a global readership promoting a

version of Christian reformism that evinced a cosmopolitan worldview while nonetheless mobilising racial typologies. In the case of Fiji and indenture, this effect was most evident in relation to those referred to as Native Fijians. Also subject to humanitarian concern at this time, they were considered subject to the consequences of culture clash claimed to have the potential to result in their extinction. Native Fiji thus figures for the most part in the 1916 report as the grounds on which the reform of indenture would be achieved; that is, by its replacement with free migration.

From the beginning, the APNR had been concerned with the conditions of Aboriginal people in Australia, considering them "a remnant of the primeval inhabitants and owners of the country, dispossessed" and calling for federal control of their affairs.⁷³ Already in 1912 it sent a delegation to the Western Australian premier protesting the "dispersal" of Aboriginal people in that state by a "police punitive expedition."⁷⁴ By the 1930s, a new era in Aboriginal affairs occupied the efforts of the association. In 1933, the centenary of Abolition, the activist and campaigner Mary Montgomery Bennett, another long-term correspondent of the ASAPS, would call upon the International Labour Organisation to declare Aboriginal labour conditions in contravention of not only humanitarian standards but also of international law.⁷⁵

The ASAPS' focus on Indian indenture in 1910 and 1911, informed by the APNR, was an expression of renewed debate on indenture circulating among British colonial authorities and Indian nationalists anticipating the Dominion status of India. In addition, the ASAPS received information directly from Fiji, for example in 1913 regarding the case of a woman brought before the courts for visiting her husband outside of the "coolie lines."⁷⁶ This and many other cases point to the agency of the indentured in demanding change. In 1911, in response to the Sanderson commission report, John Harris produced a pamphlet titled "Coolie Labour" arguing for the regulation of contracted labour rather than its abolition.⁷⁷ And on 27 March 1912, the chairman of the

73. *Ibid.*, 2.

74. News clipping, no date, Minute Books, S55–131–1–1, APNR Papers.

75. Fiona Paisley, "An Echo of Black Slavery: Emancipation, Forced Labour and Australia in 1933," *Australian Historical Studies* 45, no. 1 (2014): 103–25; Alison Holland, *Just Relations: The Story of Mary Bennett's Crusade for Aboriginal Rights* (Crawley WA: UWAP Scholarly, 2015); Russell McGregor, "'Breed Out the Colour' or the Importance of Being White," *Australian Historical Studies* 33, no. 120 (2002): 286–302.

76. Copy of letter from the Agent General of Immigration, Suva, 3 December 1913, "Coolies," MSS Brit Emp S22 G389, Anti-Slavery Papers, Special Collections, Weston Library, Oxford.

77. "Coolie Labour," typed sheets, no date, pp. 1–4, "Coolies," MSS Brit Emp S22 G479, ASAPS Papers.

69. Amalia Ribi Forclaz, *Humanitarian Imperialism: The Politics of Anti-Slavery Activism 1880–1940* (Oxford: University Press, 2015).

70. "Association for the Protection of Native Races," no page numbers, Minutes Books, S55–131–1–1, APNR Papers.

71. For example, "Australian Native Races Association," *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, series 3, vol. 5, no. 1 (1913): 44–45; "The New Hebrides Problem," *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, series 4, vol. 5, no. 2 (1914): 43; "Indentured Labour in Papua," *The Anti-Slavery Reporter*, series 5, vol. 5, no. 3 (1915): 63–65.

72. APNR Annual Report, 1916, p. 4, Minute Books, S55–131–1–2, APNR Papers.

ASAPS and Member of Parliament, Noel Buxton, contributed to a series of questions in parliament raised over following years concerning when and how reforms would take place.⁷⁸ By 1916, Sir Austen Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for India, confirmed in the House that change would be achieved through measured reform. He referred to a speech given earlier that year by the Viceroy of India, Lord Hardinge (informed by Andrews and Pearson) before the Legislative Council in India that indenture would end for the remaining Indian indentured workers across the British empire once alternative contractual labour systems were in place. He hoped India would accept this gradual approach in "a reasonable spirit" given these changes would inevitably impact on "those important industries in the Colonies which have been built upon Indian labour, and which the prosperity of the Colonies largely depends." In these exchanges, the question of indenture was often coupled with "Indian immigration."⁷⁹

Fiji and the End of Indenture

In Fiji, even though indenture had formally ended, the situation of those living out their contracts concerned Andrews. He would be welcomed in 1917 on one of his return visits, and given the name "friend of the poor" (*Deenbandhi*) in recognition of his work.⁸⁰ Wartime food shortages had worsened conditions on the line. Moreover, the present Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu had overturned Hardinge's commitment to end indenture. According to Rajendra Prasad, it was only after a second report written by Andrews in 1918 documenting starving adults and children on the plantations in Fiji that Montagu finally agreed to end indenture.⁸¹ During a stopover in Sydney that year, Andrews spoke at a meeting of the APNR, presumably pointing out that conditions had not changed no matter that the system had "ended." The members of the Association were sufficiently compelled by his account particularly of "its attendant evils especially falling on the women and children," that they requested to send a delegation to the Directors of CSR in Fiji.⁸² The General Manager of the sugar company rejected the proposition outright, declaring that he was not going to discuss the report because "he [Andrews] informed us that he came to Fiji at the cost of a body of

Indians who, we believe, belong to the small Anti-British party, which has, for the past three years, been endeavouring to embarrass British rule in India." To which the APNR responded that even if this were the case, more so should the CSR respond. The APNR then advised Sir Ernest Sweet-Escott, the Governor of Fiji, that it had been provided with an affidavit from Andrews stating that he had been sent by "the foremost Indian members of the Viceroy's Council and with the concurrence of the Viceroy." But Sweet-Escott replied likewise that he would have no further communication with the society, would not meet with Andrews, and had not known of his visit in 1915 (presumably when the Acting Governor was in residence).⁸³

Throughout these exchanges, the Joint Honorary Secretary of the APNR, Rev W. Morley, had been keeping the Anti-Slavery Society in London informed. He forwarded to the society a copy of *Indentured Labour in Fiji* for its files. As the ASAPS committee in London must have read in its pages, in their report Andrews and Pearson had been careful to assert the positive ways in which they had been received by planters, the CSR, and the Governor during their visit in 1915. They thanked the Sydney headquarters of the CSR for providing them with permission to investigate in their mills in Fiji, and they declared the managers helpful, as had been the (Acting) Governor. But they noted at the same time in their report that assertions of good intention had not led to reform. Perhaps, they suggested, CSR might best be understood through the lens of Robert Louis Stevenson's character, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde: on one hand, a business "grinding down the faces of the poor" and refusing to compensate the maimed; on the other, wishing to be seen as a "benevolent philanthropist" funding Indian settlement through assisted passage and access to plots of land, even to the point of producing pamphlets showing coolies on estates being treated humanely "like a favoured child of fortune – and actually believing its own statements."⁸⁴ According to Andrews and Pearson, the whole island and the economy, including the profits of CSR, could only benefit by encouraging freely contracted Indian immigrants rather than formerly enslaved Indian workers to stay and develop the land.⁸⁵

78. Copies of these questions in parliament are found in "Coolies," MSS Brit Emp S22 G480, ASAPS Papers.

79. *Ibid.*

80. Prasad, *Tears in Paradise*, 123.

81. *Ibid.*, 126.

82. W. Morley, APNR, to Secretary, Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, 1 August 1918, "Coolies," MSS Brit Emp S22 G381, Anti-Slavery Papers.

83. APNR to CSR, 22 January 1918, p. 3; APNR to CSR, 28 February 1918; APNR to Governor of Fiji, 20 March 1918; Governor of Fiji to APNR, 18 July 1918; all in "Indentured Labour Fiji," S55–131–7–1, APNR Papers.

84. *Report on Indentured Labour*, 64.

85. For an analysis of the obstacles faced by the Fijian economy under British rule, see Bruce Knapman, "Capitalism's Economic Impact on Colonial Fiji, 1874–1939: Development or Underdevelopment?" *Journal of Pacific History* 20, no. 2 (1985): 66–83.

But that land was already colonised. By focussing on indenture, the 1916 report omitted a parallel story of scrutiny among native Fijians, who were in these same years being investigated by colonial and imperial authorities in terms of their role (or rather, supposed lack of) in development. Drawing on racial theories, health and population management characteristic of colonisation in tropical environments, Native Fijians were considered insufficiently advanced as a "race" to play an active role in the process of development and were, moreover, in many eyes at risk of "dying out" through the impacts of "culture clash."⁸⁶ The assumption underlying the intention to turn indenture into migration was that the indigenous Fijians would be preserved as a remnant under protectionist colonial rule.

Andrews and Pearson were clearly aware of contemporary concerns about racial mixing, although they claimed that the fear of "Asians" as a racial peril in the Pacific mobilised by early proponents of the White Australia Policy was no longer a feature of public opinion in modern Australia. Relations between the two non-white races on the island were of central consequence to their narrative of relative advancement, in which indentured and free Indians were cast as essentially civilised, if vulnerable to the negative effects of the "line." In a note appended to their report titled "Fijians and Indians," the two men stated that particular attention should be paid to protecting the Indigenous people of the island, because "[t]he Fijian is only recently emerged from savagery and cannibalism" although "Christianisation through missionary work had made progress in eradicating these propensities."⁸⁷ The two men were quite ready to reiterate notions of native incapacity among Pacific Islanders, while avowedly committed to the capacity of Indian "natives," seeing the latter as the inheritors of a civilisation and religious sensibility attractive to their own worldview.

Representing India migration into Fiji as a benign project necessarily veiled the violent history of colonisation and aligned uses of indenture in the Pacific. The "blackbirding" or forced indenture of Pacific Islanders ("Kanakas") into Queensland had involved the Australian and New Zealand company CSR that by the 1910s was dominating the economy of Fiji. CSR had featured in appeals on behalf of their indentured workers in northern Australia to the Anti-Slavery Society in London during the 1870s.⁸⁸ Andrews and Pearson focussed

86. Banivanua Mar, *Decolonisation and the Pacific*, 74ff.

87. "Note 16: Fijians and Indians," *Report on Indentured Labour*, 32.

88. MSS Brit Emp S22 G100 vol. 13, "Fiji," Anti-Slavery Papers; and, for example, "Slavery in Fiji," *The Anti-Slavery Reporter* 16, no. 2 (1896): 91. See Banivanua Mar, *Violence and Colonial Dialogue*, 13; and for Anti-Slavery involvement in the British Caribbean, Kale Madhavi, *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian*

instead in their report on the end of this trade in Pacific labour as a sign of Australia's progress, thereby glossing the injustices it had entailed – even if, at the same time, remarking in passing that the high murder and suicide rate in Fiji was no news to Australians who told them they had seen worse in relation to Pacific Islanders in nineteenth century Queensland.⁸⁹ Ironically, the end of the traffic in "Kanakas" labour had provided the context for the rise of Indian indenture into Fiji.

Humanitarian Imperialism and the Indian Nationalist Cause

Already by 1917, the humanitarian concerns of the ASAPS and APNR were arguably out of step with the Indian nationalist cause. John Harris of the ASAPS was not unaware of this issue, given his contemporaneous exchanges with Henry S. L. Polak, a Jewish activist lawyer recently arrived from South Africa and India and well-networked into the progressive elite in London. Polak was a close friend of Gandhi, having worked with him in South Africa, the two men becoming life-long confidantes. In 1909, Polak published a pamphlet condemning indenture in South Africa.⁹⁰ And, as Margaret Allen has shown, in 1911 he attended the Universal Races Congress in London (to which the ASAPS was also a contributor) where he spoke on the South African Indian campaign and the struggles of Indian nationalists to achieve independence not least in the name of Indian workers around the world. During 1916 and early 1917, Polak toured India to lecture against indenture, including at meetings of The Servants of India.⁹¹

On 30 November 1917, Polak wrote a letter followed by a long statement to Lord Islington, the Under-Secretary of State for India, (copies also in the ASAPS files) protesting against the worth of the reforms recommended by the interdepartmental conference (noted above), because regulation would never work while "Indian labourers are not *free citizens of the Empire*" (emphasis in original). No amount of protection would create the kind of precautions enjoyed by British emigrants, and India was no longer content to be "regarded in the outer Empire as a 'coolie' country."⁹² In his personal exchanges with Harris,

Indentured Labor in the British Caribbean (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), particularly ch. 4.

89. *Report on Indentured Labour*, 63.

90. Henry S. L. Polak, *The Indians of South Africa: Helots within the Empire, and How They are Treated* (1909) referenced in Kelly, *The Politics of Virtue*, 32 fn 5.

91. Margaret Allen, "Henry Polak: The Cosmopolitan Life of a Jewish Theosophist, Friend of India and Anti-Racist Campaigner," in Haggis et al, *Cosmopolitan Lives*, 37–61. See also Robert John Holton, "Cosmopolitanism or Cosmopolitanisms? The Universal Races Congress of 1911," *Global Networks* 2, no. 2 (2002): 153–70.

92. Pollak to Lord Islington, 3 November 1917, p. 3; and second quotation in November 1917, p. 3; in "Coolies," MSS Brit Emp S22 G479. ASAPS Papers.

Polak deployed the language of anti-slavery in an effort to persuade him that reformism would fail:

I do not believe that it is possible to amend a thing that is fundamentally wrong, as I believe this scheme is ... I do not think you are going to render this thing innocuous by calling it by another name. So far as the comfort of the slave is concerned ... the spiritual loss remains the same.⁹³

Harris replied that he felt they both wanted the best for India, but on the question of reform they would have to disagree as he believed that to do otherwise would lock Indians out of opportunities across the empire.⁹⁴

Only a few months earlier, Gandhi had rejected also the idea of reform in "Indian Colonial Emigration" written for the *Indian Review*. A typed copy of that article published in September 1917 is on file alongside Polak's letters. He noted that the damning information at the interdepartmental conference had revealed the true conditions of indenture had "fairly convulsed" India. What was now proposed, however, was nothing more than "a scheme of indentured emigration, no doubt on a more humane basis, and safeguarded with some conditions beneficial to the emigrants taking advantage of it." While this would suit the Colonies, India had no need of such an "outlet" as the industries of India were "crying out for labour." In any case, whatever their material conditions, "the badge of inferiority is always worn" by the indentured, meaning "they can never rise to their full status." "The system of indenture was one of temporary slavery; it was incapable of being amended" and he "hoped that India will never consent to its revival, in any shape or form." Gandhi noted also that the reforms suggested by the committee did not apply to the Self-Governing Colonies of South Africa, Canada, or Australia.⁹⁵

In conclusion, in their 1916 report Andrews and Pearson rehearsed concerns about the conditions of indenture among Indians in Fiji on moral grounds. They canvassed the implications of indenture for the development of Fiji and for the reputation of India as a future Dominion nation in the British empire. The humanitarian agenda they mobilised blurred the difference between improving the system and

ending it entirely, a distinction that was of increasing importance to Indian nationalists. As the APNR and ASAPS expressions of concern indicate, the language of progressive liberal humanitarian imperialism drew attention to morality and sexuality. Women's lives and behaviours became the litmus on which the conditions of Indian indenture on Fiji were viewed as degenerative upon "character" rather than as simply labour rights agendas. The importance of family life and marriage (and thus the behaviour of women) underlined the primacy of Indian masculinity to these racial mappings of the conditions of unfree immigrants in the British colony of Fiji. Meanwhile the conditions of Native Fijians under colonial rule were not challenged beyond eliciting a degree of self-reflexivity among Australians and New Zealanders about their own history and outlook. The 1916 report cast such white settlers as relatively progressive for supposedly having relinquished formerly racial attitudes and for adopting a more benign economic progressivism considered more appropriate to the post-war era to come.

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93. Pollak to John Harris, 4 December 1917, "Coolies," MSS Brit Emp S22 G479, ASAPS Papers.

94. Harris to Pollak, 8 December 1917, "Coolies," MSS Brit Emp S22 G479, ASAPS Papers.

95. "Indian Colonial Emigration by Mr MK Gandhi," pp. 1–2, "Coolies," MSS Brit Emp S22 G479, ASAPS Papers.