Introduction

In this general issue of the Journal of Indentureship and Its Legacies, we move away from our recent themed issues to bring together some of our latest submissions. We host reviews by scholars Nienke Boer and Lomarsh Roopnarine, who have appraised new works on Indian-Caribbean Literature and Chinese Indenture in the Dutch West Indies respectively, and we are also pleased to share academic Holly Eva Ryan’s review of Ira Mathur’s award-winning non-fiction work Love the Dark Days.

The editors are honoured to be featuring, for the first time in the Journal’s history, a piece of life writing that looks specifically at the legacies of indenture in Malaysia. Drawing on an incredible family archive, the author Aneeta Sundaraj seeks to honour her father’s instruction that she seek out the beauty in her maternal grandfather’s migration story – in particular his life on the rubber estate. Sundaraj’s work shows how even after the abolition of indenture in 1917, we’re still able to trace forms of labour migration that retained some of the harder elements of the system.

Staying with the theme of life-writing, we have a wonderfully hybrid article by historian Doug Munro, who looks back both personally and professionally at the relationship between two leading scholars of Indian-Fijian history: K.L. Gillon and Brij V. Lal. Uniting his memories of these formidable academics with archival work and reflections on the nature of the mentor-student relationship, Munro offers us an intimate look at the lives behind the works that led to some of the most exciting developments in the academic study of the history of indenture in Fiji in the twentieth century.

It has been inspiring to see, in the last two decades, the spectacular growth in Indentureship Studies as a discipline. While a new generation take up the study of this post-Abolition history,
they can be encouraged by the inauguration of the first-ever Visiting Fellowship in Indentureship Studies, at the University of Cambridge. Yet this desire to connect with the indentured past and its legacies exists beyond academia and art works by the descendants of indenture have proven to be compelling testimonies of lives touched by the system.

It is in this vein that we are pleased to share interviews with the Guyana-born artist Suchitra Mattai, who is featured in conversation with art historian Melissa Baksh, and the Singaporean-born artist of Indian-Malaysian heritage, Priyageetha Dia. Dia is interviewed here by academic Karin Shankar and both conversations generously reveal the extent to which ancestral stories have informed the practice of both artists.

As a young scholar of literature, who was also a descendant of the system of indenture, some of my earliest ‘meetings’ with the history of indenture were in the pages of novels by writers like David Dabydeen, V.S Naipaul and Lakshmi Persaud. My article on these works and others can be found in this issue and it is hoped that it will offer a starting point to those seeking out the literature of what I have previously termed ‘the other’ Windrush.

NOTES
2. See for example Andil Gosine’s recent curated exhibition ‘Everything Slackens in a Wreck’, which featured work by Andrea Chung, Wendy Nanan and Kelly Sinnapah Mary. (Ford Foundation Gallery, 1 June – 20 August 2022)