



---

Chapter Title: Of Journeys and Transformations: Brij V. Lal and the Study of Girit

Chapter Author(s): Doug Munro

Book Title: Chalo Jahaji

Book Subtitle: On a journey through indenture in Fiji

Book Author(s): Brij V Lal

Published by: ANU Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt24h3ss.5>

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>

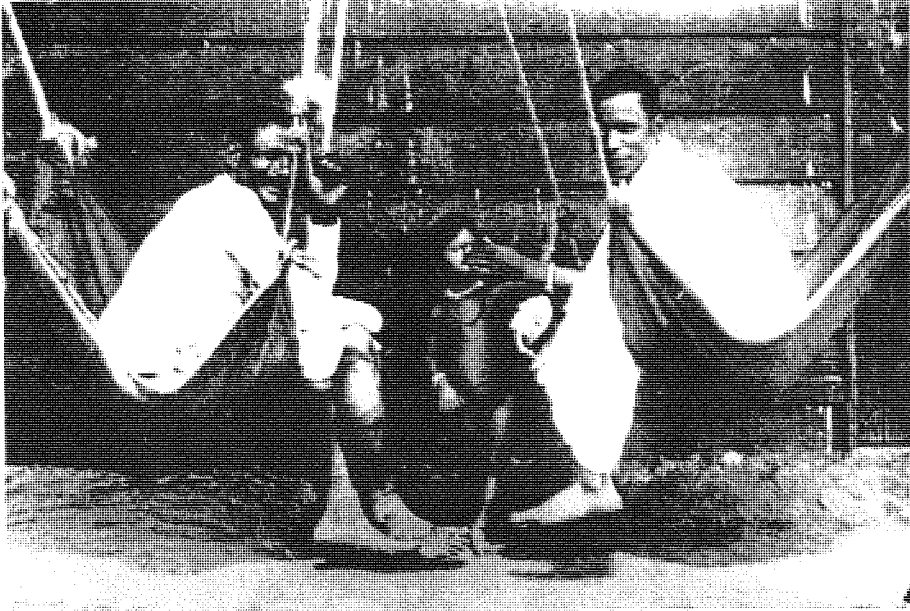


This content is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.



ANU Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Chalo Jahaji*

JSTOR



Outside the lines, two men sitting in a sack *jhalua* (hammock). A single room housed three single men, or a family. Line was what the girmitiyas called the congested plantation barracks where they lived.



# Of Journeys and Transformations: Brij V. Lal and the Study of Gimit

Doug Munro

*Leaving aside the questions of exploitation, racism, and the institutional aspects of indenture, I think that the indenture experience is a very important, formative and defining period in the history of overseas Indian communities ... because that is the site of the initial social transformation. It is fundamental.*

Brij V. Lal

Brij Lal is best known among Pacific historians for his writings on the contemporary history of Fiji and as a member of the three-man Fiji Constitution Review Commission, whose report forms the basis of that country's recently promulgated constitution. His books on the subject include an analysis of the Fiji coups, a political history of twentieth century

Fiji, a biography of the great Fiji Indian leader A.D. Patel and an account of constitutionalism in post-coup Fiji.<sup>1</sup> The other major strand in Lal's repertoire, for which he is perhaps less well known in the Pacific but for which he enjoys a substantial reputation internationally, is the Indo-Fijian indenture experience. It is a magnificent subject. Between 1836 and 1916, over 1.3 million indentured Indians travelled to places as far apart as Natal and Trinidad; this diaspora constitutes the largest segment of a trade in indentured labourers that stemmed from the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1834.<sup>2</sup> Fiji was caught up in this process and received 60,945 individuals between 1879 and 1916 (as against some 27,000 imported Pacific Islanders).<sup>3</sup> It is well to put these figures into perspective. The preponderance of Indian labourers in Fiji reflects the numerical dominance of Indian indentured labour world-wide. Conversely, the fact that Indians to Fiji constituted such a small proportion of the overall Indian total reflects the extent to which the Pacific generally was a small and insignificant segment of the global trade in indentured labourers.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, those 60,945 Indians to Fiji are an appreciable total and worthy of study in their own right.

Lal has contributed significantly to this field. In the twenty-one years from 1978, when he published his first paper, he has written or edited four books and published no fewer than 16 articles and chapters on the subject. This constitutes an appreciable corpus of scholarly work and at the time was a consuming interest. But one's life moves on and Lal wishes to draw down the curtain on this particular interest. Nevertheless, it has been the stepping stone to a highly successful career in university and public life. He has been the recipient of numerous academic and civic honours. There was the award of a 25th Anniversary of Fiji Independence Medal in recognition of his 'distinguished contribution to education in Fiji'; his election as Fellow of the Australian Humanities Academy in 1996; the appointment to the Fiji Constitution Review Commission that same year; and two years later the award of Officer of the Order of Fiji and promotion to full Professor in the Institute of Advanced Studies at The Australian National University. More recently, Anthony Low, the distinguished historian of South Asia, has dedicated his latest book to his former graduate students (or his 'Sepoys', as he calls them) and names Lal as a member of the 3rd (Canberra) Regiment along with Imran Ali, Stephen Henningham, Andrew Major and Dipesh Chakrabarty.<sup>5</sup> To do all this before the age of fifty is no mean achievement, but it is especially so for the grandson of a girmitiya (indentured labourer) who grew up on the ten acre family farm at Tabia village, on the fringes of the Labasa sugar district of Fiji, where the only

interesting reading material and about the only contact with the outside world were week-old copies of the *Fiji Times* and *Shanti Dut*.

---

Brij Lal and I first met in 1979, as graduate students, in the Records Room of the then Department of Pacific and Southeast Asian History at the Australian National University (ANU). His PhD on the origins and social background of the Fiji Indians involved a computerised analysis and the use of folklore in addition to conventional historical sources. I was told in somewhat awed tones that he was single-mindedly eating his way inch by inch through the microfilm version of the 45,000 or so Emigration Passes of the north Indian indentured workers to Fiji. He was, in the estimation of fellow students, more than usually capable and industrious. He almost lived in the National Library of Australia at this time and I hardly saw anything of him.

This was not a particularly happy time in the life of the Department of Pacific and Southeast Asian History at ANU. Such was the students' disenchantment that they organised their own seminar series, from which staff were excluded. I say 'they' because I was one of them only in the sense that I happened to be living in Canberra; I was enrolled at Macquarie University in Sydney. But I attended those fortnightly seminars on Thursday afternoons and generally enjoyed the intellectual companionship of people as diverse as Penny Gregory, Judy Bennett, Geoff Cummins, Kilifoti Etuati (from the Department of Pacific and Southeast Asian History), Greg Fry (from the Department of Political Science in The Faculties), Trish Mercer (from the Department of History in The Faculties) and John Nation (from the Department of Social and Political Change). I gave a seminar presentation, and then came the day when Lal gave a delivery on his own work. He spoke off the cuff with fluency, ease and authority that concealed effort, explaining what he was doing and what he hoped to achieve. He was in the early stages of an academic journey—the study of the Fiji Indians. It has been a continuing voyage but the ship is now at port. Lal does not intend to write much more on the indenture experience. To change the metaphor (and Lal is an avid cricket fan), he has had a fine innings. But now is the time to declare and hence the occasion to put together a selection of his essays on the origins and plantation experience of the *giritiyas*.

---

Lal likes to use the term 'journeys and transformations' to denote phases of

one's life and experiences, and how these necessarily inform and often define one's academic work. At one level it seems only natural and proper that the grandson of a *girmitiya*, who was fascinated by surviving *girmitiyas* who swapped yarns each evening under a mango tree, should write about that group. As a child, Lal was very close to his grandfather, who told him about his life in India, the reasons for coming to Fiji and what happened after that. So there were early indications that Lal had a sense of the past. In practice, however, it was not so easy for the village kid to go to university, much less to become a professional historian. The limited mental horizons and a general lack of opportunity were the main impediments. But there was a certain will to beat the odds. Lal came from an improving rural farming family that was intent on upward social and economic mobility—although hardly for the older generation given that Lal's parents were unlettered. But their children were another matter: 'always in the back of their minds', Lal told me, 'was the memory of indenture—the poverty, the petty humiliations—and my parents did not want to see their children go through a similar experience'.<sup>6</sup> Thrift and education were seen as the means to breaking a cycle of not-very-genteel quasi-poverty, especially when there was no hope that the land could provide a future for all six boys. Then there was his older brother Ben, about whose untimely death he has written here, who gladly made the necessary personal sacrifices for his younger siblings. Lal was also lucky in his teachers at Labasa Secondary School, to whom he acknowledges an enormous debt in expanding his mental horizons by introducing him to good literature and giving him a solid grounding for his future academic work.

The award of a Canadian Third Country Scholarship enabled him to enrol at the University of the South Pacific (USP) in 1971. His initial plan was to become a high school English teacher, but a mandatory course in transformational grammar deterred him from pursuing his 'romantic interest in the novels of the Bronte sisters, [so] he switched to history, a decision he has not often regretted'.<sup>7</sup> The changeover to history seemed to suit him and as a final year undergraduate he won the Te Rangi Hiroa Award for the best essay in Pacific history by a USP student for that year. The award of a Graduate Fellowship took Lal to the University of British Columbia where he studied modern Chinese history but wrote a Masters thesis on Sikhs in Vancouver<sup>8</sup> and won the John and Annie Southcott Memorial Prize for the outstanding graduating student in history.

Returning to USP in 1976 as a junior lecturer in History/Politics, Lal realised that he wanted to be an academic and to enjoy a life of the mind,

as they say. He had already started to publish,<sup>9</sup> but an academic career required further postgraduate work so he applied for a Research Scholarship at the ANU. There is an untold story of his getting placed at ANU and finding a suitable dissertation topic. His initial intention was to work on a topic of a demographic nature. He sent a copy of his Masters thesis and an accompanying letter of inquiry to the only scholar he knew of at ANU, the demographer Charles Price, who had just published a book on racial exclusion.<sup>10</sup> Price considered that Lal's lack of mathematics precluded work in demography, so he forwarded the letter and thesis to Wang Gungwu, the Director of the Research School of Pacific Studies. The paperwork then did the rounds and landed on the table of Robin Jeffery, the head of the South Asian section (and now Professor of Politics at La Trobe University). The ANU seems to have been in something of a quandary. Here was an able student from the region who clearly had to be given a scholarship. But in what section should he be placed and who would be the supervisor? The Vice-Chancellor, Anthony Low, thought it important to bring Lal to Canberra, but could not take full responsibility for Lal's supervision because he already had four PhD students (his 'Sepoys'). Another ANU academic to enter the picture was Ken Gillion, the historian of Indo-Fijian indenture,<sup>11</sup> who was about to go to Fiji for further research. Lal by that time had been offered a scholarship and was busily assessing the Emigration Passes in National Archives of Fiji. Impressed by Lal's industriousness, Gillion reported back accordingly. In the event, Lal was placed in Robin Jeffreys' South Asian section, Anthony Low was officially his supervisor, and Ken Gillion took charge of Lal's everyday mentoring.

The strong and abiding friendship that developed between Gillion and Lal was initially rather tense, partly a function of Gillion's introverted yet demanding nature being confronted with the strong-willed impatience of his newest student. A mismatch of anxiety on Lal's part and expectation on Gillion's also threw their disparate personalities into sharp relief and created for a while an abrasive effect. The problem centred on the choice of a PhD topic. Having done his Masters on the Sikhs in Vancouver, Lal was set to do a comparable study on Fiji but found it not to his liking. As he tells it:

I came [to ANU] and started working on the Sikhs. After a month I was bored with the subject. The records were sketchy and the topic just didn't interest me. There was a lot of private anguish. I told Ken that I wanted to work on the history of indenture. At first he was very unencouraging because he said the topic was done, and there was little new that I would contribute. There was also the sense that I was encroaching on his turf, and

Ahmed Ali was working on his [oral histories] book at that time.<sup>12</sup> There was a feeling that I would just be deconstructing, instead of contributing new knowledge. I said I would work on something else. And then—I don't know how it happened—I said, 'I'll look at the background of these people. You've looked at their experience in Fiji'. All of a sudden, for some strange reason, he became interested.<sup>13</sup>

It is not hard to see why Gillion was so keen to support a full-scale study of the origins Indo-Fijians: he knew that it was a viable topic, having himself written a journal article on the subject a full two decades earlier.<sup>14</sup> The choice of topic made sense in another respect: Lal's eventual study of Indian *emigration* to Fiji would nicely complement his de facto supervisor's monograph-length work on the indenture experience of those same *immigrants*.

That is not to say that Lal was going to emerge in the Gillion mould. Their temperaments were too different for that ever to happen. So were their respective views of the historian's task. Whereas Gillion, as Lal sees it, was concerned 'to maintain "balance".... so [that] everyone gets their share of his attention',<sup>15</sup> Lal himself needs a sense of involvement and attachment before he can warm to a subject; and certainly, as he later explained, his dissertation provided some of those satisfactions:

...it was a project in which the heart and the head came together. I was writing about my own people, about myself really. So there was a sense of immediacy, emotional attachment. I had the language, I had the contacts. I was making a discovery that had a direct social and personal interest. I have since discovered—no doubt my early exposure to great literature played a part here—that I am not very good at things abstract, remote. A subject has to appeal to me emotionally, has to have some personal relevance for me to be intellectually engaged with it.<sup>16</sup>

In 1980, after three years' 'ordeal by thesis', Lal submitted a two volume PhD dissertation on the origins of the Fijian Indians; a much-reduced version was published in 1983 under the title *Girmitiyas*, and dedicated to Ken Gillion.<sup>17</sup> It is largely an analysis of the 45,439 Emigration Passes of the north Indians who embarked at Calcutta for Fiji. His dissertation and book can, without too much hindsight, be seen as a logical intellectual outcome of his upbringing, his education and his need for attachment to a subject. As a small boy in Tabia village, he listened to his grandfather telling stories about India and why he came to Fiji. His PhD candidature, in days when fieldwork was still required and possible, enabled him to make a

pilgrimage to his ancestral land. Like those 45,439 North Indians who crossed the *kala pani* (dark waters) for Fiji, so did Lal but from the opposite direction. He got a huge culture shock: the oppressiveness of India with its poverty and malfunctionings assailed his senses and it took time to come to terms with the strangeness and frequent unpleasantness of it all. The highlight was to visit his grandfather's village in Bahraich. His grandfather, who died in 1962, was forever talking about the return home, and Lal discovered that the people of Bahraich had kept a place and a plot of land for him until a few years before his death (see 'Return to Bahraich' in this volume). In December 1998, Lal revisited Bahraich, this time with his own family, but only to find that many people he had met during his first trip were gone. 'I have difficulty establishing rapport with the younger generation', he writes in an essay here ('Sunrise on the Ganga'). 'I am a stranger among them'. A journey is complete. He will not return again to his grandfather's village.

---

Such were the family and academic influences on Lal's work on the origins of the Fiji Indians. What about his methods and conclusions? As he said of his dissertation:

Its purpose is to delineate the background of the indentured emigrants in India. Our central concern is to understand who the emigrants were, what social and economic strata and regions of the subcontinent they came from, the reasons for their emigration, the processes of recruitment and registration; in short, the structural dynamics of indentured labour emigration from India. These questions have, by and large, occupied the periphery of most studies of Indian indenture; yet it is certain that without a fuller understanding of them, any objective appraisal of the indenture system cannot be made.<sup>18</sup>

That appraisal was made on the basis of a computer analysis. The raw data collected from the Emigration Passes were entered onto code sheets and fed into a computer.

One purpose of Lal's study was to test what a reviewer of his eventual book described as 'The distinctly hostile stereotype of indentured Indians belonging to the dregs of Indian society, driven by unremitting poverty to the comparatively affluent circumstances of Fijian plantations, there to prove basely ungrateful to their employers-cum-benefactors by demanding quite unreasonable economic and political concessions'.<sup>19</sup> To the contrary, the *giritiyas* were scarcely a sampling of untouchables from the streets of

Calcutta. Lal demonstrated conclusively that just under 22 per cent came from the lower classes. To sum up, the emigrants were of varied social origins drawn from a wide cross-section of rural society and representing, to varying degrees, most castes. These conclusions, which are outlined in the early chapters to this volume, emerge from Lal's computerized analysis of the Emigration Passes.

Other conclusions, however, did not and could not emerge from the Emigration Passes but are based on archival research and fieldwork. On these bases, Lal took issue with another 'conventional stereotype of Indians being the world's greatest 'landlubbers', an immobile race immutably fixed in a rigidly stratified social system, observing eternal rules of *dharma* (duty) and *karma* (fate)'.<sup>20</sup> Rather, emigration to Fiji and elsewhere was an extension of an existing movement of wage labourers to the Calcutta jute mills, the Assam tea gardens, the Bihar coal mines, the Bombay textile mills. Worker mobility stemmed from a variety of 'push' factors that stemmed from the extent of rural poverty and dislocation, especially when famine stalked the land. In examining the recruiting process, Lal concluded that enlistment was sometimes based on deception and fraud but that its extent had been exaggerated. So the context is one of social mobility and the pervasive themes are agency, participation and choice by the subjects themselves.

One test of an author's interpretation is its durability. Another is its reception among workers in the same vineyard. In downplaying the coercive and deceptive role of the *arkatis*, Lal has run into criticism from Marina Carter, who found that many emigrants 'were often either unaware of their real destination or unable to reach the colony of their choice'.<sup>21</sup> But the bulk of discussion inclines in the opposite direction. In 1997, Clem Secharan, the historian of Indians in British Guiana, wrote that Lal's *Girmitiyas* was '[a] rare fount of illumination':

Here, in a freshly lucid and dispassionate way, the unexamined dogma of deception and kidnapping is scrutinised and largely debunked. Lal has unearthed compelling socio-economic reasons for their leaving, and one feels coaxed into adopting these, to see their role in shaping the temperament of the indentured labourers and their descendants in the sugar colonies.<sup>22</sup>

---

Lal's use of computer analysis is perhaps the best known feature of his earlier work. But it is not something that impels his unqualified admiration.

As he said in his dissertation,

my enthusiasm for the value of computerised data is tempered by my awareness of its limitations. We now know a great deal about who emigrated, when and from where—but very little about why all this happened. In other words, quantification has helped us to answer the 'how' (structural) questions of history, but not the 'why' (causal) questions. To understand the latter, we have had to turn to conventional published and unpublished sources as well as to oral and impressionistic evidence.<sup>23</sup>

This 'oral and impressionistic evidence' was the use of folk songs, which appear throughout *Girmitiyas*. The idea to utilise such material and to see how Indian emigration was represented in folk culture came from Wang Gungwu, one of Lal's PhD supervisors who himself was working at the time on Chinese emigration.<sup>24</sup> The results might now seem somewhat superficial and insufficiently integrated into Lal's broader discussion, but this aspect of *Girmitiyas* was done just as it was becoming academically respectable and finding a place within mainstream discourse.<sup>25</sup>

It is worth digressing to say that historians of the Pacific Islands labour trade have been notably innovative, methodologically adventurous and receptive to techniques that will add to the more conventional documentary sources, or enable them to handle the conventional sources more effectively. Peter Corris started the trend in the late 1960s when he engaged in fieldwork in Queensland, Fiji and the Solomon Islands, and interviewed surviving participants in the Solomon Islands labour trade.<sup>26</sup> The following decade, Judith Bennett, likewise gathered oral testimony in the Solomon Islands and, among other things, produced the best account of plantation life thus far in Pacific Islands historiography.<sup>27</sup> Clive Moore also made extensive use of oral testimony and innovatively intermeshed it with the documentary evidence. For example, from the documents he identified by name some 3,800 of the 9,000 Malaitans who enlisted for Queensland plantations. During fieldwork, oral information was collated on 132 of these recruits, whose personal details corroborated the existing interpretation of recruiting. Nearly all recruited willingly. Moore's research technique also modified previously held conclusions. It was previously thought that Malaitan recruits up until 1884 were predominantly salt-water people, and mostly bush people thereafter. Rather than this shift being a sharp break, however, Moore's research technique revealed that it was a 'gradual transition'. The oral testimony from Malaita also resulted in a major revision on the motives for enlisting. Once thought to have been an individual matter, it was frequently a corporate decision with kin groups

deciding who should go and who should stay.<sup>28</sup>

A closer approach to Lal's is that of Patricia Mercer who, in addition to conventional archival and oral research, deploys the specialised techniques of historical demography in her study of Pacific Islander settlement in North Queensland. In Mercer's words, historical demography involves the

reconstruction of the demographic features of a community through aggregation of individual and life histories built up from nominal sources: i.e. those in which an individual is named. These sources extend well beyond the usual library and archival material to encompass a wealth of local records—church, school, [sugar] mill, hospital and cemetery—held in the region itself and the oral testimony of present day Islanders.... This methodology offers a window on social history through the linkages which can be made between the individual and wider economic, social and cultural patterns: mobility economic and physical, occupation, educational performance, religious membership, family and community relationships support structures, social unity and divisions.<sup>29</sup>

Most recently, Dorothy Shineberg's study of the labour trade in Pacific Islanders to New Caledonia also displays a fine sense of how to surmount the limitations of the documentary sources. Her initial problem was simply knowing the size and scale of this migration when the registers of arrivals, if they ever existed, had been lost.

It was [she said] necessary to reconstruct the basic data, adding the numbers of arrivals and departures from reports in the shipping columns of local newspapers over the whole period, scanning the acts of the *état civil* (Register of Births, Marriages and Deaths) for foreign Oceanians whose origins, estimated age, (less often) registration number, and (rarely) date of arrival and ship might be given. This arduous process had to be completed before I could establish the volume and time frame of the trade and begin the normal process of research and interpretation.<sup>30</sup>

This is the closest that any Pacific historian has come to the sort of computer analysis in which Lal engaged.<sup>31</sup> As Shineberg explains, her quantification resulted in an upward revision of the numbers involved to at least 14,000—a figure, says Shineberg, that is 'so much higher than previous estimates that this in itself makes a difference to one's thinking about the subject'.<sup>32</sup>

As this statement implies, quantification is not an end in itself but a useful and often indispensable means to putting flesh on historical characters or to help understand trends and situations. Lal would agree.

His acknowledgement that computerised analysis provides partial answers is endorsed by Marina Carter, who notes that such data with respect to the family 'deal[s] only with migrants at their point of entry into colonial societies'. What happens after that can, on data of this sort, only be discussed 'at a purely speculative level'.<sup>33</sup>

Lal's disenchantment with quantification was also a matter of preference and calling. He is the first to admit that the number-crunching was boring and intellectually unsatisfying. A certain excitement surrounded the initial preparations of designing a programme to manipulate his data with the assistance of Robert Mailladert, a statistician, who helped him work this out. Lal then designed a standardised sheet and devised the codes for all the variables from the Emigration Passes. There was one sheet for each Emigration Pass. The codes were memorised and once he got used to it, it took about a minute and a half to complete each sheet. It was concentrated and exhausting work that took five months of full time daily work, and the novelty soon wore off. In one sense, he says, the time and effort was worthwhile because:

It provided me with trends that no one knew about—family migration, women and children and so on: this is what happened and it is very important. People moving about from village to village, internal migration, women moving about, what age. So it was very detailed, important information.<sup>34</sup>

But does the effort ultimately justify the results? Gillion insisted that Lal go through each and every Emigration Pass relating to north India. He brushed aside Lal's suggestion that sampling would be sufficient, insisting that each person was important.

In hindsight [says Lal] I think that 45,000 was unnecessary. Comprehensive, yes, but you don't want to overdo it. I could have attained the same results—not perhaps with the same degree of authority—with a sample.<sup>35</sup>

Lal essentially felt dissatisfied because the data from the Emigration Passes did not enable him to reach the answer to the important questions of 'why': he could not, by such means, reach the heart of the indenture experience. Some temperaments, moreover, find such work akin to watching paint drying on a wall. It is not to everyone's taste and Lal was only too glad, when the time came, to make his great escape from the world of quantification.

At the end of 1980, Lal returned to a teaching position at the University of the South Pacific (USP) and embarked on the documentary and humanistic research with which he was more comfortable. His research time was now divided between the political history of Fiji and the *girmitiya* experience in Fiji. At the same time as he was analysing the 1982 Fiji election,<sup>36</sup> he was busily extending his earlier work: he sent a condensed version of his dissertation to the publisher;<sup>37</sup> he wrote a conference paper on the circulation and migration of Indian indentured labour for the 1983 Pacific Science Congress (published for the first time in this volume); and he published a paper on the voyage of the *Leonidas*, the vessel which brought the first Indian indentured labourers to Fiji, in 1879. Some years earlier, Lal had written a beautifully crafted paper on the wreck of the *Syria* in 1884, which cost the lives of 56 would-be Indian immigrants. Both are republished in this volume.

Nonetheless, by the early 1980s, Lal was finding USP, and Fiji generally, too restrictive. He realised, as his complacent colleagues could not, the 'intellectual shallowness of [that particular] university environment'. There were, moreover, too many distractions. As one of the few local academics with a doctorate, he was in high demand to speak at high school graduations and to address various community gatherings. He felt that he was doing little serious scholarship and that too much of his time was being spent on activities that would be 'ultimately meaningless'. He had to get out and prove himself in a 'more demanding intellectual environment', and he had to 'make the move before it was too late'. When USP declined Lal's request for a year's leave of absence to teach at the University of Hawaii, he took the plunge. He packed his bags and books, and accompanied by his wife and a young daughter, took up a track-tenure Assistant Professorship at Hawaii. Oblivious to the pun, he described the move, in August 1983, as 'burn[ing] my bridges in Fiji'.<sup>38</sup> Less than three years after returning to his homeland he was on the move again—much like the north Indian peasants about whom he wrote.

There is no doubt that Lal made the right decision: he was able to achieve goals in Hawaii that would have been out of reach in Fiji. It is not pushing the analogy too far to say that his situation resembles that of the great Russian ballet dancer Rudolph Nureyev, who defected to the West. As (some) Russians are prepared to admit: 'What Nureyev did in the west, he could never have done here'.<sup>39</sup> And Lal made the most of his opportunities in Honolulu. He loved teaching the 'World Civilizations' course, and continued to teach it when no longer obliged to, as director of the program. He supervised numerous graduate students, something

hardly possible at USP even now. He was influential in the thriving local scholarly publishing scene, serving on several editorial boards. He was appointed founding editor of *The Contemporary Pacific*, which quickly became the premier regional journal in the social sciences and won the 1990 Association of American Publishers Best New Journal Award in Business, Social Sciences and Humanities. (This is one of the few things that you'll ever hear him brag about.) And his own writing and publishing blossomed as he hoped they would.

Again, he divided his research time between the recent political history of Fiji and the Indian indenture experience in Fiji. But the balance of the equation was beginning to change as Lal increasingly became absorbed with the study of contemporary politics in Fiji. This understandably intensified after the Fiji coups of 1987. Nevertheless, in his early years in Hawaii he was still mainly concerned with the indenture experience of the Fiji Indians, and he published a series of important papers. Having dealt with the *girmitiyas'* origins and social backgrounds, he now followed them on to the plantations.

I once asked Lal to make a statement on the nature of indenture and plantation life, and he said:

Leaving aside the questions of exploitation, racism, and the institutional aspects of indenture, I think that the indenture experience is a very important, formative and defining period in the history of overseas Indian communities, particularly in the Caribbean, Mauritius, South Africa and Fiji, because that is the site of the initial social transformation. It is fundamental. When the Old World meets the New, then old ways of doing things, old values and institutions start to change. We begin to confront the reality of a completely different social order when former ways of doing things, the world view, seem to lose their relevance. The caste system breaks down, and along with that a host of other social conventions and practices. Everyone is a 'coolie', huddled together on the estate lines in cramped quarters. In that sense, everyone is equal in the denial of their individual humanity. The indenture experience was a great leveller of hierarchy and status. I see the indenture process as the death of one world and the beginning of another. The details vary from colony to colony, but the process is the same everywhere.<sup>40</sup>

Lal is less dispassionate when it comes to recounting the actual working and private lives of the *girmitiyas*. It is a grim tale, as he tells it, with few redeeming features. In a general essay (not republished in this volume), Lal paints a depressing portrait of exploitation and ill-treatment that involved

over-tasking, the complicity of *sirdars* (Indian foremen), the instability of family life, suicides, lack of protection by the legal system, government indifference, non- or partial-payment of wages, ill-health and high mortality. At one point Lal writes:

Low wages led or at least contributed to a number of other problems such as poor or inadequate food, which, in turn, caused sickness. Ill health led to absence from work, a problem that had become acute by the 1890s. Absence meant loss of wages and prosecution in a court of law. The vicious cycle was thus complete.<sup>41</sup>

At first sight this emphasis on harshness and injustice might seem quite out of character with Lal's earlier work, on the *girmitiyas'* origins. Influenced by the dominant line of thought with the Canberra-school of Pacific historians, Lal had accorded the emigrants a large measure of agency in their decision to go abroad.<sup>42</sup> In other words, his work is 'revisionist' in the sense that he rejected a victims-model and, instead, endowed the Indian immigrants with a measure of free-will and credited them with having made a rational choice to go to Fiji—qualified of course by the restraints of their personal and economic circumstances. Given all the 'push' factors, they had taken a sensible option, *in the circumstances*. But now, in his discussion of plantation life, he is adopting an unambiguously 'counter-revisionist' position where oppression, harshness and exploitation loom large.<sup>43</sup> There is no necessary contradiction between seemingly divergent conclusions. The decision to emigrate and conditions on the plantations are separate issues (although if large numbers of *girmitiyas* genuinely expected 'quick and easy fortune' in Fiji, as Lal suggests,<sup>44</sup> then the element of deception at the time of recruitment may have been larger than he acknowledges). And Lal is not the first historian to be revisionist in certain respects and counter-revisionist in others. In similar fashion, Kay Saunders found that the recruitment of Melanesians to Queensland was largely a voluntary affair but their treatment on the plantations was harsh and exploitative.<sup>45</sup>

Whatever his conclusions, Lal's mode of writing is characteristic in its argumentativeness. I am using the term in its positive connotation—he has a point of view; he argues his case resolutely; his arguments stick close to the evidence (and he has the capacity for sustained research); he often draws unambiguously moral conclusions, for history, in his view, is an idealistic activity. Lal once said, with respect to writing the contemporary history of Fiji, that his approach was one of '[c]ritical attachment rather than cool detachment'.<sup>46</sup> Or as he said on another occasion, '[f]or me history

provides a tool and a method to understand the contemporary world'.<sup>47</sup> Those same impulses inform and channel his work on Indian indenture in Fiji. The heart and the head have to come together, otherwise the exercise is pointless.

Soon after arriving in Hawaii, Lal published a trio of revisionary (not revisionist!) articles (all are republished in this volume) that breathed life into the study of indenture in Fiji. They are case studies in the sense that each deals with a particular aspect of indenture, be it worker resistance, the position of women or the reasons for suicide. The essay on resistance was something of an anti-climax. Taking his cue from Eugene Genovese's observation about the paucity of slave rebellions in the United States, Lal set out the reasons for non-resistance by *girmitiyas* in terms of acquiescence against overwhelming odds.<sup>48</sup> Their strategy for survival, in other words, was outward compliance, that is 'non-resistance'. After all, as David McCreery points out, '[o]ppressed peoples have no obligation to act in ways academics find dramatic and exciting, but rather to survive and endure and to ensure the survival of their families and communities in the face of what threaten to be literally overwhelming pressures'.<sup>49</sup>

These are hardly politically correct sentiments. It is well known that resistance by indentured workers was largely covert and small-scale (so-called 'day to day resistance'), stopping well short of organised, collective dissent. This situation of scaled-down options was a function of employers holding a big edge in the power relationship.<sup>50</sup> This, according to Lal, was extreme on sugar plantations in Fiji. It takes little imagination to realise how an argument along these lines would have gone down had it been applied, in the late-1960s/early-1970s, to American slaves. The particular context was the Black Power movement when black separatism and nationalism were at their height. In that touchy, politicised setting, there was great resentment should white historians find any deficiencies in American slaves or their descendants. Even to say they were hapless victims and were damaged as a result was 'ideologically untenable'. The politics of grievance was driving the debate *and* the conclusions.<sup>51</sup> In a less politically charged setting, Lal's conclusion that non-resistance/accommodation could be a positive strategy for survival now simply pushed the debate in new directions. It put questions of resistance and accommodation, and the boundaries and relationships between the two, onto the research agenda and resulted in—if I may say—an important collection of essays on which we collaborated as editors. It turned out that Lal's notion of non-resistance was anything but far fetched, as the chapter on Gilbertese labourers in Samoa demonstrated. The Gilbertese were not

shrinking violets. They were not easily cowed. But on German plantations in Samoa during the 1870s and 1880s, they buckled under a reign of near-terror and, like their Indian counterparts in Fiji, discovered that non-resistance was their only viable option.<sup>52</sup> Not surprisingly, there is little room for individual or group agency in Lal's discussion of non-resistance. The watchword is survival.

The theme of survival likewise pervades Lal's study of women labourers. Another of Lal's revisionary essays of the mid-1980s, it examines the private and working lives of Indian women and gives credence to the assertion that gendered history can be remarkably ungendered, so to speak. It has recently been said that 'many women have written major works on political or diplomatic history in which there is nothing at all that might betray the fact that they are female except the name on the cover...'.<sup>53</sup> Conversely, there are histories about women whose male authorship is only identifiable by his name on the title page. Lal is a case in point. He writes with profound sympathy for and understanding of the plight of women *giritiyas*. The essay is entitled 'Kunti's Cry', in remembrance of a young woman's misfortune. Kunti rejected the sexual advances of her European overseer and jumped into a nearby river to escape his unwanted intentions. She was saved from drowning but she was deeply traumatised by the ordeal. Kunti became a *cause célèbre*, around whom revolved highly publicised attempts to stop the emigration of Indian women for overseas indentured service, to the accompaniment of a sustained government cover-up. In Lal's account, Kunti's story becomes Kunti's metaphorical cry of anguish for the lot of her female compatriots, who took the brunt of the blame for the multifarious ills of plantation life. Just as Edward Thompson sought to rescue 'the poor [nineteenth century English] stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the "obsolete" handloom weaver, the "utopian" artisan ... from the enormous condescension of posterity',<sup>54</sup> so has Lal attempted to rescue the poor Indian woman labourer from the enormous sanctimony of posterity.

He not only sets out the women's broader working experience, which was exacting in itself.<sup>55</sup> He is concerned to refute the wider implications and consequences of their allegedly immoral character. The women made up less than 30 per cent of the adult plantation workforce and their supposed licentiousness and infidelity produced such a degree of sexual jealousy that the males were frequently driven to commit suicide or else to murder the women. Prostitution, moreover, was rampant and the level of infant mortality appalling, and again the women were held responsible.<sup>56</sup> Lal does not see it that way at all: he places the responsibility squarely on the plantation system, which eroded family life, or on the males, some of whom

were not backward in prostituting the wives and daughters. In Lal's words, '[t]he focus of the supposed immoral character of the women conveniently detracted attention from those conditions on the plantations that promoted sexual jealousy and the murders'. The high infant mortality rate was a function not of bad mothering but of the unsanitary conditions that prevail on the plantations. Indenture was 'indeed a harsh experience'. The theme of survival again emerges because, despite a mix of 'achievement and wreckage', most of the women somehow survived through 'sheer determination', and that is to be applauded. But, reminds Lal, '[i]t is too often ... forgotten that the benefits and hardships of indentured were not distributed equitably...' and women bore the brunt of the hardships. Kunti's cry of was thus 'a protest against the veil of dishonour that Indian women wore, or rather were made to wear, during their indenture on Fiji plantations'. Again, Lal provides a victims-model in which damage and survival are key elements.

This article came under attack from the ubiquitous but wayward Tom Brass who claimed that Lal's 'positive theorization of "survival" entailed a negation of the women's oppression and exploitation'.<sup>57</sup> It is difficult to see how such a comment can be sustained when the gist of Lal's argument has consistently been the harshness of the plantation system as it operated in Fiji, and not least in this particular article where he paints an unrelentingly grim picture of plantation life and labour. He repeated the charge in his latest book on indenture—a collection of documents—reminding his readers that the indenture experience 'in the main was a story of great hardship and suffering, and many were broken and left by the wayside'.<sup>58</sup> There is nothing inconsistent or untoward in celebrating the survivors and their capacity for survival against the odds. Lal is not, as Brass seems to be saying, letting the indenture system off the hook. To survive at such high cost is hardly an undiluted triumph. Much less does it entail a denial of suffering.

The early article that Lal himself most likes is the one on suicide. It is the most difficult to discuss, not surprisingly, because it is seldom possible to discover the real intention behind such an act and, to varying degrees, suicide is a taboo subject in most cultures. Nor it is surprising that Lal's evidence is sparse and fragile—a comment here, an aside there, an expression of prejudice or concern elsewhere. That said, 333 Indians committed suicide in Fiji during the indenture period, almost all of whom were indentured labourers. Given that there were almost 61,000 *giritiyas*, this may sound insignificant; but it was high by comparison with the free population, with the north Indian population, and with indentured

populations elsewhere. The vast majority of the suicides were by males, and the finger was pointed at the alleged infidelity of the women labourers. This was the prevailing contemporary explanation and Lal admits that he found the sexual jealousy argument persuasive until he conducted detailed documentary research into the question. While he admits that sexual jealousy was a contributing factor, not least because there were so many more men than women, he again finds that the plantation system was the real culprit, this time because it led directly to the social and cultural disruption that created the conditions for suicide. His argument is more subtle and nuanced than this bald outline would suggest. But, in the last resort, suicide was 'both a cry of despair and an act of protest directed ultimately at the principles and ethics of the indenture system itself'.

On a topic so controversial and slippery, there is bound to be room for discussion. The sociologist Shaista Shameem offers the quite contrary view that it was not the erosion of 'integrative institutions' such as family and kinship that caused the suicides of men (and the murders of women), but because women 'challenge[d] the[se] "integrative institutions" on the plantations and the men's place in them'. It is an interesting speculation, but no more than a speculation: Shameem provides not a shred of hard empirical evidence to support her assertion, either in the source quoted or elsewhere.<sup>59</sup>

Lal's work will prosper in the company of genuine discussion and debate. There is room for alternative lines of enquiry, especially those informed by more comparative perspectives. There were, for example, proportionally far fewer suicides among Melanesian indentured labourers in Queensland where the gender imbalance was far more severe (about 8 per cent of Melanesian labourers were females against about 28 per cent in Fiji). What does this suggest? It is also worth paying greater attention to the fact the vast majority of suicides occurred within the first six months of indenture when the trauma and despair of social dislocation were most keenly felt. Another matter for detailed enquiry is the role of religion and especially its role as an integrative institution. 'The Story of the Haunted Line' by Totaram Sanadhya (published in this volume) tells how a strong religious faith sustained him through terrible moments in the early months, and probably prevented him from taking his own life. And there is something else to consider: Lal's specialised articles on the indenture experience are still generalist in nature—delineating the broad trends of a particular theme or topic but seldom engaging in the fine-grained details of individual lives or situations. There is obvious scope to build upon his work in the manner, for example, of John Kelly's micro-study of capital

punishment.<sup>60</sup>

These challenges and urgings provide one of the rationales for publishing the present volume. Lal and I somewhat deplore the lack of a developed historical consciousness in Fiji. It is as though anything before the 1987 coups is ancient history, to be ignored and despised as an irrelevance. Few descendants of the *girmitiyas* have an informed knowledge of the indenture experience, and this is altogether wrong. We hope that the retrieval of these essays in readily accessible form will contribute to a better knowledge of a crucial aspect of Fiji's history. And what better time than now, when Lal has signalled his intention to write no more about the indenture experience, apart perhaps from reflections of a more personal nature. Just as he drew the veil of dishonour from the indentured women, he now brings down the curtain on this particular journey in his life. He will no longer, metaphorically speaking, follow in the steps of his late grandfather. His own *girmit* is complete.

## Endnotes

1. A listing of Lal's books is appended at the end of this book.
2. David Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834-1920* (Cambridge, 1995), 156-62; Stanley Engerman, 'Servants to Slaves to Servants: contract labour and European expansion', in P.C. Emmer (ed.), *Colonialism and Migration: indentured labor before and after slavery* (Dordrecht, 1986), 272-74
3. Jeff Siegal, 'Origins of Pacific Islands Labourers in Fiji', *Journal of Pacific History* (hereafter *JPH*), 20:1/2 (1985), 46.
4. For historiographic overviews of the Pacific Islands labour trade, and the place of Fiji Indians within it, see Clive Moore, 'Labour, Indenture and Historiography in the Pacific', in Brij V. Lal (ed.), *Pacific Island History: journeys and transformations* (Canberra, 1992), 129-48; Doug Munro, 'The Pacific Islands Labour Trade: approaches, methodologies, debates', *Slavery & Abolition*, 14:2 (1993), 87-108.
5. Anthony Low, *Britain and Indian Nationalism: the imprint of ambiguity, 1929-1942* (Cambridge 1997), viii. Ali is a professor of business management in Pakistan, Henningham is deputy Australian high commissioner in Papua New Guinea, Major taught history at the University of Singapore until recently, and Chakrabarty teaches at the University of Chicago.
6. Doug Munro, 'Interview with Brij V. Lal: historian of indenture and of contemporary Fiji', *Itinerario: European journal of overseas history*, 21:1 (1997), 16.
7. Lal (ed.), *Journeys and Transformations*, 245.
8. Brij V. Lal, 'East Indians in British Columbia, 1904-1974: an historical study in growth and integration', MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1976. Publications to emerge from this research are 'Political Movement in the Early East Indian Community in Canada', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 2 (1981), 61-87; and 'Canada: the tide of the turbans', in Ron Crocombe (ed.), *Pacific Indians: profiles from 20 Pacific countries* (Suva 1982), 130-43.
9. Brij V. Lal, 'Exhaustion and Persistence: aspects of rural Indian society in Fiji', *Quarterly Review of Historical Studies* (Calcutta), 17:2 (1977-78), 69-79.
10. Charles A. Price, *The Great White Walls Are Built: restrictive immigration to North America and Australasia, 1836-1888* (Canberra, 1974).
11. K.L. Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants: a history to the end of indenture in 1920* (Melbourne, 1962; reprinted 1973).
12. Ahmed Ali (ed.), *Girmit: the indenture experience in Fiji* (Suva, 1979).
13. Taped conversation, Canberra, 13 December 1998.
14. K.L. Gillion, 'The Sources of Indian Emigration to Fiji', *Population Studies*, 10:2 (1956), 139-57.
15. Munro, 'Interview with Brij V. Lal', 19. Another historian of overseas Indians, Hugh Tinker, also maintained that Gillion was concerned with 'balance', but with slightly derogatory connotations. In Tinker's assessment of *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, 'Dr. Gillion is perhaps a little too concerned to be "balanced", and sometimes holds back from the most searching probe into the sordid, being also influenced by traditional British colonial history. He gets closer to the Indians than does Dr. Cumpston [in her book *Indians Overseas in British Territories, 1834-1854* (London, 1953)]'. See Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: the export of Indian labour overseas, 1830-1920* (London 1974), 407. In Lal's view, Gillion tried to be fair to everyone—but not all groups and individuals are worthy of equal

attention. My experience of Gillion leads me to suggest that he certainly cared about moral and political issues but was not given to expressing himself in emotional language, despite being highly critical of plantation conditions in Fiji (Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, 103-29). Measured terminology does not necessarily equate with lack of passion.

16. Munro, 'Interview with Brij V. Lal', 18. For a somewhat similar statement, see Peter H. Wood, "'The Dream Deferred': black freedom struggles on the eve of white independence', in Gary Y. Okihiro (ed.), *In Resistance: studies in African, Caribbean and Afro-African history* (Amherst, 1986), 166.
17. Brij V. Lal, 'Leaves of the Banyan Tree: origins and background of Fiji's North Indian migrants, 1879-1916', 2 vols., PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1980; Lal, *Girmitiyas: The origins of the Fiji Indians* (Canberra, 1983). The book has long been out of print. It was to have been reissued by a London publisher, which unfortunately went bankrupt.
18. Lal, 'Leaves of the Banyan Tree', I: 21-22.
19. W.T. Roy, review of *Girmitiyas*, in *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 30:2 (1984), 292.
20. Brij V. Lal, 'Fiji Girmitiyas: the background to banishment', in Vijay Mishra (ed.), *Rama's Banishment: a centenary tribute to the Fiji Indians, 1879-1979* (Auckland, 1979), 14.
21. Marina Carter, *Voices from Indenture: experiences of Indian Migrants in the British Empire* (London/New York, 1996), 45.
22. Clem Seecharan, *'Tigers in the Stars': the anatomy of Indian achievement in British Guiana, 1919-29* (London/Basingstoke 1997), xxiii. See also Surendra Bhana, *Indentured Indian emigrants to Natal, 1860-1902: a study based on ships' lists* (New Delhi 1991), xi., another computer-based analysis which is modelled on the *Girmitiyas*.
23. Lal, 'Leaves of the Banyan Tree', 28.
24. Anthony Reid (ed), *Community and Nation: Essays on Southeast Asia and the Chinese* by Wang Gungwu (Singapore: Heinemann Educational Books, 1981).
25. There was already some discussion of the use of songs and folklore in West Indian historiography. For example Ved Prakash Vatuk, 'Protest Songs of East Indians in British Guiana', *Journal of American Folklore*, 78 (1964). The pathbreaking work is Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (Oxford 1977). Another profoundly influential book on the use of folklore is Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: a South Carolina slave community* (Urbana/Chicago, 1984).
26. Peter Corris, *Passage, Port and Plantation: a history of Solomon Islands labour migration, 1870-1914* (Melbourne, 1973), esp. 4-5, 151-54.
27. Judith A. Bennett, *Wealth of the Solomons: a history of a Pacific archipelago, 1800-1970* (Honolulu, 1987), 167-91; Bennett, 'Personal Work Histories of Solomon Islands Plantation Laborers—methodology and evidence', *Pacific Studies*, 5:1 (1982), 34-56.
28. Clive Moore, *Kanaka: a History of Melanesian Mackay* (Boroko/Port Moresby, 1985) esp. 50-51, 81-89.
29. Patricia Mercer, *White Australia Defied: Pacific Islander settlement in North Queensland* (Townsville, 1995), xv. Manifestos by the practitioners of historical demography include E.A. Wrigley, 'Population, Family and Household', in

- Martin Ballard (ed.), *New Movements in the Study and Teaching of History* (Melbourne, 1971), 93-104; Wrigley, 'The Prospects for Population History', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 12 (1981), 207-26; Kenneth A. Lockridge, 'Historical Demography', in Charles F. Delzell (ed.), *The Future of History: essays in the Vanderbilt University Centennial Symposium* (Nashville, 1977), 53-64. A more neutral description is Richard E. Beringer, *Historical Analysis: contemporary approaches to Clio's craft* (New York, 1978), 235-53. My own somewhat skeptical remarks on the possibilities of historical demography are in 'Indenture, Deportation, Survival: recent books on Australian South Sea Islanders', *Journal of Social History*, 31:4 (1998), 937-38.
30. Dorothy Shineberg, "'The New Hebridean is everywhere": the Oceanian labor trade to New Caledonia', *Pacific Studies*, 18:2 (1995), 2. The eventual book was published as *The People Trade: Pacific Island Laborers and New Caledonia, 1865-1930* (Honolulu, 1999).
31. One should also note the work of Ralph Shlomowitz, a Chicago-trained economist, whose studies of the structure of indentured labour markets and on worker mortality have a solid statistical basis. Shlomowitz's work on mortality has been gathered in his collection of essays, *Mortality and Migration in the Modern World* (Aldershot, 1996). Shlomowitz's background is sketched by Doug Munro, 'Debate on the Queensland Labour Trade' [symposium], *Journal of Pacific Studies*, 18 (1994-95), 105-09.
32. Dorothy Shineberg, "'Noumea no good, Noumea no pay": "New Hebridean" indentured labour in New Caledonia, 1865-1925', *JPH*, 26:2 (1991), 187.
33. Carter, *Voices from Indenture*, 142.
34. Taped conversation, 13 December 1998.
35. Taped conversation, 13 December 1998.
36. Brij V. Lal, 'The Fiji General Election of 1982: the tidal wave that never came', *JPH*, 18:1/2 (1983), 134-57.
37. *Girmitiya* is a drastically condensed version of the original dissertation. It contains none of the statistical tables in volume 2, and the historiographic and methodological chapters in volume 1 have likewise been omitted. See his 'Indian Indenture Historiography: A Note on Problems, Sources and Methods', in *Pacific Studies*, 6:2, 33-50.
38. Brij V. Lal, 'From Across the Horizon: reflections on a sojourn in Hawai'i', *Journal of Pacific Studies*, 20 (1996), 225-27.
39. Peter Watson, *Nureyev: a biography* (London, 1994), 455.
40. Munro, 'Interview with Brij V. Lal', 21.
41. Brij V. Lal, 'Labouring Men and Nothing More: some problems of Indian indenture in Fiji', in Kay Saunders (ed.), *Indentured Labour in the British Empire, 1834-1920* (London/Canberra, 1984), 137.
42. Lal acknowledges that Peter Corris's *Passage, Port and Plantation*, an unambiguously revisionist text, was '[t]he book on Pacific history that most impressed me initially'. Munro, 'Interview with Brij V. Lal', 18-19.
43. The revisionist/counter-revisionist positions and debates are discussed in Clive Moore, 'Revising the Revisionists: the historiography of immigrant Melanesians to Australia', *Pacific Studies*, 15:2 (1992), 61-86; Doug Munro, 'The Labor Trade in Melanesians to Queensland: an historiographic essay', *Journal of Social History*, 28:3 (1995), 609-27.

44. Lal, 'Labouring Men and Nothing More', 147.
45. Kay Saunders, *The Origins and Bases of Unfree Labour in Queensland, 1824-1916* (Brisbane, 1982).
46. Brij V. Lal, *Broken Waves: a history of the Fiji Islands in the twentieth century* (Honolulu, 1992), xvii.
47. Munro, 'Interview with Brij V. Lal', 22.
48. Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave revolts in the modern world* (Baton Rouge, 1979), 7.
49. David McCreery, 'Hegemony and Repression in Rural Guatemala, 1871-1940', *Peasant Studies*, 17:3 (1990), 157.
50. The paradigmatic statement is James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: everyday forms of peasant resistance* (New Haven/London, 1993).
51. See August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession, 1915-1980* (Urbana/London, 1986), 277-98; Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: the 'objectivity question' and the American historical profession* (Cambridge, 1988), 472-91. For an example closer to home, see Clive Moore, 'Decolonising the History of Australia's South Sea Islanders: politics and curriculum materials', in Donald Denoon (ed.), *Emerging from Empire?: decolonisation in the Pacific* (Canberra, 1997), 194-203.
52. Doug Munro and Stewart Firth, 'Samoan Plantations: the Gilbertese laborers' experience, 1867-1896', in Brij V. Lal, Doug Munro and Edward D. Beechert (eds), *Plantation Workers: resistance and accommodation* (Honolulu, 1993), 101-27.
53. Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London, 1997), 217.
54. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963), 12.
55. Such was the extent of overtaking that girmitiyas—men as well as women—did not routinely received their full wage until as late as 1908. Wadan Lal Narsey, 'Monopoly Capitalism, White Racism and Super-profits in Fiji', *Journal of Pacific Studies*, 5 (1979), 86; Ralph Shlomowitz, 'The Fiji Labor Trade in Comparative Perspective, 1864-1914', *Pacific Studies*, 9:3 (1986), 140.
56. The questions of infant mortality and fertility are also dealt with by Ralph Shlomowitz, 'Infant Mortality and Fiji's Indian Migrants, 1879-1919', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 23:3 (1996), 289-302; Shlomowitz, 'Fertility and Fiji's Indian Migrants, 1879-1919', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 24:2 (1988), 205-12 (both republished in Shlomowitz, *Mortality and Migration in the Modern World*).
57. Tom Brass, 'Some Observations on Unfree Labour, Capital Restructuring, and Deproletarianisation', in Tom Brass and Marcel van der Linden (eds), *Free and Unfree Labour: the debate continues* (Bern, 1997), 64.
58. Brij V. Lal (ed.), *Crossing the Kala Pani: a documentary history of Indian indenture in Fiji* (Canberra/Suva, 1998), 2.
59. Shaista Shameem, 'Girmitiya Women in Fiji: work, resistance and survival', in Clive Moore, Jacqueline Leckie and Doug Munro (eds), *Labour in the South Pacific* (Townsville, 1990), 153; 'Sugar and Spice: wealth accumulation and the labour of Indian women in Fiji, 1879-1930', D.Phil thesis, University of Waikato (Hamilton, 1990), 227.
60. J.D. Kelly, 'Fiji Indians and the Law, 1912', in John Dunham Kelly and Uttra Kumari Singh (eds), *My Twenty-One Years in the Fiji Islands and The Story of the Haunted Line* (Suva, 1991), 154-219.