

Destined to Leave Hindustan for Suriname?

*Explaining the Motivation behind Repatriation and Settlement of Hindustani Labour Migrants in Suriname, 1873-1940*¹

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Abstract

This article investigates the post-indenture choice of Hindustani indentured labour migrants in Suriname either to settle in Suriname or repatriate to India between 1873 and 1940. Based on extensive demographic statistical analyses and the autobiography of Rahman Mohammed Khan, this research concludes that familial relations, especially those formed in Suriname, had a strong effect on the relative share of Hindustanis settling in Suriname after their contract period. Additionally, this study convincingly proves that the Surinamese context had an important effect on the development of the individual life courses of Hindustanis.

[...] my soul, this is a foreign land where no one is known to me. Who will come and support me? The only one to whom I can turn to is Khuda [Allah, MK] who has cared for me and will take care of me in future as well.²

This quote from Rahman Mohammed Khan (1874-1972) describes the feeling he had when arriving from British India in the Dutch colony of Suriname to work as an indentured labourer. His dependence on Allah seems to suggest that Khan had a rather lonely and uncertain life during his indentureship in Suriname. However, as we know from his autobiography, Khan stayed in Suriname after his indentureship and lived there until his death. Khan was only one of 25 to 30 million Indians who

¹ This article is based on my master thesis, written at Radboud University Nijmegen in 2021.

² Munshi Rahman Khan, *Jeevan Prakash*, translation: Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff, Ellen Bal, Alok Deo Singh (eds), *Autobiography of an Indian indentured labourer* (Delhi 2005 [1945]) 92.

left home as indentured labourers to different colonies, so this feeling of loneliness and insecurity was probably not unique. The fact that many countrymen of Khan followed his example of staying in Suriname raises questions on why people stayed or went back after their contract period.³

This article will especially investigate the life courses of Hindustani indentured labourers – hereinafter *kantráki* (the Sarnami Hindustani term, which stresses the function rather than the status of the person in question) – who migrated from British India (mostly called Hindustan by *kantráki*) to Suriname between 1873 and 1940, focussing on their post-indenture choice between repatriation and settlement.⁴ Although research on indentureship focuses on many aspects of the process of indentureship itself, as well as on the working and living conditions, it can be stated that a thorough analysis of why *ex-kantráki* moved back home or settled in their host country is mostly absent. Several authors give a broad scope of possible explanations for the choice to either settle or repatriate, but it is still not clear whether these reasons were ubiquitous or, rather, an individual consideration and to what extent these explanations were important in the decision to settle or repatriate.

This article will dive deeper into this lacuna by answering the following research question: ‘How did individual characteristics and the Surinamese context influence the post-indenture choice of repatriation or settlement of Hindustani indentured migrants in Suriname between 1873 and 1940?’ The research period will be broader than the formal existence of the indentured system (1873-1921) due to the possibility of re-indenture(s) and because of the fact that people did not always choose to return immediately after their contract period. The main sources that are used for this research are the Surinamese Hindustani immigration registers and the autobiography of Rahman Khan.

The combination of qualitative and quantitative sources shines an insightful, new, and rather unique light on the matter of late-colonial life courses and demographic developments. Granted, the Hindustani migratory flow to Suriname only constituted a small part of the movement of the 25 to 30 million Indian indentured migrants throughout

3 Brij V. Lal, ‘Understanding the Indian indenture experience’, *South Asia. Journal of South Asian Studies* 21:51 (1998) 215-237; Dirk Hoerder, *Cultures in contact. World migrations in the second millennium* (Durham/London 2002) 366-404; Lommarsh Roopnarine, ‘Re-indenture, repatriation and remittances of ex-indentured Indians from Danish St Croix to British India 1863-1873’, *Scandinavian Journal of History* 35:3 (2010) 247-267.

4 Gharietje Choenni and Chan Choenni, *Sarnami Hindostani, 1920-1960. Worteling, identiteit en gemeenschapsvorming in Suriname* (Amsterdam 2012); Margriet Fokken, *Beyond being koelies and kantráki. Constructing Hindostani identities in Suriname in the era of indenture* (Hilversum 2018).

the world between 1820 and 1920. Nonetheless, this relatively small group of 34,000 *kantráki* gives a unique and insightful example because of the relative richness and completeness found in the registration records of these individuals. Elsewhere, due to limited documentation of other indentured migration flows, it has not been possible to research this post-indentureship choice, which influenced population structures all over the world. In this sense, the Hindustani labour migration movement to Suriname functions as an important case study of the lives of Asian indentured labourers. It enables us to provide insight into these global developments, uncovering especially why ex-indentured labourers either stayed in or left the colony in which they served their contract period.⁵

This article will first present an examination of the historiography, after which the sources will be discussed, alongside the methodology used in this research. With this theoretical framework, this research will investigate five hypotheses, which will be presented after the methodology.

Staying or leaving?

Migration history is a research field that is being analyzed rather thoroughly, and migration in colonial contexts is a much studied topic too. Worth noting in these histories is that colonial migrants mostly did not have free choice in their movement; the majority of these were enslaved people who were transported throughout the world.⁶ In the post-colonial period, however, migrants did have more freedom in their movement, of which the migration stream from Suriname to the Netherlands from around 1975 (the year of Surinamese independence) onward is a good example.⁷ In the case of Hindustani indentureship in Suriname, as

5 Hoerder, *Cultures in contact*, 366-404; Radjinder Bhagwanbali, *Contracten voor Suriname. Arbeids-migratie vanuit Brits-Indië onder het indentured-labourstelsel 1873-1916* (The Hague 1996); Idem, *De nieuwe avatar van slavernij. Hindoestaanse migranten onder het indentured labour systeem naar Suriname, 1873-1916* (The Hague 2009).

6 Ernst van den Boogaart and P.C. Emmer, 'Colonialism and migration. An overview', P.C. Emmer (ed.), *Colonialism and migration. Indentured labour before and after slavery* (Dordrecht 1986) 3-15; Slave voyages, 'Trans-Atlantic slave trade – estimates', <<https://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates>> Accessed 12 March 2021.

7 Herman Obdeijn and Marlou Schrover, *Komen en gaan. Immigratie en emigratie in Nederland vanaf 1550* (Amsterdam 2008) 248-259; Jan Pronk, *Suriname. Van wingewest tot natiestaat* (Volendam 2020); Leo Dalhuisen and Maurits Hassankhan (eds), *Geschiedenis van Suriname* (Zutphen 2018 [1993]) 179-181.

a part of the greater migration flows from India⁸, it is disputed among historians whether *kantráki* did have some form of free choice in their personal lives. The research conducted by Maurits Hassankhan and others suggests that, although Hindustanis migrated into a hierarchical system of labour, these indentured labourers in fact had agency and that, although living in an oppressive society, it was possible for indentured labourers to improve their social status and living conditions in Suriname; there were downsides as well as advantages for the Hindustani indentured migrants regarding emancipation, integration, and social mobility in their host or new country.⁹

Indentureship in colonial historiography

Indentureship, which can be defined as a migration and labour system where workers temporarily move from their hometown to another place to work for a certain amount of time, dominated the labour market in British, French, Danish, and Dutch colonies like Mauritius, South Africa, and Barbados beginning with the abolition of slavery during the 1830s and lasting until the 1930s. The majority of the indentured labourers in that period came from the former colony of British India, but indentured migration flows also originated elsewhere as, for example, in the former colony of the Dutch East Indies.¹⁰

8 This system of migratory streams is often called the Indian Diaspora. In this global movement, about 1.2 million Indians left Asia to (temporarily) work on European-owned plantations in the Caribbean, southern Pacific, and Indian Oceans over a time period of 86 years. Ashutosch Kumar, *Coolies of the empire. Indentured Indians in the sugar colonies, 1830-1920* (Cambridge 2017); Eric Williams, *Capitalism and slavery* (Chapel Hill/London 1994); Robin Cohen, *Global diasporas. An introduction* (Abingdon 2008); Sunanda Sen, 'Indentured labour from India in the age of empire', *Social Scientist* 44:1/2 (2016) 35-74.

9 Bhagwanbali, *Contracten voor Suriname*; Fokken, *Beyond being koelies and kantráki*; Hoerder, *Cultures in contact*; Hugh Tinker, *A new system of slavery. The export of Indian labour overseas, 1830-1920* (Oxford 1974); Joshua R. Hyles, *Guiana and the shadows of empire. Colonial and cultural negotiations at the edge of the world* (Lanham 2014); Maurits S. Hassankhan, Brij V. Lal and Doug Munro (eds), *Resistance and Indian indenture experience. Comparative perspectives* (New Delhi 2014); P.C. Emmer, 'The great escape. The migration of female indentured servants from British India to Surinam, 1873-1916', David Richardson (ed.), *Abolition and its aftermath. The historical context 1790-1916* (London 1985) 245-266; Rosemarijn Hoefte, *In place of slavery. A social history of British Indian and Javanese laborers in Suriname* (Gainesville 1999); Sandew Hira, *Van Priary tot de Kom. De geschiedenis van het verzet in Suriname* (Rotterdam 1982).

10 Hyles, *Guiana and the shadows of empire*; Roopnarine, 'Re-indenture, repatriation and remittances'; Lomarsh Roopnarine, 'Indian migration during indentured servitude in British Guiana and Trinidad, 1850-1920', *Labor History* 52:2 (2011) 173-191.

The historiography on indentureship is mainly focused on the process of recruitment, migration, and on life on the plantations. However, not much research has been devoted to the post-indenture life, especially as concerns whether the *kantráki* returned to their country of origin or settled permanently in their new country. The same can be stated for the Hindustani case in Suriname: this specific scholarly debate on that choice after the ending of the contract period is rather fragmentary and superficial. However, there are research projects focussing on the reconstruction of the indentured populations of different countries – and their post-indenture life courses if they stayed. Two examples are the International Indentured Labour Route Project and the Historical Database Suriname.¹¹

In this regard, the studies of Chan and Gharietje Choenni do, in fact, present an overview of criteria *kantráki* had to meet if they wanted to settle in Suriname, which could have limited *kantráki's* freedom of movement. The stipulations on this list seem to be strict and to apply for the full period of indentureship, and some criteria have more than one possible interpretation. According to Choenni and Choenni, one was not permitted to sign a re-indenture contract or permanently settle after their contract period if one was in any way convicted or had anything to do with any illegal practices. This prerequisite is not subject to much interpretation – albeit that the trial and conviction themselves were handled from a European and mostly pro-planter perspective. On the other hand, Choenni and Choenni mention, for example, that if an *ex-kantráki* was considered to be debilitated or lazy, the Hindustani lost their right to stay in the colony. Nevertheless, it is a challenge to standardize the practice of exclusion of re-indenture or settlement for this particular group based on this particular list, since there are several examples found that seem to contradict these prerequisites.¹²

In all probability, despite this list of criteria, the majority of Hindustanis actually had a choice to settle or to repatriate after their contract ended. Regarding the motivation to stay or to return, Rosemarijn Hoeffte states that ‘many factors influenced decisions about whether to return

11 Cornelis W. van Galen and Maurits S. Hassankhan, ‘A research-note on the slave registers of Suriname, 1830-1865’, *The History of the Family* 23:3 (2018) 503-520, 515-517; Historical Database Suriname Curaçao, ‘Suriname migration registers of Indentured laborers from India (Hindustanis)’, < <https://www.ru.nl/hdsc/online-sources/suriname-migration-registers-indentured-laborers/suriname-migration-registers-laborers-india/> > Accessed 24 February 2022.

12 Choenni and Choenni, *Sarnami Hindustani*, 15-16, 46-47; Nationaal Archief (hereafter: NA), *Suriname. Contractarbeiders uit India (Hindostanen)*, 1999, www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/index/nt00345?searchTerm=. Accessed 21 December 2020.

or to stay.' She mentions some variables on which this choice could have been based, like the positive effect on settlement for the formation of family and other relations and the fact, for example, that women were financially dependent on men due to a significantly lower income for female indentured labourers. Together with a greater amount of oppression, this made women more vulnerable and, therefore, female *kantráki* had a lower chance of repatriation. However, she does not dig deeper into the relative importance of the mentioned factors.¹³

The historiography suggests that living and working conditions during and after indenture improved from 1873 onward. Not only the emergence and the expansion of Hindustani communities and relations, as mentioned by Choenni and Choenni, but also improving living and working conditions, as well as advances toward disease control and better nutrition, increased the attractiveness of settlement for ex-*kantráki*, especially from 1895 onward. In this year, the colonial government actively sought to reduce the repatriation rates by offering ex-*kantráki* land while guaranteeing their right to a free return. Those who declined to return received a premium of 100 florins – the equivalent of 34 working weeks for men and 58 for women. Additionally, this distribution of land boosted petty agriculture, which enabled small farmers to grow different crops, while it also contributed to the reduced importance of plantation agriculture.¹⁴

In addition to these rather demographic prerequisites and characteristics, it is equally important to take Indian cultural values into account to improve our understanding of the position in which Hindustani immigrants were situated. These cultural values were important

13 Hoeft, *In place of slavery*, 3-4, 102-113; Idem, 'Female indentured labor in Suriname. For better or for worse?', *Boletín de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe* 42 (1987) 55-70; Idem, 'Indenture in the long nineteenth century', in: D. Eltis, et al. (eds), *The Cambridge world history of slavery* (Cambridge 2017) 610-623, 611, 626.

14 Choenni and Choenni, *Sarnami Hindustani*, 13-15, 27-35, 46-47; Hoeft, *In place of slavery*, 56, 162-163; Hyles, *Guiana and the shadows of empire*, 87-89; Lal, 'Understanding the Indian indenture experience', 218; Amba Pande, 'Indian diaspora. Diversities within a common identity', *Economic and Political Weekly* 48:49 (2013) 59-65; C.J.M. De Klerk, *De immigratie der Hindostanen* (Amsterdam 1957) 162-165; Hans de Beer, 'The biological standard of living in Suriname, c. 1870-1915', *Economics and Human Biology* 22 (2016) 140-154; James McNeill and Chimman Lal, *Report of the condition of Indian immigrants in the four British colonies: Trinidad, British Guiana or Demerara, Jamaica and Fiji and in the Dutch colony of Suriname or Dutch Guiana*, II, 'Surinam, Jamaica, Fiji and general remarks' (Simla 1914) 176-179; Peter Meel, 'De emigratie van Hindostaanse contractarbeiders naar Suriname 1873-1917', *Groniek, Gronings Historisch Tijdschrift* 92 (1985) 120-138, 121, 134; Waldo Heilbron, *Kleine boeren in de schaduw van de plantage. De politieke economie van de na-slavernijperiode in Suriname* (Amsterdam 1982).

for both Hindus and Muslims, since they are mostly based on Vedic traditions. Sumit Guha and Choenni and Choenni argue that, culturally speaking, Muslims from Hindustan are more inspired by and tied to the Vedic traditions than Middle Eastern cultural customs, and it is therefore important to include non-Hindus in Indian history. In this research, especially one cultural aspect is important. Hindustanis believed that crossing the sea, or the *kali pani* (black waters), to other lands is a sin and that, therefore, one's social position will be lost because of the detachment from the River Ganges. Following this detachment, the migrant will be severed from the cycle of reincarnation. Not only did this affect the process of consideration to emigrate, but it was also particularly important if one wanted to repatriate to Hindustan after indentureship. Without the rights of the caste they formerly belonged to, it was difficult to maintain a life in Hindustan, thus influencing the post-indenture decision between settlement or repatriation.¹⁵

From home to the Surinamese plantation

The processes of recruitment, migration, and arrival of Hindustani *kantráki* have been extensively described. Mostly, they were recruited in the region or village where they lived. The majority of the recruited *kantráki* came from smaller towns and villages in the northern Indian provinces Uttar Pradesh (North West Province and Oudh, *illustration 1*), Bihar (part of Bengal, *illustration 1*), and Bengal.¹⁶ *Kantráki* were gathered in a central depot in Calcutta before embarking a ship to Suriname. During the voyage to Suriname, which could take six weeks to three months, *kantráki* faced harsh conditions for disease but, at the same time, were also able to get acquainted with those who shared the same destiny. When arriving in Suriname, the ship first stopped at Fort Nieuw-Amsterdam on the other side of the River Suriname from Paramaribo, where a medical examination took place. The healthy *kantráki* were sent to the Paramaribo depot, from where they were assigned to a

15 Choenni and Choenni, *Sarnami Hindustani*, 27; Fokken, *Beyond being koelies and kantráki*, 19, 67-68; Gaiutra Bahadur, *Coolie woman. The odyssey of indenture* (London 2013) 46-50; Marina Carter and Khal Torabully, *Coolitude. An anthology of the Indian labour diaspora* (London 2002) 167; Sumit Guha, *Beyond caste. Identity and power in Southeast Asia, past and present* (Leiden 2013) 1-15.

16 Bhagwanbali, *Contracten voor Suriname*, 53-75, 105, 115, 157, 176; De Klerk, *De immigratie der Hindostanen*, 48-50; Khan, *Jeevan Prakash*, 73-74; Lal, 'Understanding the Indian indenture experience', 219-220; Hoefte, *In place of slavery*, 31-38.



Illustration 1 A political map of British India in 1893 (source: Constable's Hand Atlas of India (1893), Collection University Library Groningen.)

plantation. The Hindustanis from ships that had sick *kantráki* could be quarantined in Fort Leyden, south of Fort Nieuw-Amsterdam.¹⁷

There were specific demands regarding age, sex ratio, and social status in the recruitment process. *Arkatias* (recruiters; literally: cunning seducers) were not to recruit men above the age of 35 and women above the age of 30 years. Additionally, only 10 percent of the recruited *kantráki* could be younger than ten years old. For every hundred men, about fifty women had to be recruited. In addition, the Surinamese planters preferred low-caste, agricultural Indians. Although some contemporaries argued that only the 'scum of the earth'¹⁸ came to Suriname, not all contemporaries saw the immigrants as weak, poor servants. For example, Agent General for Immigration C. van Drimmelen wrote in 1910 that the Hindustanis were agriculturists with outstanding qualities. Radjinder Bhagwanbali and Choenni and Choenni, among others,

17 Bhagwanbali, *Contracten voor Suriname*, 147-154, 179; De Klerk, *De immigratie der Hindostanen*, 74-83, 118-121; Fokken, *Beyond being koelies and kantráki*, 98-103, 125-127; Madhwi, 'Indentured labour for overseas colonies, circa 1834-1910', *Social Scientist* 43:9/10 (2015) 53-68.

18 '[...] Dutch officials contended that Suriname recruited the "scum of the earth"; Hoefte, 'Indenture in the long nineteenth century', 616.

have demonstrated that the *kantráki* represented Indian society relatively well in terms of religion and social position in the caste system.¹⁹

Sources and methodology

To properly answer the research question at hand, a combination of qualitative and quantitative sources is used. Although these sources have been used separately in many studies, this article will integrate these sources into one analysis, so as to reveal insights in indentureship that have been unprecedented until now. Supplementing the unique qualitative sources with biographical, governmental, and secondary sources makes it possible to understand different statistic relations in a more thorough, coherent, and personal way.

The autobiography *Jeevan Prakash* (Light of Life) by Rahman Khan gives a unique insight into the experiences of Hindustanis in Suriname, because this chronicle is the only known autobiography of a Hindustani *kantráki* in Suriname. Khan described his life vividly, ranging from his life as a youngster in Uttar Pradesh until he finished his book in 1943. Admittedly, the autobiography is not representative of all the Hindustani *kantráki*, because Khan held a rather strong position in Surinamese society. He could speak at least five languages and taught Hindus – despite being a Muslim himself – the meaning of holy texts. Considering that Khan was appointed *sardar* (overseer), it becomes even more obvious that Khan was not an average person. Therefore, it seems impossible to extract experiences from Khan's life and superimpose these on other *kantráki*. However, Khan's life story will be useful when criticizing and supplementing quantitative information and explaining given statistical outcomes and relations. It is, after all, difficult to reconstruct the lives of that many people based solely on databases.²⁰

19 Bhagwanbali, *Contracten voor Suriname*, 100-103, 135, 180; Choenni and Choenni, *Sarnami Hindostani*, 35-36; De Klerk, *De immigratie der Hindostanen*, 91-113; Fokken, *Beyond being koelies and kantráki*, 98-99; Guha, *Beyond caste*, 15; Hoefte, 'Indenture in the long nineteenth century', 616; Hoefte, *In place of slavery*, 37-38; Lal, 'Understanding the Indian indenture experience', 218, 221; C. van Drimmlen, *Rapport omtrent de beantwoording van vragen betreffende immigratie in Suriname van Javaansche, Britisch-Indische en andere tropische en sub-tropische gezinnen op groote schaal* (Paramaribo 1910). resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMUBL07:00001910. Accessed 11 January 2021;

20 Fokken, *Beyond being koelies and kantráki*, 21, 69-72; Khan, *Jeevan Prakash*, 15, 27-35, 93-95, 106, 133; Ellen Bal and Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff, 'Een Hindoestaanse diaspora. India en de moslim-Hindostanen in Nederland en Suriname', *OSO. Tijdschrift voor Surinaamse taalkunde, letterkunde en geschiedenis* 23 (2004) 236-256.

The other set of textual primary sources consists of works produced by colonial institutions, for the most part the *Surinaamsche Almanakken*, which was an extensive yearly publication that included a detailed overview of the different plantations and their cultivation, covering most of the period for this research. This list has been used, for instance, to collect information on the cultivated crops on the plantations. Additionally, the *Adresboek* (Address Book) has been used to extract information on the number of cultivated crops for the year 1911. Moreover, the Surinamese newspaper *De West* mentions the production of several crops for two years. Additionally, the secondary work of Philip Dikland, in which he summarizes a vast amount of information on Surinamese plantations from their establishment to the present day, is used to determine the crops cultivated over several years. Furthermore, the 1914 report of James McNeill and Chimman Lal on the living and working conditions of *kantráki* in British colonies and in Suriname has been consulted to give extra contextualization. This report was the result of investigations by McNeill and Lal commissioned by the British-Indian government. Although this report was written from a colonial perspective, it still gives insight into the lives of the *kantráki*. Just like the work of Khan, the report is useful when contextualizing quantitative information and explaining statistical outputs.²¹

The quantitative source used for this research is the database *Suriname: Hindoestaanse immigratieregisters*²² (Suriname: Hindustani immigration registers, hereafter: the database), which enables us to capture the life courses of many individuals to gain a more general image of *kantráki*. The database is the result of merging the information from the immigration registers and a semi-alphabetical index. The registers were kept at the Immigration Department in Paramaribo, and the information in them was written down at the Paramaribo depot after arrival in Suri-

21 McNeill and Lal, *The condition of the Indian immigrants*; Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren (hereafter: DNBL), *Tijdschrift Surinaamsche Almanak*, Paramaribo, www.dnbl.org/titels/tijdschriften/tijdschrift.php?id=_suro01surio1. Accessed 23 December 2020. For a complete overview of the used *Almanakken*, see *Appendix 1*; Jacqs. Morpurgo Dzn, *Adresboek van Suriname 1911* (Paramaribo 1911); W. Kraan, 'Binnen onze grenzen 1913', *De West. Nieuwsblad uit en voor Suriname*, 27 January (1914) Paramaribo, resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:011090359:mpeg21:p001. Accessed 23 December 2020; W. Kraan, 'Landbouw. Cacao, koffie, hevea', *De West. Nieuwsblad uit en voor Suriname*, 2 February (1910) Paramaribo, resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:011090804:mpeg21:p002. Accessed 23 December 2020; NA, 'Plantages in Suriname en op Curaçao', www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/zoekhulpen/plantages-in-suriname-en-op-curaçao#collapse-7668. Accessed 23 December 2020; Philip Dikland (ed.), *Surinaamse erfgoed documentatie, 2000-2018*, www.suriname-heritage-guide.com/. Accessed 28 December 2020. For a complete overview of the used documents, see *Appendix 1*.

22 NA, *Contractarbeiders uit India*.

name, in part directly copied from the muster rolls. Those muster rolls were drawn up in Calcutta, as commissioned by the emigration agent.²³

All the variables from the immigration registers were standardized in the process of compiling the database, which was supervised by Maurits Hassankhan and Sandew Hira. However, more information was written down in the registers after the first registration upon arrival in Paramaribo, which has been collected in a non-standardized memo field in the database.²⁴ This information is, however, of utter importance for answering the research question of this article because, on the one hand, this information can determine the development of the life course of a Hindustani migrant and because, on the other hand, variables can be used to explain the developments. This information is, however, far from complete, partly due to the fact that memo fields were not added in the original folios and information was not always written down.

The richness of the database notwithstanding, it does not completely compensate for the colonial, top-bottom perspective used by the Dutch officials who recorded the information of the *kantráki*. It therefore must be kept in mind that although much information seems rather objective, it was still written down with the goals of legibility in mind. This concept of legibility means that the population of the colony was recorded in order for governments to administer and govern the colony and to be able to recognize and identify the immigrants. The latter becomes clear when considering that body height, identifying marks, and skin colour were mentioned in the registers. Additionally, the Surinamese colonial administration was obliged to report information to the British-Indian government.²⁵

The database has limitations regarding the resemblance of the registration to the real-life situation. For example, it is known that not only is information particularly on marriages incomplete, but also the concept and definition of marriage was itself an issue. The colonial officials only recognized marriages conducted according to European tradition and therefore traditional Hindustani marriages were hardly recognized – even after a modification of the marriage law in 1907. On the other

23 McNeill and Lal, *The condition of the Indian immigrants*, 190; NA, 'Hindustanen in Suriname', www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/zoekhulpen/hindustanen-in-suriname. Accessed 2 November 2020.

24 De Klerk, *De immigratie der Hindostanen*, 83-87; NA, 'Hindustanen in Suriname'.

25 *Ex-kantráki* remained 'strangers' (*vreemdelingen*) according to the Dutch government. Only their children born after 10 June 1927 were officially Dutch subjects: De Klerk, *De immigratie der Hindostanen*, 184-186. Bhagwanbali, *Contracten voor Suriname*, 180; Fokken, *Beyond being koelies and kantráki*, 46-50, 83-85, 141; Keith Breckenridge and Simon Szreter (eds), *Registration and recognition. Documenting the person in world history* (Oxford 2012).

hand, it also appears from the autobiography of Khan that in practice 'marriage' was a concept imposed upon migrants by the planters and therefore not recorded in the database. This becomes strikingly clear from the following episode when Khan arrived at the plantation named 'Lust en Rust':²⁶

We were five men and a woman who was without husband. Seeing this, the manager asked the lady who her husband was. I do not know what happened to this bitch but she alleged that I was her husband. [...] But despite all my pleadings, the manager refused to heed to my clarifications and warned me of dire consequences if I refused to lodge with the woman.²⁷

This research used a sample that manually extracted the non-standardized information from the memo fields. This sample consists of every first person from every 25 persons mentioned in the database, resulting in a group of 1,151 *kantráki*. To properly determine the development of these *kantráki*, the demographic status of the Hindustanis ten years after the ending of their last contract was established in several ways. This period of ten years was selected due to possibility of temporal settlement in Suriname and because, in the words of McNeill and Lal, an *ex-kantráki* could choose to 'make a round of estates and settlements before deciding what they will do in the future.'²⁸

The first method used was to link the database to the census of 1921 based on the contract number. When an *ex-kantráki* was listed in the census ten years after the last contract, it is assumed he or she settled in Suriname. The second method was to determine the last known life event and compare that event with the end date of the last contract. One of the most useful events was the revision of the names of the Hindustanis from 1916 onwards, because the names were not always written down correctly in the immigration registers. Considering all last known life events, a set of sixteen possible final demographic statuses were extracted from the database (Figure 1), which were then categorized into five main divisions. These are: settlement, repatriation, de-

26 De Klerk, *De immigratie der Hindostanen*, 81-82, 188-191; McNeill and Lal, *The condition of Indian immigrants*, 158-159; NA, 'Hindostanen in Suriname'.

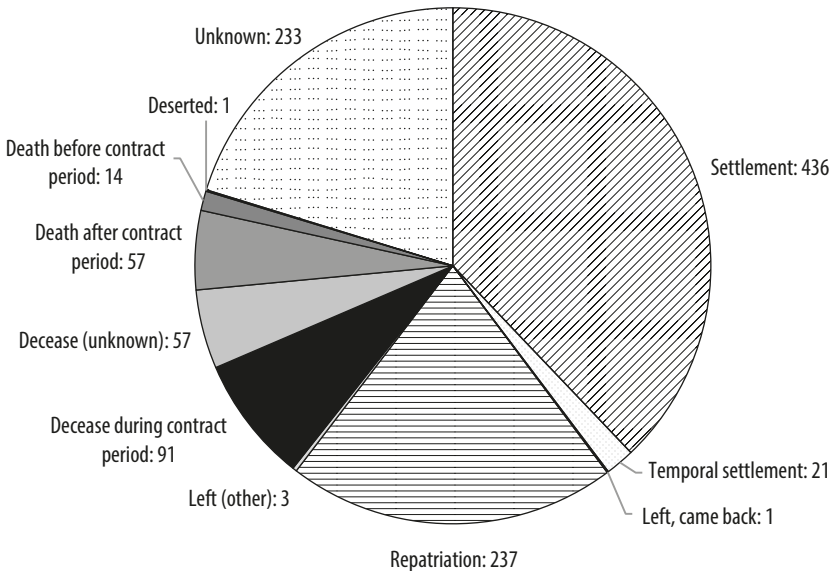
27 Khan, *Jeevan Prakash*, 91.

28 De Klerk, *De immigratie der Hindostanen*, 154-155; McNeill and Lal, *The condition of Indian immigrants*, 168-169; NA, *Contractarbeiders uit India*.

cease (other), decease (during contract period), and unknown/other. The explanation of these divisions is given in Appendix 2.²⁹

This study will follow trends in colonial historiography, taking bottom-up and subaltern perspectives in order to investigate individual choices and the motivation behind these life-determining decisions. By researching the individual demographic aspects and the influence of the Surinamese context with a large-scale methodology, this article will align with the perspective of New Imperial History. This widely supported trend in colonial history aims at looking further than the institutional aspects of colonies and focussing on (information) networks as well as the 'webbedness' of colonialism – the intertwining of multiple sorts of relations constituting colonial societies.³⁰

Figure 1 Visual presentation of the distribution of demographic statuses of Hindustani *kantráki*, ten years after the ending of the last contract (N=1,151) (source: NA, *Contractarbeiders uit India*.)



29 De Klerk, *De immigratie der Hindostanen*, 182-184; Fokken, *Beyond being koelies and kantráki*, 72; Khan, *Jeevan Prakash*, 3, 15, 269; NA, *Contractarbeiders uit India*; NA, 'Hindostanen in Suriname'; NA, *Suriname. Namenklapper Volkstelling 1921*, www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/index/nt00445?searchTerm=. Accessed 22 December 2020.

30 Remco Raben, 'A new Dutch imperial history? Perambulations in a prospective field', *BMGN – Low Countries historical review* 18:1 (2013) 5-30; Tony Ballantyne, 'Religion, difference, and the limits of British imperial history', *Victorian Studies* 47:3 (2005) 427-455.

Hypotheses

This article will follow the aforementioned statement of Hassankhan, assuming that people had agency and, therefore, the settlement and repatriation rates will be regarded as a result of personal motivation. Based on the historiography, the sources and the methodology, this article investigates five hypotheses. The first hypothesis, regarding the development over time, is that the relative share of Hindustanis settling themselves permanently in Suriname, compared to the share that repatriated, increased throughout the research period. This growth is believed to be explained by improving working and living conditions and by the establishment and expansions of Hindustani communities.

Secondly, following the discussion in the scholarly literature, it is expected that close relations with family members contribute to a higher chance of settling at the expense of the share of *kantráki* returning to India. Thirdly, and consequently, it is expected that women settled more often, because it is argued that they were more dependent on other people during and after the contract period than men were. Fourth, it is expected that religious differences did not affect the choice between staying or leaving, since Hindus and Muslims shared many cultural values with one another.

What stands out in the debate on the demographic development of Hindustanis is that Surinamese and plantation-specific circumstances are mostly not taken into account. It has, however, been shown in studies on slavery that different crop growth processes are not always comparable in the physical labour that was required by plantation directors and overseers. Therefore, following the same train of thought, the fifth hypothesis is that indentured labourers who worked on sugar plantations – where work is considered physically more exhausting – had a higher chance of repatriation to India.³¹

'A leopard never changes his spots': the time-related analysis³²

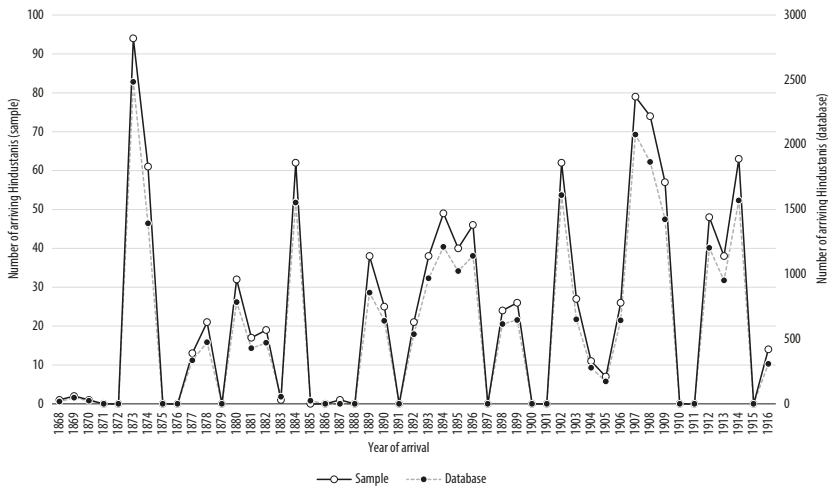
To test the first hypothesis, it is important that the development of the number of arriving *kantráki* is delineated according to the year of arrival,

31 Alex van Stipriaan, *Surinaams contrast. Roofbouw en overleven in een Caraïbische plantagekolonie, 1750-1863* (Leiden 1993) 11-12, 113; B.W. Higman, 'The sugar revolution', *Economic History Review* 53:2 (2000) 213-236; Clive Y. Thomas, *Plantations, peasants, and state. A study of the mode of sugar production in Guyana* (Los Angeles 1984) 1-26; Walton Look Lai, *Indentured labor; Caribbean sugar. Chinese and Indian migrants to the British West Indies, 1838-1918* (Baltimore 1993) 117-119.

32 Khan, *Jeevan Prakash*, 113.

because the contract period was not a standardized amount of time and there were possibilities of signing one or more re-indenture contracts. This distribution over time is presented in Figure 2; from this graph, it can be stated that the sample aligns with the numerical development of the total migration flow. There are several years for which no immigrants were recorded in the database, mainly because of two reasons. First, in August 1875, the migration of Hindustanis was suspended by the British-Indian government, due to a high death rate and bad working and living conditions. In 1877, after some improvements, the migration recommenced until the abolition of indentureship in 1917. Second, registers of some years do not exist anymore.³³ It is, however, known from the *Koloniale Verslagen* (colonial reports) that Hindustani *kantráki* did arrive in these years.³⁴

Figure 2 Number of arriving Hindustani *kantráki* per year, 1868-1916, in the sample (N=1,138) and in the database (N=28,494) (source: NA, Contractarbeiders uit India; NA, 'Hindostanen in Suriname')³⁵



33 This is applicable to the years 1875-1876, 1879, 1885-1886, 1888, 1891, 1897, 1900-1901, 1910-1911 and 1915; NA, 'Hindostanen in Suriname'.

34 De Klerk, *De immigratie der Hindostanen*, 121-123; Fokken, *Beyond being koelies and kantráki*, 75; Hoefte, *In place of slavery*, 42; Roopnarine, 'Re-indenture, repatriation and remittances', 250; Het Utrechts Archief, 'Zeister Zendinggenootschap van de Evangelische Broedergemeente 1793-1962' 48-1.5, *Koloniale verslagen, 1909-1912, en Surinaams verslag, 1930, inzake bestuur en staat van Suriname door het ministerie van Koloniën*, inv.nr. 1406, scan number 163, [...] <www.archieven.nl/nl/zoeken?mivast=0&mizig=210&miadt=39&miaet=1&micode=48-1&minr=2550704&miview=inv2>. Accessed 10 January 2021.

35 There are four Hindustanis in the sample who started their contract before 1873. They did not come directly from India but had already migrated to Barbados, Demerara, or St. Lucia, from where they moved to Suriname: De Klerk, *De immigratie der Hindostanen*, 71-73, 87, 176-177.

In order to analyze the effect of the year of arrival on the decision to stay in Suriname or go back to India, a comparison of the amount of settling and repatriating Hindustanis has been made. This ratio, displayed in Figure 3, proves that *kantráki* who arrived before 1889 repatriated more after their contract, while people arriving after 1889 settled more. The highest percentage of settlement was among people arriving in 1903, after which the relative share of people repatriating slightly increased. This trend towards more settling compared to the rate of repatriation can probably be explained by the emergence and gradual expansion and extension of Hindustani communities in Suriname as put forth by Choenni and Choenni. However, there are several time periods in which the settlement-repatriation ratio declined. It is likely that a combination of factors played a role, such as the emergence of a cacao disease around 1900, the growing importance of petty agriculture at the expense of plantation agriculture, several diseases (malarial fever in 1909, enteritis in 1908 and 1912-1913), the consequences of World War I, and the Spanish Flu. Additionally, a growing aggression between Hindus and Muslims in India and Suriname emerged at the end of the 1920s and lasted until the 1940s, and the growing influence of Indian nationalism probably had its effect on repatriation rates as well.³⁶

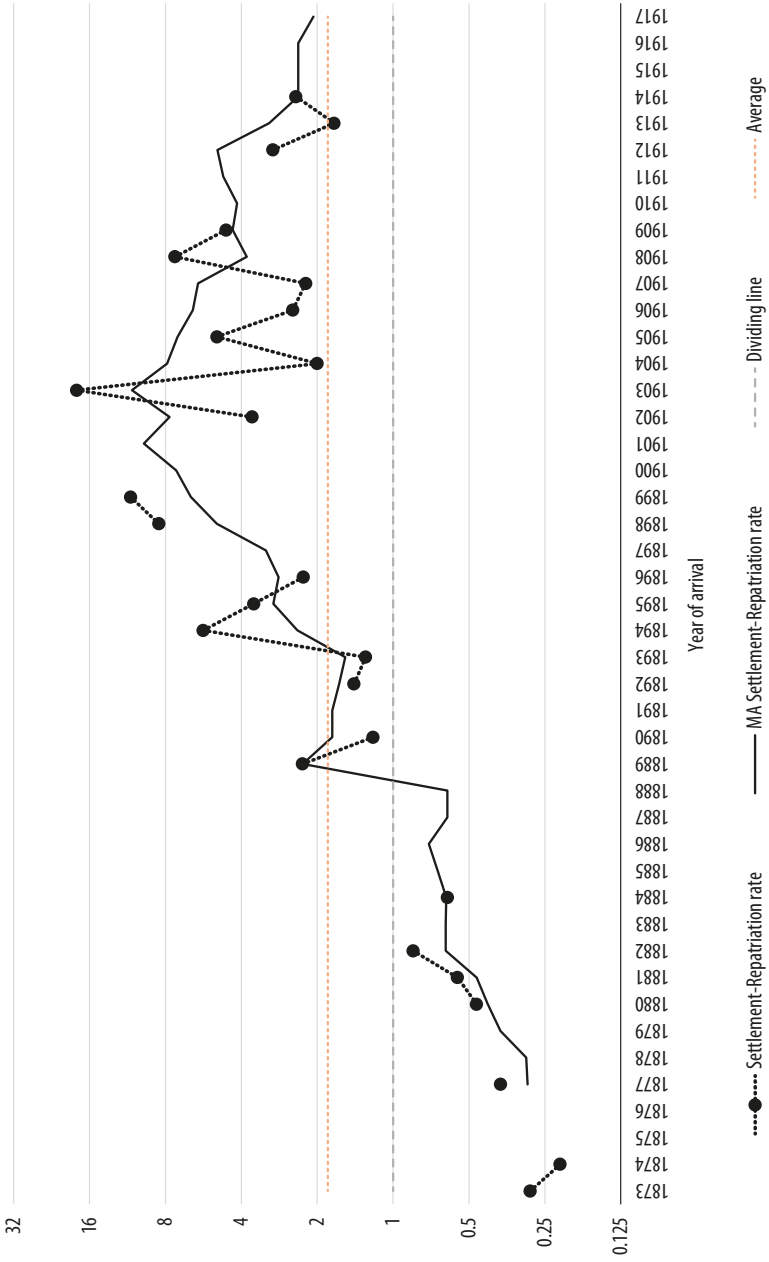
*'He made me breathe the air of Suriname': the effect of children and family bonds*³⁷

The second hypothesis states that family bonds resulted in a relatively large number of *kantráki* staying in Suriname after their contract period. To properly analyze the impact of different family related variables, a distinction is made between relations that were forged in India and those that were constituted in Suriname. About 30 percent of the arriving *kantráki* in the sample were accompanied by at least one family member of which 168 came with their husband or wife, 127 with one or both parents. Whether someone was accompanied by a family member upon arrival seems to have had a small but significant effect ($\chi^2=10.502$; $p=0.062$; $V=0.096$; $N=913$). The relation between number of family members at the moment of arrival and the difference in settlement and repatriation rates also has a significant effect (ANOVA: $F_{(3,909)}=2.714$; $p=0.044$). In this relation it can be stated that the more

36 Khan, *Jeevan Prakash*, 77-83, 90-95, 123-127, 191-199; McNeill and Lal, *The condition of Indian immigrants*, 153; NA, *Contractarbeiders uit India*; Brij B. Khare, 'Indian nationalism. The political origin', *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 50:4 (1989) 533-559; P.H.J. Lampe, *Suriname. Sociaal-hygiënische beschouwingen* (Amsterdam 1927) 13-14.

37 Khan, *Jeevan Prakash*, 100.

Figure 3 Settlement-repatriation ratio of Hindustani *kantráki* who arrived between 1868 and 1916 on a log₂ scale. A moving average (MA) of five years is added (N=676) (source: NA, Contractarbeiders uit India)



family members were present at the moment of arrival, the greater the chance of settlement.

At least 15.1 percent of the *kantráki* married in Suriname. The remainder consisted of *kantráki* of whom it is either not known whether they married, or who did not marry in Suriname. When *kantráki* married in Suriname, the chances of settlement are almost two times higher, while the likelihood of someone repatriating is significantly lower. This pattern is significant and has a considerable effect, and this relation is stronger than the others already mentioned ($\chi^2=111.203$; $p<0.001$; $V=0.349$), although there might be some bias. As mentioned before, not all marriages were recorded, partly because of the incompleteness and fragmentary nature of the database, partly because of the limited official recognition. This could mean that the marriages that were recognized were between Hindustani who, relatively speaking, accepted the Dutch-oriented laws and values considering marriage. Another bias which should be kept in mind is that the majority of marriages were solemnized after the contract period. This means that most of the *kantráki* who died during their contract period were probably not married in Suriname during their contract period. Therefore, the effect of marriage on the post-indenture life course is possibly somewhat smaller in reality than it appears from the statistical analyses.

Although the information on births is also not complete in the database, children were registered more often than marriages. At least 18.3 percent of the *kantráki* had children that were born in Suriname. The variables 'married in Suriname' and 'children born in Suriname' are to some extent correlated ($\rho=0.471$; $p=0.000$; $N=1,151$), which means that these two variables could have affected each other, but also that a combination of these variables could have boosted the relative number of settling *kantráki*. The chances of *ex-kantráki* settling after their period of indenture almost doubles when one or more children have been born in Suriname ($\chi^2=78.383$; $p<0.001$; $V=0.239$).³⁸

It is important to understand why these statistical relations exist and what the reasons were for settling or leaving Suriname. When consulting the autobiography of Khan, he clarifies his decision to marry in Suriname. Initially, he wanted to return to India and, therefore, he did not marry in Suriname. However, his close friend Ashraf (Khan calls him his brother) persuaded him to marry for reasons of stability in the colony. In April 1911, he married Joomenie, whom he does not men-

³⁸ NA, *Contractarbeiders uit India*.

tion by her name in *Jeevan Prakash*. However, Khan does not mention this marriage as a reason to stay in Suriname but instead explains his decision by stating the importance of the birth of his first son, Suleman Khan: 'Truly speaking, it was this boy who prevented me from returning to Hindostan [...]. By Allah's blessing, this was my first son whose affection has till today made me breathe the air of Suriname'.³⁹ Additionally, McNeill and Lal stated in their report: 'In this and in every other Colony immigrants [...] stayed mainly on account of their children'.⁴⁰

Female minority and male majority: the sexual differences

The majority of the *kantráki* in the sample were male, counting for at least 61.3 percent of the total research group. About 28.8 percent was female and of the remaining 9.9 percent, the sex is unknown. Upon examining the sex of the *kantráki*, it becomes apparent that both women and men settled more often than repatriated. However, the settlement rate among Hindustani women was slightly higher than for men. Although the sex of *kantráki* did significantly matter in their choice to stay or to return, the effect of this difference is rather small ($\chi^2 = 17.160$; $p = 0.001$; $V = 0.143$; $N = 843$).⁴¹

Women tended to stay more often than men after completing their contract period. This probably can be explained by two main reasons: financial and family-related circumstances. The report of McNeill and Lal states that women in the period of 1908-1912 earned 59.3 percent of what men earned. The authors state that the earnings were low in comparison to the wages of Indians in British colonies, but that the sexual divergence itself was comparable. Along with the notion that Hindustanis returning to India wanted to save a considerable amount of money, it makes sense that female *ex-kantráki* tended to return less often. Men earned more money and therefore not only had the means but also the savings either to go back to their country of origin or to build up a stable, new life in Suriname.

Regarding the aforementioned quotation from Khan on his alleged marital status and the passage in which he is convinced to marry Joomenie, it becomes obvious that women were more often expected to be married, which would have to be explained by the fact that women were financially dependent on men. The fact that women married more than men can also be explained by a skewed balance of men and

39 Khan, *Jeevan Prakash*, 99-100; NA, *Contractarbeiders uit India*.

40 McNeill, Lal, *The condition of Indian immigrants*, 168.

41 NA, *Contractarbeiders uit India*.

women; about 68 percent of the *kantráki* were male. The previous section also demonstrated that when someone married in Suriname, the chances of settlement were higher. This could explain the higher settling rates among female Hindustanis after their contract period.⁴²

*'Dui jati Bharat se aye, Hindu Musalman kahlaye': the role of religion*⁴³

For testing the fourth hypothesis, on the role of religion, it is important to note that, in the research period, British-Indian society consisted of different religious and cultural groups. Although the name of Hindustan suggests that mostly Hindus lived in India, this was clearly not the case. For the analysis of the role of religion, only Hindus and Muslims were taken into consideration because about 74.9% of all the *kantráki* in the sample were Hindu, whereas about 14.2% adhered to Islam, and for 10.9% the religion is not known. Two Hindustanis were Christian, while no other religions were identified in the sample. It can be concluded from the analysis that religious differences did not affect the choice between repatriation or settlement ($\chi^2 = 2.502$; $p = 0.475$; $V = 0.055$; $N = 835$). This means that (cultural) differences between religions were not a determinant in the outcome of the life course.⁴⁴

Khan devotes a considerable share of his writing to describing the relations and the extent of the boundaries between Muslim and Hindu *kantráki* as well as between different castes. As he describes in *Jeevan Prakash*, he was rather shocked to find these boundaries practically vanished in the Calcutta depot. However, when he describes these cultural markers in Suriname, he does not seem to be surprised by people crossing these lines. He describes how he teaches Hindus about the Ramayana and how Muslims and Hindus lived together. This does seem to fit the earlier statements by Guha and by Choenni and Choenni that the amount of considerable cultural differences was limited, because both religious groups were culturally influenced by Vedic traditions. During most of the research period, at least until 1929, relations between the two religious groups were relatively good and the cultural boundaries happened to be practically non-existent. This does seem to explain why

42 McNeill and Lal, *The condition of Indian immigrants*, 153-154, 176-179.

43 'Two communities came from India, they were called Hindus and Muslims': Hindorama, 'Een prominente immigrant: Leraar, dichter en schrijver Munshi Rahman Khan' 2003, www.hindorama.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Munshi-Rahman-Khan-HR-3-2003.pdf. Accessed 7 June 2021.

44 NA, *Contractarbeiders uit India*.

there is no significant difference in the demographic statuses of the life course based on religion.⁴⁵

Actors in a foreign setting: the influence of the Surinamese context

For completely understanding why Hindustanis wanted to stay or desired to go back to India, the impact of the Surinamese context, and especially the plantations where *kantráki* worked and lived, potentially have served as central arguments in their considerations. Therefore, it is important to explore how they actually got to the place they fulfilled their contracts. Rahman Khan describes that it seems that the first assignments were for plantations in the western district of Nickerie: 'On the first day of such an allocation [...] I sat among the crowd of recruits. Even though people on our ships who had been to Suriname before had warned us not to sit there on the first day, since the place of appointment would be Nickeri[e] [...]'.⁴⁶ Illustration 2 depicts the moment of assignment, and it seems that the *kantráki* were handed a label, which presumably contained the name of the plantation Hindustanis were assigned to. It seems from the story of Rahman Khan that there was a form of selection in assigning the *kantráki* to the plantations, while illustration 2 seems to suggest that it may have been more random. However, it makes sense that the assignment for Nickerie took place first, because of the long distance that had to be travelled. De Klerk, who wrote one of the standard works on Hindustani-Surinamese indentureship in 1953, states that married couples were not supposed to be separated, just as children below the age of fifteen were not to be separated from their parents. De Klerk adds that the preference of the *kantráki* was taken into consideration, but this is not apparent from the work of Rahman Khan. Altogether, it is not known to what extent *kantráki* had any influence in their assignments, but it seems that the selection method was rather random, besides some convenient and practical choices. It is yet unknown whether officials at the Paramaribo depot had any form of personally developed selection method, be it conscious or not.⁴⁷

In Map 1 and Figure 4, the plantations where the *kantráki* were assigned to are sorted by district. It is necessary to mention that 1898 has been selected as the reference year for designating the plantations in their districts. When looking at the results, almost half of all the Indi-

45 Khan, *Jeevan Prakash*, 77-83, 90-95, 191-199.

46 Ibid., 90.

47 Bhagwanbali, *Contracten voor Suriname*, 181; De Klerk, *De immigratie der Hindostanen*, 82-83; Fokken, *Beyond being koelies and kantráki*, 148.

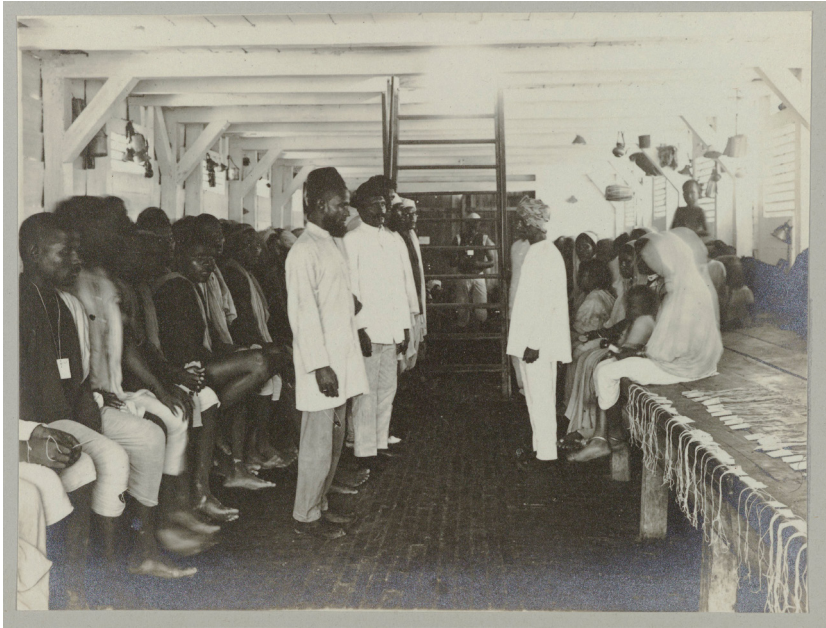
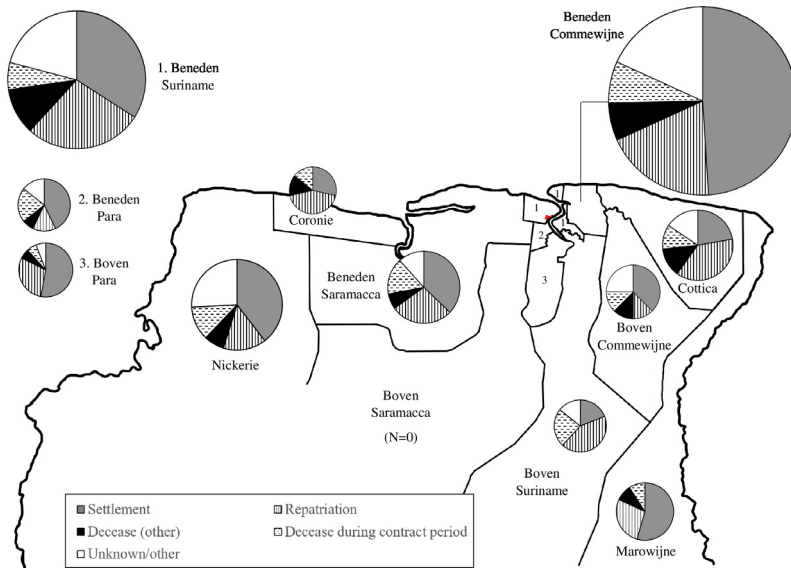


Illustration 2 Hindustani kantráki in the Paramaribo depot. The labels on the right side of the picture and around the necks of the Hindustanis presumably mentioned which plantation the indentured labourer was assigned to work on (source: Rijksmuseum, 'Hindostaanse contractarbeiders in het immigrantendepot', Hendrik Doijer, Souvenir de voyage V, 1906-1913, hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.489776.)

an migrants included in the sample worked on a plantation in the geographically small district of Beneden Commewijne, and more than three quarters of the Hindustanis worked on estates in a radius of 50 kilometers from Paramaribo. About 25 percent of the migrants were designated to serve their contracts in the eastern district of Nickerie. Because of the too small number of cases in the other districts, the statistical analysis will only include Beneden Commewijne, Cottica, Nickerie, and Beneden Suriname.

There are significant differences between the four districts regarding the choice of settling or repatriating ($\chi^2=34.890$; $p=0.000$; $V=0.127$; $N=718$). These differences, however, only have a small effect. *Kantráki* serving their first contract in Beneden Commewijne tended to settle more and repatriate less, while the opposite can be stated for Hindustanis in Cottica and Beneden Suriname. For Nickerie, no significant differences have been found, but there is a slightly lower chance of repatriation and a slightly higher chance of dying during the contract period. This might be caused by the fact that the Dutch colonial government

did not pay much attention to the western parts of Suriname and, as a result, the planters enjoyed less governmental pressure to improve living and working conditions.⁴⁸



Map 1 Distribution of kantráki over Surinamese districts (source: Wackie, et al., *Kaart van Suriname; Suriname plantages*, <www.surinameplantages.com/>.) Accessed 8 January 2021.⁴⁹

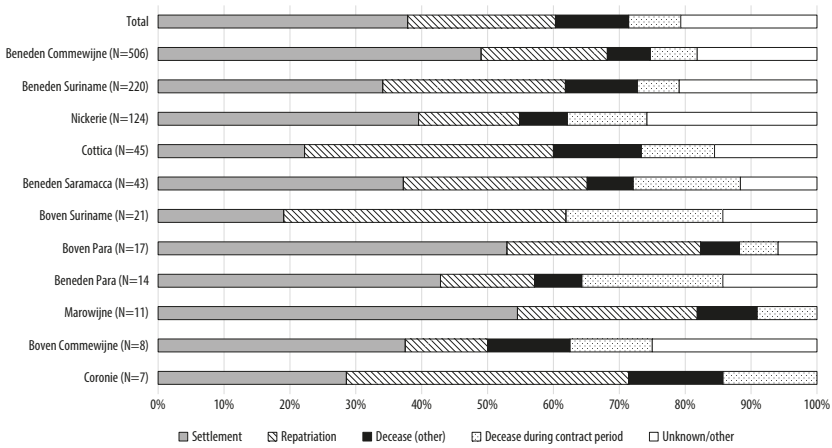
In regarding the cultivation on the different plantations, it can be concluded that the relevance of a specific crop in itself did not have a great influence on the choice between leaving and staying. However, conducting a χ^2 test ($\chi^2 = 108.461$; $p = 0.000$; $V = 0.345$; $N = 913$) for the importance of either monoculture or polyculture shows that when plantations only cultivated one crop, the chances of repatriation are considerably higher, while when polyculture was the norm, settlement rates were higher.

Upon conducting an ANOVA test for the number of cultivated crops ($F_{(3,909)} = 28.942$, $p = 0.000$; $N = 913$), the result indicates a significant positive relation between the number of cultivated crops and the chance of settlement ($N = 436$; $\bar{x} = 2.40$; $s = 1.403$). Compared to the chances of repatriation ($N = 436$; $\bar{x} = 1.55$; $s = 1.545$; $\Delta\bar{x} = 0.834$; $p = 0.000$), death dur-

48 Doortje Swaters, *Tegen de grens van emancipatie. De ontwikkeling van slavernij in Nickerie, 1820-1842* [thesis] (Nijmegen 2018).

49 Dikland, 'Surinaamse Erfgoed Documentatie'; NA, *Contractarbeiders uit India*; W.L. Loth, *Beknopte aardrijkskundige beschrijving van Suriname* (Amsterdam 1898) 15-32.

Figure 4 Relative distribution of the *kantráki*'s life course development subdivided by the Surinamese districts (N=1,151) (source: NA, *Contractarbeiders uit India*)



ing the contract period ($N=91$; $x=1.75$; $s=1.363$; $\Delta x=0.650$; $p=0.001$) as well as other moments of decease ($N=128$, $x=1.28$; $s=1.621$; $\Delta x=1.116$; $p=0.000$), the amount of cultivated crops increased the chances of settlement ten years after the end of the last contract. This finding must be explained by the idea of spreading economic risk. Failed harvests affect only one crop in case of a plant disease, and the cultivation of one or more other crops reduces the risk of making no profit at all.⁵⁰

A clear example of this condition is the emergence of cacao diseases after a dry period in 1900. Khan describes this period as an uncertain time for many plantations: 'At that time, almost no land was cultivated.'⁵¹ He continues: 'The manager had said, "[...] you will get your full payment later."⁵² After reminding this manager that he had not paid the salary for nine months, Khan decided to leave and moved to his newly bought place in Lalkondre (La Rencontre, some fifteen kilometers southeast of Paramaribo), where he, quite ironically, cultivated cacao. This passage shows that when a crop disease was present on a plantation where monoculture was practiced, it directly affected the *kantráki*'s financial situation. When multiple crops were cultivated, a case of non-payment was less likely to have happened.

⁵⁰ DBNL, 'Tijdschrift Surinaamsche Almanak'; NA, *Contractarbeiders uit India*; D.G. Bullock, 'Crop rotation', *Critical Reviews in Plant Sciences* 11:4 (1992) 309-326.

⁵¹ Khan, *Jeevan Prakash*, 126.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 127.

Conclusion

This article has tried to shed light on the development of Hindustanis' lives in Suriname by focussing on the choice between returning to India and settling in Suriname. By conducting this analysis, this article enables scholars to understand indentureship and its consequences in a more macro and quantitative manner. The research question was: 'How did individual characteristics and the Surinamese context influence the post-indenture choice of repatriation or settlement of Hindustani indentured migrants in Suriname between 1873 and 1940?' In order to answer the question, then, the hypotheses will now be either accepted or rejected, after which the relative importance of the hypotheses is presented.

The first hypothesis stated that the share of Hindustanis repatriating compared to the ones who settled declined throughout the research period. This seems to be partly true, because the balance shifted from more repatriation to more settlement, although Hindustanis arriving after 1903 again tended to repatriate more often. This development has, however, not been fully explained. The role of a growing possibility to connect with like-minded people who migrated before seems to play at least a considerable role. The hypothesis can thus be partly accepted, yet has to be rejected for the last years of the research period.

Secondly, it seems that the presence of family members or close acquaintances had a positive effect on the number of Hindustanis settling in Suriname, especially when those relations were forged in Suriname. However, the sample used may have had a bias, since the database does not give all marriages made or children born in Suriname. However, the fact that the presence of family members upon arrival – which information is more complete – also had a positive effect on the share of repatriation, implies that connections did matter. Therefore, the second hypothesis can be accepted with quite a degree of certainty.

The third hypothesis stated that women settled more often than men, who were expected to have repatriated more often than women. This expectation also seems to be correct, which can be explained by the female need for dependency both during and after the contract period and by the assumption on the part of both the colonial planters and Hindustani women that female *kantráki* ought to have been accompanied by a man. However, in absolute numbers, more women as well as men present in the sample settled in Suriname than returned to Hindustan. Altogether, this hypothesis can be accepted as well.

The fourth hypothesis can also be accepted. It can be concluded that there were no significant religious differences that influenced the post-indenture choice of staying or repatriating. This can be explained by the fact that crossing the *kali pani* was believed to erase religious and cultural status and positions, and also by the fact that Indian Muslims and Hindus shared many cultural values, as described in the literature. Additionally, the partly vanishing boundaries between Muslim and Hindu *kantráki* resulted in a decreased importance of their religious differences, which further confirms the idea that religion did not affect the settlement and repatriation rates significantly.

Regarding the role of the Surinamese context, it was expected in the fifth hypothesis that when *kantráki* served their first contract on estates that cultivated and processed sugar products, the living and working conditions were harsher and more difficult. However, there is no statistically significant evidence for higher repatriation rates and, therefore, this hypothesis must be rejected. Instead, there seems to be a positive relation between the number of different crops cultivated and the chances of settlement. Polyculture reduced the risk of total crop failure and therefore increased the *kantráki's* chance of receiving full payment. This enabled Hindustanis to build up more savings, which enabled them to have a more financially stable life in Suriname. This seems to contradict the statement previously posited that money was needed to return to India, given that these savings were also necessary to build up a stable life in the new home country. Additionally, the district to where the *kantráki* were assigned to seems to have influenced the final demographic status. For four districts, statistical evidence was found that supports the idea that the assigned district influenced the choice between repatriation or settlement.

When comparing the statistical outcomes, some statements can be made about the relative influence of the variables. The formation of family relations in Suriname, especially in the form of marriage, had the strongest impact on the choice of settlement or repatriation. The Surinamese context, especially the cultivation of either monoculture or polyculture on plantations, had the second strongest influence in the *kantráki's* decision. The sex and the presence of family members upon arrival did have some kind of role on the post-indenture life course, albeit rather small. Altogether, it seems that, as Hassankhan and others have already stated, Hindustanis indeed had agency and could to a great extent determine their own life course development after indenture.

Situating this research in the scholarly discussion, it appears that, although the literature stated there were some rules, requirements, and assumptions that influenced the development of the life course after the period of indentureship, these statements are not always correct. The overview given by Choenni and Choenni as to when someone was to leave Suriname does not seem to apply to all cases considered in this article. Therefore, it must be stated that the development of the life course in some cases evolved outside of the legal framework and was instead shaped by individual decisions.

It is evident that, although this research has explored the specific historical processes for the post-indenture choice of either repatriation or settlement, it has its limitations and therefore calls for future research. First of all, following the relatively large impact of family bonds in this choice, it is necessary to conduct more broad analyses on the formation of family relations; at the same time, it also suggests that forming these networks was a decisive factor in the development of the post-indenture life courses of Hindustanis. Therefore, it will be important to expand the information included in the sample. On the one hand, information on marriages and births has to be added to conduct a more precise analysis. This information is available in the *Centraal Bureau voor Burgerzaken* in Paramaribo. On the other hand, it would be similarly useful to expand the sample itself. In this way, more significant relations can be found as regards, for example, the role of the smaller districts, whereby it will be possible to better understand the role of the different variables analyzed in this article. In expanding the research on this subject, scholars will be enabled to better understand the processes of indenture in colonial spheres, especially concerning the developments after the contract periods, as well as forced labour and labour migration in general. Secondly, in combining the immigration registers, the information on marriages and children, and the 1921 census, it will be possible to (partly) reconstruct the Hindustani population of Suriname from 1873 onwards. This sort of research would contribute to the *Historical Database of Suriname*, so that the Surinamese population between 1830 and 1975 can be reconstructed as fully as possible. This enables a group of 400,000 descendants from these Hindustani *kantráki* to dive deep into their family history, giving them insight into how people, destined for Suriname, built their lives far from their origins.

About the author

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Appendix 1

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Appendix 2

Categorization of the found demographic statuses ten years after the ending of the last contract among Hindustani *kantráki* (N=1,151). Source: NA, 'Hindustanen in Suriname.'

N	Demographic status	Figure 1	Analysis	N
293	Settlement (Census)		Settlement	436
143	Settlement (other)			
237	Repatriation	Repatriation	Repatriation	258
21	Temporal settlement	Temporal settlement		
56	Decease after contract period	Decease after contract period	Decease (other)	128
1	Decease during forced labour			
7	Decease before contract period in Suriname	Decease before contract period		
7	Decease during migration to Suriname			
57	Decease (unknown)	Decease (unknown)		
91	Decease during contract period	Decease during contract period		91
1	Left, came back	Left, came back	Unknown/other	238
1	Deserted	Deserted		
2	Left (Cayenne)	Left (other)		
1	Left (Trinidad)			
233	Unknown	Unknown		
1151				

